



Art Education to Develop Creativity and Critical Skills in Digital Society: Integrating the Tradition in an E-Learning Environment

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1. Introduction

The importance of art education is increasingly recognized worldwide and in Europe as it offers to the student useful guidelines to develop his creativity, his imagination, his sensitivity towards himself and the world around him. In addition, art education allows to develop the ability to express themselves by a wide range of subjects and languages that hardly could be offered by other educational means. Art education also boosts critical skills necessary to think and move freely and consciously in our society full of stimulation and information. Furthermore, arts education has the responsibility to bring students closer to the past and present cultural-heritage and the cultural diversity [9, 7]. For these reasons it is important to provide a high quality arts education. However, following topics should be further investigated and developed: art education curriculum, teacher training, the use of new media, collaboration between professionals of the education environment and the artistic one.

A more considered importance for the use of new media in art education is necessary, as well as about e-learning (online teaching at a distance) and the preparation of teachers of art education. The use of new media expanded the role of arts education and art teachers allowing the collaboration between teachers, artists, educators and other professionals specializing in a wide range of sectors. Many art teachers are motivated to teach using new media in the classroom, but often lack experience, training and educational resources [9]. On the contrary other art teachers reject the use of teaching methods that use new media, maintaining the conservative approach of traditional methodologies, because they do not believe their skills adequate to use technology in teaching and they are afraid of the new [1]. It even happens also because teachers of arts education support strongly the importance of practical experience for the development of creativity through the stimulation of the senses and the physical interaction individually and in groups. Regardless of each point of view, the technological innovations of information and communication produced and continue to produce significant effects changing our society [6]. Educational systems are not excluded from this change, thus not including new technologies in education means to produce a gap between the extra-curricular students reality, rich of digital experiences, and the school reality. Finally, it means deprive the students of many of the skills necessary for their inclusion in digital society [3]. Furthermore, deny the use of methods, tools and technologies would impede the improvement of teaching, curricula, and teacher training [2]. The new media offer many possibilities to art education, for example obtaining, creating, processing, organization of material (text, images, audio, video), rapid share, connection with other cultures, create animated images.

The e-learning allows to share creative projects, to exchange information quickly by e-mail, discussion groups, forums and chat. This is particularly useful in teacher training because it permits us to work collaboratively for the construction of shared meanings, making the distance in the nearness [5, 1]. The teacher who uses new media for its own training will be more inclined to do the same with their students. The new generations often possess most advanced digitally literacy than their parents. The task of the educator or the art education teacher is to guide students to independent use of digital tools and to propose effective methods of research and conservation of information, to develop critical thinking, to stimulate creative reworking and to exercise the power of expression and communication of their experiences [4].

However, if virtual experiences are not integrated with real-life experiences of these networks would lose sense, it would produce isolation and virtual experiences would increase in quantity but lose in quality and in credibility. In order to evaluate the educational possibilities of integration between traditional tools and new methodologies (e-learning) and technologies we present the preliminary results from the application of the Didart project to the teacher training (university student in training to become educators) in the Granada University (Spain).

2. The project with the on-line platform Didart

The on-line platform Didart.net is a European project of contemporary art education addressed to users of different age ranges. This website is a collection of educational proposals raised from the collaboration between different institutional partners (museums, universities, libraries and cultural associations coordinated by the MAMbo museum, Bologna, Italy) and contemporary artists of different disciplines (photography, performance art, video art, painting and sculpture). The artists have contributed to the construction of Didart educational paths showing some of their favorite movies, books, clothes, artworks, tools, which influenced the realization of their artworks, both formally and conceptually, in order to bring users to the contemporary art language.

The main objectives of the Didart project are:

- To propose new tools and methodologies to students and teachers in training;
- To foster collaboration between professionals from different sectors to make a complete arts education project;



- To experience a direct approach to art and poetry of artists;
- To bring the users closer to the art world;
- To offer the opportunity of discovering, inventing, creating and to learn enjoying whenever possible;
- Interchanging experiences among various educators and students (from different countries and different educational environments);
- To use new media and e-learning in an original, creative and critical way, combining new and traditional technologies, virtual and real experiences.

Recipients of this project are users of various age ranges, from children up to educators or teachers, interested in approaching, play and understand the contemporary art world. Therefore, the on-line didactic proposals and the information contained in them are designed in relation to this plurality of users. Examples of these educational proposals are animated reading about artists and their works, museums paths, virtual classrooms, book workshop and portrait workshop. All these proposals have the common goal of engaging and stimulating the public allowing to understand the art rather than learning it [8]. The users can access to paths (through a password furnished by the educator), view online and download different types of contents. Processing these contents, the users are invited to create their own works and upload them online. The educator role is to guide the users throughout the process and collect on-line the users works. Finally the experience will be published and compared with that of other educators or users.

The Didart educational path that we experienced at the Granada University is called *Id@rt experience* and consists of three paths designed by three Italian artists (whose works can be found at the MAMbo museum). In these educational paths artists present their poetry not only by their works, but also by the hobbies, literature, movies, music that inspired them. We proposed this path Didart to seventy teachers in training at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of Granada. We decided to address the educational path to teachers in training (university student in training to become educators) because we believe it is very important to train educators able to accompany students to explore art languages by innovative and effective tools and methodologies.

The experience was carried out for about a month and it took place both by meetings in the classroom and by online working. The teachers in training worked on creative interpretations with the guidelines given by the artists, first in a personal way and then in a collective one; this allowed a personal depth reflection and then an exchange of ideas and skills among them. We worked using both traditional tools and new methodologies and technologies. To conclude the experience, we evaluated the results proposing questionnaires to the teachers in training and we presented them by an exhibition with their collective works and photos documenting the experience.

3. Discussions and Conclusions

In *Id@rt experience*, as well as in the whole Didart, the users have the unusual opportunity to receive suggestions for creative interpretation of artworks directly from the artists who created them. Generally, in arts education, the artwork is mediated by the educator and is taken as a pretext to tell the artist poetry creating relationships with the personal experiences of recipients. Thus, the *Id@rt experience* provides a direct approach to the art with the aim to form critical and creative persons able to understand the topics and language of the contemporary art. In the field of teacher training the online platform results an efficient tool because it allows a non-linear search of information, processing, creation and organization of audiovisual materials. It also permits to share, rapidly at a distance, the materials produced, leading to cooperate and exchange ideas between the various actors of the project. Thus, the *Id@rt experience* offers a dynamical formation and a continuous sharing.

The Didart methodology takes advantage of the use of new technologies without ever losing sight of the importance of practical experience both individual and collective. Indeed, the activities are provided by digital medium but users are invited to elaborate these stimuli in a practical manner by the mean of tools both digital and conventional. Finally, Didart stimulates and makes possible the synergy between people from different countries, backgrounds and working methods. In the education field, as in many other ones, this type of collaboration is important to provide a complete education, flexible and open to new points of view, and in contact with external reality. In schools, where the co-presence of an artist or another professional with the teacher is not always possible, e-learning projects, as Didart, can fill this gap. However, in the school environment the technological medium results sometimes limited. Many schools have a computer room and digital tools, but often not all equipment is functioning and/or sufficient for simultaneous use of a whole class. Moreover, not all children have the equipments or the opportunity to connect to internet at home.

Didart is an efficient tool for art education as it integrates the use of new media offered by our digital society and the practical experience providing a complete education. Therefore it is important to continue the investigation on e-learning methodology in art education, working on the solution of technological limitations in schools.

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