

## The Bauhaus Model and Artistic and Cultural Education in the contemporary European school

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**Abstract:** *The Bauhaus concentrated revolutionary ideas of the 1920s, avant-garde concepts and ideas. There has never been a school in Europe before that really put these ideas into practice. It accomplished something totally different from what other schools and technological colleges were doing, namely the concept of treating life (everyday needs) on an aesthetic level.*

**Keywords:** *Bauhaus; Walter Gropius; Arts and Crafts schools; industrial design; Art Philosophy; art innovation; artistic development; craft workshop; teacher and working master; Art education;*

### ● Introduction

The Bauhaus<sup>2</sup> idea was born in the mind of Walter Gropius, a German architect, who served as an officer in the German army during the First World War, he dreamed of a school of arts and design that would change the world. War, a nightmare of mechanized carnage, causes Gropius to yearn for the bending and submission of the machine to the service of man.

After the war, Gropius begins to bring his utopian ideas into reality. On the basis of the manifesto written in 1919 he founded, with the support of the authorities, an art school, the Bauhaus school. One of the ideas that governed the philosophy of the Bauhaus school was that of returning to the crafts, where the school served the workshop and one day would be incorporated by it.

*I still remember when I came out of the First World War, I thought everything will snap-back as it has been before, until one day all of the sudden I realised – What there is now – there is something quite different from what was before.*

*I was aware, after what I have done already as an architect, that in order to really penetrate that could not be done by one person alone, you have to build up a whole school. The whole thing was less a school than a laboratory. The teachers were as much stimulated by the student than vice-versa. In my experience the younger man is always closer to the future than the old man, and so the older man should listen to him. - Walter Gropius, Radio Interview, fragment<sup>3</sup>.*

### ● The purposes of artistic education

There is an increased pressure on artistic education to accomplish a variety of goals in connection with the teaching of the arts. Education systems increasingly recognise the importance of developing children's creativity and contribute to cultural education, but it is not

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<sup>2</sup> The Staatliches Bauhaus, commonly known as the Bauhaus (German for 'building house'), was a German art school operational from 1919 to 1933 that combined crafts and the fine arts.

<sup>3</sup> Fragment of interview given by Walter Gropius for the BBC Third Program recorded in 1968

necessarily clear how the arts are expected to contribute either as individual subjects or by working with other curricular areas.

„These included: development of artistic skills, knowledge and understanding, involvement in a variety of art forms; increased cultural understanding; sharing artistic experiences, becoming both artistic consumers and contributors. But in addition to this, in most of the countries, personal and social/cultural artistic results are expected – from artistic education (such as confidence and self-esteem, individual expression, teamwork, intercultural understanding and cultural participation). In particular - among the goals of artistic education - a new focus is present on creativity (often in relation to its importance in innovation) and on cultural education (in relation to both individual identity and the promotion of intercultural understanding). This raises questions about the ability of the artistic curriculum to achieve such diverse goals and over a wide range, as evidenced by the data presented in the publication”<sup>4</sup>

The Bauhaus concentrated revolutionary ideas of the 1920s, avant-garde concepts and ideas. There has never been a school in Europe before that really put these ideas into practice. It accomplished something totally different from what other schools and technological colleges were doing, namely the concept of treating life (everyday needs) on an aesthetic level.

*The Arts and Crafts schools in Germany and in other countries in Europe were too platonic, people were learning on paper with brush and pencil, but didn't have enough access to the process of making these things. I thought that the designer should know the process of how these things are made and so it has to be schooled first to understand the machine and the whole process of industry.*<sup>5</sup>

The Bauhaus School was founded in 1919 in the city of Weimar, the cultural capital of Germany. This moment marks a real revolution in artistic education - the introduction of the method of training in the craft workshop. Gropius believed that the connection between the machine and the "individual with artistic inclinations" must be a very close one, to knowledge. Thus, he developed a method of training on two levels – as an artist and as a craftsman.

*I realised that there was no man anymore, who was able to design and invent a new chair and make it. So I had to bring in two types of teachers into the Bauhaus – One for the technique and one for the form then marry these two in each workshop. One painter or sculptor was on top of the workshop and some tenuously working master, craft master, on the side for the technicalities.*<sup>6</sup>

The craft workshop thus becomes the backbone of the trainings at Bauhaus school in Weimar, where the apprentice-students developed their skills not only by sketching on paper but even by realizing physical elements. The major innovation implemented at the Bauhaus was the teaching of crafts by specialist foremen while the aesthetic side was taught by the artists. This philosophy was applied in all aspects of work at the Bauhaus, whether we are talking about furniture, book binding, stained glass, glass-metal sculpture, tapestry or ceramics.

The design of many such objects was closely related to the basic courses where the emphasis was on colour and geometry. In the basic courses, attempts were made to subject the form and colour to scientific edicts. – Wassily Kandinsky<sup>7</sup> teaches the theory that primary forms: circle, square and triangle represent and transmit attributes identical to those inherent in primary colours: blue, red and yellow. These primary colours also inspired many theatrical productions staged at the Bauhaus. The theatre was a central figure in teaching at the Bauhaus because it provided a common bridge to several forms of artistic expression.

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<sup>4</sup> EACEA, Eurydice. 2009 *Educația Artistică și Culturală în Școala Europeană*, [Artistic and Cultural Education in the European School]. Bruxelles: Eurydice

<sup>5</sup> *Idem* 3

<sup>6</sup> *Idem* 5

<sup>7</sup> Wassily Wassilyevich Kandinsky, Russian painter and art theorist, generally credited as one of the pioneers of Abstract Art.

- **Responsibilities and standards for the arts and education**

As Anne Bamford points out<sup>8</sup>, many education systems rely on teachers with general training to teach artistic subjects, especially to children. Teaching the arts at a higher level it is more challenging, so it's not surprising to learn that teachers lack the confidence in this sense.

There seems to be a need to take into account both the initial training of teachers to teach artistic subjects and aspects of continuous professional development; to allow art teachers to keep up to date with knowledge and develop skills, as revealed in „Educația Artistică și Culturală în Școala Europeană”<sup>9</sup>.

Aspects of monitoring the quality of teaching in the arts have received little attention in recent research studies, although there are frequent references to concerns about variability of standards and the need to provide high-quality learning experiences in school as found in the publishing of Anne Bamford<sup>10</sup>, Ken Robinson<sup>11</sup>, Caroline Sharp and Joanna Le Métais<sup>12</sup>.

Ken Robinson<sup>13</sup> emphasized a structurally inhibitory aspect to the development of coherent artistic education in schools. Moreover, in *Educația Artistică și Culturală în Școala Europeană*<sup>14</sup> magazine, Government responsibilities for the arts and education are often shared between two or more separate ministries of education and culture, and sometimes of youth and sport, which can make it difficult to achieve a common understanding of needs and priorities. He went on to argue that there are mutual benefits, in terms of increased understanding, efficiency and improved effectiveness, where previously separate ministries were brought together.

In contrast to the above-mentioned conceptual we find Walter Gropius' philosophy of unification, of breaking of barriers and of bringing into the same plane all the decisional and defining elements.

“The old dualistic world-concept which envisaged the ego in opposition to the universe is rapidly losing ground. In its place is rising the idea of a universal unity in which all opposing forces exist in a state of absolute balance.”<sup>15</sup>

Moreover, he stated that:

*My idea was always – we have to do something together, we have to destroy these separations between painting and sculpture, architecture and design and so on, it is all one. There is a low barrier between the different fields – only the interpretation and the aim of uses is a different one. When you make a painting – this is a person in motion an affair which has an effect on human beings, when you make a chair, it is a very practical thing which has use value but beyond that also it should be beautiful. I consider beauty a basic requirement of life.*<sup>16</sup>

In Gropius's and his associates conception, the division of responsibility for the standardization of educational artistic programs between academy/academism, political and state policies that claimed that art is a profession that can only be mastered through study – brought with it an isolation of the individual from the community. For the Bauhaus, academism meant isolation. It was further argued that schooling alone would never produce art – whether

<sup>8</sup> Anne, Bamford. 2006. *A Child's Rights to Quality Arts and Cultural Education*. London: Wimbledon School of Art

<sup>9</sup> *Idem* 4

<sup>10</sup> *Idem* 8

<sup>11</sup> Ken, Robinson. 2011. *O lume ieșită din minți. Revoluția creativă a educației*. [Out of our minds: Learning to be creative] București: Publica,

<sup>12</sup> Caroline, Sharp and Joanna, Le Métais. 2000. *The Arts, Creativity and Cultural Education: An International Perspective*. London: National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem* 11

<sup>14</sup> *Idem* 9

<sup>15</sup> Herbert, Bayer. Walter, Gropius. Ise, Gropius. 1938. *Bauhaus 1919-1929*. NY: MOMA. p. 22

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem* 3

we are talking about an ingenuity exercise or a work of art, everything depends on the talent and skill of the individual.

As *Educația Artistică și Culturală în Școala Europeană*<sup>17</sup> publication states: All European countries that have curricula of artistic and cultural education have established the goals/learning outcomes to be achieved. Some of the goals/learning outcomes can be more carefully defined for the visual arts, music, theatre, dance, media arts and handicrafts, if those curricula are structured either as an integrated whole or as a collection of separate disciplines. The formulation of learning goals/outcomes differs from one country to another: in some cases, they are expressed globally and in others in particular. The goals to be achieved or the skills to be achieved can be defined for each year of study or for each ISCED level. In some countries, although the learning purposes/outcomes differ from one ISCED level to another, the types of goals we refer to are entirely very similar for the two levels under discussion.

### ● Curriculum Aspects

The analysis of the aims of the curriculum of artistic and cultural education is based on a previous international study on them realised and published by Caroline Sharp and Joanna Le Métails.<sup>18</sup> However, new categories have been added in this case in order to better reflect the content of the curricula of artistic and cultural education in the European countries under discussion. They are even general goals and are expressly connected to artistic education. All curricula refer to "artistic skills, knowledge and understanding". Of the six purposes, "creativity" is the one to which it refers the least: five countries do not include it in their artistic and cultural education curriculum. Artistic skills, knowledge and understanding are generally the skills that form the basis of "artistic language" (such as understanding colours, lines and forms in the visual arts or musical skills, listening and musical instrument performance). The development of artistic skills tends to include learning different styles and artistic genres. In this regard, some countries refer to a repertoire of specific works, particularly for music and theatre. Artistic understanding tends to focus on artistic concepts, such as understanding the characteristics of various means of artistic expression or the relationship between the artist, his cultural and physical environment and his works.

Critical appraisal (aesthetic judgment) is among the six purposes to which we often refer the most. It refers in particular to increasing students' awareness of the essential features of the work or performance, as well as to developing their ability to judge critically, in the evaluation of their own work or that of others. A third goal common to almost all countries is the understanding of a cultural heritage. In some cases, this purpose is related to the creation of a cultural identity; learning cultural forms seeks to develop in a student the self-understanding that he is a citizen of a country or a member of a group.

Understanding cultural heritage, as presented in *Educația Artistică și Culturală în Școala Europeană*<sup>19</sup>, is promoted through contact with works of art, as well as by learning the characteristics of works of art produced in different historical periods and of the works of certain artists (sometimes from a predetermined repertoire or from artistic "canons"). Understanding cultural diversity is another common goal of most artistic and cultural curricula. The promotion of cultural diversity through the arts also seeks to lead to a high awareness of cultural heritage and modern genres specific to various countries and cultural groups (sometimes with a certain reference to European cultures).

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem* 9

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem* 12

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem* 9

The Bauhaus Philosophy focuses on craft from a contemporary perspective besides the study of Art History and specific or localised crafts thus: training courses were divided into main specializations Fig.1:

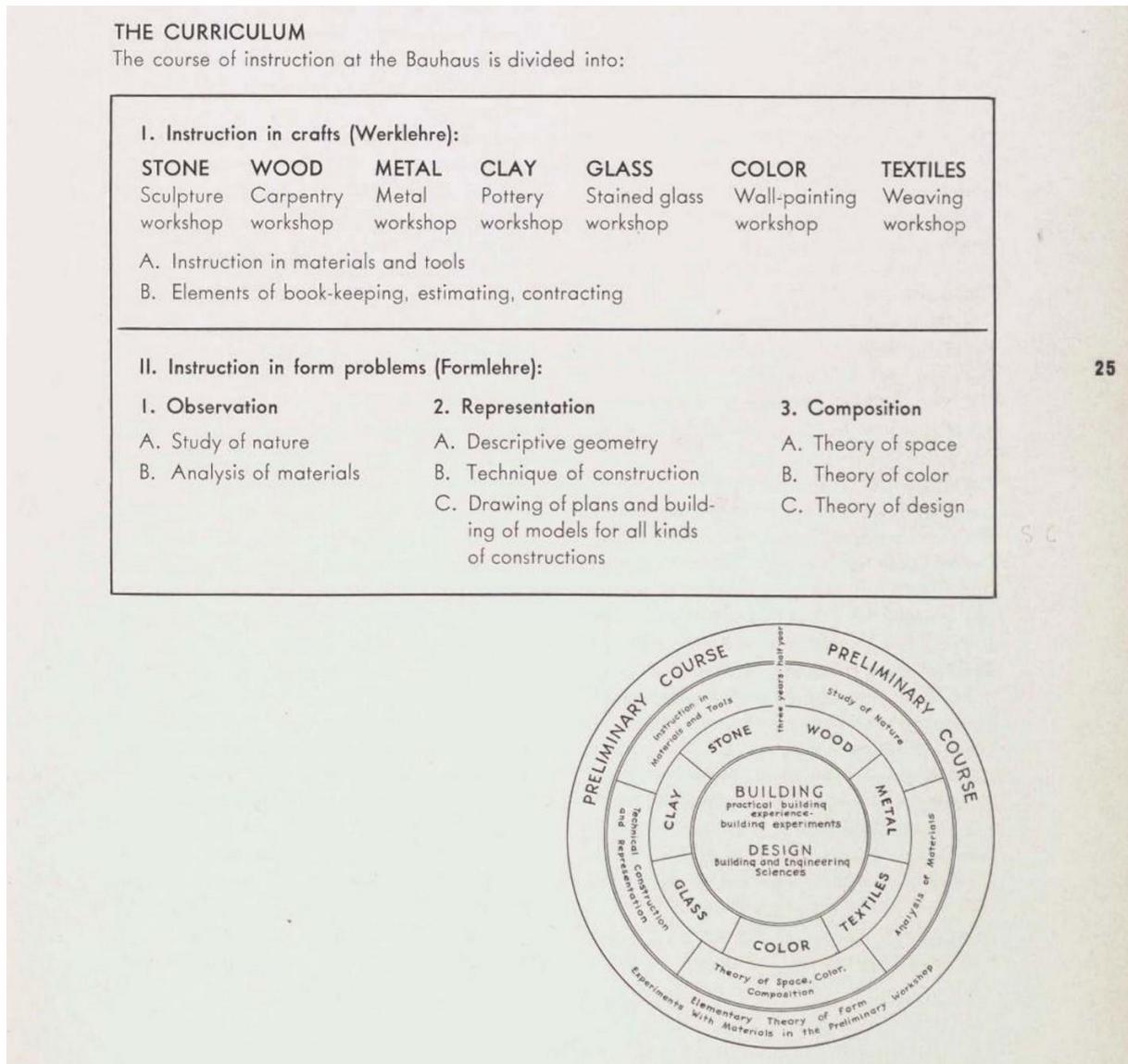


Fig.1 *THE CURRICULUM*, Bauhaus 1919-1929<sup>20</sup>, NY 1938, p. 25

- 1) *Preparatory Instruction, lasting six months, which consisted of elementary training in design and experiments with different materials in the special Beginners' Workshop.*
- 2) *Technical Instruction (supplemented by more advanced instruction in design) as a legally bound apprentice in one of the Training Workshops. This lasted three years, at the end of which the pupil (if proficient enough) obtained his Journeyman's Certificate either from the local trades council or the Bauhaus itself.*
- 3) *Structural Instruction for especially promising pupils, the duration of which varied according to the circumstances and talents of the individual concerned. This consisted of*

<sup>20</sup> Herbert, Bayer. Walter, Gropius. Ise, Gropius. 1938. *Bauhaus 1919-1929*. NY: MOMA. p. 25

*an alternation between manual work on actual building sites and theoretic training in the Research Department of the Bauhaus, which amplified the Practical and Formal Instruction he had already received. At the end of his Structural Instruction the pupil (if proficient enough) obtained his Master-Builder's Diploma either from the local trades council or the Bauhaus itself.*<sup>21</sup>

The development of individual expression and creativity are two other widespread goals, although the latter is found only in a few countries. The development of children's individual expression through artistic means is closely related to their emotional well-being. This type of purpose is connected to all forms of art, but especially to visual ones. The development of creativity can be defined as a development of the individual's ability to participate in imaginative activity, the product of which will be marked by originality and value – approach also found in *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education*<sup>22</sup>. Although its links with the development of individual expression are obvious, the development of creativity is different enough to be regarded as a separate type of artistic purpose. The remaining learning goals/results can be grouped into two main categories: general goals (although not necessarily specific to the arts) of the cultural and artistic curriculum on the one hand and specific goals, explicitly connected to artistic education on the other, as stated in *Educația Artistică și Culturală în Școala Europeană*.

## ● Conclusions

Recently, attempts are being made to reintroduce in the plans of education of crafts in one form or another. We have here as a reference “*Metodologia de organizare și funcționare a învățământului dual*” a concept diametrically opposed to the principles and ideas of Walter Gropius. In the case of dual education, the economic environment is the one that dictates the necessity and the way of training the students. Moreover, the economic operator becomes a decision-maker in the policy of the partner school. Of course, it is easy to understand that the artistic element of formation and strategy – the teacher artist, is completely missing from this dual system. Also, the way of training and the curriculum remain to be summarized at a few points in a contract between the three parties: pupil-school-economic operator, as evidenced by” *Metodologia de organizare și funcționare a învățământului dual* Capitolul I: Dispoziții generale, articolele 3 și 4”.

We believe that, although at present the principles of Gropius seem to be utopian again, they are the only way to a relevant and quality artistic education. Of course, we note the need for decentralisation in various aspects of society, but some such as artistic education programmes are evolving coherently and are socially relevant in the long term, following the Bauhaus tested principles.

<sup>21</sup> Walter, Gropius. 1965. *The new architecture and the Bauhaus*, Cambridge: MIT Press

<sup>22</sup> National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education. 1999. *All Our Futures: Creativity, Culture and Education. Report to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport*. London: NACCCE report

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