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DEVELOPMENT OF COLOUR PERCEPTION AND COLOUR COMBINATION SKILLS OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN THROUGH STUDYING ARTWORKS OF IMPRESSIONIST ARTISTS

Galina Nikolova

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo (Bulgaria)

Abstract. This article studies the development of painting skills in preschool children by studying the works of Impressionist artists. Artistic perception is an important part of visual arts education that creates prerequisites for the formation of aesthetic personal qualities and creativity. The study offers methodological ideas for developing a sense of colour and colour combination by studying the artworks of the Impressionists.

Keywords: impressionism; colour combination; colour perception; composition; art; visual perception, aesthetics

*“A work of art is a corner of nature seen through
the prism of a temperament”*

E. Zola

The magic of children's visual art lies in its elusive ease and spontaneity as well as freedom and expressiveness of speech. Children explore the world with amazement and recreate their emotional impressions by using colours and shapes to turn the drawing sheet into a colourful kaleidoscope, a space full of fantasy images. It is this spontaneity and sincerity of children's art that must be preserved in the teaching process, while at the same time developing creative, aesthetic thinking through the consistent acquaintance of children with the multifaceted artistic processes, with the vastness of visual arts. These first steps, the introduction of children into the world of art are especially important as they determine the overall development of the little discoverers, educate them as independent, creative persons able to see beauty and recreate it through their individuality and temperament. It is extremely important for art education and training to be comprehensive; only in this way would children fully master the visual processes and develop their artistic skills, gaining knowledge to create a pictorial space. “The compositional construction of a

drawing combines the biological sense of balance and the aesthetic need for rhythm and harmony. They are embedded in every child, but they need to be developed purposefully and systematically” (Dimchev 1993, p. 113).

An important part of the education in visual arts is the artistic perception, the acquaintance of children with works of the world visual art. By studying works of artists of different eras and styles, children enrich their aesthetic culture, develop skills to observe and discover beauty, to interpret in a creative way the knowledge acquired, which leads to the formation of their own, author's vision and individuality. Albums with reproductions of world-famous artists are like ABC books for children who learn the alphabet of art gradually gaining knowledge of the types and genres of visual arts, the shape, colour, and colour combination in a composition, the variety of expressive and technical means used by artists. Thus, children enter the vast world of art and create a basis for the formation of their own, creative ideas; they are given the opportunity to expand the boundaries of creativity, with all these being important prerequisites for a successful creative path.

A prerequisite for full artistic perception is the correct selection of works of art consistent with the age and individual characteristics of children. Thus, the process of acquiring and upgrading knowledge and skills is carried out methodically, consistently, and effectively. The artistic perception of works of visual art is largely a creative process, multifaceted and complex. The building through it of aesthetic qualities in children depends exclusively on the great pedagogical mastery, on the knowledge of the problems of visual arts on the part of pedagogues, on their rich general culture and knowledge in the field of aesthetics (Legkostup, Angelova 2005, p. 144). Pedagogues must have the necessary erudition and training in the field of visual arts and know closely the complex multifaceted artistic processes in order to reveal to children the magical nature of art and pass their knowledge of the broad technical possibilities of visual techniques and rules for creating of pictorial space.

In the compositional construction of paintings, colour harmony and colour combination are of major importance. Colour is an integral part of shape. In works of visual art, the arrangement of colour spots is subject to certain laws and logic related to the artistic content. The harmonious combination of colours in the pictorial space and the aesthetic and functional interaction of colour and shape increase the artistic expressiveness of the works of art. “The main means of expression for the construction of an artistic image, conveyance of a certain ideological content, and emotional impact are colours” (Zankov 2006, p. 10). The colour composition builds the artistic image, the associative properties of different colours and combinations allow by using a certain colour combination or colour scale to recreate a different emotional state, impression, mood. The colour in a composition is a powerful integrating tool that unites all the elements in a single, complete sound. The harmony between the different tones determines the colour

combination of the work; through it, the artist their creative ideas, feelings, state of nature, emotional experiences (Rats, 2014: 84). Painters know that each new colour put on the plane of the painting changes the adjacent colours and they also change the overall colour balance. Each new tone can destroy the colour combination harmony or unite it. There is no expressiveness of colour combination without a colour interrelation, without an opposition of light and dark, of one nuance to another, united by a common sound (Volkov 1965, p. 63).

Knowledge of colours and complex colour combination relationships between them are the basis for the construction of a painting. But what approach should be chosen to introduce children to the world of painting? What methods should be used for effective development of the colour perception and colour combination skills of little artists? What is the colour for children? According to Solomon Levin, “of all the means of expression in a children's drawing, the brightest, strongest, and most accessible seem to be contained in colour. Colour is the most powerful magician in the hands of little artists” (Levin 1984, p. 69). Children use colours expressively and with ease, expressing their emotional impressions of the world around. Young artists also use the language of art to communicate with the people around them. Children intuitively focus on colours, showing a need for artistic creativity and creative activity. (Gyulchev, 2010, p. 147). For the full artistic development of preschool children, it is necessary to apply teaching methods that reveal the properties, qualities, richness of means of expression of colours and, at the same time, develop the culture of colour perception and learn skills for combining colours in a painting.

According to the researcher of children's art Yu. A. Poluyanov, “for the development of the coloristic abilities of preschool children, the tasks should be set so that the expressiveness of a drawing depends directly on the interaction of colours, and children are trained to combine different colours with each other” (Poluyanov 1988, p. 92). Children can easily learn new knowledge about colours and their harmonious blend in the composition of paintings, if we introduce them to the works of Impressionist artists. Why exactly the works of the Impressionists? To answer this question, we must explain the specifics of this stylistic trend, the means of expression used, and the direction of the aesthetic pursuits of the Impressionist artists.

Impressionism was a significant stylistic trend which gave a new, revolutionary direction to contemporary art. The aesthetic pursuits of the Impressionists overturned the hitherto existing notions of art, which formed the foundations and created preconditions for the emergence and development of artistic trends, styles, and creative concepts in more recent times. One of the modernist artists, Fernand Leger, shared: “The era of the Impressionists was naturally melodic. They made a real revolution, put an end to the light and shadow. What a game of pure colours!” (Vallier 2001, p. 73). The inspiration for the Impressionists was nature – everything

elusive on which the breath of life was stamped – the rustling of leaves, the movement of air. Light became their style principle (Venturi 1979, p. 182). Claude Monet himself, one of the most prominent representatives of this artistic trend, wrote: “Light is the main protagonist in a painting” (Clark 1977, p. 322). In the paintings of the Impressionists, rapidly changing natural states depicted expressively and materializing light through tonal diversity and picturesque contrasts were recreated. The artistic image in their works was reduced to a kaleidoscope or a mosaic of coloured spots and the work of art acquired a new meaning. The Impressionists shifted the structures of the reality through colour contrasts, the pictorial space was based on the relationships between colours and shapes, creating a new attitude towards reality. In their paintings, the artists built multi-layered spaces filled with light and life (Petrov 1978, p. 131). The paintings of Impressionists have an exquisite colour combination the impact of which was achieved through a variety of halftones and transition of delicate colour nuances organized in a single blend and harmony. The colour combination is vibrant, intense. “The Impressionists found that the cold blue colour of the sky and air constantly contrasted with the warm shades of the sunlight acting as a colour shade. The charm of the paintings of Monet, Pizarro, and Renoir lies precisely in the unusual game of modulations of warm and cold colours” (Itten 2001, p. 49). The study of the sunlight changing the natural colours of objects as well as the light in the atmosphere of the natural environment enriched the Impressionist artists with new scientific knowledge.

The discoveries of the Impressionists changed the notions of artistic image in visual arts, of colour combination and pictorial impact of works, and, with it, the way in which works of art are perceived. This is how the famous art critic and art theorist E. Gombrich described the artistic experience: “To properly appreciate an impressionist painting, one must take a few steps back and then experience the miracle of how the colour spots suddenly fall into place and come to life before their eyes” (Gombrich 1988, p. 449).

Monet, Manet, Degas, Renoir, Sisley, Morisot, and Pizarro were just some of the artists who united their creative, aesthetic pursuits in the stylistic direction of Impressionism. Every one of them had their own style, and solved complex painting problems through their work. What united them was the change in the attitude to the shape, the striving to recreate the elusive, the materialization of light in subtle colour combination vibrations organizing the harmonious sound of the pictorial space.

The purpose of artistic reproduction is not exact repetition of nature. One of the main tasks of artists is to recreate the aesthetic qualities of nature with the help of all pictorial means, of which colour harmony is one of the most important. The works of the Impressionists can teach us how to use colours to build a variety of colour harmonies and achieve an emotional impact. “The introduction of children to works of art is a kind of communication. Children must get acquainted with the

‘language’ of the artists, understand the language, and master it. We can help them clarify and express verbally their impressions and feelings about what they have been shown” (Legkostup 2003, p. 98). The introduction to the world of visual arts, the first encounters with the history of art must be made with appropriate works that are understandable to children. The pictorial language of the Impressionists is accessible to preschool children, as in their canvases they recreated their admiration for the surrounding world. By getting acquainted with works of the Impressionists, children acquire the sensitivity to discover the beauty of nature, the variability of colours, and the uniqueness of each moment.

Characteristic of the artists of light was the *plein air painting*, which can also be used in the creative activities of preschool children. The famous Bulgarian artist Boris Denev, who was also a pedagogue, defined in the early twentieth century the purpose of teaching painting as “inspiring love for nature” (Denev 1905, p. 4). The artist, whose artistic pursuits were close to the style of the Impressionists, emphasized the importance of children’s contact with the natural environment and the interdisciplinary connections in the educational processes. In direct communication with nature, children have the opportunity to observe and analyse natural phenomena and changes, the colours of the seasons, the changes in the nuances of light.

In visual arts education, the integrative connections with the educational field of music are especially strong. “The colour in a picture is the same as the sound in music. To be selected, it needs an artistic eye, just as musical sound needs musical hearing. Both are products of human education in the process of artistic activity and perception, the result of listening to music, looking at pictures, and, therefore, part of the musical and painting traditions” (Volkov 1965, p. 100). The works of the Impressionists have a melodic radiance, the colour combination harmonies of their paintings have a characteristic lyricism. As a stylistic trend, Impressionism was also present in music; among its main representatives was the composer Claude Debussy, whose work was inspired by the beauty of nature, and the musical harmonies of his works were in tune with the colour and colour combination pursuits of the artists. “... Composers like Debussy conveyed spiritual impressions that they often took from nature and transformed them into spiritual images in a purely musical form” (Kandinsky 2016, p. 50). Debussy's musical pieces are saturated with lyricism and ethereality, evoking sensations close to those when we contemplate the canvases of the Impressionists, built of melodious gentle combination of colours. Children should be explained the bidirectionality between the two arts, the ‘musicising’ of the painting components in the work of art, which organizes the colour combination of the pictorial space, and the colour tonalities and harmonies that build the musical work. This associative connection can be easily mastered by preschool children through the paintings and musical works of the Impressionists.

By studying the pictorial qualities of the works of the Impressionists, children can improve their colour perception and colour combination skills. Here are some ideas to use in the teaching process:

- Viewing reproductions with works of the Impressionists. Defining the genre and analysing the compositions; analysing the artistic content through guiding questions asked by the pedagogues;

- Clarifying basic concepts related to the painting techniques and compositional construction of the picture; mastering terms such as colour, tone, scale, nuance, colour combination.

- Listening to an excerpt from a piece of music – *The Sea* symphonic suite by Claude Debussy, with previous analysis of the *Impression, Sunrise* painting by Claude Monet. Analysing the mood evoked by the works. Establishing associative connections between colour combination in painting and musical harmony. Determining the colour scales of the works – warm / cold (in paintings); major / minor (in music).

- Creating a system of exercises for mastering painting techniques: tempera, watercolour, and mixed by drawing up nuances and introducing the concept of colour contrast between warm and cold colours and their tonal varieties;

- Creating exercises for mastering various methods for applying tempera paint on the drawing sheet: by individual strokes with a flat brush, by using cotton swabs; Tasks for nuancing and creating pictorial contrasts by exploring tonal possibilities; Discovering the richness of colour harmonies and combinations;

- Setting the pictorial task: creating a landscape built in the colour harmony characteristic of the season conveyed, through musical work association and use of the possibilities of the tempera painting technique. Applique task: building a composition of finely nuanced, pre-prepared coloured parts, which must be organized in a uniformly sounding colour combination;

- Discussing the works, analysing the compositions, the colours and colour combinations used, the moods recreated by the children through the expressive means of painting.

The approaches described help to improve children's colour perception and colour combination skills and give them an opportunity for creative interpretations through the means of painting.

Communicating with works of art is crucial in the development of creative thinking and in expanding the creative abilities of children. Through the artistic perception and experience, the language of visual arts is mastered, skills for recreating an artistic image are built, and an aspiration for transformation of the reality through the prism of one's own temperament and individuality arises. The introduction of children to the work of the Impressionists, some of the most significant colourists in the history of art, contributes to the development of colour perception and the acquisition of important knowledge about the pictorial construction of space in paintings.

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✉ **Dr. Galina Nikolova, Assist. Prof.**

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-7751-1680

St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo

Veliko Turnovo, Bulgaria

E-mail: g.nikolova@ts.uni-vt.bg