

WORKS OF ART AND 5 – 10 YEAR OLD CHILDREN

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Abstract. This article reflects the views of its author on the importance of perception of art in its integral wholeness in the process of developing pedagogical interaction with children contributing to their personal and social development. Here, the focus is on the integration of pedagogical technologies with means of art; and visual art, knowledge of art, and artistic and visual skills acquired are enriched through the application of integral pedagogical-methodological technologies. Based on the research done by the author in the period from 1992 to the present, a methodology for visits to museums and galleries has been developed, which can be of help to teachers and parents. Indicated is one of the ways in which purposefully selected works of art, perceived by children in galleries and museums, can stimulate creative activity, imagination, and fantasy and help children build and express their identity.

Keywords: artistic image; perception; gallery; museum

The perception of works of visual art is far from inherent in all people. In order to understand art, first of all, children must feel the need to communicate with works of art. Contacts with works of art are a special kind of communication: children have to get acquainted with the “language” of an artist, understand and master it. Perception of works of art is expressed in commenting on one’s own and other people’s works, visiting exhibitions, and meeting artists. These activities stimulate children’s sensitivity and ability to listen and observe, and bring them closer to different forms of art.

Artistic perception begins with a work of art. An artistic image, similar to that of the author, is formed in the mind of the recipient. Just as the image of one and the same object differs in the works of different artists, so one and the same work of art is perceived differently by people. Here is how the famous Bulgarian art critic and artist Nikolay Raynov described the perception of paintings: “The painting is hanging in front of you. The lines, spots, and shapes perceived by the eye awaken in you a number of ideas about objects seen earlier... Thus, against the visible work, in your soul, a second one, already yours and invisible, some image of the visible, some interpretation thereof, appears. Remember well that when you talk about a painting, you are talking about this second, your own painting, reflecting the work

of the artist only to some extent... This second work is a creation of the viewer, born out of what you see and built with the help of your previous visual experience. In this painting of yours, not all the features of the visible work are always repeated; often, even the most essential of the artist is missing there” (Raynov, 1936: 19).

The in-depth perception of works of visual art depends on several factors that can be summarized as follows:

- Structure of the work of art;
- Degree of closeness of what was depicted to children’s experience;
- Knowledge of the means of expression used;
- Questions asked by adults;
- General culture and ability to observe;
- Development of children's speech.

In the perception of works of visual art, Luchia Angelova distinguished several degrees of communication with the work:

“The first level of communication is the simple, visual impact of the combination of colours, chiaroscuro, volume, rhythm of black and white and colour spots. Here, the evaluation of a work is “I like it” or “I do not like it”. The second degree is characterized by the definition of both the plot and the theme and idea as the main elements of the content of the work of art. At the level of the third degree of communication with the work, the recipient must understand the specifics of the creative process. The fourth degree of communication with works of visual art is the building of a critical-evaluation criterion and the development of critical-evaluation activity based on this criterion” (Angelova, 2005: 86).

Here comes the question how children interpret and share the mood of a picture. One of the ways is to use what I call the “perception mechanism”, which includes the following elements:

The first one is the “right selection of works of art”. The criterion for choosing a work of art should be the accessibility of the artistic content and idea, as “according to the theory of sensory integration, processing of lower-level skills on which visual perceptions stand is an essential factor for the adequate formation of higher-level skills” (Popova, 2019: 420).

Through the second element “own pictorial activity”, children learn to see what is main and essential: shape, colour, construction, structure, and spatial arrangement necessary for their discovery in the perception and analysis of works of art. The third element of the mechanism is the “adults’ example”. The conditions mentioned so far lose their meaning without “training in perception”. Appropriate discussion should become a unifying factor between the separate elements of the mechanism.

In educating the aesthetic taste, sense, and attitude of children, and especially in training in perception, pedagogues must be supported by parents and the public. Apart from kindergarten or school, this can be done at home, in an art gallery or a museum.

The many years of experience and long-term observation allow us to formulate certain statements and conclusions about their place in a given pedagogical project, and visiting cultural centres can begin much earlier than usual.

Children stand in front of an original work of art: they look and talk freely about what they see and feel. In the first stage of contact with it, the teacher intervenes to help them observe, verbalize, and recall what they have learned. Through conversation, children's attention is directed to the base used by the author, the tools and materials, the method, etc. This phase of discovery and analysis allows the teacher to stimulate children to learn new techniques, which will allow them to get to know the world of the artist. The second stage of the pedagogical project can be conditionally divided into three parts: use – full mastering – integration. By getting acquainted with new ways of working, children can express themselves “by the example” of the artist. The final phase in the transfer of knowledge obtained from the contacts with a work of art is also divided into three parts: change - excursus – reproduction. At this stage, children should be able to express themselves freely, in their own manner, depending on their abilities and individuality, with the help of the group of techniques that they have already learned and which they will apply in their own works.

When visiting galleries and museums, children's attention should be focused on works and authors in which the plastic means of expression of visual art are clearly visible. The acquaintance with the works of art is followed by their reproduction in different pedagogical situations.

The experience so far shows that children who are free to use plastic means of expression soon begin to feel their deficit. It can be overcome by using techniques of contemporary artists that are close to the children's way of expression. In this sense, we can say that works of art cause changes in the plastic expression in children. Based on the plastic stylistics and thematic world of some artists, aesthetic sensitivity in the age of studying can develop to the point of creating habits of “interpreting”. Teachers can encourage children to use specific words which will allow them to say exactly what they see. Such a training provokes them to ask spontaneous questions about the way artists choose their means of expression.

Many parents are happy to take their children to art galleries and museums, but not everyone can make the visits beneficial. This is why the question before us is: How, in what way, and by what means can we make a child's meeting with art interesting and memorable? The answer to this question and the underestimation of children's purposeful contacts with works of art have made me dwell on some events, which I am going to tell in brief.

My most striking impression of the Picasso Museum in Paris was not the masterpieces of the world-renowned maestro, but the crowds of children and students who were enjoying them led by their teachers. For several hours, I met a dozen groups of children aged 5 to 12. Young visitors were breathlessly listening to their

teacher, who was sitting in front of a sculpture. The older of them were diligently writing down their teacher's words.

I was even more impressed by the retrospective exhibition of the German abstractionist Kurt Schwitters at the exhibition halls of the Pompidou Cultural Centre in Paris. The presence of children could no longer surprise me, but there was another surprise. In groups of three to five, they were looking with interest at various works of art. My professional curiosity prevailed and I began to observe them more closely than the paintings. At that moment, the teacher gave them sheets and felt-tip pens. The little lovers of visual art sat on the floor, each next to the picture they were looking at, and began to draw with diligence.

Then, once again, I was convinced that purposeful contacts with works of art are becoming an increasingly permanent trend in the artistic education of children.

Later, at the City Art Gallery of Leeds (England), my conclusion was confirmed: in the centre of a huge and full of paintings hall, I saw a separate work area, where there were various in colour and size papers, paints, pastels, colour pencils, and other materials. The children, in different positions - sitting, squatting, lying on a thick carpet in a space surrounded by large, colourful pillows-, were expressing on paper their view of the works in the gallery.

Similar were my impressions from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (Netherlands), the Altemuseum in Berlin, Zwinger in Dresden (Germany), the Palazzo Pitti and Piazza de la Signoria in Florence (Italy), and the National Art Museum of China in Beijing.

On the basis of the research done by me in the period from 1992 to the present, a methodology for visits to museums and galleries has been developed. It can help teachers and parents, and consists of five stages: Preparing to visit a museum or gallery; Specifics of the first visit to a museum or gallery; Communicating with children at the exhibition hall; Second visit to a museum; After the visit to a museum.

Preparing to visit a museum or gallery:

The first visit should be an event in the children's life. In order for it to become a real, memorable holiday, it is necessary to keep in mind some requirements:

It is traditionally believed that a museum is visited only when there is nothing else to do or in rainy weather, as if it is sunny outside, it is more natural for a child to be outdoors. This view is fundamentally wrong. Quite the contrary, a visit to a museum should be a conscious choice, a celebration, and not just a way to while away the time. "By the way, on a sunny day, it is much more pleasant to look at works of art than on a cloudy one, and standing in front of the cloakroom with wet jackets and umbrellas is quite an unpleasant situation" (Barb-Gall, 2007: 18).

It is undesirable for the viewing of a gallery to coincide with other significant events: the beginning of a school year, coming back from "green classes", etc. If the "discovery" of museums happens in a relatively calm and free of other important

events moment of the children's lives, impressions can be imprinted in their minds to occupy the central place in building future systems for understanding art.

Let us not forget to explain to children how we should behave in a museum. "The basic rules of conduct are the same everywhere: we must not touch the works of art or go too close to them, or take pictures with a flash. These rules may seem too strict for children, but they are all designed to preserve the pictures as long as possible" (Barb-Gall, 2007: 19).

Let children invite a friend of theirs. It is better for them to go to a museum with their own friend than with a friend of yours so that they have the opportunity to share their impressions with a person with equal rights and opportunities to evaluate the works.

Specifics of the first visit to a museum or gallery:

Every visit to a museum or gallery is a serious effort for children. They usually tend to look at exhibition halls as a desirable space where they can run and chase at will, but, instead, will have to walk slowly, make no noise, touch nothing with hands, and all this is not easy at all. It is necessary to remember that in museums, besides paintings and sculptures, there are many other objects that attract the attention of the small visitors: big stairs, huge halls, unusual interior. In order for children to see the space of a museum gradually, it would be a good idea to make a plan for the visit. Children may be allowed to sit on sofas, look at stairs, walls, chandeliers, etc. Without all this, it would be difficult for the little visitors to concentrate on the perception of the works. All the interior accessories in question will distract them constantly. Sometimes, these impressions can be the most important for the children. According to K. Petrova, "voluntarily mastered knowledge, skills, and competencies to deal with various problem situations are the basis for the transformation of behavioural mechanisms into socially oriented norms of behaviour and activities" (Petrova, 2020: 45).

Communicating with children at the exhibition hall:

In most museums, visitors are offered detailed plans of the exhibition space. Children should be explained how to use the plan and they will be happy to choose the route. "Older children will be interested to know on what principle the pictures are placed in the halls: chronologically or thematically. In some halls, works from a given country or the work of a particular artist can be presented, and in others, works from different eras and authors can be exhibited together." (Barb-Gall, 2007, 21). One should direct children's attention to the signs next to the paintings, help them read their names, the names of the artists and the dates correctly, explain what the different techniques mean. In order to perceive a specific work of art, children need some concentration which will certainly be disturbed if they remain in front of the picture longer than necessary. It is more useful to spend five minutes on one work than to skim through them all in a row for an hour.

Various techniques can be used when viewing works of art. One is to choose a picture with strong emotional content. Ask the children what remarkable and interesting they can see in it. Adults should direct children to the distinctive features of the artistic image and help them discover the most important things in the work. Another method is to ask children to choose the picture that is, in their opinion, the funniest (harshes, most anxious) by mood, and ask them to explain why. You should not be nervous or angry if your child speaks naively or seems to be making inappropriate decisions. Try to find out where the problem is, taking into account the fact that pictures are arranged at the level of eyes of adults. Squat or sit and look at the work from below, then you will know for sure that your child, being shorter, does not see exactly the same as you, and you will understand their interest in some minor, according to adults, details. It is possible that something that escaped your attention turned out to be right in front of your child's eyes. If they liked one of the pictures, they will want to see it again: all children love to listen to their favourite tales and watch their favourite movies again and again. At first, you will have to patiently walk the same path, and this is not a waste of time but a very important ritual. The favourite picture will nurture the interest in others, and, with your active help, the child will understand that every time they look at the same picture, they could find something new in it.

Often, parents would like to know what pictures they can show their children and what they should not. There are no special restrictions here, but it is not recommended to direct their attention to paintings with erotic content, and works that reveal the beauty of the naked human body should be viewed together with other works. Discussing paintings that depict scenes of violence or ones that are extremely overloaded with allegories should be avoided. Children enjoy looking at landscapes, still lives, and figural compositions, but there is a difference in their attitude to painting and graphics because of the special attractiveness of colour at their age. Therefore, if you would like for your child to get a pleasant impression of a museum, it will be better for the first visit to be dedicated to painting, and graphics can be seen another time. Remember: in half an hour, your child will probably be fed up with what they have seen, and the younger they are, the shorter their stay in the museum should be.

The visit would not be complete if you do not go to the cafe (buffet) after that. For the child, this will be like a movie without popcorn or ice cream. If there is no cafe, go somewhere near and remember: the smaller the child, the more important it is to organize for them this little holiday.

Second visit to a museum or gallery:

It is best to organize it in one or two weeks, while the first impressions are still fresh. The “journey” can begin with a hall that is already familiar to the child. But the task must be different this time. For example, standing in the centre of the room,

ask your child to decide which works they think belong to an artist and, should they answer correctly, ask them to explain how they knew that. Children often have questions about how an artist achieved one or another effect. To give a qualified answer, it is necessary that you know art well. If you have difficulty answering, then you can ask the child the same question: And what do you think? Let them reflect on the picture.

After the visit to a museum or gallery:

With proper organization, impressions remain in children's memory for a long time, but they fade over time. Therefore, it will be useful to keep your child's interest between the visits. Art books can play an important role here. It is a good idea to have albums at home with reproductions of paintings from the museums you have visited with your child. The following game is recommended: Ask the child to find in the book or album reproductions of the paintings they viewed at the gallery. Ask them who the author of the paintings is and what they know about them. It will be good if your child identifies exactly some specifics of the works. Praise them for that. If your child wants to draw at home something that impressed them at the museum or gallery, they should be stimulated in this endeavour every possible time. In this way, the very important for children of this age connection between the perception and knowledge of art and their visual activity will take place.

Of course, not all children who have visited museums or galleries can be expected to be artists of tomorrow, but we can hope that some of them will retain such a memory from the visits that they will need to visit them again, as children quickly adapt to new places and apprehend their topology. It was found out that their visual memory can be relied on: they remember the works of art and their arrangement very well. Such is the case with contemporary works especially, as they remind them of different techniques.

All that has been said so far indicates only one of the ways in which a purposefully selected work of art or exhibition perceived by children in their “natural” environment, i.e. a gallery or museum, can stimulate creativity, imagination, and fantasy, and can help children build and express their identity. The rest, to a large extent, depends on the pedagogical mastery of teachers or parents for creative interpretation of works of visual art.

At the end of this all, the logical question comes: Do works of art have any influence on children's drawing? “Yes, they obviously do, and such influence is not insignificant. It can be seen in the direct borrowing of content and shape, in the imitation, and, sometimes, in the assimilation of models that hinder children's own search. But, most often and most noticeably, this influence is expressed in the accelerated development of drawing, in the awakened child's desire to paint and ability to draw” (Levin, 1984: 34). The consideration and analysis of various works of art develop in children “sensory aesthetic abilities” (Petrova, 1995: 93),

enrich their cognitive experience, which in turn contributes to the development of children's art. Since sensory experience is the basis of both aesthetic and mental education, its enrichment through children's encounters with visual art is a prerequisite for the development of imagination, too. It is the imagination which, with its actively transforming, productive-creative, and constructive character, stimulates young artists to creative self-expression, which projects "the unity of known and unknown, visible and hidden, possible and impossible, essential and insignificant in the mutual transitions between them" (Konakchieva, 2010: 16).

In contact with accessible works of art, children are enriched with new concepts and ideas and their knowledge expands: they see the world from different aspects, and this helps for the formation and development of valuable qualities of children's mental activity. The mental effort they put into such contacts ensures the long-term preservation of the resulting image and its use by children in various types of practical and mental activity. The unity of the cognitive and emotional aspects of learning is expressed in reaching personally meaningful insights based on meaningful analysis, selection of information, and the relevance thereof to the specific situation (Chuhovska, 2016: 253). The analysis of works of art provides various opportunities for the moral formation of the children's personality. Children develop an attitude towards the world around them, humane traits are formed in their behaviour, and the need for contacts with art arises and is educated. In addition to the development of cognitive abilities, imagination, and fantasy, contacts with works of visual art also contribute to the enrichment of the expressive means of children's drawing. Here, the dialectical connections between one's own pictorial activity and the perception of art are most clearly seen.

This article reflects my views on the importance of perception of art in its integral wholeness in the process of developing pedagogical interaction with children contributing to their personal and social development. Here, the focus is on the integration of pedagogical technologies with means of art; and visual art, knowledge of art, and artistic and visual skills acquired are enriched through the application of integral pedagogical-methodological technologies. The use of works of art in the learning process reveals opportunities for directing the pedagogical-psychological interaction with children to the areas of their personality the integrity of which creates conditions for the development of its main substructures such as intellect and creativity.

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