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Contributions provided by visual arts lesson for students at secondary stage in elementary education

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Abstract

Visual arts education is an effective learning tool that brings out the creative and instinctive feelings of the individuals. Thus individuals have permanent learning experience by observing objects and assets around to internalize them in their minds. Hence visual arts education is a necessity for individuals in their lives. An effective art education is a very important factor in the primary stage in which creativity developing of children are high. It contributes individuals; to participate in the community as a social person, to make right decisions with mental activities, to express themselves emotionally. By this way the aims of this study is to determine the contributions of visual arts lesson to students. The study carried out with four visual arts lesson teachers working at secondary stage in elementary education. Semi-structured interviews used as a data collection tool. The data obtained from the participants, were analyzed descriptively in line with qualitative research approach. As a result, it is found that the visual arts lessons contribute the social, mental and emotional development of the children.

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1. Introduction

Visual Arts lesson (VAL) is an important educational appliance which keeps individual active in all aspects. It brings significant impetus to our rapidly developing society's improvement struggles not only in the past but also at present, sheds light to the society's past and future by means of developing cultural and social values. Hence, one of the most important objectives of the Visual Arts lesson provided in elementary education is to help children develop themselves emotionally and mentally so that they can actively participate in the socialization process. Artut (2002) emphasized that one of children's most critical periods corresponds to the elementary education period, when they are fragile to external factors by nature of their emotional status. In that period, a child tries to demonstrate her/himself to the others by means of drawings, and realizes s/he represents a value. Therefore; elementary education period is one of the most appropriate periods for arts training. As an aesthetical initiative, visual arts have many spiritual, cultural and social values such as amusement, improving attention, educational, religious, professional and historical contributions (Gotshalk, 1947). In the scope of these values, all activities carried out as a part of art education target social and mental aspects as well as emotional development of individuals. At the same time, other capabilities of the individuals such as critical thinking and intelligence develop as well. According to

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Yolcu (2009), art education helps an individual reach emotional satisfaction within the framework of an aesthetical awareness while discovering new forms and styles, and teaches how to direct their excitement appropriately. This reveals that art education is directed towards encouraging individuals' creativity in order to improve their social, mental and emotional characteristics rather than training artists.

Children close to arts use artistic appliances, and gain new experience and opportunities which they hardly realize throughout their lives such as personality development, creativity and self-expression come to learn how to enjoy all these (Combs, 1991; Russell-Bowie, 2006 quoted by: Russell-Bowie, 2009). In this process, those that can learn the mysteries of art making or gain command of the brush, gain cognitive skills such as coping with determined technique as targeted and interpreting peers' or teachers' supportive and critical comments from their own point of view (Catterall and Pepler, 2007). In the light of this, identifying contributions of Visual Arts lesson provided for students is important in that they help individuals gain social experiences, express themselves by starting close contact with their families and immediate environment, make decisions, solve problems and communicate with the others (Samancı, 2010) and guide their cognitive development covering emotional learning, practicing what is learnt and paying attention (Posner, 2002 quoted by: Feldman and Eidelman, 2009) and they help individuals improve themselves from emotional aspects by means of artistic activities. Subject of this study is to examine contributions brought by visual arts lesson, which focuses on students' social, emotional and mental development, to the students.

Overall objective of this study is to examine contributions provided by Visual Arts lesson for students attending the 2nd stage in elementary education. To this end, answer is sought for following questions.

1. What is the contribution of Visual Arts lesson to students' social development?
2. What is the contribution of Visual Arts lesson to students' mental development?
3. What is the contribution of Visual Arts lesson to students' emotional development?

2. Method

Qualitative research approach was used in this study. Collected data was descriptively analyzed, and then attention was paid to the results indicated by the data in accordance with the research problem (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2008).

2.1. Sample

Sample of the study is comprised of four visual arts teachers teaching the second stage in four elementary schools affiliated with Ministry of National Education in Trabzon province during 2009-2010 education-instruction year.

2.2. Collection and Analysis of Data

Semi-structured interview forms were used for data collection. Interviews were held in schools at times predetermined by teachers. During interviews, each participant's view about the subject was neatly noted down as they refused recording of their statements. The responses on the questionnaire were analyzed in a descriptive way. Reliability and validity analysis were validated by specialists' opinions. Findings obtained from the interviews were presented in tables showing teachers' views and important sections of the participants' quotations were given between quotation marks.

3. Findings and Discussion

In this part, data obtained from teachers' views were analyzed from a descriptive aspect in order to seek answers for the study sub-problems, and resulting findings were interpreted.

Table 1. Contribution of Visual Arts Lesson to Students' Social Development

Subject	Teacher's Views	Participant			
		A1	A2	A3	A4
Social Development	Improving Communication	✓			
	Gaining Self-Confidence	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Showing Respect to Others	✓			
	Gaining the Ability to Empathize with Others	✓			
	Gaining the Ability to Express Oneself			✓	✓
	Socialization			✓	✓
	Professional direction				✓

As a result of the descriptive analysis, views of 7 teachers were found out regarding Visual Arts lesson's contributions to students' social development. Accordingly; A1 said that Visual Arts lesson (VAL) help to compensate for students' communication defects and said "...by means of group works here or flow of the lesson, they attempt to recover their lack of communication". It shows that artistic activities carried out or in-group activities contribute to students for recovering the lack of communication they face in interpersonal relations. In addition; A1 pointed out that students could learn how to empathize with others and show respect to them thanks to VAL. A1 noted "...they start to appreciate feelings and ideas underlying the others' works, and learn to be respectful for their peers' perspectives." This can be explained with that students could empathize with each other by integrating the others' artistic expression with their own feelings and thoughts, and they learnt to be respectful for each others' thoughts in this way. A1, A2, A3 and A4 expressed that VAL proved effective in students' gaining self-confidence. A2 noted "In the beginning, children believe that they cannot draw, they are not confident with themselves. But thanks to the art education, students' self-confidence improves." A3 and A4 said that students acquired the ability to express themselves thanks to VAL. Another view regarding the contributions made by VAL for students was analyzed as "professional direction". In this issue, A4 noted "Many students started to dream of being an artist or arts teacher thanks to the visual arts lesson". A3 and A4 pointed that VAL has a positive effect in students' socialization. In this subject, A3 said "Students become more sociable and motivated when they participate in competitions, are awarded in competitions or their works are exhibited." A4 said "Students become more interested in taking part in competitions once they see their works' being exhibited and they receive positive feedback. This, in turn, supports students' socializations". This finding demonstrates that students' participating in competitions or artistic events make students more sociable, and students take right decisions according to their own skills and refer to arts in selecting profession. Review of the literature regarding contribution of VAL to students' social development showed similar results with present study's findings (Iwai, 2003; Türe, 2007).

Table 2. Contribution of Visual Arts Lesson to Students' Mental Development

Subject	Teacher's Views	Participant			
		A1	A2	A3	A4
Mental Development	Acquiring Critical Point of View	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Discovering the Nature and Environment	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Developing Creativity	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Learning to Think	✓			✓
	Understanding the Figure-Form Relationship	✓	✓		
	Acquiring the Ability to Interpret	✓		✓	✓
	Developing Hand Skills	✓			
	Discovering New Ways of Expression		✓		
	Realizing Details	✓			

As a consequence of the descriptive analysis, views of 9 teachers were found out regarding Visual Arts lesson's contributions to students' mental development. Accordingly; A1, A2, A3 and A4 expressed that students could acquire a critical perspective and develop their creativity thanks to VAL. A1 spoke "During activities, presentations or practical studies, everybody is asked for their opinion and they are written on the board. They learn to deal with one thing from many aspects. The students are told to interpret artists' paintings. Such activities both improve students' interpretation capability and point of view and help them learn to think. Also students criticize each

others’ work and gain a critical point of view. Their creativity improve, while A2 said “I have students interpret artists’ paintings or give them art criticism forms to get their written comments. such activities improve students’ interpretation capability and point of view and help them learn to think. They can look at things from a more creative perspective”. A3 said that students acquired the ability to interpret things thanks to VAL. A4 said that students’ approach to art, artists and even to the environment changed. Also their ability to interpret things and creativity developed, thus they learnt to think due to the interpretation activities. This shows that students gain different points of view and their creativity improve as a result of being exposed to thinking-developing artistic activities such as art criticism or work analysis within scope of the in-class activities. In the light of this, VAL is found to contribute to students’ mental skills such as critical thinking, creativity, interpreting and learning to think. Another common point agreed by A1, A2, A3 and A4 is that students could discover the nature and environment thanks to VAL. A1 said “They realized how nature is balanced and tidy, and how aesthetical values, complimentary forms and crucial arrangements it has. They became aware of the details in the nature.” As for A2, s/he told “...students can learn how to transfer artistic elements like forms and figures into the implementation studies, and to make connection between the two concepts by drawing a relationship between the form in the nature and pictorial forms in their paintings””. This shows that thanks to VAL, students turn into an artistic expression the details they see in the nature and environment by means of making connections between objects or entities. In this way, they gain ability to discover the nature and environment from their own perspective. Moreover; A1 specified that students come to school with untouched hand skilled, but their hand skills develop thanks to VAL. On the other hand, A2 said “I did not restrict my students in any way. I did not urge them to use water color. I just let them do whatever they like. In this way, many students learnt how to discover new ways of expression. In summary, s/he meant that students learnt to explore thanks to VAL.

Table 3. Contribution of Visual Arts Lesson to Students’ Emotional Development

Subject	Teacher’s Views	Participant			
		A1	A2	A3	A4
Emotional Development	Acquiring Aesthetical Perspective	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Gaining Courage for Achievement			✓	✓
	Becoming Volunteer to Express Oneself			✓	✓
	Using Imagination				✓
	Overcoming Fear of Inability to Draw		✓	✓	✓
	Realizing Her/His Own Skills	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Emotional Relaxation	✓			
	Minding Environmental Arrangements		✓		

As a result of the descriptive analysis, views of 8 teachers were found out regarding Visual Arts lesson’s contributions to students’ emotional development. Accordingly; A1, A2, A3 and A4 mentioned that students could acquire an aesthetical perspective towards objects or entities they see thanks to VAL. In this issue, A2 noted down “Students start to be alerted by the mess around. When they see unaesthetic images around, they are encouraged to seek what is beautiful”. This shows that thanks to VAL, students gain an aesthetic perspective. As a consequence, they start to be irritated by unaesthetic environmental arrangements, and thus they are directed to look for and attain what is aesthetic. Tuna (2007), in his study, expressed that it can be achieved by means f-of aesthetic awareness that students realize importance of the figures and forms they did not realize before or seeing details regarding objects, entities and the nature itself. Another expression by A3 regarding VAL’s contribution to students is “many students thinking that they are incapable recognize and develop their skills, especially introvert ones become more interested in noticing themselves”. A4 said “The students with prejudice to painting and alleging themselves for “being incapable” discover their skills and come to a stage where they are voluntary to express themselves by means of painting thanks to VAL. The activities have improved students in a way they can use their imagination better, and their dreaming capacity improved”. A1 said “Since students feel bored in other lessons, they need to discharge their energy and to emotionally relieve. Particularly, children whose both parents are working want to relieve their energy in VAL” meaning that VAL contributes to students’ emotional relaxation. This indicates that students recognize their own skills in VAL in the light of individual differences and develop their imagination power regarding given subjects and become more voluntary to express their hidden feelings by visual means. Furthermore;

A2 and A3 stated that students afraid of painting with fear of failure managed to overcome this fear. A2 spoke “*At the beginning, students are prejudiced. In fact they want to do it right but they are frightened. I attempted to motivate them by saying “You do not have to succeed but you can see the beauties you create”. As a result, they could overcome their fear, now they are painting more voluntarily*”. A3 and A4 pointed out that many students finding themselves incapable of painting could overcome negative feelings such as fear of painting or failure, and gain courage for painting, and their belief regarding their success improved.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the findings, VAL helps students acquire social abilities like communication, gaining self-confidence, being respectful for the others, empathizing with others, expressing oneself, socializing and professional direction. It is seen that this finding resulted from provision for students of environments where they can make mutual contact due to the implementation activities or artistic events. Furthermore; it is concluded that students could acquire several mental abilities such as critical perspective, exploring the nature and environment, developing creativity, learning to think, inferring figure-form relationship, interpretation, developing hand skills, discovering new ways of expression and noticing details thanks to VAL. This shows that events by which students can join discussion with the help of artistic activities like art criticism or work analysis contribute to the development of their mental skills as a result of the in-class activities. Another conclusion is that thanks to VAL, students acquire an aesthetic perspective and courage, enhance their enthusiasm for expressing themselves, develop their imagination, and overcome their fear of not being able to paint, realize their skills, relax and feel irritated by inappropriate arrangement. This shows that thanks to VAL, students gain an aesthetic perspective. As a consequence, they start to be irritated by unaesthetic environmental arrangements, and thus they are directed to look for and attain what is aesthetic.

These findings demonstrate that VAL contributes to students’ social, mental and emotional development. It is thought that number of VAL classes should be increased, and students should be in physical media where they can communicate with each others, join discussion about work analysis or interpretation, and contemplate about events by means of the artistic activities carried out during VAL. As a result, it is expected to help guide students’ perspective of life, and acquire social, mental and behavioral skills.

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