

Mirjana Tomašević Dančević

Senior Lecturer

B.A. Art, History of Art, English

Teacher Education Academy, University of Zagreb

Potocnica Early Childhood Education Centre, Zagreb, Croatia**Address** (Home): Jarnoviceva 3, 10000, Zagreb, Croatia**Telephone** (Home): +385 1 3885 174**Email:** mirjana.tomasevic@zg.htnet.hr**Education for the 21st Century: Visual Language and Foreign Languages from Preschool Age****(Interdisciplinary Sea projects with children 4 – 6/7)****Abstract:**

The paper, as well as the slide/video presentation and the exhibition of children's artwork/performance, advocate the idea that contemporary and future education should meet the needs of society (i.e. the social environment) which is characterised by visual culture and global communication. The second idea presented in the paper is the challenging possibility to start such education at an early age – in early childhood education institutions.

The realisation of these ideas is shown in a long-term interdisciplinary project of learning/teaching English (as an almost globally-spoken language) through art (expressed through visual language which is an almost universal, usually pre-verbal, and actually a predominant language in today's world) with children between the ages of 4 and 6/7, which took place in Zagreb, Croatia.

Evaluation of the project has shown the high level of the children's language competence and their creativity in problem solving in art, in other early years programme activities, and in everyday life.

The presentation of the project focuses on *Sea* sub-projects provided for two different generations of early education classes, 2002/2003 and 1997/1998.

Key words: education, visual language, foreign language, early years, sea project**The role of education**

A three-decade-old definition of education (Flere, 1976:15) states that education is an effectively organized social process which enables (young) members of a community to acquire different kinds of knowledge, information, abilities and skills important for their activities when they grow up: for their jobs as well as for the

Kommentar [D1]: originally you didn't have a comma. And there should be no comma, in spite of what Microsoft tells you!

harmonization and connection of their own behaviour patterns with those of other members of the social environment.

In a more recent study of the role of (the arts in) education, Arthur D. Efland (2002:158) considers the new demands placed on education which is likely to "improve the life-chances of individuals preparing for the future, a time that promises to be less certain and predictable than the past." Some of his concerns are the continued globalisation of international economies; the acceleration of technological progress, with new forms of technological play, virtual reality, and centralisation of mass communication media; the increased pace, quality, and variety of information exchange by means of popular culture, mass consumerism, travel, and the Internet. He points out the need for a "widened array of cognitive abilities that are demanded by the challenges of the postmodern world, including those abilities fostered through experiences in the arts."

Kommentar [D2]: but you are not quoting him here. So I suggest you use the better word, which to my mind is "progress"

Kommentar [D3]: did he perhaps write "wider", which could also go here? Widen is simply wrong

The role of visual language and foreign languages in education for the 21st century

The following statement of the presenter seems to be quite in accordance with Efland's previous assertion:

Contemporary and future education should meet the needs of the new social environment that is obviously characterised by visual culture and global communication.

Culture, as a "people lifestyle" (Hernández, 1999), has been progressively turning to visual culture, especially since the second half of the 20th century. This is why visual language (and visual literacy) becomes indispensable in contemporary communication, taking the role of the predominant language in today's world. Consequently, art/visual art, which is expressed by visual language, has – or at least should have – a more distinguished role in the education appropriate for the 21st century. Moreover, since visual language is, if not incontestably pre-verbal and universal as many authors emphasise, then at least in most cases pre-verbal and almost universal, it also serves as an important means of learning other subjects, especially in early learning/teaching of foreign languages.

Concerning foreign languages, to the dismay of many language teaching experts who do not teach English, as well as anti-globalists, English is quite clearly becoming an almost globally spoken language. Although the need for linguistic diversity (Kolar-Panov, 2003:37) and multilingual culture (Kolar-Panov, 2003:38) have recently been widely recognised, and though intercultural dialogues have been stimulated, the English language has inevitably acquired a predominant role in global communication and exchange of knowledge. Education in the 21st century should certainly take all this into account in order to meet the needs of contemporary and future generations of children and young people. This is why the European Union's education policy promotes the learning of two or more foreign languages. Currently, the widely discussed problem is whether English should maintain its role, which has been accepted worldwide, as the first foreign language learned at school, or whether this priority in the order of learning should be given to a less "popular" language.

The second idea presented in this paper is the challenging possibility of starting such complex education at an early age – in early childhood education institutions.

The project of early learning of English as a foreign language through art

The realisation of the aforementioned ideas was shown in an interdisciplinary project of teaching English through art to children between the ages of 4 and 6/7,

which recently took place in the *Potocnica (Forget-me-not) Early Education Centre* in Zagreb, Croatia.

This was the presenter's own project, *The Development of Creative Thinking in Early Learning of English as a Foreign Language*, being part and the successor of a more comprehensive project, *The Project of Early Learning of Foreign Languages in Kindergartens*, which started in Zagreb in the school year 1992/1993.

It is well known that very young learners' acquisition of a foreign language is quite different from older students' learning. Because of their natural intellectual development, young children aged 4 to 7 years (being at the pre-operational stage of cognitive development) are still not able to understand the intellectual input of any method of teaching foreign languages, and neither can they accept it as valuable and connected with their world of interests (Elliot, 1981, according to M. Wragg, 1998). However, this inability of children to understand things outside their own reality successfully supports a method of teaching a foreign language that is based on learning just about the things they are naturally interested in. The acquisition of a language in this case is confined to satisfying these interests and needs. For this reason, Martin Wragg, sharing Alison Elliot's attitudes, has doubts about teaching children under 11 a foreign language as a language, but speaks in favour of teaching, for example, geography, art or science in English.

Moreover, the presenter's aforementioned project showed that the acquisition of a foreign language at a very early age could be successful, provided that in the process of learning as many situations as possible are allowed for the use of "real" and meaningful language in a way as similar as possible to the natural acquisition of the mother tongue. In such a daily organized programme of integrated learning of English the linguistic aims are achieved indirectly by learning about other "subjects"/topics or by different non-linguistic content (art, music, dance, play, sports, everyday activities), using the support of non-verbal languages (visual, auditory – music, body language, etc.). Other benefits of the developmentally appropriate interdisciplinary teaching of a foreign language to very young learners are the children's more integrative and coherent knowledge, the holistic picture of the world they construct, and the children's experience of learning as fun.

As for the component of creative thinking in the project, the presenter's teaching English to young learners is based, besides its instructional aims, on two main educational objectives. The first one is to teach children to explore, and the second one is to prompt them to independently and creatively solve a given problem, whether a mathematical, artistic or a practical everyday problem. After all, learning in the early years education centre is only one aspect of the children's daily learning, with the ultimate aim of preparing them for real life. Art, with its aspect of creativity, helps children enormously in this educational process.

Other important aims of the project are the development of ecological thinking and the basic elements of democracy and multiculturalism.

Evaluation of the project has shown that its points include both the high level of the children's language competence (vocabulary, pronunciation and communication) and their creativity in problem solving in arts, in activities in different areas of learning, and in everyday life.

The Sea sub-projects

The presentation of the project was focused on Sea sub-projects provided for two different generations of early education mixed-age classes (2002/2003, 1997/1998).

Kommentar [D4]: Sorry, your way is better. I just wanted to avoid the long split infinitive, and got it wrong

The video- and slide-presentation showed the children's multiple communication ability (in a foreign language, visual language/language of art, language of music, dance and body language), which was best expressed through their multimedia messages, ranging from interpersonal and local messages to international ones. The messages were both global ecological ones and those expressing their own cultural identity (for example, the Croatian maritime heritage and masked balls in February).

The exhibited children's artwork entitled ***The sea in the artwork of children aged 4 – 6/7 years*** is the result of the one school-year (2002/2003) Sea project with young children. Since Croatia, thanks to Dalmatia, its historical region situated on the Adriatic Sea, is not only a South Eastern European Country, but a Mediterranean one as well, most children included in the project have direct contact with both the antique and contemporary Mediterranean culture – through their family roots and the relatives still living at the sea, or at least through their summer holidays' experience. The Croatian maritime heritage and the individual experience of the boat have made an especially strong impact on their visual memory. Other "objects" of their interest were the undersea world including fish, sea urchins, corals and sea stars, as well as the marvellous dynamics of the sea, seen as waves which are ever-changing both in their shape and colour. By taking part in this project the children also had the chance to learn more about the naval heritage, the life at sea and sea animals in other parts of the world. In this way they were able to develop both their national and global cultural identity and a new ecological consciousness.

Besides the direct individual experience of the sea, the other stimuli used for the children's art expression and creativity were music (e.g. Claude Debussy, *Le Mer*, Three Symphonic Sketches: *Jeux de vagues*, Play of the Waves), masterpieces of art (e.g. Hokusai, *The Great Wave*, woodblock print, 1823–9), video films, photographs, books, natural/geographic magazines and museum visits.

The art techniques used in the project were: watercolour, tempera, collage, pastel, crayons, pencil, coloured pencils and modelling mass.

Conclusion

The interdisciplinary project of early learning of English focusing on learning through art is one of the possible ways of adjusting (early) education to meet the needs of the 21st century social environment characterised by visual culture and global communication. Very young children can successfully take part in this process if developmentally appropriate integrated methods are used.

The greatest value of the programme includes the high level of the children's language acquisition based on communication; creativity, not only in art, but in other areas of the early years programme activities and in everyday life; basic elements of democracy and multiculturalism attained without excluding national cultural identity; the development of self-confidence, self-esteem and independence of children; and the development of ecological awareness.

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Kommentar [D5]: both versions are fine

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Illustrations of the text

Possible illustrations: From the list of the printed artworks in the *catalogue of the exhibition ***The sea in the artwork of children aged 4 – 6/7 years:***

**(Please inform me if you need/miss the catalogue.)*

- 1 Dinko Markovic, *The Sailing-ship*, tempera, 6 yrs 9 months
- 2 Nikola Luzaic, *The Sailing-ship*, tempera, 6 yrs 6 months
- 3 Luka Strukan, *The Sailing-ship*, tempera, 7 yrs
- 4 Iva Jurekovic, *The Sailing-ship*, tempera, 7 yrs
- 5 Hana Berakovic, *The Sailing-ship*, tempera, 6 yrs 4 months
- 6 Borna Bolanca, *The Sailing-ship*, tempera, 6 yrs 4 months
- 7 Marta Ergotic, *The Sailing-ship*, tempera, 5 yrs 5 months
- 8 Iva Covic, *The Sailing-ship*, tempera, 5 yrs 4 months
- 9 Marta Ramljak, *The Fish*, watercolour, 5 yrs 4 months
- 10 Borna Milinkovic, *The Fish*, watercolour, 6 yrs 4 months
- 11 Ana Lu, *The Fish*, watercolour, 6 yrs 6 months
- 12 Karlo Kralj, *The Sea Urchin*, watercolour, 6 yrs
- 13 Dinko Markovic, *The Fish*, watercolour, 6 yrs 1 month
- 14 Ana Lu, *The Crab*, watercolour, 6 yrs 1 month
- 15 Hana Ljevakovic, *The Fish*, tempera, 7 yrs 2 months
- 16 Hana Berakovic, *The Fish*, tempera, 6 yrs 4 months
- 17 Iva Jurekovic, *The Waves*, tempera, 7 yrs
- 18 Marta Ramljak, *The Waves*, tempera, 5 yrs 7 months
- 19 Karlo Kralj, *The Waves*, tempera, 6 yrs 3 months
- 20 Nikolina Covic, *The Waves*, tempera, 6 yrs 6 months
- 21 Karla Tenzera, *The Sailing-ship*, pencil, 4 yrs 7 months
- 22 Iva Jurekovic, *The Sailing-boat*, pencil, 7 yrs
- 23 Marta Kralj, *The Sailing-boat*, pencil, 6 yrs 3 months
- 24 Nikolina Covic, *The Sailing-ship*, pencil, 6 yrs 6 months

Front cover: Sebastijan Vukosavic, *The Sailing-ship*, coloured pencils, 6 yrs 1 month
Ana Lu, *The Sailing-ship*, coloured pencils, 6 yrs 9 months