

TEACHING ABOUT ENVIRONMENT THROUGH ART

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PREFACE

This paper is a brief presentation of my dissertation where the title is “The Environmental Aspect of Art Education in Secondary School. Design, Application and Evaluation of a Teaching Medium about Art and Environment”. It is a research about audiovisual teaching and learning. Its theme is *environmental art*, an art not so well known to the public. Its field is a kind of aesthetic interventions and artworks in natural and artificial environment.

The intention of this dissertation is, to propose an alternative method of teaching and learning about environment using an audiovisual teaching medium where we can see some examples of this art. The idea to design a teaching medium about environment by using the arts came out, from the theory that the real students’ interest and motivation about environmental protection can be improved, easier and with more completeness, through art. That happens because art is, a vehicle to promote global communication and understanding and helps the educator to better explain all about cultural and environmental matters. In fact, we are pleased to confirm as an art educator, that the role of art is remarkable increased in many Environmental Education School Programs, where, cultural and environmental issues are connected very often. This is good because, we know that art education helps students feel better and imputes more in the school environment.

How much environment and culture are connected, we are able to realize in a man’s environmental behavior. That means, how much understands himself, his role and his place with the other people and the other species, how much can feel consciously that belongs both to a natural and a social environment. As we already know from manifesto of Environmental Education worldwide congresses, to overcome the environmental crisis knowledge and information are not enough. What we have to do is to change our “everyday life”, change our attitudes and principles in everyone’s living (U.N.E.S.C.O., 1977). But if we want to live this change, we must count seriously on the influence of cultural environment in teaching and learning process.

METHODOLOGY

This research took place in three levels. The first is the theoretical, the second the creative and the third the evaluative. In the first part, we tried to find the proper

teaching materiel (the content) and then we designed the proper medium (the form) for teaching about “art and environment” or “environmental art”. In the second part, we created this medium and in the third we tried to evaluate its implication to the students.

We shall explain quickly what we did in every step and give some results for each one of them. At the end of this paper you can find a brief conclusion and some proposals for the use of this medium.

1. Theory

Theory was sine qua non for the design of a teaching materiel-medium about art and environment. One of the most important research questions was, if there is any relationship between Art Education and Environmental Education and what is this?

We thought that environmental art, as a lesson of Art Education, was a good example to show the connection between these two disciplines. It is a kind of art that not only cares about nature and environment but also cares about environmental awareness of the people.

Environmental art, as an art movement was a cognitive field completely unknown for the students, but they could understand that concerns environmental aesthetics. That means, everything that is surrounding us in everyday common life. Environmental artworks are, special projects where artists, scientists, teachers and students work together. The results are environmental art pieces created by the spirit of “**ecology and sustainable development**”. The most important thing in environmental art is, that these actions have, at the same time, at the same place, an artistic and ecologic meaning. So, environmental art belongs both in Art Education and Environmental Education. Of course, we had to prove these relationships, so, we had to compare them in order to find and explain the most important elements in common. Finally, Art Education joins Environmental Education in many points. These points became the guiding principles for the design of the medium we created and we named “Art and Environment”. We present here the resume in four points:

- a. The multi-cultural and inter-cultural approach
- b. The multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary approach
- c. The multi-sensational and inter-sensational approach
- c. The spirit of sustainability

2. Art production

Through artwork, students can have an alternative contact with any kind of knowledge or information about different thematic topics. When a student is watching a piece of art, he can live a holistic experience, with his mind by the symbols, with his body by the senses and with his heart by the feelings. A piece of art is a very precious piece because it carries the human history and obviously, is always reflecting the evolution of cultural environment.

As we know, teaching also can be an art. In this case, we can say that teaching can have form and content, like a piece of art, therefore, teacher can be an artist, too. He can be creative, imaginative and communicative like an artist, so, students could learn do the same.

In the first part of research (theory) we designed the form and the content of a teaching medium that is talking about art using the arts and demonstrates the relationships between Environmental Education and Art Education. In the second part (art production), we created a file made by photos, texts and music about art, environment and environmental art. From this teaching material we picked up, everything we needed to create an artistic, audiovisual teaching medium about environmental art.

The program we used for this production is the PC Power Point and we followed the criteria of Multimedia Education 2003, Multimedia Rubric 2004 and some others. The teaching medium about "Art and Environment" we created is, a CDROM that lasts 20 minutes.

The presentation starts, with a preface where we explain to the students some basic things about the meanings "art" and "environment". The presentation finishes, with a poem about what every man should do or think for the environmental problems, like the environmental artists.

During the presentation music is playing. Five music pieces (3 classics, 1 chill out, 1 folklore song made by students) accompanies the photos and texts. This music is tuning with the time changing of 47 slides which content is colored photos, images and texts. 25 slides of them are, the photos of the most important environmental artworks in the world. To show better some differences between the artists and their projects we divided them in two chapters:

1. The first chapter is named *Land Art, or Earth Art or Landscape Art*. Here, we present to the students some examples of 12 photos with a small text for each. This chapter presents three categories of artworks that they praise the sublime of nature and landscape:

1a. The "Artificial Landscapes" are huge sculptures in the countryside where they will be transformed according to the weather, the climate and the time passing by.

1b. The "Parks and Gardens" are big areas designed for enjoy the people. Everybody can visit them (especially

people who live in big cities) and walk and play around. Different kind or size of art pieces are, exposed together with plants, trees, flowers, rocks, water etc.

1c. The "Made by Natural Materials" are special art pieces made from leaves, stones, rocks, snow, sand etc, and it depends if they are permanent or not of how much fragile they are in external conditions.

2. The second chapter is named *Ecoart*. This chapter is about artworks that concern the environmental protection and the message of the artists is, that life in natural, human and social environment is worthy to be protected, renewed, enhanced. There are three categories that present 13 photos with text.

2a. The "Trash Art" is a very new art expression. It is a comment about the modern style of life where everybody makes a lot of rubbish things. The super consumption is one of the biggest problems in man's behavior today, because it has a lot environmental consequences (pollution, energy, etc).

2b. The "New Reclamation of Land" concerns the cases of restoration, innovation and change of the use of land, or area, or construction, because of social-economy and cultural reasons.

2c. The "Life Protection" presents the artists who try to save the aesthetic, biological and cultural values of the nature and most of all they try to save the wild life, because this is the most important part of the circle life.

3. Application and evaluation

The last step was the application of the teaching medium "Art and Environment" in students' classes. The target group was the students of the third class of gymnasium (15 years old). We projected the audiovisual medium to 250 students in different schools in Athens, in four different departments of secondary education. The students saw the film and they answered voluntarily to the questionnaire in the field research.

The questions for the evaluation research were many because our focus was to understand, if the meaning of this experimental lesson passed through the students. Successfully and effectively in the way we had designed it. The students should answer after the projection, if the film was good, useful, and practical. Finally we prepared, a questionnaire of 9 pages with a different group of questions for each page. We present the resume in the follow questions:

1. What we need to make the proper teaching and learning medium about Art and Environment for the secondary schools pleasant, interesting, entertaining and not bored, complicate and exhausting?

2. How easy is to teach the theory and practice of environmental art in secondary school and what we need to succeed?

3. How possible for the students is, if they learn about environmental art, to understand the role of art and aesthetics in environmental protection?

4. How possible is, art to be the motive for the students so they can be more sensitive and active in front of environmental problems?

The final results of the evaluation research for the teaching medium in a few words are the follow: Environmental awareness is what we expected after the presentation of the audiovisual medium about “Art and Environment”. We found that school environment (educators, classes, teaching medium, etc) was responsible for the success in this direction, and not other reasons. Par example, if the students had a previous experience in environmental education or, if they used to visit museums, etc. Also, we believed that using audiovisual teaching methods, lesson could be an entertainment for the students. Our expectation from this evaluation research was, to measure the quality, the utility and the practicality of the teaching medium. The final goals of the evaluation research proved that all the mean values were above the average (about 3 in the scale of 5). The analysis of the results was done by statistic methods.

CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS

- * This research explored the relationships between Art Education and Environmental Education trough a teaching and learning audiovisual medium about *environmental art*. The whole idea was to help the students better understand the environmental crisis and environmental problems without be disappointed, pessimist, anxious or indifferent about it. Teaching and learning about environment through art, is one of the best ways to help the students and the teachers to get safer to this point.
- * The audiovisual form of the lesson encouraged, the students to understand the meaning of environmental artworks, because they reacted to the new knowledge spontaneously. Specially, the music helps to open the mind and accept new information without so much prejudice.
- * Artistic and aesthetic visions about environment influence seriously what the students think, feel and do about environmental problems because they can remember the images for a long time instead of the words that they will forget them in a short time.
- * Teaching about environmental problems through art, we avoid to be oppressive or moralist. On the contrary, we promote the creative, communicative and optimist side of art expression *about, in and for* the environment.

Our major objective was to support an “Education for Art and Environment” in secondary education through the teaching medium “Art and environment”. In this context we can suggest the followings:

- * Get some ideas for planning new projects of environmental education school programs.
- * Give inspiration and motives for the students to participate in these programs.

- * Organize some environmental art workshops in the school for the students and the teachers.
- * Create a network about environmental art.

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