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The Nursery Teachers' Views on the Use of Art in the Education Process. The Case of Nursery Teachers of the Achaia Prefecture

Elisavet Papadopoulou

Nursery Teacher
Patras, Greece

Iosif Fragkoulis

Professor of Hellenic Open University
Patras, Greece

Abstract. The present survey aims at exploring the views of the nursery school teachers of the Achaia Prefecture in relation to the use of Art in the education process. Their views were identified with regard to the content, the potential benefits and the form of a relative training action.

Both the questionnaire and the personal interview were chosen as the methods for conducting the present survey.

The results of the survey showed that the nursery teachers consider important the use of art in the education process and identified the fields where they think it has a positive contribution. In addition they demonstrated the difficulties associated with the relevant interventions and, finally, they described the characteristics and the content of a potential training related to the arts in education, which they wished to follow.

Keywords: Art, education process, competences/skills, nursery school, training.

Introduction

The quality of the education provided constitutes a main priority issue for the education systems at both the European and the wider international environment (European Commission, n.d.; The World Bank, 2015:72; UNESCO, 2015:18).

Quality in education is increasingly considered an essential component of the social good order and the vehicle for reducing marginalisation and social exclusion (OECD, 2012:3).

Accordingly, the centre of gravity of education is shifted from the provision of knowledge to the acquisition of cognitive, social, personal and vocational skills

with the purpose that youth can be adapted on a lifelong basis to a continuously changing environment and at the same time be able to manage information, innovate and produce (European Communities, 2007:3).

The development of these skills is therefore the issue at stake of curricula at all levels of education and this goal is strived for with the use of a variety of methods.

At the same time, as emphasised by Kokkos (2011:11), it has been argued by many academics such as Dewey, Gardner, Perkins, among others, that education through arts contributes to pursuing an integrated learning approach whereas the learners' critical thinking, creativity, emotional expression and imagination are developed in parallel to the cognitive approach of different issues.

Since it is, therefore, the development of the students' horizontal competences and skills that plays a crucial role in improving the quality of the education provided and the lifelong development of the same whilst the aesthetic experience serves and supports very significantly this purpose, we do find it important to explore the educational use of art in education by taking account of the teachers' opinions.

We consider that by highlighting the teachers' views and concerns as well as possible observations and proposals on their part, the practical and realistic aspects of the task of using art in the education process and the development of the students' skills and competences shall be illustrated within the framework of the day-to-day reality of life of Greek schools.

Reflection on the quality of education and the importance of developing the students' competences and skills

Improving the quality of the education system is not merely a key local issue. On the contrary, it is considered as one of the principal strategic objectives within the broader socio-economic environment of the European Union inasmuch as high quality education contributes decisively to employability, reducing marginalization and exclusion of youth, social cohesion and overall social and economic success (European Commission, 2015:3, 2017).

New requirements shift the centre of gravity of education from the provision of knowledge to the acquisition of cognitive, social, personal and vocational skills, which ensure the possibility that each young individual can be adapted on a lifelong basis to a high-risk society, manage a growing volume of information, innovate and produce (Daglis, 2008:26).

Furthermore, modern schools are required to develop the students' creativity and critical thinking whereas in order to be able to participate in modern complex and open societies such faculties are now a necessity (Tsatsaroni & Kourou, 2007:62).

According to UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization), "*the encouragement of creativity from an early age is one of the best guarantees of growth in a healthy environment of self-esteem and mutual respect – critical ingredients for building a culture of peace.*" (Irish National Teachers' Organisation, 2009:11).

The preparation of students for their adult life must include, beyond approach of the basic traditional subject areas, the mastering of broader problem-solving

skills of human activities as a whole (Chatzinikita & Anagnostopoulou, 2007:265-266).

Those who develop meta-cognitive competences shall use them throughout their lives. H. Gardner maintains that "Those with flexible minds, with open minds, are at a distinct advantage overall. (...) So are those who know how their own mind works and can marshal that metacognition knowledge in cases where the course to pursue is not clear" (OECD, 2014).

Finally, today, insofar as there is an urgent need for people to work collectively, the acquisition of knowledge, competences and skills must be combined with social learning and seeking alternative solutions in order to resolve problematic situations, tensions and conflicts with the use of imagination and acumen. Individuals must assume responsibilities, become familiar with new technologies, be able for lifelong learning, update their stances and adapt themselves in ever-changing and interdependent environments (Christodoulou-Gliaou, n.d.:6-7).

Having endeavoured to briefly record the contemporary debate on education and the importance of developing the students' skills for a quality education, we will now attempt to present in a succinct manner the most significant methods with which Art contributes to learning and the development of students' skills and competences.

The importance of the use of Art for learning purposes

Education through Art and the use of Art in Education is more and more systematic in recent years. The aim of these efforts is to send a strong signal to students to observe, explore, experiment, imagine and make their own correlations as well as to compare and develop their own critical and creative thinking. (Malafantis & Karela, 2012:372).

The power of Art in the development of critical thinking is especially important. Housen (2001:121) maintains that critical thinking is difficult to develop before students are capable of acquiring a level of understanding and knowledge on this issue. Nevertheless, according to research data it has been observed that before children can read a book are able to "read" a work of art seeing that a carefully selected work of art stands on its own.

At this point we may add Barrett's "voice" (2003), who maintains that every work of art offers the possibility of its multiple interpretations where there is no such thing as a "wrong answer". We are all different and our reactions to works of art are different too. Moreover, our personal reactions to works of art allow differing nuances thus broadening their understanding.

This is also a powerful weapon for teachers in encouraging and improving the self-esteem of the more timid and/or "weak", from a learning point of view, students since different viewpoints are sought and rewarded.

Efland argues that dealing with art can contribute to the development of four cognitive functions: cognitive flexibility, knowledge integration, imaginative thinking and the perception of the aesthetic value of Art (Malafantis & Karela, 2012:372-373).

Moreover, Karen Heid (2005), in her work *Aesthetic development, A Cognitive Experience*, expresses her firm belief that dealing with art improves knowledge, considering that art is not just about our senses and emotions but also engages

our minds too. In addition, seeing that we are forced to express our emotions for and reactions to a work of art, we are engaged in a cognitive process.

Similarly, in the project *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (1999), seven independent research groups in the USA, examined different relevant programs in different schools and with different methodologies. In summary, they came, although independently, to significant common conclusions. a) Arts approach students, which cannot be otherwise approached, and in such ways that cannot be otherwise approached. b) Arts connect students with themselves and with others while at the same time modify the learning environment. c) Arts present new challenges for those students which are considered successful (Irish National Teachers' Organization, 2009:15-16).

Arts provide the means of approaching a wide variety of students with different cultural, social and financial background resulting in varying ways of thinking, learning and behavior. School systems, which are based on teaching with the use of mainly written and spoken word, cannot approach all students since students depending on their environment perceive and process information in different ways (Dickinson, 1997).

We have known for some time that the ways with which people are provided with information differ significantly. As it is understood, a large number of students have difficulty in learning in the conventional classroom, where most information is conveyed verbally while arts provide these students with especially precious tools so as to make it easier for them to learn. Yet, arts are an especially useful tool for all students since they facilitate them to learn more effectively, retain all the things they have learned, be able to use what they have learned in different settings and deal with learning in a positive manner. Moreover, arts offer numerous opportunities for evidential and sensory learning, which is crucial for the long-term memory (Irish National Teachers' Organization, 2009:15).

Malafantis & Karela (2012:374) make a reference to Gardner's view according to which active involvement with works of art can contribute to the multi-faceted enhancement of intelligence providing a wealth of symbols for processing. They maintain also that this is the result of the function of Art as an alternative mode of expression of emotions and ideas.

Dickinson (1997) refers to Gardner and the theory of multiple intelligences, maintaining that through arts students can find not only the means for communication and self-expression but also the tools to consolidate meaning and learn almost all disciplines effectively. This becomes more evident when art is taught not as a separate module/subject but when it is dealt with at all levels of the curriculum.

According to neurophysiology, our mind modifies its physiology as long as we are engaged in learning. And this change becomes more extensive and intensified when emotions are involved in the learning process. Learning takes place when cerebral connections change. In a number of cases when the chemical substances of emotions are not involved no such changes occur. Therefore, while arts stimulate and mobilize emotions, they can change the brain of both artists and observers (Zull, 2005).

In the paper "*Discussion Document and Proceedings of the Consultative Conference on Education 2009*" published by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation, Marion

Diamond maintains the view that although the human mind is the most complex system on earth, often and especially in primary education is used as a mere information storage and retrieval device. Nevertheless, human mind can change for the better and for the worse both structurally and functionally as a result of learning and experience, throughout our life. Such capabilities are provided by well designed art-related programs (Irish National Teachers' Organization, 2009:15).

Models for the observation and analysis of works of art and their use in the education process

The term "models" for the observation of works of art is understood as an often distinct in individual phases process aiming at the gradual transition from the superficial observation of a work of art to more in-depth interpretations (Mega, 2011a:44).

Below, we are listing the basic models that have been used from time to time in the education process, which pertain to the critical observation and assessment of works of art, and which focus on the work of art as such (Μέγα, 2011a:44).

Models focusing on works of art

Both Feldman (1994), in his work *Practical Art Criticism*, and Michael Prater (2002), in *Art Criticism: Modifying the Formalist Approach*, but also Broudy (1972), in *"The Enlightened Cherishing: An Essay on Aesthetic Education"* and Anderson (1993), in *A model for art criticism: Talking with kids about art*, develop methods of observation and analysis of works of art, which have been developed in order to support the critical approach of a work of art and this is, in fact, their main purpose.

Subsequently, the most substantive strategies for the observation of works of art are set out, which, contrary to the abovementioned, comprise a part of the teaching practice with the primary objective of developing students' skills. They concern structured educational programs which have been developed and applied for this purpose. However, observation and assessment of a work of art in such cases is not an end in itself.

Models focusing on the development of competences and skills

The following models constitute a cognitive process whereby, through a structured set of questions that are being posed by the teacher to his or her students, it is aimed to develop the students' reflective competence on one hand and foster their mental development on the other while, in general, nurture a holistic development of their personality. These models are intended to support students in developing their cognitive abilities that cultivate reflective learning as it regards both arts and modules/subjects.

At this point it should be underlined that the approach of a work of art, by adopting some of the models presented below, is not a strictly predefined and with binding steps process. The steps, which are described and build these models, aim to the gradual deepening and understanding of a work of art, stimulating at the same time the students' reflective attitude.

They represent flexible models in which the educational techniques are selected and adapted in relation to the educational goals, the educational framework and

the students' specific characteristics and needs (Tishman & Palmer, (2007); Mega, 2011b: 63-65).

D. Perkins "Model" (1994)

We will commence our presentation with the description of a model for the analysis of works of arts, which has been designed and proposed by David Perkins, Professor at the School of Education of Harvard University, who has also carried out outstanding work pertaining to the exploration of the role of arts in the educational process and in particular the development of reflective thinking (Mega, 2011a:45).

Perkins' strategy has four distinct phases, which are successively followed although a degree of freedom is allowed as regards their application. Perkins' methodology aims at reflective stimulation and mobilization through three components: key actions, possible questions and educational measures (Mega, 2011a:46; Mega, 2011b:65).

According to Perkins, observers cultivate both their creative and critical thinking through systematic and organized observation of works of art. This is an "attitude"-approach whereby an observer takes a stand towards a work of art rather than a technique that should be adhered closely to (ARTiT, n.d.:29).

Perkins' four phases are the following:

1st Phase: Time is provided for observation where we do not rush to make interpretations at first sight but we dedicate time for a more objective observation.

2nd Phase: Open and bold observation whereby it is endeavored to mobilize students' open thinking and creativity.

3rd Phase: Clear, analytic and in-depth observation whereby analytical thinking is cultivated.

4th Phase: Holistic observation - review of the process whereby the students' organizing thinking and their ability to use all relevant information acquired from the previous stages are mobilized (Mega, 2011b:65-68).

The ways with which students are invited, each time, to process everything that they experienced and obtained in the previous phases vary. The most appropriate mode is chosen each time according to the learning objectives, the students' age and the educational framework. Thus, this may be dramatization, a text or a discussion (Mega, 2011b: 68).

Visible Thinking (V/T) and Artful Thinking (A/T) Projects

These projects were developed by the Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

The *Visible Thinking project (V/T)* encompasses a large number of routines, which can be easily and flexibly combined with the content of the subjects involved.

The aim of V/T is, among other things, to cultivate students' intellectual skills and patterns such as truth-seeking, understanding, fairness, and creativity. It also engages tools so as to involve arts with different contents of various issues (Visible Thinking, n.d.a).

Furthermore, Visible Thinking includes a practical framework in order to cultivate students' thinking skills and dispositions, and, deepen content learning

as well. Its aim is to make students' thinking visible to themselves and one another, so that they can improve it (Visible Thinking, n.d.b).

At a fundamental level, routines are simple structures that can be integrated and used in a variety of subject areas (Visible Thinking, n.d.c).

The *Artful Thinking project (A/T)* is a research program which employs the idea of V/T as dominant structure. The objective of the A/T project is to assist teachers to engage regularly works of performing arts and music in their curriculum in ways that develop students' thinking dispositions (Tishman & Palmer, 2006:4).

The program recommends six thinking dispositions to teachers, which, if adopted, will strengthen students' intellectual behaviors. These dispositions are developed through Thinking Routines, which are easy to learn and can deepen students' thinking in the classroom (Tishman & Palmer, 2006:8-9).

The routines are short and easy-to-learn procedures which help students routinely enact thinking-dispositional behavior in and across six thinking dispositions. Students are asked to use thinking routines first and frequently with works of art, and also with a wide range of topics and subjects in the curriculum (Tishman & Palmer, 2006:8-9).

“Transformative learning through aesthetic experience”

In conclusion, it is important to mention another method proposed by Professor Alexandros Kokkos called “transformative learning through aesthetic experience”. Initially, this method concerned adult education that can be applied in the framework of transformative learning. However, serious efforts have been made so as to be adapted and applied to younger ages. It concerns the reassessment of the learners' dysfunctional assumptions and has as its main objective the transformation of their frame of reference or of one or more of their intellectual patterns (Kokkos, 2011:87-88).

More specifically, it includes six stages:

Stage A: Determination of the need for critical assessment of the learners' stereotypical assumptions on a given issue.

Stage B: The teacher facilitates a process in the context of which, learners express their views on a given issue.

Stage C: Determination of the sub-issues to be examined and the critical questions that are raised on these sub-issues.

Stage D: Encompasses the selection of works of art to be dealt with and their correlation to critical questions.

Stage E: Dealing with the works of art with the use, alternatively, of the models: α) Perkins and b) Visible Thinking, correlation of the latter to critical questions and critical approach of the learners' views in relation to these questions.

Stage F: Critical rethinking takes place whereby the learners' views as regards the subject under discussion are restated. Then they are compared with those views which were initially stated, synthesis is carried out and conclusions are drawn (Kokkos, 2011:98-99).

Research Methodology

Designing and conducting a research survey is of key importance not only for achieving the basic objective of the research effort but also for ensuring its validity and reliability.

In the present chapter attempt is being made to present the methodology used for the implementation of our survey. In more detail, we will attempt to present:

- a) the purpose, objectives and research questions of the survey;
- b) b. the identification of sample and data collection techniques applied;
- c) c. the processes adopted for the development of our research tools; and finally
- d) d. the restrictions of the present survey.

Purpose – objectives and research questions

The purpose of the present survey is to explore nursery teachers' views on the use of art in the framework of their educational practice.

The objectives of the research are: a. to explore nursery teachers' views on the ways with which they can use art in the framework of their educational tasks; b. to take stock of difficulties met by them in treating and using works of arts in their work, and c. their wish to attend systematic training on issues relevant to the use of art in their teaching work.

In particular, in the context of the present research effort, we will attempt to answer to the following research questions:

1. Do the extent and the manner of using art on the part of nursery teachers in the context of the education process depend on their demographic characteristics?
2. Do nursery teachers' views on the use of art in the education process depend on their demographic characteristics?
3. Do the difficulties encountered by nursery teachers in connection with the use of art in the education process depend on their demographic characteristics?
4. Do nursery teachers' views on their participation in training programs on the use of art in the education process depend on their demographic characteristics?

Data Collection Techniques

Triangulation is the research method selected in this particular research effort.

The tools employed in conducting the survey were questionnaire and interviews.

Sample selection – Sample size

Questionnaire

For the identification of the sample simple the random sampling method was used with the use of random number tables proportionately stratified with regard to nursery teachers working in nursery schools located in urban, semi-urban and rural areas.

The questionnaire was handed out to 90 data subjects i.e. nursery teachers covering all districts of the Prefecture. 85 questionnaire replies were received,

which composed our survey sample. This number corresponds to 20% of the entire population under study. The questionnaire was handed out in May 2017.

Interviews

Structured interviews were used to further investigate the validity of the questionnaire replies. Five nursery teachers from the Achaia Prefecture who had not been given a questionnaire and, in addition, had not participated in the pilot application of the survey underwent a structured interview of approximately 20 minutes each for each individual. The interviews were conducted during the same period in which the questionnaire was handed out.

Survey questionnaire

The questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. The questionnaire in the present survey was chosen as a data collection tool for the following reasons:

- It allows the collection of plethora of data in a short time.
- The data collected is likely to be quantified and conclusions can be drawn by statistical methods that can be generalized in wider population groups, and
- The anonymity of responses is likely to contribute to the sincerity of the subjects' replies (Fragoulis, 2003: 91).

Interviews

We have opted to use the structured interview as a data collection tool for the following reasons: a. the interview is a process that allows the researcher to extract information and obtain data through the analysis of the discourse of selected but characteristic cases; b. the interview "illuminates", that is it allows access to the way other people see things, their thoughts, attitudes, and opinions hidden behind their behavior (Cohen & Manion, 1997:373-375). In addition, we have opted to use this particular data collection technique insofar as our aim was *"to identify the views of the population surveyed by focusing on the perspectives of individuals experiencing and feeling about facts"* (Bird, Hammersley & Woods, 1999:320).

The essentials of interviews were analogous to those of the questionnaires.

As a method for analyzing the interviews, the content analysis was used and as analysis unit the topic.

Survey Research Limitations

The survey was carried out on a specific sample of nursery teachers working in the Achaia Prefecture. Therefore its results cannot be generalized to all nursery teachers throughout the country.

Moreover, nursery teachers, who work either in kindergartens or in private nursery schools, were excluded from the sample. The reason for this exclusion is the fact that in these facilities significant differences are observed as to both the students' socio-economic background and the different educational objectives than those adopted by public nursery schools.

Finally, the tool employed for conducting the survey was designed to be used for nursery teachers working in school units in Greece. In order to be used for nursery teachers working in other countries it should be weighed up according

to the specific educational conditions of these countries (e.g. curriculum, teacher training, education system).

Presentation of results

The presentation of results includes the results of univariate and bivariate analyses using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The presentation of the results of univariate analysis follows the order of the questionnaire questions. The bivariate analysis includes all those findings that are statistically significant and respond to the research questions of the survey.

1st research question: Knowledge about art in education and ways of using art in the education process

- To the question: *“Do you consider the use of art in the education process: a. necessary, b. unnecessary, c. useful”*, 45 data subjects (52.9%) consider art necessary in the education process, 1 data subject (1.2%) considers it unnecessary and 39 data subjects (45.9%) consider it useful.

Statistical significance level was observed with respect to the data subjects training in relation to art ($\rho=0.002$).

- To the question: *“Which forms of art spring to your mind when you hear the term works of art”*, the data subjects indicated: Painting (100%), Music (74.1%), Sculpture-Engraving (71.8%), Literature (69.4%), Theatre (67.1%), Dance (57.6%) and Cinema (37.6%).

- To the question: *“Which of these forms have you already used in the education process”*, the data subjects stated as their first or second option the following: *Painting* (85.9%), *Music* (65.9%) and *Literature-Poetry* (27.1%).

Statistical significance level was observed in the frequency of use of forms of art in the education process between:

- ✓ Painting and the work area of the data subjects ($\rho=0.002$).
- ✓ Sculpture-Engraving and the work area of the data subjects ($\rho=0.042$).
- ✓ Literature-Poetry and:
 - the data subjects' further studies ($\rho=0.000$)
 - the participation of the data subjects in significant training activities ($\rho=0.037$).
- ✓ Theatre and the data subjects' further studies ($\rho=0.001$).
- ✓ Cinema and the data subjects' further studies ($\rho=0.000$)
- To the question: *“Do you know any of the following methods of use of art in the education process?”*, the data subjects stated:

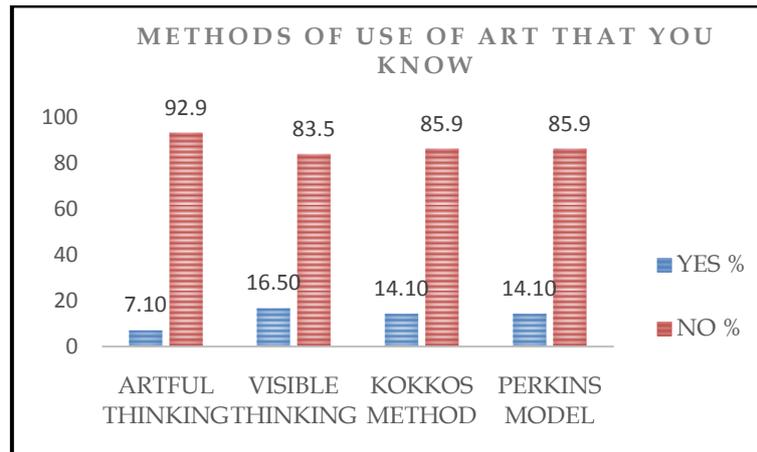


Chart 1: Methods of use of art in the education process, which the data subjects know

- To the question: «*Do you use any of these in the education process?*», the data subjects stated:

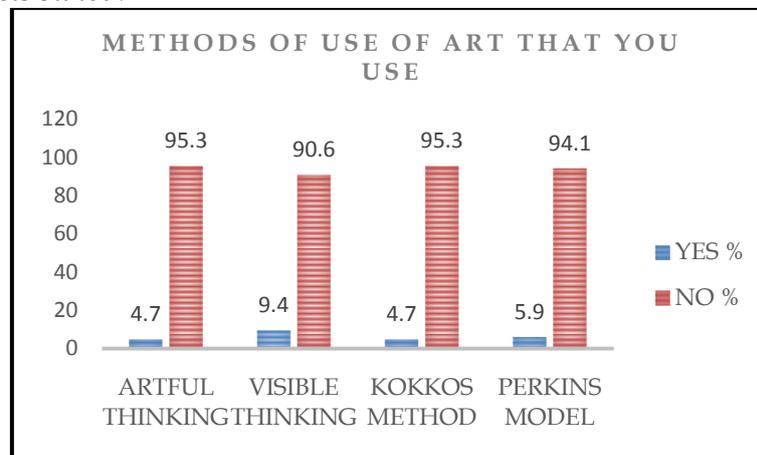


Chart 2: Methods of use of art in the education process used by the data subjects

- To the question: «*Do you consider some of them most suitable for preschool age?*», the data subjects stated:

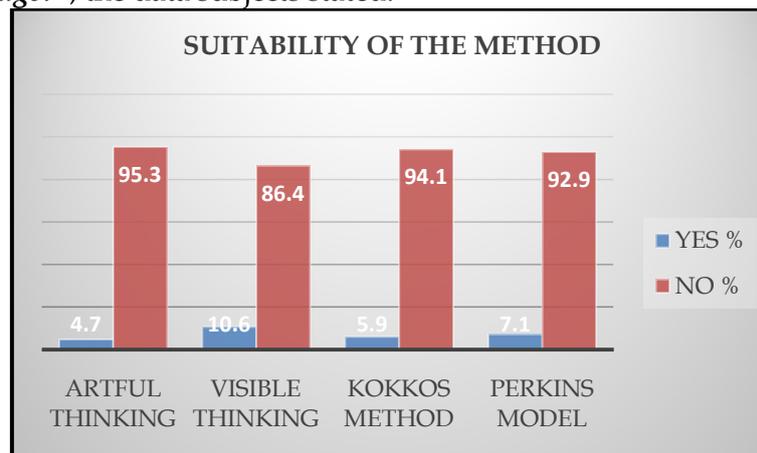


Chart 3: Method of using art in the education process, which the data subjects consider most suitable for preschool age

- To the question: «*With which ways do you usually use art in the education process?*», the data subjects stated: 72 (84.7%) to develop creation and expression activities, 59 (69.4%) to introduce a thematic area (69.4%), 34 (40%) to

detect previous knowledge, 22 (25.9%) stated that they use art to modify behaviour, 64 (75.3%) stated that they use it to deepen and enrich the subject/topic and two data subjects stated that they use art furthermore for "fun" and "consolidating knowledge".

Statistical significance level was observed with respect to the variables listed below:

- ✓ "deepening- enrichment of subject/topic" and the data subjects' years of employment in education ($\rho=0.04$).
- ✓ "detecting previous knowledge" and the data subjects' work area ($\rho=0.032$) and the data subjects' further studies ($\rho=0.015$).

2nd research question: Objectives of the use of art in education process

- To the question: *"To what extent do you consider that through the use of art in the education process learning objectives are achieved"*, 78 data subjects (91.8%) stated that they are achieved to far too great or too great an extent and 7 data subjects (8.2%) stated that learning objectives are achieved to a moderate extent.

- To the question: *"To what extent do you consider that through the use of art in the education process the learning process is improved"*, 80 data subjects (94.1%) replied that the learning process is improved to far too great or too great an extent, 5 subjects (5.9%) to a moderate extent.

Statistical significance level was observed in relation to the work area of the subjects ($\rho=0.018$).

- To the question: *"To what extent do you consider that through the use of art in the education process modern teaching techniques for young children are used?"* 70 data subjects (82.3%) replied that modern learning techniques for young children are used to far too great or too great an extent, 14 data subjects (16.5%) to a moderate extent and 1 (1.2 %) to a minimum extent.

Statistical significance level was observed in relation to the subjects' work area ($\rho=0.014$).

- To the question: *"To what extent do you consider that through the use of art in the education process the particular characteristics of your students are used?"* 76 data subjects (89.4%) stated that this occurs to far too great or too great an extent and 9 (10.6%) stated that this occurs to a moderate extent.

- To the question: *"To what extent do you consider that through the use of art in the education process your students' educational needs are satisfied?"*, 73 data subjects (85.8%) stated that this occurs to far too great or too great an extent and 12 (14.1%) stated that this occurs to a moderate extent.

- To the question: *"How would you prioritize your views on the skills or competences developed with the use of art in the education process"*, data subjects replied as follows:

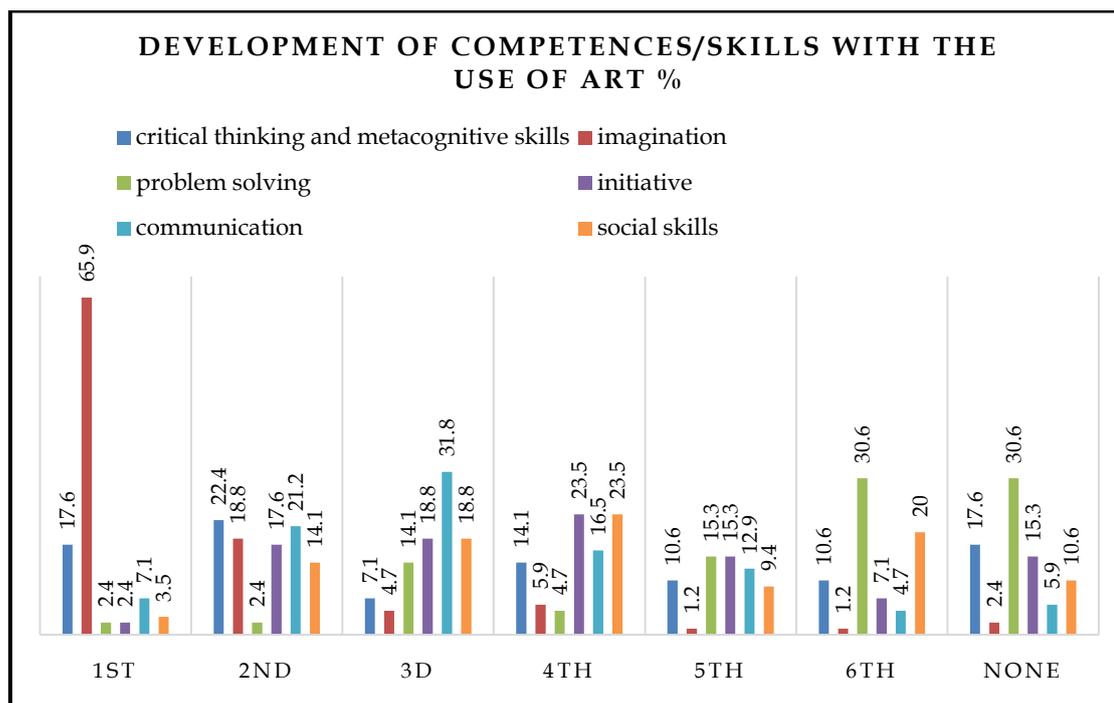


Chart 4: Nursery teachers' views on the development of skills or competences with the use of art in the education process.

Statistical significance level was observed between the development of:

- ✓ Critical thinking and metacognitive skills and the training of the data subjects in relation to art ($\rho=0.008$)
- ✓ imagination and creativity and the data subjects' years of employment in education ($\rho=0.002$)
- ✓ initiative and the data subjects' age ($\rho=0.025$)
- ✓ social skills and the data subjects' age ($\rho=0.004$) and further education ($\rho=0,017$).

3d research question: Factors deterring the use of art in the education process

- To the question: *"Do you consider the use of art in the education process: a. difficult, b. of moderate difficulty, c. easy, d. very easy?"* 34 data subjects (40%) considered it easy or very easy and 51 (60%) considered it of moderate difficulty or difficult.

Statistical significance level was observed in relation to:

- ✓ the work area of the data subjects ($\rho=0.027$)
- ✓ the further education of the data subjects ($\rho=0.000$).
- To the question: *"Of the following factors, which do you consider to deter to a larger extent the use of art in the education process?"*, data subjects replied as follows:

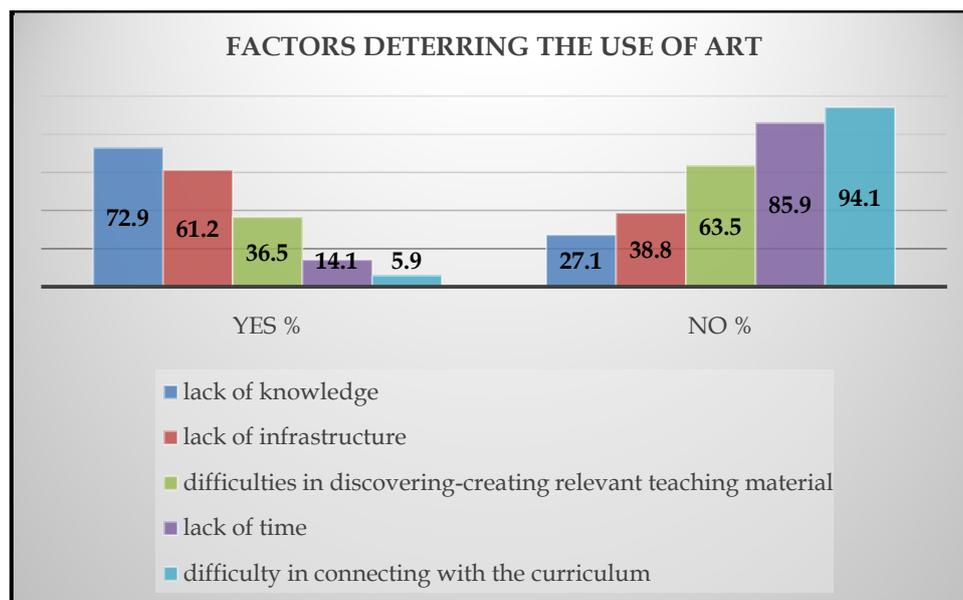


Chart 5: Factors deterring the use of art in the education process

Statistical significance level was observed:

- ✓ For the variable “difficulties in discovering-creating relevant teaching material” and the art-related training of the data subjects ($\rho=0.036$).
- ✓ For the variable “difficulty in connecting with the curriculum” and the data subjects’ further studies ($\rho=0,029$).
- To the question: *“To what extent do you consider necessary the existence of a databank of art-related topics providing information and proposals on works of art and good practices?”*, 82 data subjects (96.5%) consider the existence of a relevant databank of art-related topics necessary to far too great or too great an extent while 3 (3.5%) consider it minimum necessary.

Statistical significance level was observed in relation to:

- ✓ the work area of the data subjects ($\rho=0.004$)
- ✓ the data subjects’ further studies ($\rho=0.006$)
- ✓ the art-related training of data subjects ($\rho=0.013$).
- To the question: *“To what extent do you consider that you encounter difficulties when you use art in the education process?”*, data subjects replied as follows:

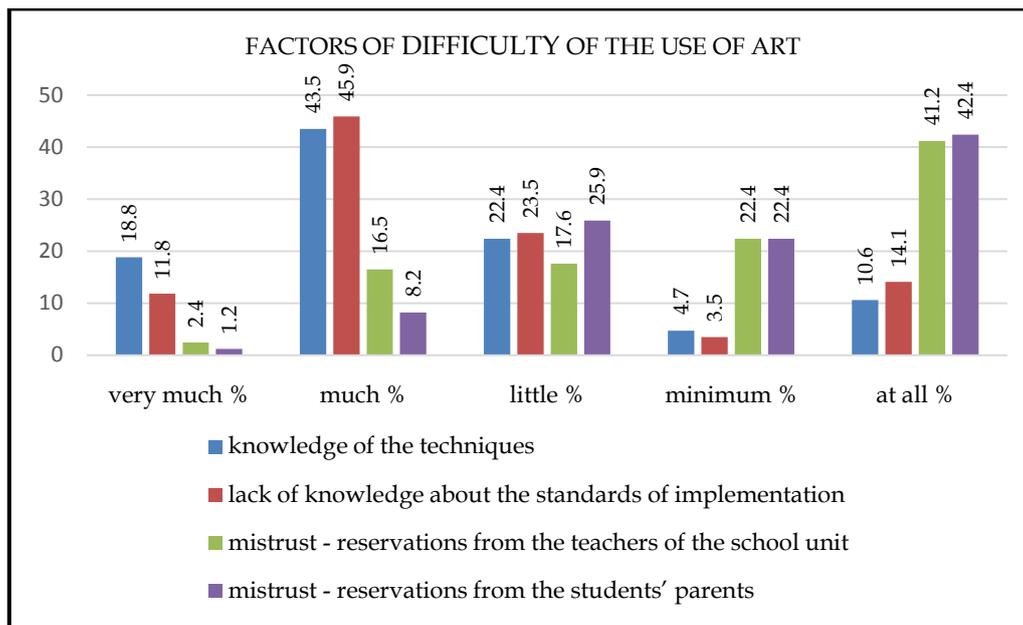


Chart 6: Difficulties in the use art in the education process.

Statistical significance level was observed between:

- ✓ lack of knowledge of the implementation techniques
 - and the work area of the subjects ($\rho=0.044$).
 - and the further studies of the data subjects ($\rho=0.007$).
- ✓ lack of knowledge of the implementation standards and art-related training of data subjects ($\rho=0.017$).
- ✓ mistrust - reservations expressed by the teachers of the school unit
 - and the data subjects' age ($\rho=0.019$)
 - and the further studies of the data subjects ($\rho=0,001$)
 - the art-related training of data subjects ($\rho=0,012$)
- ✓ mistrust - reservations expressed by the students' parents and the data subjects' age ($\rho=0.000$).

4th research question: Form and content of a training program on the use of art in the education process

- To the question: *"To what extent do you consider necessary your training on the use of art in the education?"*, 49 data subjects (57.6%) consider their relevant training necessary to far too great an extent, 29 data subjects (34.1%) to too great an extent, while 7 data subjects (8.3%) consider their training as little or minimum necessary.

Statistical significance level was observed in relation to both the work area ($\rho=0.027$) and the further studies of the data subjects ($\rho=0.006$).

- To the question: *"Will you prioritize your views on the content of a training program on the use of art in the education process?"*, data subjects replied as follows:

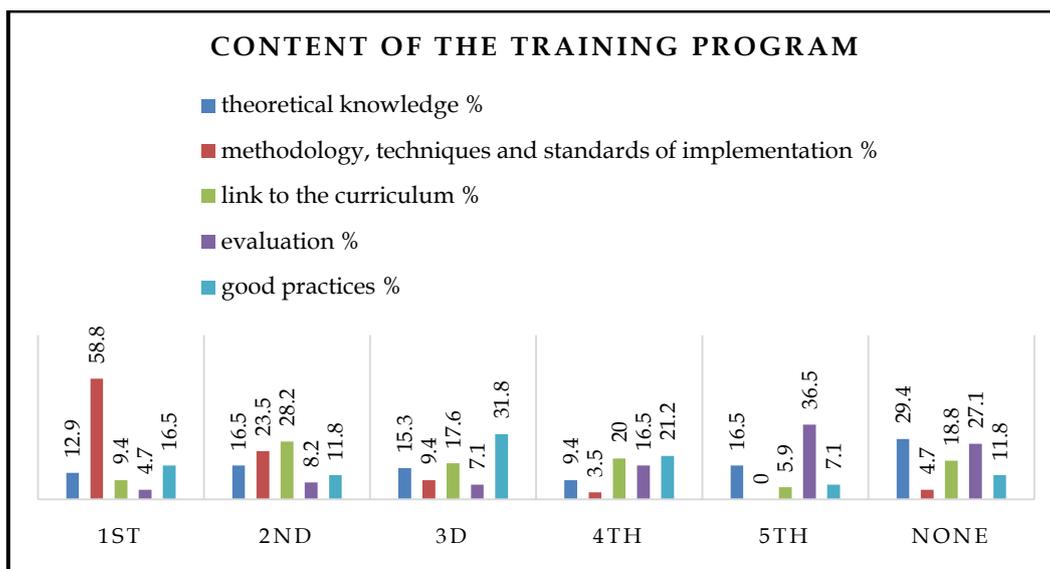


Chart 7: Content of a training program on the use of art in the education process

Statistical significance level was observed between the variable “methodology, techniques and standards of implementation” and the data subjects’ years of employment in education ($\rho=0.044$).

- To the question: “*What do you consider, on a prioritization basis, that a training program on the use of art in the education process should offer?*”, the data subjects replied as follows:

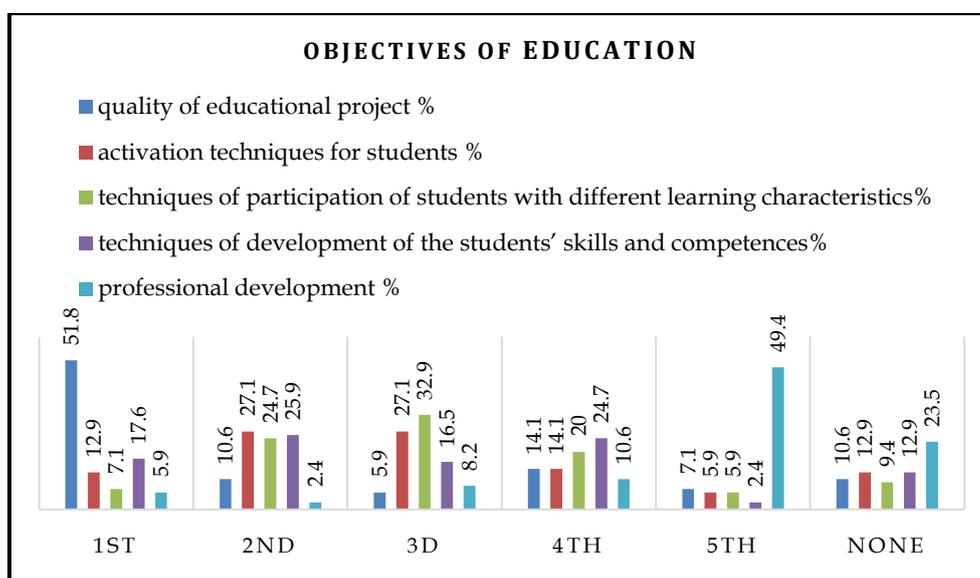


Chart 8: Objectives of a training program on the use of art in the education process

Statistical significance level was observed between the variable:

- ✓ “techniques of participation of students with different learning characteristics” and the data subjects’ further studies ($\rho=0,029$).
- ✓ “techniques of development of the students’ skills and competences” and the work area of the data subjects ($\rho=0,019$).

- To the question: «*Which training method do you consider most suitable for you?*», 41 data subjects (48.2%) have chosen the traditional, face to face, method while 44 data subjects (51.8%) have chosen the blended learning (face-to-face and distance learning) method.
- To the question: «*To what extent would you wish to participate in a training program on the use of art in the education process?*», 78 data subjects (91.7%) stated that they wish this to far too great or too great an extent, while 7 data subjects (8.3%) wish to participate a little or not at all in a relevant training program.

Conclusions - Discussion

1st research question

The results of the survey have shown that almost all nursery teachers consider the use of art in the education process useful or even necessary. They know most forms of art and use a number of them in their everyday teaching practice.

Results suggest that nursery teachers use more often Literature and Poetry. Children's literature module is included in all programs of studies of all University Faculties of Pre-school Education. In addition, with regard to the thematic area pertaining to the Design and Development of Language Activities in the Nursery School Curriculum emphasis is placed on the use of literary texts and poems to achieve the objectives of the curriculum.

Finally, since many training programs have from time to time been carried out, which highlight the language development of young children, encourage the use of appropriate literary texts, and often provide relevant proposals, teachers feel more secure and, at the same time, are encouraged and supported to participate in relative activities.

At this point we should underline the fact that in both the Nursery School Curriculum and the new pilot curricula for arts, which were published in 2011, not all forms of art are mentioned and, subsequently, methods of their use in teaching are not proposed.

In Greece, the first systematic training efforts for formal education teachers with regard to the use of art in the education process were made during the school year 2011-2012 as part of the "Major Training Program" training activity. At the same time, the Hellenic Open University has contributed in this area through the Postgraduate Course on "Adult Education" since the academic year 2012-2013. Finally, the Adult Training Scientific Association has undertaken related actions for the training of teachers and adult educators on the use of art in the education process (Koutsoukos & Fragoulis, 2017:2).

On the other hand, nursery teachers, who have already participated in art-related training programs, consider more necessary the use of art in the education process, specifying that through their involvement in such activities became familiar and assessed to a greater extent the importance and the possibilities of art for young children's education and development.

Nevertheless, as shown by the survey results, all the abovementioned are implemented while nursery teachers are unaware of the relevant internationally applied models in order to such activities could be of the greatest possible benefit to them. On the contrary, those educational interventions that are implemented have been designed on the basis of the teachers' general

pedagogical knowledge and experience as well as on the proposals suggested by the curricula.

The field “arts and education” is attractive and quite promising. The Greek educational and scientific community has become aware of this issue and is now more systematically approached. This could be seen from the efforts made to enrich school textbooks with works of art, the ever-increasing training activities of museums, number of conferences, symposia or workshops, which study arts in education. (Mega, 2011a:64-65).

At the same time, many research surveys are carried out in order to investigate the extent to and explore the methods with which art courses, which are taught in the framework of the school curricula, can help develop the students’ competences in various contexts. Indicatively, we mention the 2013 publication of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) titled “Art for Art’s Sake? The Impact of Arts Education” where the results of a large number of surveys on the impact of art education are listed in a critical way with a view to acquiring various skills (Winner, Goldstein & Vincent-Lancrin, 2013).

From the above, it is clear that either we use art in the education process in order to facilitate and support our students in the development of skills and competences or the teaching of art is implemented in such a manner so as to attain this goal, teachers’ interventions ought to be done methodically, systematically, scientifically and with a focus to the objectives set.

2nd research question

Nursery teachers are of the opinion, according to their order of preference, that the use of art in the education process contributes to a far too great or too great an extent to the improvement of the learning process, the achievement of learning objectives, the appreciation of young children’s particular learning characteristics, the fulfilment of their educational needs and the appreciation of modern educational requirements.

As shown by the bivariate analysis, nursery teachers working in urban areas support this view to a statistically more significant extent. The nursery teachers in urban areas work in heavily populated classrooms where there is a wider variety of students, both in relation to their socio-economic position and in relation to where they come from or/and their nationality, and young children with special needs but also with different learning characteristics.

As a consequence, the needs for the management of such groups of young children as well as the need to mobilise all potential tools so as to deliver a high-quality educational output are maximized, and, as the results of our survey suggest, the nursery teachers working in urban areas consider art such an effective tool.

In respect to the development of students’ competences and skills nursery teachers considered that the students’ imagination and creativity were developed at too great extent whereas other skills were developed at a significantly lower extent. The next in order of preference competences and skills proposed by data subjects were young children’s critical thought and metacognitive competences.

These findings seem to agree with previous findings of our survey according to which nursery teachers are unaware of the models for the use of art in the

education process and as regards their educational interventions are based, mainly, to suggestions provided for in the Curriculum.

The findings as regards the nursery teachers with a few years of employment in education are similar whereas they also seem to consider that through art young children's imagination and creativity are primarily developed.

Nursery teachers at the beginning of their educational career cling more to the Curriculum and they should be given more time and experience so as to experiment and interact with both their colleagues and young children in order to proceed to new verifications and applications which broaden and enrich the learning process and the corresponding outcomes as well.

Furthermore, nursery teachers of older age stated that, in addition, young children's social skills are developed to a greater extent than what other nursery teachers groups suggest. Moreover, nursery teachers, who have participated in art-related training activities, consider, to a statistically more significant extent, that through the use of art the young children's critical thinking and metacognitive skills are developed.

For various reasons, the relationship between critical thinking and creativity has been misunderstood. In fact, critical and creative thinking skills are interrelated and interconnected. When engaged in high-quality thought, the mind must simultaneously produce and assess, both generate and judge the products it fabricates. In short, sound thinking requires both imagination and intellectual standards (Paul & Edler, 2008:3-7). Thus, by developing young children's critical thinking, we facilitate also at the same time the development of creativity and vice versa.

3rd Research question

Nursery teachers consider that the use of art in the learning process is of moderate to even easy difficulty process and they focused on the difficulties arising mainly from the lack of both relevant knowledge and infrastructure as well as the creation or/and the discovery of suitable learning material.

Accordingly, in using art in the classroom, they encounter difficulties emanating mainly from the lack of knowledge for the techniques and implementation standards. Due to all the above difficulties, the existence of a databank of art-related topics with support material would be necessary to a far too great to too great an extent.

Upon the bivariate analysis it results that nursery teachers, who have earned a postgraduate degree, consider to a statistically larger extent the use of art easy or of moderate difficulty. Actually, the same group has stated that they have been informed and have applied the main models for the use of art in the education process.

The nursery teachers employed in urban areas, in their majority, expressed the opinion that they have a lesser difficulty in using art in the education process. By referring to their previous replies, the use of art, for the most part, is not based on some model but rather on the suggestions made in the Curriculum.

On the other hand, nursery teachers employed in peri-urban areas seem to consider to a larger extent that the use of art is of moderate difficulty or difficult. They have difficulty insofar as they don't have proper knowledge for the relevant models or they are unaware of their implementation techniques.

Finally, nursery teachers, who have attended art-related training courses, consider the creation of the relevant teaching material and the absence of a “databank on art-related topics” as a serious deterrent.

It follows from the above that it has become clear the necessity of systematic intervention, effective support and empowerment of nursery teachers with regard to the use of art in the teaching practice by relevant educational and training institutions and bodies addressed to teachers.

4th Research question

Nursery teachers consider absolutely necessary a relevant training program and by the same percentage wish their participation in it.

As to the content, they emphasize acquiring an understanding and the familiarity with the methodology and the implementation techniques. They also consider that the fundamental benefit from their participation in a relevant training program would be the improvement of quality and effectiveness of their educational output.

The above also agree with other research findings demonstrating teachers are of the opinion that training is imperative for their profession. As knowledge changes and consequently the requirements for the performance of their tasks, it is reasonable to appreciate training and the benefits which it offers (Teachers Training Organization - TTO, 2007:81). In addition, teachers prefer thematic areas related to the management of school, dealing with practical issues of daily teaching practice and their update and familiarity with issues pertaining to changes that take place in the realm of education (Doukas, Vavouraki, Thomopoulou, Kalantzis, Koutra & Smyrniotopoulou, 2008:375; Paedagogical Institute, 2009:9).

It is worth highlighting, at this point, the percentage of nursery teachers who opted not for evaluation as a possible module of training. The nursery teachers' low level of interest in the evaluation is found also in Delikanaki's research where also the topics related to evaluation appear to concern them less (Delikanaki, 2009:3).

Then, according to the results of our survey, nursery teachers expect their participation in a training program to improve their educational outcome, focusing again on the techniques for developing students' skills, mobilization of the majority of students but also students with particular learning attributes.

A crucial observation at this point is that nursery teachers' professional development expectations were not figured highly among the issues raised. Similar findings have been provided by TTO's research on the needs expected to be met by training (TTO, 2007: 55-56).

Professional development of teachers is considered a decisive quality indicator of the educational output. It concerns the teachers' development, which is achieved as a result of the increasing experience and continuous and systematic examination of their teaching. This is a continuous process that includes formal, non-formal as well as informal forms of learning. Besides, it becomes more effective to the extent that is linked to specific day-to-day activities of teachers and students, and is based on the interaction of teachers with other partners in the educational community. In this context, the teacher is also considered an active participant in learning since he or she is involved in specific teaching

activities, monitors them and critically reflects on them. Teacher support is seen as an important factor in changing daily practice (Doukas et al., 2007: 114-116). In addition, on current global trends, the creation of a new professionalization of teachers is the target of designing a training policy, moving from formal and fragmented training to lifelong learning processes (Pedagogical Institute, 2009:5). Finally, their preferences in relation to their method of training in the use of art in their teaching work were almost equally shared between the traditional face to face and the blended training method.

Without overlooking the benefits of face-to-face training sessions, such as the important role of physical communication with both the trainer and the trainees, or those parts of training that should be in the laboratory form, the affinity with a team, possible difficulties in the use of new technologies etc., the model of blended learning, has already been applied in recent years, and seems to have significant advantages in respect of learning outcomes compared to corresponding activities carried out either only in a distance or only in a conventional manner. Among the advantages it presents is an increased sense of community that it supports amongst the parties involved, greater retention of knowledge, greater satisfaction of students and teachers, easier communication among the parties involved, easier management of a large number of students, flexibility in space and time of learning (Komis, Zagouras, Skountzis, Goumenakis, Simota, Voulgari, Misirli, Tzavara, Fragaki, 2014).

Consequently, we believe that nursery teachers who do not feel safe with the blended training method should be strengthened and supported in order to get more efficiently involved in this method.

Recommendations

It is proposed that international organizations such as, among others, UNESCO, the European Commission/Union (through the Erasmus *Programme*), as well as teachers' scientific unions and associations at all levels of education, organize and implement specialized teacher training programs in the use of art in the education process. For these programs to be successful, they should be designed and implemented, taking into account parameters such as the particular interests and needs of teachers. In addition, appropriate methods of education (face-to-face, blended or distance) should be adopted to facilitate, but also encourage teachers to participate in them.

Further/future Research

In conclusion, we consider important to point out that further research efforts should be carried out to explore parameters that affect the use of art in the education process.

In particular, it would be useful to explore the views of both training managers and training bodies of teachers on the necessity and content of relevant training programs, as well as any supportive efforts of teachers regarding the subject under investigation.

Another topic which, in our opinion, would be of interest to research could be the exploration of the views of primary and secondary school teachers as well as educational art disciplines (visuals arts, music, teatrology etc.) in relation to the use of art in education.

Thus, further studies could investigate if the issues identified here can apply more generally. The findings of such surveys could lead to the improvement of policies and practices for the more effective use of art in the educational process.

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