

## The usage of didactic principles in the practice of artistic education

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**Abstract:** *The educational practice carried out over time has irrefutably demonstrated that the observance of certain laws transposed in didactic principles is intended not only to rationalise teaching-learning activities, to make them more efficient and more appropriate to extremely varied contexts, but also to give them a greater degree of attractiveness and, as a natural consequence, become more motivating for the students involved in such activities.*

*By virtue of the previous argument, didactic principles constitute a fundamental variable of the entire teaching-learning process about which teachers must know a series of specific elements that refer to the System of Didactic Principles, to their functions, to the correlations that exist between didactic Principles and other teaching-learning elements.*

**Keywords:** *didactic; principles; education; functions; education; correlations; teaching; learning; artistic;*

### Introduction

Over time, the development of didactic activity led to the discovery of some laws with a fundamental role in the regulation of this type of activity and which were called didactic principles on the definition of which there is a consensus among specialists. For example, Ioan Nicola defines didactic principles as "general theses that orient and give a functional meaning to the educational process, thus ensuring the prerequisites necessary to fulfil the objectives and tasks it pursues in its development"<sup>2</sup>

Despite the reluctance of some authors in approaching didactic principles, it can be stated that many of them are quite old because they were formulated as early as 1632 by the Czech pedagogue J. A. Comenius in his fundamental work *Didactica Magna*<sup>3</sup> in which reflections such as:

1. Education will begin early, before the mind is corrupted;
2. It will proceed from easy to hard;
3. Proceed from general to special;
4. No one will be overloaded with too much information;
5. Everything will be taught intuitively;
6. Everything will be taught for present use;
7. Knowledge will be placed on a solid foundation;
8. Everything that follows will be based on what precedes;
9. Everything will be organised according to the mind, memory and language;
10. All will be strengthened by continuous exercises;
11. Everything that is joined to another will be taught together;

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<sup>2</sup> Ioan Nicola. 2003. *Treatise of school pedagogy [Tratat de pedagogie școlară]*. București: Editura Aramis, p. 413.

<sup>3</sup> Jan Amos Comenius. 1970. *Didactica Magna [Didactica Magna]*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, pp. 68-75.

12. Everything that is learned must be taught as it is and as it appeared, that is, by presenting the causes;
13. Everything that is offered to knowledge will be offered first in general and then in its parts;
14. At each thing we will stop as long as is necessary to be understood;
15. Execution is learned by doing;
16. The exercise will begin with elements, and not with complicated things, etc<sup>4</sup>.

## 1. The Didactic Principles System

Among the Romanian psychopedagogy specialists, currently, there is a consensus regarding the Didactic Principles System, most of them accepting that the following principles are included in its structure:

1. The principle of conscious and active participation of students in the learning activity;
2. The intuition principle of the interaction of the concrete with the abstract in the instructive-educative process;
3. The principle of systematisation, structuring and continuity in the learning activity;
4. The principle of linking theory to practice;
5. The principle of accessibility or orientation according to the age and individual characteristics of the students;
6. The principle of the soundness and durability of the results obtained in the education process;
7. The principle of feedback or reverse connection.

The statement of these principles and a closer look at them may generate some reflections as follows:

- Many principles are quite old because they were first formulated by J.A. Comenius in *Didactica Magna*<sup>5</sup> proving its validity over time;
- All didactic principles are functional at the level of all schooling cycles, starting with the pre-school or pre-primary cycle and ending with the post-graduate cycle;
- All didactic principles can be found in all subjects that are included in the structure of the educational curriculum;
- Although they are detectable at the level of all subjects, their functionality is dependent on the specifics and particularities of each individual subject;
- Over time, many principles have retained their meaning, and others have acquired enriched meanings. For example, referring to intuition, E.E. Geissler<sup>6</sup> considers that one was its acceptance in the view of J. A. Comenius in *Didactica Magna* and another is in the meanings of contemporary didactics;
- It is possible that in the future, as a result of the developments recorded in the perimeter of pedagogical theory and practice, other principles will appear and be imposed, as happened in the last decades with the principle of feedback and reverse connection.

<sup>4</sup> Apud. Constantin Cuceș. 2014. *Pedagogy [Pedagogie]*, Ediția a III-a revăzută și adăugită. Iași: Editura Polirom, p. 400.

<sup>5</sup> Jan Amos Comenius. 1970. *Didactica Magna [Didactica Magna]*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, pp. 59-93.

<sup>6</sup> Erich Eduard Geissler. 1977. *Techniques of Education [Mijloace de educație]*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, pp. 51-54.

The effective use of didactic principles is conditioned first of all by the users' knowledge of the functions they perform and their specific characteristics.

Regarding the functions performed by the didactic principles, there is a consensus among specialists, and Constantin Cucuș considered that the main functions are:

"- orients the educational journey towards the objectives proposed by the educators;  
- it regulates educational practice because there is an obligation to comply with some psychological, pedagogical, deontological, scientific rules;  
- prescribe specific treatments and ways of relating in relation to the learning situation;  
- regulates the educational activity when the obtained results and performances are not in accordance with what has been projected;"<sup>7</sup>

Regarding the relation to the characteristics of didactic principles, things are also clear, and most authors consider the following to be the most important:

The general approach transposed in the fact that the didactic principles cover all education cycles, all elements of the education process and all subjects that are included in the structure of the educational curriculum;

The systemic approach explained by the fact that the principles act as the elements of a system, which means that they interact with each other, being able to support each other, or on the contrary disrupt if they are not properly respected.

In relation to these conditional rules, the users must know that the principle of the soundness and sustainability of the results obtained in the educational process is conditioned by the observance of other principles such as: The principle of the conscious and active participation of students in the learning activity, The principle of linking theory to practice, The principle of systematization, structuring and continuity in the learning activity.

The dynamic character, demonstrable and explainable by the fact that the system of didactic principles is not immutable, unchanging, but it is dynamic in the sense that new didactic principles can be developed, or some changes can be made to already existing didactic principles.

For example, the principle of feedback or reverse connection is one of the new didactic principles of the educational process, which is not even listed in all textbooks or pedagogy treatises, and some authors already speak of new principles such as the principle of interdisciplinarity or the principle of motivation.

## **2. The particularities of the principles of the educational process in the context of teaching fine arts**

As I mentioned before, the validity of the educational process can be found at the level of all education cycles, all levels of schooling, at the level of all subjects that are included in the structure of the educational curriculum, but despite these records, it should be noted that each educational principle will be particularised differently, depending on the characteristics and specifics of the level of applicability.

For example, the principle of intuition will be customized differently depending on the schooling cycle in which the students are, depending on the specifics of the subjects that are

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<sup>7</sup> Constantin Cucuș. 2014. *Pedagogy [Pedagogie]*, Ediția a III-a revăzută și adăugită. Iași: Editura Polirom, p. 401.

integrated into the educational curriculum, etc. In the case of teaching of visual arts, as can be easily anticipated, all the principles of the educational process can be found, but there are significant differences when the question of the representativeness of each individual principle is raised, and also when the problem of the transposition of each didactic principle into practice is raised.

If we discuss the aspect of representativeness, we clarify that in the perimeter of visual arts the principle of intuition, of the interaction of the concrete with the abstract in the instructive-educational process occupies a special place, and this privileged status is due to the specificity and particularities of the field in which it is applied.

Trying to particularise this principle at the level of fine arts, we clearly specify that also in the case of this field of application, the teachers representing this subject must answer and be aware of the importance of questions such as:

- Why is intuition very important in the teaching-learning activity?
- What functions does intuition perform in teaching of fine arts?
- At what levels of schooling does the principle of intuition operate maximally?
- By what means and in what ways can the principle of intuition be put into practice in the case of visual arts?

In relation to the first question, regarding the importance of intuition in the teaching of fine arts, it can be answered by demonstrating that intuition facilitates the formation of correct representations regarding the entities that are the object of activity and creation in fine arts. Without the formation of correct representations, the very understanding as a fundamental direction of thought is affected.

Regarding the second question, the one focused on the functions of intuition, it can be stated that here things are as obvious as possible because, broadly speaking, the following functions can be attached to intuition:

a. Intuition as a source of information, of knowledge, this also being valid in the case of fine-arts, a function that facilitates students' contact with a series of elements from the surrounding reality and implicitly the formation of correct and precise representations that amplify their sphere of knowledge.

b. The function of concretising the objectified intuition if the approach to knowledge is of a deductive type, starting from abstractions (concepts, principles, theories) and finishing through a descending approach to the concrete aspects of reality.

In this second type of approach, if intuition did not intervene, it would end up in a situation where students would acquire abstract knowledge, but which they would not signify in a correct manner, nor could they use it in various training contexts or in solving problems.

Trying to answer the third question, we explain that the principle of intuition operates maximally at the level of early school and middle school, and the explanation is quite simple, since between 6-10 years old, students are in the stage of concrete operations from the psychogenetic development's point of view and they have as a note of specificity the fact that they can perform a series of operations and a series of reasonings provided that they rest on a concrete material. Intuition can also be used at the middle school level because at the age of 11 not all students pass the stage of formal operations and therefore still need concrete supports to carry out various categories of tasks.

Even if the Principle of Intuition operates maximally at the low and middle school levels, this does not mean that intuition should be ignored at the higher levels of school, that is at the

High School and university levels, because doing so it would be committed a great psychopedagogical error.

It is obvious that at these levels very often the teaching of knowledge is done through a descending approach, in the sense that it starts from notions, from very general statements, but in order to reach the concrete and particular aspects it is necessary to use the intuition, which has the role of facilitating the correct understanding of the contents of education.

Finally, if the fourth question is considered, then it should be mentioned that "The principle of intuition is achieved by combining intuitive-natural didactic material (objects, substances, technical systems, processes, experiences, etc. on a real scale) and substitution didactic material (miniatures, models, representations, graphics, audio-visual means, etc.) with the word, logical-mathematical, IT means, etc."<sup>8</sup>.

There are a multitude of situations when the principle of intuition can be used, and this also depends on the psycho-pedagogical training of the teachers, but also on the imagination they possess and have accumulated over the years.

Facilitating the use of intuition in the training-learning activity can be achieved, among others, by using the observation method, but obviously with the observance of some conditions that Ioan Cerghit ranks as follows:

"- Take as a starting point a problem encountered during the learning activity and the experienced practice;

- To have a mutual discussion of the problem until it becomes sufficiently clear;
- Specify the concrete objectives or tasks to be achieved during the observation;
- It is preferred that the observational activity to be taken on a problematised form with certain important details of the question-problem inserted;
- To be guided by certain criteria and certain observation indicators around which to collect the necessary data;
- Observations to be carried out systematically conscientiously and continuously as necessary;
- The effective engagement of students in the observation exercise should be done individually or in teams;
- The results of the immediate observation (collected data) should be recorded in observation notebooks, sheets, drawings, sketches, etc.);
- Still during the observation, the students should try to make some identifications, differentiations, comparisons, orderings, classifications, etc.;
- In the final part, the obtained data are to be subjected to analysis and processing, interpretation and explanation, elaboration of reasoning, formulation of final conclusions;
- The main data and their conclusions will be communicated orally or in writing, accompanied by graphs, schemes, drawings, tables, etc. and subject to the collective debate of the whole class;
- As much as possible, the new purchases will be used in lessons or other forms of activity."<sup>9</sup>

Last but not least, the practical transposition of the Principle of Intuition can also be achieved through the use of didactic transposition, a psycho-pedagogical approach in which M. Tardy captures the following directions of action:

<sup>8</sup> Ioan Bontaș. 2001. *Pedagogy [Pedagogie]*, Ediția a V-a revăzută și adăugită. București: Editura BIC ALL, p. 124.

<sup>9</sup> Eugen Noveanu. & Dan Potolea. 2007. coord., *Science of Education: encyclopedic dictionary [Științele educației: dicționar enciclopedic]*, vol II. București, Editura Sigma, pp. 743-744.

”- Transformations of a terminological nature observed in the narrowing of the lexical repertoire and in the avoidance of technical terms in favor of common words of the current language.

- Simplification of explanatory models, which means that, if at the level of science, scientists use matrix and complex models, at the level of didactic transposition, a linear and greatly simplified scheme will be used.

- Increasing the amount of the figurative representations in order for students to notice more easily the relationship between the signifier and the signified and to create optimal conditions for the transmission of contents that cannot be presented directly to the students in the training activity

- Imagining and designing educational activities by the teacher through which students can test and practice the skills they have developed as a result of the training they have received.”<sup>10</sup>

The particularisation of the use of didactic principles in fine arts teaching can also be realised in the case of other didactic principles, although, as I mentioned previously, the level of representativeness may be different from one principle to another.

Concretely, intuition can facilitate the following steps in the case of visual arts:

- knowledge of the particularities of important artistic movements;

- knowledge of works of art belonging to representative authors on a universal and world level, from all times;

- knowledge of the evolution over time of the materials, tools and techniques used by artists in "expressing ideas, feelings and messages, using artistic-visual language in varied contexts"<sup>11</sup>.

Transposed in didactic activities, the principle of intuition can be used when starting from the characteristics and context of an artistic movement and obtaining its identification at the level of representative works.

For example, Conceptual Art has as defining notes:

"Concepts, ideas are presented in the form of spoken or sung declamations, conversations, reflections or political, social, philosophical, linguistic quotes or even exhibitions. There are also small books, illustrated texts. Photos, films, words written on the walls of the galleries, canvases enlivened by mathematical formulas with the intention of expressing the idea or even the scenography of the artist's body or nature"<sup>12</sup>.

Among the didactic principles used in the teaching of fine arts, the "Principle of linking theory to practice" is more representative, and in the exploratory context we propose, its presence is due to the potential it possesses in the case of teaching fine-arts.

Starting from its definition which stipulates the requirement that what is learned, what is acquired should be applied, transposed into practice, more directly said in various perimeters of it, and the consequences of complying with it will be obvious because on the one hand, the knowledge acquired by the students will have a greater degree of functionality, and, on the other hand, the students will become more motivated for the activity proposed to them.

<sup>10</sup> Virgil Frunză. 2015. *Optimisation of didactic communication in teaching [Optimizarea comunicării didactice în activitatea de instruire]*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, p. 234.

<sup>11</sup> *Curriculum for Fine-Art Education, classes 5-8 [Programa școlară pentru disciplina Educație plastică clasele a-V-a-a VIII-a]*, Anexa nr.2 la ordinul ministrului educației naționale nr.3393/28.02.2017, p. 3. Retrieved 06.04.2023, from <https://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Educatie-plastica.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Patricia Fride-Carrassat. & Isabelle Marcade. 2007. *Artistic Movements in painting [Mișcări artistice în pictură]*. București: Editura Enciclopedia RAO, pp. 189.

In relation to the concrete ways of using this didactic principle, most didactic works (Constantin Cucos<sup>13</sup>, Ioan Nicola<sup>14</sup>) indicate two ways:

a. solving some problems or theoretical tasks based on the assimilated knowledge; it is about applying the rules, definitions or laws used to solve some tasks or to understand knowledge from other fields;

b. implementation of a practical activity that requires theoretical knowledge or intellectual operations and specifically here there is the fact that we are dealing with a motor achievement. We can include here laboratory work, activity in workshops and circles, making devices, instruments, installations, solving economic, social problems, etc.

Linking theory to practice must become a major concern for all teachers because if students are not given opportunities to put knowledge into practice, they may believe that it is of no use, that it has no functional value and therefore it could be even ignored or bypassed. Consequently, in the teaching of any type of content, it is advisable to reflect on the possibility of linking the theoretical part with the practical part, and this is also possible in the case of fine arts.

Knowing the elements of plastic language can determine the creation of useful works in everyday life (paintings, pieces of furniture, tapestries, clothing items, ambient or clothing accessories, some personalised, with particular, original elements)

From a theoretical perspective, they can facilitate and generate the creation of installations, devices, instruments that are emblematic for the perimeter of the visual arts (representative artists: Leonardo da Vinci, Theo Jansen)

The last didactic principle aimed by our investigative itinerary is the Feedback Principle, because the fine arts, by its specificity, imposes more coaching and more guiding of the students. The successful use, however, is conditioned also in the case of this didactic principle by a series of requirements that in fact materialise specific elements of the principle, some being related to the knowledge of the types of feedback that can be found at the level of school practice, others to the concrete ways of achieving feedback in the activity of training.

Specific elements of feedback are analysed and made aware in the psychopedagogical literature, but they must be known by teachers who use the various didactic principles.

For example, in relation to the forms of feedback, two Canadian authors N. Lebrun and S. Berthelot<sup>15</sup> propose an interesting typology of feedback that distinguishes the following types of feedback with advantages and limits as follows: general/specific; positive/negative; product/process; prompt/delayed, high frequency/low frequency.

All of this can be found in the teaching of fine arts in various contexts and instructional situations, and notable results will be obtained when the advantages of each form of feedback are maximised and when their disadvantages or minuses are minimised.

When we consider the specifics of feedback in art teaching, we also automatically slide into the types of influence and direction that students need to benefit from during the development of the works they have engaged.

Also in relation to this aspect, many comments can be made, but we must start from the fact that in the psychopedagogical literature there are numerous paradigms regarding the types of influence that teachers must have on students.

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<sup>13</sup> Constantin Cucos. 2014. *Pedagogy [Pedagogie]* Ediția a III-a revăzută și adăugită. Iași: Editura Polirom, pp. 399-413.

<sup>14</sup> Ioan Nicola. 2003. *Treatise of school pedagogy [Tratat de pedagogie școlară]*. București: Editura Aramis, pp. 413- 428.

<sup>15</sup> Nicole Lebrun. & Serge Berthelot. 1994. *Plan pedagogique*. Ottawa: Les Editions Nouvelles, pp. 149-152.

For example Michel Saint-Onge<sup>16</sup> (1993, pp. 16-20) identifies three types of accompaniment within the type of influence exerted on students. For each of the types: "close accompaniment", "discreet accompaniment", "distant accompaniment", the actions that can be written here have the following characteristics:

a. Close support

- Provide students with clear and uniform rules about what is expected from them;
- The steps to follow are specified step by step;
- Clear objectives are fixed and, short and precise breaks to achieve them, are established;
- Learning activities are short and vary frequently;
- The teachers must show great attention to the students' activity; they must provide without delay an evaluation of each stage of an activity;
- Provides many concrete experiences;
- Stimulates activity through competition;
- Start from the students' centres of interest;
- The group activity is prepared through short changes;
- It is ensured that for each class the students have the satisfaction of having learned something new and that they really understood the studied information;
- Frequent but short evaluations are used.

b. The discreet support

- It favors short activity in small groups;
- Expectations and operating rules are always clearly established;
- Use the study of concrete cases to promote awareness;
- Teachers encourage work and are often in the proximity of students to closely monitor their activity and provide frequent feedback;
- Does not cause situations that intimidate and in which the students cannot express their opinion;
- Give students the opportunity to stand out;
- Submit concrete problems to be solved in small groups with the aim of allowing the emergence of various points of view;

c. Distant support

- Students are allowed to make choices about topics, strategies, methods and places of activity;
- Students are given the opportunity to carry out work by giving more time;
- Students are given the opportunity to use their time as they consider;
- Consultation between students, with the teacher, with specialists, etc. is encouraged.
- Students are invited to participate in decision-making;
- Autonomy is encouraged;
- The teacher does not play a control role anymore, but that of a resource person;
- Listening to others is encouraged;
- Self-evaluation is practiced.

After the presentation of these types of support, we make it clear that in training-learning activities must be promoted those roles that are compatible with the characteristics and particularities of the groups that benefit from these methods of conducting, and, as a general

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<sup>16</sup> Michel Saint-Onge. 1993. „Comment répondre aux besoins des élèves”. *La Vie Pédagogique*, Numéro 86, Québec, pp. 16-20.



note, conducting will be more accentuated in cases where students are at lower school levels and looser when they are at higher school levels.

All types of feedback are used in art teaching. It is true that some of them may have a higher frequency depending on the training contexts.

For example, general feedback can be used effectively in situations where students are given information about the level of performance achieved by them in the teaching-learning process. Likewise, specific feedback can be used when students are given specific information about what they have achieved by analysing their work at the end of the lesson.

Also, the forms of feedback focused on both the process and the product are currently used, even if the assumption is accepted that this last variant has a higher frequency, and this is obvious because in the same training-learning process the coordinates can ultimately determine a variety of school outcomes and performance.

Also, there are interesting observations that can be made in relation to other types of feedback used in teaching Art. For example, the use of both prompt and delayed feedback is common, as well as the use of collective or individual forms of feedback.

Prompt feedback is inextricably linked to a punctual direction of learning when the students receive information about how they do the tasks assigned to them. This prompt feedback can objectify or materialise information of a positive nature, in which case the students prove progress in the tasks they fulfil, or information of a negative nature in the event that they prove certain gaps, minuses in what they undertake. If delayed feedback is taken into account, it can also take the form of a summative assessment, or a balance sheet, which provides students with information about the level and quality of the performances obtained as a result of their involvement in fine-art activities.

An interesting aspect is also related to the ways of achieving feedback in the development of artistic-plastic activities. Their palette is quite varied because the students can receive from the teacher information and assessments regarding the quality of their work.

Another way is that in which people from outside the group are invited to make assessments and evaluations on the quality and originality of the works made by the students.

Other ways of feedback are represented by self-evaluations made by students based on grids provided by the teacher, which indicate the criteria and standards that the work must meet and/or by evaluations made by peers, the latter being important because they reflect the points of view of some students who come from the same group.

An interesting way of feedback is the inclusion of students' works in specialised competitions or exhibitions of a larger or smaller scale, on which occasion students also receive valuable information about the qualities of the displayed and presented works.

### **3. Conclusions**

The specificity elements of the didactic principles refer to the fact that they are valid at the level of all schooling cycles which are included in the structure of the education system, of all educational subjects that are included in the structure of the Educational Curriculum.

We can conclude that there are very strong intersection relationships between the Didactic Principles, which means that in many cases they can support each other, but there are also situations when the non-compliance of some disrupts and alters the optimal functioning of others.

Teachers must also know how to accept that didactic principles should not be conceived as immovable, unchanging entities, but as variables that can undergo changes over time both from the perspective of the number, in the sense that new principles can appear, but also in the sense of meaning, of signification.

The real competences of teachers, when it comes to didactic principles, refer to the knowledge of the principles' characteristics, to the functions they perform, and last but not least, to the way of using the didactic principles according to several variables such as: the cycle of school level at which the students are, the specifics of the discipline or the subject, the characteristics of the students who are involved in the training activity.

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