

Creative Innovations in Teaching of Art

Doinița Venera DINCĂ¹

Abstract: *The didactic creativity shown by the teaching staff in the direct activity of training and learning represents an indication of the pedagogical training formed over time and it is conditioned by a palette of factors embodied in the personality traits that are specific to each individuality (sensitivity, originality, inventiveness, etc.) but also in the professional-didactic accumulations that express the efforts of each educator in the direction of continuous professionalisation.*

The levels of creativity manifestation are nuanced and determined by a series of variables. The most important of these variables are the specifics of the subject, the curricular level of intervention, the imagination and originality of the teaching staff. The masterwork of didactic creativity, however, is perfected at the level of the direct activities that teachers carry out with students, because this is where the most fruitful perimeter for generating innovation and didactic creativity is manifested.

Keywords: *creativity; interdisciplinary; approach; learning; pedagogical; innovations; teaching; arts;*

Introduction

Before showing precisely how the teaching staff can show their creativity in organising and supporting the activities of fine art expression, it must be admitted that the use of creative visual language is based on a series of premises as follows:

"a. Learning using thinking processes mirrored in images has preceded and precedes learning that uses thinking with and mirrored in words;

b. Imagination and the imaginary, although they represent primary forms of thinking, are used in learning through all forms of the conscious and superconscious but also by those of the human preconscious in expressing contents, representing the word, the linguistic expression for thinking and the conscious engaged in knowledge in the form of an image, of the iconic which involves the preconscious or even the deep layers of the creative conscious;

c. Psychic life, especially our perception, representations and memory are based on certain patterns, models, functional frames in networks of connections visible or not, with meaning (or not) between schemes, things, events, states. It is appreciated that even the proper photographic memory or "eidetic", as it is also called, does not represent a photograph, a video recording, a hard disk or a storage device, but, in reality, a network of connections between man and the perceived reality or represented. These connections are "those that allow us to understand cause-effect relationships, to anticipate future events, to remember elements of learned experience, helping us to make predictions, to associate characters and things, especially those that have an emotional burden"².

¹ Faculty of Arts, Ovidius University of Constanța, vivanciu22@yahoo.com

² Ioan Neacșu. 2015. *Methods and techniques of efficient learning: Fundamentals and successful practices* [Metode și tehnici de învățare eficientă: fundamente și practici de succes]. Iași: Editura Polirom, p. 259.

Moreover, also in the introductory part of the study, we recall the fact that the transposition or use of visual-creative language involves going through certain stages that Ioan Neacșu ranks as follows:

"Alternative A.

- Writing the objective/objectives clearly, simply, concisely.
- The creation of the idea of content defined by tasks/ clear images, positive at the mental level, actionable through activities with an accepted degree of difficulty to be fulfilled.
- The situational placement in the present tense of the language of mental visualisation successfully in concrete tasks, going to significant details, but also anticipating potential problems or obstacles.
- Concentration/focus on the creative mental image through meditation through relaxation, positive motivational state.
- Allocating time, positive energy, affirmative state with the visualisation of elements that can constitute benefits, added values, success values, with self-motivation, involvement, performance.
- The inner dialogue with the Self, reflecting on *how* we look at the problem, the obstacles, the solution, the path, the success.

Alternative B

- Knowledge of the operating principles of visual-creative language, with a clear understanding of the technique and advantages for knowledge/learning/performance.
- Mental and physical relaxation.
- Reaching, through attentional states and focus on a deep mental state, of calm, meditative and flexible awareness for the creative approach.
- Imagining the ideal conditions for the design of the ambience, the mode of cooperation or harmonisation with the activity and results of the others of the incentive framework, rewarding, encouraging and evaluating poor performances. Other details can be added regarding the work schedule (duration), the degree of autonomy of the actors, responsibilities.
- Conducting exercises, creative imagination activities, with the offer of repetition.
- Reporting the results, recording and evaluating the progress with the integration and harmonisation in the didactic logic of the learning and training activities"³

1. Creative innovations in some fundamental curriculum documents

In relation to this idea, in general, teachers can refer differently to the second important curricular document.

This different relation of teachers to the analytical curriculum can take the form of three postures that Michel Minder identifies in his well-known "Functional Didactics", postures or manners that we reproduce in the following lines:

"When they see the curriculum, the teachers can react in at least three ways: the first, which is probably the most common, is to be satisfied with a textbook directly or indirectly depending on the curriculum. The disadvantage of a blind trust in a textbook is however obvious:

³ Ioan Neacșu. 2015. *Methods and techniques of efficient learning: Fundaments and successful practices* [Metode și tehnici de învățare eficientă: fundamente și practici de succes]. Iași: Editura Polirom, pp. 260-261.

the teachers abdicate any power regarding the formulation of personal objectives, thought out and built accordingly, depending especially on the students they guide, without a deep exegesis of the work, which will reveal possible a priori manifest and latent intentions, the teachers become the unconscious transmitters of choices and values that they could not really explain. Apart from that, the textbook often links the teachers to a methodological scheme. Other disadvantages are related to the formal aspect of the book: the division into units, the logical or chronological chaining of the contents, the highlighting, or on the contrary, skipping of some aspects, etc. Everything risks, if it is accepted as a block and once and for all, to cause a form of alienation in the teachers. Textbooks obviously have an important place in a teaching procedure and this place is better measured, but this can only be measured during the process, long after the objectives have been set"⁴

In summary, it can be appreciated that the textbook is a fundamental tool for the teachers, which helps them, especially at the beginning of their career, but the greatest danger that can be for the teacher is that of being influenced by the subjective design of the author, compared to the contents they integrate into the textbook. Unfortunately, in some situations, this subjective design can generate unforgivable gaps, and examples of this kind can be found in many works, regardless of the field they address. For example, Maurice Reuchlin⁵, in *General Psychology*, in the chapter dedicated to motivation, ignores the substantial contribution that the renowned American psychologist Abraham Maslow had in treating this mental activity, and this idiosyncrasy is deeply regrettable, because to ignore the contribution of the American psychologist in approaching the aforementioned mental activity, it is as if, when you treat intelligence, you ostentatiously ignore the contributions of Jean Piaget in unraveling the mysteries of cognitive development.

A second way to operate is to build your own lesson starting with the objectives listed in the curriculum. The intention is commendable and the effort often turns out to be very captivating. Also here, however, a danger lurks: that of the logical and rigid construction that will be very difficult to problematise because factors with emotional investment inevitably come into play. On the other hand, the behavioral objectives will frequently risk being in a position to give way to the content objectives to which the teacher, a specialist in a discipline, will have, of course, devoted the essential of their efforts. It remains that these objectives are targeted and that there must be encouraged a pedagogy in which the teachers take most of the decisions themselves.

For example, the same theme is built and reconstructed, depending on the specialty of the class of students; students from the computer science class will be much more comfortable facing the content of a topic that includes notions of information and communication technology, examples from this field of activity. The theme will be presented from a perspective which is convenient for them, it will be more attractive, more motivating, closer to their interests; in the visual education class, many of the students of these specialty classes prefer to create and present the projects/themes by means of the image on the computer; it is their "comfort zone", and they refuse, at first approach, to use the classical means of representation. Painting, collage, drawing, graphics, tools such as brushes, pencils, markers, etc. it is a "mine" field, unless the art teacher

⁴ Michel Minder. 2011. *Functional Didactic-Objective, strategies, assessment: operant cognitivism [Didactică funcțională-Obiective, strategii, evaluare: cognitivismul operant]*. Cluj- Napoca: ASCR, p. 54.

⁵ Maurice Reuchlin. 1999. *General Psychology [Psihologie generală]*. București: Editura Științifică, pp. 391-465.

has encouraged them to try to express themselves in other ways. They certainly need to be taken out of that "comfort zone" but after they have stepped into the territory of the arts without the fear that various unknowns will await them in this space that will put them in difficulty, and they will not be able to complete their school tasks. Thus, students must, first of all, be encouraged to try to express themselves in a foreign language for them, up to a certain point. That is why it is possible to explain to students the importance of knowing the elements of fine-art language, understanding the "alphabet" of art, in receiving the message from the artistic image, from the work of art.

In relation to this second way of reporting the teachers to the school curriculum, which really gives them the freedom but also the responsibility to design their own lesson, as can be easily anticipated, there is also a series of advantages, the biggest of which is to invest the entire didactic creativity of which the respective teachers are capable. In other words, through this modality, the teachers can "pedagogise" the contents in such a way as to try to make compatible, the three types of logic that Gerard Fourez⁶ illustratively analyses in his work *Eduquer* as follows:

1. The first of the three logics is the logic of science, which means that within their efforts they must ensure an optimal progression in the approach of content elements, so that, during their transfer from teachers to students, the pieces of knowledge to support each other. If those who designed the textbook did not fully respect this requirement, it is the duty of the teacher to redo the ranking of the topics in the curriculum or the lessons in the textbook, so that the logic of science is respected because it will ultimately guarantee optimal understanding, which is one of discursive type, of the entire textbook.

2. The teachers must also reckon with its logic, knowing that any teacher, due to very different variables, will proceed in a unique way in the treatment of certain contents, which means that the same topic can be approached from a different perspective from one teacher to another. This aspect is a positive one because basically, through this, they express their didactic creativity and originality which is distinct. And here, however, certain precautions must be taken into account, because this personal approach, which is subjective, must not be separated or removed from a standard treatment, from a consecrated treatment, because in this situation it could reach caricature and alteration of the respective contents. In the same way, the question could arise as to why, in the case of the same subject, or the same topics, teachers react differently and the explanations can be varied, such as:

- teachers do not have the same scientific training, and consequently, those with less solid training cannot treat the topics at the same level of depth;
- they do not have the same level of psycho-pedagogical training, and in the case of some, with a brief training, it is clear that the themes can benefit from a somewhat undocumented treatment, from a pedagogical point of view;
- they do not always share the same sets of values, standards, criteria and consequently, due to this fact, they will relate differently in the treatment of the topics in the curriculum;
- they do not show the same attractiveness for all topics and themes in the curriculum, and as a result, some will be treated and analysed with more attention and concern, and others, on the contrary, will be treated with less involvement, and even with a certain dose of conciseness.

⁶ Gerard Fourez. 1990. *Eduquer- Ecoles, Ethiques, Societes*. Bruxelles: De Boeck Universite, p. 35.

All these previously made considerations are embodied in didactic approaches that we reproduce below.

During the artistic education classes, in the 11th and 12th grades, the students were proposed projects aimed at the interpretation of some texts or literary works studied, projects that ended with the creation of two/three-dimensional images (e.g. artistic book-object), and which took place in several stages: documentation on the chosen subjects, analysis and debate of the themes, methods of representation, materials and work techniques, making composition sketches, presenting and commenting on them in during the classes, selecting the best sketches to be transposed into future compositions, creating images, organising exhibitions with students' creations. At the end of the projects, the students found that the interpretation can be done in multiple ways, that they have a clearer picture of the topic addressed, that they can also "read" other fine-art images (along with the analysis of the composition sketches, the students' knowledge was updated theories about the grammar of the image), that the created object is connected to knowledge from various fields (literature, art, philosophy, history, biology, etc.) The fine-art discourse was embodied in many of their creations, in objects bearing purposes, meanings, symbols, inspired by the work of Mihai Eminescu, Tudor Arghezi, Lucian Blaga, George Bacovia, Marin Sorescu, Ion Creangă, Ion Luca Caragiale et al., authors who are well-known literary landmarks of our literature.

We consider that the main theme, the book, often becomes a relief through the presence of objects that make the idea visible, by transforming the emotional load of the textual content into a fine-art object, the object itself being tense under the burden of meanings.

Through a careful, documented analysis, starting with the creation of the Romanian artist, Ion Bitzan, originated in Dobrudja, the students understood the legacy left by the great artist, the system of associating different cultural elements, materials and forms that lead to extremely refined expressions, the works becoming a tribute to culture.

Starting from the analysis of the fine-art object proposed to the Romanian culture by this great artist, we were led to another great creator, in another field, that of literature, Jorge Luis Borges, the one who imagined in one of his writings the Paradise but like a library not like a garden. This superb metaphor with multiple decipherments also offered the possibility of continuing research in the field of writing, the book field, which became a "pretext" for the transfer of forms and ideas between the two universes. And then, the study of the writings helped to understand the mechanism of the dislocation of an object, a sign, from its original nature by moving it to another unnatural world; on this occasion the experiment of artistic exploration and the reinvention or re-writing of a new horizon took place.

The proposed themes are related to various problems of the contemporary world: the role of the book in people's lives, the importance of a clean environment for all beings on Earth, family violence, the creation of an environment that enhances the quality of life, or of physical and mental comfort.

3. The student's logic is also very important in the general equation of teaching and learning activity. Very often the teachers, because they are not aware of its importance, cannot explain many of the failures of their own students regarding the learning activity.

This type of logic can be easily detected in the teaching-learning activity because it is evident that in the case of teaching the same topic to a group of students, the results can be quite different.

The causes of the existing differences between students are numerous, but by doing a more careful and deeper analysis, the following can be identified:

- the extension of the volume of knowledge when they are presented with the same topic; There will be one type of echo of the theme for a student who possesses a considerable volume of knowledge, data, information, and a different echo will be in the case of a student with a precarious, poor and limited round knowledge;
- the way in which the whole cognition is structured and functions; if, over time, the students who were highly motivated for the learning activity formed a cognitive structure in which knowledge, data, notions are well correlated, ranked according to the principle of scientific logic, there are also students, as is known, who prove lacunar, incomplete cognitive structure gaps, and even marked by confusions and misunderstandings or erroneous meanings.
- the motivation they put into play in the learning activities, knowing that some are strongly motivated, and especially driven by an intrinsic type of motivation, while others are less motivated or are more related to a negative motivation, which means that their main objective is not to pursue success in learning but to avoid failure of a greater or lesser amplitude.
- the variety of learning situations they have experienced during a more extensive or limited schooling period.

All these aspects that we have referred to can provide explanations in relation to the completely different ways of students' answers in the training and learning activities.

The third way of reporting consists "in defining first and foremost the final objective of the educational sequence that is proposed to be implemented, in order not to return until afterwards to the curriculum from which they will extract elements likely to match and promote pre-selected behaviours"⁷.

Trying to evaluate these methods, M. Minder believes that the last one is the most functional and effective because it takes into account to a greater extent the characteristics and possibilities of the students with whom teachers work.

On the other hand, the teachers' creativity at the level of the school curriculum can also be proven if they promote the principle of interdisciplinarity in the treatment of some themes or subjects that are specified by the curriculum.

As a general note, the advantages of interdisciplinarity are mentioned in didactic or pedagogy textbooks and it is recommended that users know them very well, even before trying to implement this modality in practice. For example, in a paper, V. Frunzã⁸ mentions the advantages of interdisciplinarity as follows:

- reduction or decongestion of school curriculum, which results in positive effects both on the teacher's activity and on that of the students; the teacher, for example, is no longer under the pressure of transmitting a large volume of knowledge per unit of time, and the students, in turn, are no longer subject to prolonged labor imposed by the assimilation of a large volume of knowledge and information;
- facilitating interdisciplinary transfer, by being able to make correlations between the content of several disciplines, provided that there really is a certain degree of similarity between them.

Making these correlations is able to facilitate, on the one hand, the process of understanding

⁷ Gerard Fourez. 1998, *Eduquer-Ecoles, Ethiques, Societes*. Bruxelles: De Boeck Universite, p. 28.

⁸ Virgil Frunzã. 2013. *Problems of contemporaneous pedagogy [Probleme de pedagogie contemporanã]*. București: Editura Universitarã, pp. 171-172.

the transmitted contents, and on the other hand, to ensure their longer retention through long-term memory (L.T. M.);

- ensuring a greater functionality of the pieces of knowledge in the sense that they become more operational, they are more easily transposed into practice, can be more easily used in solving some problems or carrying out some activities;
- favoring the apparition of border disciplines such as: psychosociology, psychopedagogy, sociopedagogy, psycholinguistics, biochemistry, etc., through which the common areas of these disciplines can be exploited to a greater extent.

2. Curricular innovations through the semantic organisation of knowledge

Another direction through which the teachers can demonstrate their didactic creativity at the content level is the organisation of knowledge through prototypes, cognitive schemes and semantic networks.

For example, the organisation of knowledge through prototypes is beneficial because, if the teacher carefully identifies the specimen that most faithfully embodies the characteristics of the respective class, then these characteristics can easily be identified in other representatives of the respective class. For example, if, in the case of Symbolism, the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch is established as a prototype, starting from his fundamental characteristics, one can reach the identification of these characteristics and other representatives of symbolism, such as in France - Gustave Moreau, in Belgium - James Ensor, Spain - Adria Gual-Queralt, Great Britain - Sir Edward Bore-Jones, Italy - Giovanni Segantini, Russia - Martiros Serghievichi Sarian, Switzerland - Arnold Bocklin⁹.

In the case of organising knowledge through cognitive schemes, teachers must have basic information about the context or situations when it is advisable to use information of a cognitive nature. For example, the specialists of this trend in psychology are of the opinion that cognitive schemes must be appealed to and that cognitive schemes must be used in the case of *inseparable* knowledge, or in other words, knowledge that cannot be dissociated, cannot be transmitted to students through sequencing, but presupposes a simultaneous or concurrent presentation. The advantages of teaching knowledge through cognitive schemes is that, starting from the core of the cognitive scheme, other more detailed pieces of knowledge can easily be derived and integrated into the respective mode of presentation. For example, in the cognitive scheme entitled *students in the painting workshop*, the strong core of the scheme is made up of the following elements:

1. the existence of a workshop as an architectural space intended for this activity;
2. the existence of students who are to be involved in the painting activities;
3. the existence of the teacher, who has the task of guiding the students and monitoring their progress.

Starting from the hard core of the scheme, other significant pieces of knowledge can be derived, such as the age of the students or the theme to be approached pictorially, tools and materials used in painting, etc.

⁹ Patricia Fride-Carrassat & Isabelle Marcade. 2007. *Artistic Movements in painting [Mișcări artistice în pictură]*. București: Editura RAO, p. 88.

Organising contents through semantic networks. This method of organisation is also of cognitivist origin, and the element of specificity within the semantic network is the fact that the organisation of the pieces of knowledge is done in a hierarchical way depending on the degree of generality at which they are located, which is why, at the top of the semantic network there are the concepts with the highest degree of generality, and at its base those with a greater degree of concreteness and specificity. Mircea Miclea¹⁰ reveals the fact that from a structural point of view, the semantic network is made up of *nodes and arcs*, the nodes representing the concepts ranked according to the degree of generality, and the arcs, the relationships between concepts or the relationships between concepts and their related essential characteristics.

Mircea Miclea but also other authors, for example Mielu Zlate¹¹, emphasise the fact that one of the fundamental properties of the semantic network is the *heritability* of features, which means that the properties or characteristics related to concepts with a higher degree of generality are necessarily found in all concepts subordinate to them.

The advantages of organising knowledge through semantic networks are obvious because, on the one hand, it facilitates the process of understanding this knowledge, which becomes integrable in cognitive structures with a higher and higher degree of generality, and on the other hand, because it ensures a better retention in long-term memory and a faster reactivation of them determined by solving certain tasks or performing certain activities.

For example, we offer a semantic network of artistic movements: Classicism, Romanticism, Symbolism, Crude Art.

Classicism (17th century)

Characteristics:

- the painting glorifies the deeds of the individual;
- historical painting is inspired by Antiquity, mythology, the Bible, Latin bucolic poetry and the literature of the era;
- painters study nature "live" through notes and line drawings, sketches, and in the workshop they recreate an intellectual landscape based on the laws of perspective.

Representatives:

Annibale Carracci, Guido Reni (Italy) Nicolas, Philippe de Champaigne, Claude Lorrain (France)

Romanticism (19th century)

Characteristics:

- the notion of technique loses its meaning because the expression also involves the choice of materials;
- the drawing propitious for the spontaneous release of the inner world of the artist gains momentum and is enriched with plastic inventions;
- the canvases that the artists make become the support of an outpouring of exacerbated and passionate, strange and melancholic feelings.

Representatives:

¹⁰ Mircea Miclea. 1996. *Cognitive Psychology-Theoretical-experimental Models* [Psihologie cognitivă: modele teoretico-experimentale]. Iași: Editura Polirom, p. 247.

¹¹ Mielu Zlate. 1999. *Psychology of Cognitive Mechanisms* [Psihologia mecanismelor cognitive]. Iași: Editura Polirom, pp. 248 - 254.

Caspar David Friedrich (Germany), Francisco de Goya (Spain), Antoine-Jean Gros, Eugene Delcroix, Victor Hugo (France), William Blake, John Constable, Josph Mallord William Turner (Great Britain)

Symbolism (19th century)

Characteristics:

- painters are inspired by contemporary and past literature (Dante);
- symbolists go towards the inner emotion of the idea;
- addresses the spirit, the imagination;
- painters escape into dream and melancholy, reject positivism, technique and materialism

Representatives:

Gustav Moreau, Odolon Redon (France), Sr Edward Burne-Jones (Great Britain), Giovanni Segantini (Italy), Edvard Munch (Norway).

Crude Art (20th century)

Characteristics:

- spontaneous art, without cultural pretensions and without intellectual approach;
- recycled materials are used (pieces of wood, tattered, crumpled paper), unusual materials (sand, fuel oil) or "natural" materials such as rust, oil, pieces of collapsed walls;
- compositions in an infantile manner (abstract drawings, illegible writing, without defined aesthetic characteristics.

Representatives:

Jean Dubuffet, Robert Tatin, Josep Crepin, Augustin Lesage (France), Adolf, Wolfli, Aloise, (Switzerland), Ossorio (United States)¹²

3. Conclusions

After this incursion into the presentation of ways to stimulate didactic creativity in the field of visual arts, it can be concluded that their palette is practically unlimited, obviously depending on the psycho-pedagogical training of the teachers, but also on the material conditions they have and, not in the last place, the motivation and appetite that students have for participating in plastic-visual activities.

The perimeter of fine arts is, by its specificity, a space that favours creative innovation and curricular modernisation, something that is not found in the case of highly formalised subjects, where the educator's room for manoeuvre is much more limited.

The teachers' intervention in the creative teaching of Art can be found at several levels, such as: the level of curriculum documents, the level of didactic design, the level of semantic organisation of knowledge, the level of the use of didactic principles.

Creative intervention at the level of curricular documents can be easily visible at the level of the subject curricula and especially at the level of school textbooks, on which teachers can project their specific creativity.

Creative teaching can also be found at the level of didactic design, despite the fact that it has been accredited the idea that teaching design actually objectifies an eminently algorithmised approach with precise prescriptions for what the teacher undertakes. Contrary to this conception,

¹² Patricia Fride-Carrasat & Isabelle Marcade. 2007. *Artistic Movements in painting [Mișcări artistice în pictură]*. București: Editura Enciclopedia RAO, pp. 21-24; pp. 41-46; pp. 86-90; pp. 147-149.

the educator can proceed creatively both when structuring the didactic stages, and especially in the configuration and dimensioning of the lesson events.

Being of a more recent date, innovations of a cognitivist nature do not receive the frequency they deserve in teaching-learning activity. However, as we have demonstrated, whether it is the use of prototypes, cognitive schemas, semantic networks, they all result in both benefits in terms of learning, but also in better student motivation for this kind of learning activity.

Consequently, a creative use of didactic principles will make learning more efficient and training more attractive.

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