

THE ROLE OF ARTISTIC EXPERIENCES IN THE COMPREHENSIVE INDUCTIVE EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

Abstract:

Postmodern pedagogy is constantly confronted with Lyotard's condemnation of grand narratives found in the philosophy of modernity, on the basis of which basic patterns of moral education were developed. In searching for new answers to the question of how education can prepare individuals for life in an age of late modernity, This paper presents the idea of approaching identity and moral development through the inductive educational approach and highlights the importance of education through the arts in the latter, especially in view of the theoretical notion of aesthetics as ethics of postmodernity.

In an age in which artistic creativity is deemed less important than acquiring competences aimed at technological development, it is crucial to provide a clear answer as to why and how different art practices may exert an influence on the full development of a child's personality. In order to demonstrate the meaning of artistic experience in general education, one must seek arguments supporting the intrinsic value of the artistic experience. This paper stresses the meaning of artistic experience as a means of communication providing both the artist and the art recipient with the opportunity for personal fulfilment. In this context, Aristotle's concept of mimesis and its role in education through the arts is emphasised as part of the comprehensive inductive educational approach.

The argument is illustrated with some qualitative data from the implementation of a project in kindergarten Vodmat, Ljubljana, Slovenia, using the inductive educational approach and art as a tool for cultural enrichment of pre-school children.

Key Words:

Moral education, education through art, comprehensive inductive educational approach, mimesis, Aristotle

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Introduction

Postmodern pedagogy is constantly confronted with Lyotard's (1979) condemnation of grand narratives found in the philosophy of modernity, on the basis of which basic patterns of moral education were developed. In the last few decades we have witnessed a strong emphasis on the affective dimension of human morality and moral education in many fields of the humanities, including pedagogy.

In *ethics* a wide interest in the affective dimensions of morality can already be found in the history of ethical concepts (on Aristotle's virtue ethics and Hume's notions of sympathetic emotion, see especially Kristjansson 2010), whereas among the more modern ideas in the field of ethics we may highlight the principles of ethics of *care* (Gilligan, 2001; Noddings, 1984) and the ethics of *personal encounter* (Levinas, 1987) both denominated by Moss as *relational ethics*, which "...share common themes: responsibility for other humans, other species, and the environment; rejection of calculative thinking; making contextualized judgments rather than conforming to universal codes; and a respect for otherness" (Moss 2008, p. 116).

In regard to *the emotional dimension of moral reasoning, moral motivation, and moral acting*, the relevant discoveries to be found in psychoanalysis are those of the importance of inter-psychic relations, empathic guilt, and compassion (Klein, 1997; Winnicot, 2005, Todd, 2003; Benjamin, 1995). Relevant new trends also come from developmental psychology (especially Hoffman's theory of the development of empathy, positive psychology and Goleman's concept of emotional intelligence), and new approaches in the philosophical anthropology of the Self and its emotions (Kristjansson).

In the field of *theology and philosophy* we must mention the growth of interest in personalism and approaches such as the so-called 'world ethic' (Buber, 2006; Levinas, 1987; Küng, 1993), as well as the truly interesting thesis about the connection between ethics and aesthetics, i.e. the theoretical notion of aesthetics as ethics of postmodernity (Wittgenstein; cited in Ule and Varga-Kibed 1998).

These ideas have had an important influence on *pedagogy*, where we can find new promising educational approaches, like the *pedagogy of listening* (the Reggio Emilia Approach, (Rinaldi 2006)) and *relational pedagogy* (Bingham and Sidorkin, 2004).

In this article, following Hoffman (2000), I propose a comprehensive inductive educational approach, which I will try to illustrate and further support by providing some qualitative data acquired during the implementation of a project in kindergarten Vodmat, Ljubljana, Slovenia using the inductive educational approach with art as a tool for cultural enrichment of pre-school children. I shall argue that the main theoretical ideas of the comprehensive inductive educational approach are able to provide an answer to most questions important for defining a new approach to moral education. These include the questions of the basic goals of education, the anthropological basis of prosocial and moral attitude, the construction of a supportive educational environment, and a wider set of educational activities. Above all, the approach offers a clear idea about the basic model most suitable for encouraging prosocial and moral development.

Martin Hoffman's model of inductive discipline

The inductive approach to disciplining children was first described by Martin Hoffman (2000) in the late 1960s as he was conducting research on the main strategies of disciplining children within the context of the family. Based on his work on the development of empathy as the primary source of children's prosocial behaviour, he viewed this model of discipline as more appropriate than the authoritative-assertive model generally accepted as the most appropriate one at that time. The main difference between the two modes of interventions in situations requiring discipline is that the reaction to a child misbehaving would in the case of the authoritative-assertive style typically include judging the child's actions, invoking a preconceived norm or rule right from the start ("You know we have a rule not to do this"), while inductive discipline recommends expressing disapproval of the child's misconduct, bringing to the child's attention the distress of the person who was hurt by him/her ("Look, how you made this person feel. . ."), and making it visible to the wrongdoer, which facilitates the activation of mechanisms evoking empathic response/distress of the wrongdoer and her/his feeling of empathic guilt. The distress caused by empathic guilt felt by the child who misbehaved generally results in her/him wanting to fix their wrongdoings and thus alleviate their emotional distress (Kroflič 2010).

Hoffman's work indicated that the inductive discipline approach is the most fruitful among the existing models in aiding the development of empathic abilities, prosocial motivation and moral judgement, while his findings were further supported by Krevans and Gibbs (1996) in the mid-1990s. The psychological dimension of Hoffman's theory on the development of empathy was also supported by N. Eisenberg (2003) and her studies of the meaning of emotions for one's prosocial orientation.

It is important to note that the tendency of a person who has misbehaved to repair the damage they have done is supported by the concept of *restorative justice* (Braithwaite 1999) and the *transformative model of peer mediation* (Baruch Bush and Folger 2005), which are among the most promising concepts for solving discipline problems in schools and communities (Cremin 2007).

A Comprehensive Inductive Educational Approach

In order to develop a comprehensive paradigm of the inductive approach in education, we need a clear definition of the role of the adult in educational situations. We also need to address other theoretical elements, such as the essential elements of moral responsibility (what we aim for in education), the rudiments of ethical sensibility and motivation for prosocial action (the anthropological basis for prosocial behaviour and morality as a starting point for encouraging moral development), what the best environment for the development of the prosocial and moral orientation of a child may be and which methods to employ. Naturally, a comprehensive paradigm of the inductive approach in education will include a broader array of different educational activities and will go beyond mere intervention in conflicts.

The most drastic shift in the conceptualization of moral responsibility in postmodern times is attributed to Levinas (1987) and his provocative claim that morality does not signify a subject's view on following social rules and ethical principles, but rather a respectful attitude towards other human beings, our environment and the shaping of a meaningful existence. As ethically responsible human beings, we must thus direct our actions in consideration of the consequences they might have for our fellow human beings or the environment instead of the

question of concordance of our action or the motive behind it with a certain social norm or an ethical imperative. (I have developed this idea elsewhere; see Kroflič 2007).

The psychological dimension enabling the development of such a moral stance is the ability to recognize other people's emotional responses and feeling discomfort when somebody has hurt another human being. Numerous theoreticians have recently recognized the anthropological basis of compassion, indignation and empathic guilt seen by ethics as having a direct prosocial dimension (Kristjansson 2010), which develops even before socio-cognitive abilities prerequisite for appropriate ethical judgement (Kroflič 2008).

The answer to the question about the environment enabling the development of a child's prosocial and moral orientation contains two important findings relevant to our discussion. The first one is that children's primary prosocial traits begin to develop in their relationships with significant others, adults and peers, i.e. relations characterized by the presence of love and friendship. The capacity for such relations is encouraged in earliest childhood by the presence of a nurturing environment (the presence of emotionally nurturing adults, encouraging social contacts with peers etc.) (Marjanovič Umek and Fekonja Peklaj 2008). The second finding is that kindergarten teachers have a key role in shaping inclusive environments in the education process, that they should accept the view of the child as capable of actively participating in that process (Moss, Dillon and Statham 2010), and that, in the case of their assumptions that children are selfish and socially inept, teachers step into a patronizing role, while children remain passive.

The comprehensive inductive education approach addresses not only discipline (i.e. interventions in cases of conflict), but other educational activities as well, such as encouraging prosocial activities (e.g. mutual help), dispelling children's fear of difference, abating stereotypical judgements/prejudice, using mediation as a method of conflict resolution and encouraging cooperation. One of the most efficient activities in achieving these objectives is education through art (Kroflič 2010).

On the basis of the above discussion, we can outline the basic structure of our inductive model for encouraging prosocial and moral development, as follows:

- First: Children are capable of relations of love and friendship already in their first years of life (even if ethical consciousness demands complex cognitive capacities); therefore pedagogy supporting these relationships enables the child to develop *relational response-ability* and *normative agency* for prosocial activities in a most authentic way.
- The next important focus is to *develop the sense of respect* towards concrete persons or activities because personally engaged relations may also be harmful if they lead to empathic over-arousal, empathic bias, pity and paternalism.
- The third step in moral education is *to become aware of ethical principles and humanistic demands*, especially concerning human rights and ecological values, and to learn how to use them as a basis for democratic negotiation in cases of interpersonal conflicts (Kroflič 2007).

There is today wide-spread criticism of permissiveness and the re-emergence of calls for a consistent and more authoritarian/assertive approach to upbringing based on insisting the children accept rules and consolidate/automatize their actions in accordance to these rules. Such expectations are in many ways a reflection of adults' view of children as incompetent beings, as "child-in-need" (Moss, Dillon and Statham 2000). The paradigm of the child as a socially competent ("rich") being calls for different methods of education, including the *relational understanding of education and the developing self* (people become morally sensitive, respectful and ethical beings only through engaging in relationships and activities involving their beloved), *recognizing others as different, but worthy* by empathically listening to their story (Kroflič 2009), and *inductive disciplinary argumentation* resulting in children becoming aware and responsible for the consequences of their actions.

Education through the arts as an important element of the comprehensive inductive educational approach

Even though the comprehensive paradigm of the inductive approach in education is original in itself, it is based on many well known theoretical investigations. Among them I would like to highlight the critique of traditional rationalist views of moral development (Kroflič, 2007) as well as postmodern ideas about the dialogic nature of our selves (Bingham and Sidorkin, 2004). The main premise of these approaches is that the core of human morality is our

responsibility towards other people, our community and nature; thus the focus is no longer on a person's willingness to act according to recognized moral imperative(s) shaped by disciplinary practices in early childhood, but rather on the afore-mentioned responsibilities. Education should therefore motivate children to enter different prosocially oriented, engaged relationships and engage in activities that stimulate their imaginative and empathic abilities. One could say that in human relations love and friendship are of the utmost importance and in much the same way, artistic experiences hold a special place among human activities and could in fact be said to be among the key factors of children's prosocial development. To support this thesis, this paper delves both into the ancient concept of *poiesis* (Aristotle 2005) and contemporary concepts of artistic imagination (Malaguzzi, 1998; Greene, 1995; Nussbaum, 1997; Eisner, 2002; Egan 2010 and others).

In our view, artistic experiences can indeed be central to the resolution of children's inner tensions which arise when they are confronted with new situations in the environment of the kindergarten as an institution. Artistic experiences are, furthermore, also the perfect tool for the development of engaged, sensitive, creative and prosocial attitudes of pre-school children towards their social and natural environment. Those starting points led us to the development of a comprehensive inductive educational approach and its implementation in Vodmat kindergarten (Slovenia) with artistic practices occupying the central role among the activities aimed at encouraging children's prosocial and moral orientation.

In the second part of this article I therefore present, firstly, a brief insight into the idea of creating a model of moral education based on artistic experiences by using some concepts of Aristotle's aesthetics (Kroflič 2011), and secondly, some qualitative data acquired in the process of using arts in kindergarten Vodmat, Ljubljana, as part of the evaluation of the trial implementation of the comprehensive inductive educational approach.

Key concepts of Aristotle's aesthetics

While developing the idea of using *art as inductive educational practice* and working on its theoretical basis, I found the following concepts of Aristotle's ethics and aesthetics especially fruitful (Kroflic, 2011):

- Creativity and the experience of beauty as one of the constitutive virtues

- Aesthetic mimesis as a creative practice
- Empathic imagination as a way of entering life stories/experiences of the other as a different human being
- Catharsis as completion of the artistic experience on the subjective level of the viewer

Creativity and the experience of beauty as a source of happiness

Aristotle ascribes human beings the instinct for appreciation of beautiful colours, melody and rhythm. However, beauty is not the only source of pleasure people strive for in their lives, nor is it the ultimate end of human existence. In examining ways for reaching happiness in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle underlines the meaning of spiritual goods, the most important one being “rightful action” or “doing well” since “‘activity in conformity with virtue’ involves ‘virtue’” (Aristotle 1994, p. 39). One can admittedly find pleasure in external goods or rightful action, but “things pleasant by nature” are primarily a function of good and noble action. This also includes “actions in conformity with virtue [...] that are pleasant essentially as well as pleasant to lovers of the noble. [...] they are also of course both good and noble” (Ibid, p. 41).

Even though the relation between good and beauty is certainly not as simple as described in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, the part relevant to our discussion is Aristotle’s view on experiencing beauty as one of the most natural sources of human pleasure and happiness. In other words, in Aristotle’s view artistic activities represent the most prominent of virtues, as does the appreciation and pleasure found in a work of art, since the latter, as will be discussed further on, enables catharsis as the completion of a work of art (or in Aristotle’s case Greek tragedy) on the subjective level of the viewer’s experience.

Aesthetic experience is widely acknowledged as representing an important source of spiritual experiences (Best 2011) and self-fulfilment (Koopman 2005). In approaches to pre-school education, the Reggio Emilia Approach is known for making the aesthetic experience an important part of pre-school education. Thus, for example, V. Vecchi, the first atelierista in Reggio Emilia kindergartens, writes about offering beauty to children as one of their natural rights. She views beauty as a vital seed of civilization, with the aesthetic dimension seen as “...a process of empathy relating the Self to things and things to each other... It is an attitude

of care and attention for the things we do, a desire for meaning; it is curiosity and wonder; it is the opposite of indifference and carelessness, of conformity, of absence of participation and feeling” (Vecchi 2010, p. 5). So aestheticizing can be understood “...as a filter for interpreting the world, an ethical attitude, a way of thinking which requires care, grace, attention, subtlety and humour, a mental approach going beyond the simple appearance of things to bring out unexpected aspects and qualities” (Ibid., p. 10).

Aesthetic mimesis as a creative practice

In discussing the Aristotelian concept of aesthetic *mimesis*, it is important to note its creative instead of merely mechanical nature. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle writes about the artistic image transcending its realistic counterpart as it not only describes the past and present state of things, but also includes the portrayal of “the kind of things that people say and think; the kind of things that ought to be the case” (Aristotle 2005, pp. 126-127). Therefore mimesis is more than mere imitation – it is the act of creation, immersion into phenomena and the depiction of a certain event, human or object as the artist sees it, at the same time reflecting various contextual factors that have influenced the story portrayed. And it is only when we are able to recognize the main causes and effects of the accounted story that we have worked our way to the truth.

An interesting exploration of the creative nature of artistic mimesis can be found in Rakić’s 1911 doctoral dissertation *Education Through Play and Art* (Rakić, 1946). The author divides all human activities into those aiming at repetition and those involving change or transformation, seen by him as two main modes of adaptation to human living environment. In Rakić’s opinion, an inherent paradox of education is that it is not primarily based on activities involving change, but rather activities involving repetition and acquiring knowledge, abilities, skills, and habits transferred to the coming generations by adults. Therefore encouraging children’s play and artistic activity is one of the crucial dimensions of education that facilitates children’s transformation abilities. In Rakić’s view, symbolic play and art are examples of transformation activities despite their mimetic nature, as they possess the potential to change reality due to their “tendency for imitation of reality, but under *freely changed conditions*. In view of its content, art goes even further by depicting life in certain *fictitious* conditions ...” (Rakić 1946, p. 21). Rakić sees the positive pedagogical influence of art and symbolic play in “. . . helping people to keep *an open-minded view* of the world

around them despite everyday repetition, reinstating *common sense* as the opposite of blind prejudice and cruel dogmatism and demonstrating the possibility of inner *freedom* and *innateness* with the entirety of its actions. Such influences are naturally the most important in one's *childhood...*" (Ibid., p. 23). Another more recent interesting work speaking in favour of using arts as a support for creative processes and in-depth learning worth mentioning is Egan's (2010) Learning in Depth programme the author proposes for public schools.

Empathic imagination as a way of entering life stories/experiences of the other as a different human being, and catharsis

Although Aristotle did not mention artistic imagination in his *Poetics*, it is clear from his famous concept of catharsis that this mysterious concept entails a person relating to the story and to the tragic hero and by this becoming aware of some secret parts of their own soul rarely uncovered in everyday activities.

Artistic imagination offers us a glimpse into the world of other people by entering imaginary, "as if" worlds created by writers, painters, sculptors, film directors, choreographers and composers (Greene 1995, p. 4). Imagination consists of many dimensions that hold value for education since "... in the process, the reader learns to have respect for the hidden contents of that inner world, seeing its importance in defining a creature as fully human" (Nussbaum 1997, p. 90). Imagination thus provides art consumers the opportunity of delving into the psyche of literary heroes and the circumstances of their story, liberating them from stereotypical perception as well as facilitating empathy and compassion. Since compassion also involves feeling vulnerable, the reader may feel that a fate similar to that of the (fictional) character could perhaps befall him/her in the future, resulting in their willingness to offer heart-felt support or help, thinking: "Something like this could happen to me as well and this is how I would like to be treated." The great value of empathic imagination in today's world is linked to the empathic recognition of the social position of all those who are different, outcasts, invisible in the global world full of difference (Kroflič 2009 a). As I have written elsewhere:

"Immersion in the artistically created character or event, sympathizing with the character's fate, cancellation of ego fantasies about oneself as the centre of the world, contemplating on events we might never experience ourselves, the ability of creating

visions of possible worlds in which we are able to surpass our original selfishness and unfairness are all components of imagination and capacities enforcing our ethical consciousness.” (Kroflič 2007 a, p. 22)

According to Aristotle, the crux of aesthetic/tragic catharsis has to do with tragedy mimicking a grave and well-rounded action in a heightened language and the form of theatre that by inspiring pity and fear facilitates purgation of such emotions: “Since the one is felt for the undeserved victim of adversity, the other for one like ourselves (pity for the undeserving, fear for one like ourselves)” (Aristotle 1995, p. 71).

Aesthetic mimesis and catharsis, with their interweaving of aesthetic experiencing of beauty and enforcing good through catharsis, are among the best ways of looking for deeper truths of the human soul. The aesthetic representation of fictional characters’ actions enables empathic imagination not because it employs pretentious morality, but due to its purposeful relating of stories/acts that could happen to us. Empathic imagination can also awaken virtues in the viewer or offer the opportunity of overcoming one’s fears and insecurities. It is through facing the question of how one would feel in a situation similar to the one portrayed in the tragedy, or how one would act in a similar position that we are given the chance of encountering the hidden aspects of the human soul, otherness hiding behind ego perceptions of oneself and a deeper truth of one’s own existence. Or, as Vecchi describes the importance of aesthetics, it is “...a process of empathy relating the Self to things and things to each other... It is an attitude of care and attention for the things we do, a desire for meaning; it is curiosity and wonder; it is the opposite of indifference and carelessness, of conformity, of absence of participation and feeling... In our understanding of the word, aesthetics is a promoter of relationships, connections, sensibility, liberty and expressiveness, and its closeness to ethics appears natural. In educational terms, I would speak of a need for an inseparable union; the surest of unions for keeping all forms of violence and oppression at a distance, making aesthetic sensibility one of the strongest barriers to physical and cultural violence.» (Vecchi 2010, pp. 6 and 14)

Implementation of the comprehensive inductive educational approach to prosocial and moral development in the kindergarten Vodmat, Slovenia

Kindergarten Vodmat is a public pre-school institution, located in the centre of the capital of Slovenia – Ljubljana. Due to the open concept of national curriculum for kindergartens in

Slovenia, public kindergartens have a lot of opportunities for experimental practice, so in the school year 2008-2009 I was invited to lead an implementation of the comprehensive inductive educational approach to prosocial and moral development, using artistic experiences as one of the main sources for the development of prosocial sensibility and moral reasoning of children, from one to five years old.

In order to study how art practices may encourage children's prosocial orientation, we asked kindergarten teachers and artists who were cooperating with the kindergarten to delve into three levels of action directly linked to the development of children's identity, i.e. relations towards others, their attitude towards the environment (both natural and cultural) and historical tradition influencing our living space. Among the many possible artistic practices available, we chose to employ approaches to fine art creativity and installations, music, dance, literary texts and dramatization (including puppets). The main source of financing that enabled us to invite artists to work with pre-school children was the Ministry for Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia and European social funds, and their project entitled *Cultural enrichment of children - The development of children's identity in space and time through the different artistic activities (2008-2010)*.

We started the project with education of pre-school teachers and invited artists about the key elements of the comprehensive inductive educational approach and the role of artistic experiences in it. When they had started to plan and work together with children, we proposed to them a wider set of tools for documenting educational processes, among which ethnographic field-notes were together with artistic objects of children the best basis for discussions with educators and artists about the elements of good practices and the possibilities of deepening the inductive practices. We also wanted to see if the use of the comprehensive inductive educational approach would have a positive impact to children's prosocial and moral development, so we used LaFrenier and Dumas' *Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Preschool Edition* questionnaire (1995, standardized for the use in Slovenia by Zupancic, Gril and Kavcic 2001) to measure the influences of our approach in the experimental group to compare them with control group of children of the same age and similar psychological characteristics who were not involved in the project activities. In the last part of this article I will present some qualitative data acquired in the process of using arts in kindergarten Vodmat, and in the conclusion basic results of the above mentioned questionnaire.

Creativity and the experience of beauty as a source of happiness

During the implementation of the project in kindergarten Vodmat, we used the aesthetic element as the main principle guiding the creation of a pleasant environment and a pleasant space for children's games and play according to their own perception. Among different interventions in the outdoor playground (flower and herb borders, wild place, birdcages etc.), children also engaged in constructing artistic installations (resulting for example in "Red Balloons on the Playground Hill", "Tom Thumbs as the Keepers of Flower and Herb Borders") and impressionist paintings (Kroflič, Štirn-Koren, Štirn-Janota and Jug 2010).



Figure 1:

The beauty of artistic installation *Red Balloons*



Figure 2:

Impressionist painting of the installation

During the play with balloons, children of 3 to 6 years of age were asked to prepare a "captured moment", the installation with red balloons on the playground hill. Afterwards they took a photo of the installation (see the figure 1) and made an impressionist painting of it (see the figure 2). Later they showed their painting to the musician who helped them to express it also with drums and creative dance (Kroflič, Štirn-Koren, Štirn-Janota and Jug 2010, pp. 150-151). Throughout the whole process children were expressing an intense joy and happiness which is according to Aristotle an important criterion of virtuous life.

Aesthetic mimesis as a creative practice

The best evidence of the ability of pre-school children to use artistic language (especially metaphor) in a very creative way (as one of a hundred languages as it is called in the Reggio

Emilia Approach), exhibited itself in the following ethnographic field note (Štirn- Janota and Jug 2010, p. 49):

Ethnographic field-note:

Timna (3 years and 2 months): “I cutted a tlee, goes shhhhhh ... the hail does the same. Up the dov does coocka-cless, coocka-cless ...” (shakes the paper tree, makes shhhhhhhh sounds and laughs merrily).

Kindergarten teacher: “I don't understand. Would you like the necklace¹?”

Little Timna nods, runs to her so called “collaglescope” (a plastic bottle containing her treasures) and takes a piece of necklace out of it. She sticks it to the tree and draws wings on each side of it.

Kindergarten teacher: “Oh, it’s the turtle dove singing “coocka-cless” in your tree?”

Timna nods and is very pleased that she finally made herself understood.



Figure 3:
“Turtledove” – a creative metaphor and the creation of new expressive possibilities

The creativeness of the little girl in using a metaphor to overcome the barrier of her limited language skills, as can be seen from the ethnographic field-note and Figure 3, is impressive. A 3 years and 2 months old girl has succeeded in overcoming her weak oral competencies to express the meaning of her play with a visual metaphor, using a piece of necklace and pencil to draw a turtledove in her collage of the tree. Ideas, similar to the ones described above, can again be found in the Reggio Emilia Approach: »I believe metaphor corresponds to an investigative attitude towards reality, to participation that allows our thoughts to open out and

¹ In Slovene, words for “dove” and “necklace” sound very similar

break down the rigid boundaries that are usually constructed. I see metaphor as a genuine system for organization of intellectual development; for this reason and because I think of it as ‘celebration thinking’, I believe it is useful and amusing to use – frequently, naturally and with a light touch.« (Vecchi 2010, p. 34)

Empathic imagination as a way of entering life stories/experiences of the other as a different human being and catharsis

In the Vodmat project, another strong piece of evidence of pre-school children’s ability to have a deeply-felt aesthetic experience was found when a little girl facing Munch’s print *The Scream* performed the action described in the following field-note. This was accompanied with a clear feeling of relief or catharsis (due to amakened memories of the tragic events in her family):

Ethnographic field-note:

Observing various art reproductions, four-and-a-half year-old Timna’s gaze is captured by Munch’s print The Scream. She grabs a crayon and sketches in an intensily coloured violet scarf around the person’s neck [See figure 4].

Preschool teacher: “What are you doing? Why are you ruining the painting I just wanted to put on the board?”

Timna: “I don’t want you to put this painting on the board. You should put it into my portfolio, where we put things that are mine. This painting is mine!”

Preschool teacher: “And who is wearing the violet scarf?”

Timna: “My mommy.”

Later, during spontaneous play involving magnets, Timna observes how some magnets are drawn together, while others are drawn apart (saying: “These two like each other and those two don’t”) and starts to describe her home situation (mommy and daddy are getting a divorce and mommy has been in the mental hospital for a month now due to mental instability).



Figure 4

The Scream – an example of catharsis among the youngest children and an ultimate proof that even pre-school children are capable of deep-felt aesthetic experience.

While aesthetic purists would be quick to judge the irresponsible act of a child doodling on an art reproduction, Munch would probably show excitement over how a four-and-a-half-year-old girl was able to recognize the underlying feeling of his work of art and associate it with her own real-life circumstances. The story of Timna unquestionably testifies to children's ability of a deeply-felt aesthetic experience.

Conclusion

Preliminary results of the implementation of our inductive educational approach and the use of art as a tool for cultural enrichment of pre-school children in kindergarten Vodmat, confirmed the importance of the concepts that form a part of our comprehensive inductive educational approach and in a number of aspects coincide with the approach of education through art as seen in Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi 2006, Vecchi 2010). Among our findings, I would like to highlight the following:

- (1) The basic idea of the comprehensive inductive educational approach to prosocial and moral development is the thesis, that prosocial sensitivity and morality of the pre-school child does not follow from accepting and internalizing rules of proper behaviour, but from the child's emphatic abilities and prosocial emotions of compassion and emphatic guilt that can be stimulated by motivating children to step into different sensitive relationships, by admiration of artistic objects and by artistic

expressions of their attitudes toward other persons, natural environment and cultural heritage.

- (2) The starting point of artistic experience entails encouraging children to enter intense exploration of the part of reality that they would like to portray. Art practices do not only deepen empathic sensitivity and children's wonder over beauty, but provide the possibility for children to associate the contents of artistic activity with real-life events in a way that fosters their empathic imagination and the development of cognitive concepts that they use in judging the appropriateness of a certain action.
- (3) In the case of kindergarten Vodmat, such activities had a direct positive influence on the children's ability to listen to their peers and use their ideas in the reconstruction of their own views or theories used in explaining various phenomena.
- (4) Our evaluation (reported elsewhere, see Kroflic and Smrtnik-Vitulić, in press) of the impact of the inductive use of artistic activities and other pedagogical practices that form an inherent part of the proposed comprehensive inductive education approach to children's prosocial and moral orientation (where we used LaFrenier and Dumas' *Social Competence and Behavior Evaluation Preschool Edition* questionnaire, standardized for the use in Slovenia) shows statistically significant positive shifts towards more tolerant responses of children to frustrations, more peaceful conflict solutions among peers, more prosocial behaviour in interactions with peers, better cooperation of children with teachers and better general adaptation (an overall result).
- (5) The comparison of the results obtained from the group of children that took part in the project with the results acquired in the control group, besides significantly larger positive shifts in afore-mentioned behaviour and social competences in the group of children that took part in the project, also showed less depression, anxiety, loneliness and dependency in the latter group of children (Kroflič and Smrtnik-Vitulić – in press).
- (6) During the implementation of our approach we also noticed a growth of the kindergarten teachers' skills of systematic observation and listening to the children

as well as an evident change in their perception of pre-school children as “rich”, competent and prosocially oriented beings.

In this paper, I have argued that in the last few decades there has been a strong emphasis on the affective dimension of human morality and moral education in many fields of humanities, such as ethics, psychology, theology, philosophy and pedagogy. I have advanced the thesis that there is a connection between ethics and aesthetics, and the premise that different artistic activities may present an important educational tool used to promote children’s empathic abilities as well as prosocial emotions. Those were the starting points for the development of a comprehensive inductive approach to prosocial and moral education later implemented at kindergarten Vodmat, Slovenia. The empirical evaluation and perhaps even more importantly, children's own artistic creations, proved to support the basic idea that children are capable of reaching the most important dimensions of artistic experience already in the pre-school period. Thus they proved to be able to enjoy the creation of beauty and use artistic languages in truly creative ways. Furthermore, they were able to employ empathic imagination and thus override difference by entering life stories of other human beings. During the implementation of the approach we also encountered examples of art enabling children to release tensions that were caused by some traumatic experiences in their lives. All of the above-mentioned findings lead to the conclusion that there are good grounds for believing the comprehensive inductive approach, which exploits the potential of artistic activity and aesthetic experience to promote empathy and ethical behaviour, has much to offer kindergartens and schools. Such an approach may make a very valuable contribution to the personal, social and emotional development of children.

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