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Art for all ages: a lifelong desire and hard work

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Abstract

Art education is a lifelong necessity for adults as well as it is for children. The aim of this study is to show that by means of art education given by the experts of the field a desire for art can be motivated especially among people outside this field and also being involved in artistic activities would make them more sensitive and thus their aesthetic appreciation would improve. Related literature in this field was scanned and by using observation and interviewing techniques, a participant aged was educated on painting for two years and the effect of continuation in artistic practices and motivation on one's creativity was examined. It has been observed that art education is influential and inspirational particularly in the lives of elderly people; and no matter how old a person is if she wants and works, she can achieve artistic sensitivity by means of creative works.

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1. Introduction

It is essential to ensure that children to be brought up be happy and productive individuals and this can be achieved by educating adult population. In the years 2000 the concept of “lifelong learning” which defends the idea that useful and enjoyable learning can be realized in family, in spare times, in public life and in daily work life, shortly in every stage of life is getting started to be used more often (Ayhan, 2005, p:7). This concept is used as a synonym or in similar meaning to the concepts such as “further education”, “adult education”, and “permanent education”. Lifelong learning covers an individual's acquiring knowledge, ability, manner and habits in every kind of learning environment to develop himself (Sönmez, 2007), all the formal and informal learning from pre-school to post retirement periods (Budak, 2009, p:698) and all the educational activities which spread adult education (Sayılan, 2005, p:109). Informal education is the learning gained through experts and/or educationalists who make individuals think of the events and conditions by motivating them by means of organizations like non-governmental organizations, public training centers, institutions and youth clubs. Coombs and Ahmed (1974) defined non-formal education as an educational activity realized in an environment where there is no formal education and informal education as a process in which behavior, ability and knowledge are acquired from life individually and which continues lifelong (as cited in Turkmen, 2010, p:47, 49-50).

Learning, supported by creative thinking, turns into an intensive and lively process stimulating perception, feelings and imagination and gaining an in-depth knowledge. Public which consists of healthy, successful and happy

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individuals can be created only by activities stimulating creativity (İlgar, 2008, p:88) because imaginative and creative enterprise is in fact a continuous learning process (Vaill 1996, as cited in Tusting&Barton, 2011, p:77). Therefore, artistic activities experienced in old ages shouldn't be considered as a trivial occupation in spare times. Read emphasizes the necessity of educating adults as well as children with voices, colors, bodily movements, toys and various tools to express themselves (as cited in San, 2003, p:136). Giving such an intensity and clear distinction to life is the duty of the art itself (Edman, 1977, p:7). Art as a process of seeing, understanding, experiencing and creating is necessary for everybody who has limited ability in this field. Education, in this context, should be given to turn talent into artistic ability (Kırıçoğlu, 2005, p:6). While informal art has a vital role in the appreciation of art and develops culture, (Wali and others, 2001, p:213) the values the art gives to an individual can never be acquired in another lesson, field or experience (Dewey, 1934, as cited in Kırıçoğlu, 2005, p:47). In a research conducted in 2010 (Reynolds, pp:137-140, 142) activities (such as painting on paper, canvas and tile or poetry, textile art and weaving) and interviews were done among 32 women participants aged between 60-86 and who were not professionals in the field of art to discover their own visual artistic capacity. Participants were nurses, secretaries and teachers before they retired. 20 of them were healthy but the remaining 12 had chronic diseases. A participant aged 75 stated that she had never touched a brush until she was 68, another participant aged 86 said that she had started painting 6 years ago and started living since then and another one aged 73 said that she learned to see life from a different angle. At the end of the research a lot of achievements such as looking at an environment from an aesthetic view, gaining sensitivity through art, having new purposes, playing and experiencing, having new ideas were made and a lot of participants stated that colors and creative activities stimulated their mental development and their feelings started communicating with a wider world. Using the power of art in discovering the capability of a person is exhilarating.

In humanist psychology an individual's capability and desire for development is considered as a fundamental hypothesis and it is underlined that an individual has an unlimited capacity to develop and realize himself. Since adults choose to be a part of the learning process themselves and since their time is valuable, their learning tendencies are different from those of the children (Tusting&Barton, 2011, p:47, 57). In another research various artistic activities were carried out with 12 elderly women (aged between 62 and 81) who have romatoid arterit and the influence of dealing with visual arts to create a positive life source was observed. 3 basic themes were diagnosed for this. First of all, controlling the arterit pain (by total concentration and by using colors and imagination) by painting, secondly again by painting being in continuous communication with the outside world (a psychological escape from the limitations of their body and the walls of their house), and thirdly expressing themselves by experiencing their valuable memories again and giving them a chance for their personal development. At the end the research confirmed that going through an imaginative process with total concentration was influential in lowering (easing) pain and hence some patients endured pain more easily by the help of the aesthetic qualities (specifically colors) of artistic activities and their view of pain changed and this increased their flexibility (Reynolds&others, 2011, p:328, 335). In another research where colors were used in art therapy it was observed that art therapy went deep in the subconscious of the patients and helped them release their feelings and thus fight with their feelings. In researches done with colors it was stated that colors are influential and sometimes have a mysterious effect on thoughts, human body and behaviors (Withrow, 2004, p 39). In the studies of Johnson and Sullivan-Marx (2006, p:315) where they used creative methods to cure elderly African and American people and made them start hoping again it was determined that art therapy had considerably helped people to overcome the problems stemming from getting old. These results showed that especially the art education in older ages help artistic abilities to come to the surface and made people's lives more meaningful. People's interest, desire and motivation have an important role in the development of artistic abilities. Successful and productive aging when supported with creative experiences has a significant contribution in the development of the existing creativity with the help of the life experiences of the old people who have fewer responsibilities at that age.

In recent years when most of the fields concentrated on child and child development surely the importance of the studies on children can't be denied. Nevertheless; quite a lot of the studies on learning are conducted on children (Tusting&Barton, 2011, p:11); in our country different generations spend their time passively and in a useless way and they do not go through a training (Tezcan, 1988, as cited in İlgar, 2008, p:88); also the pictures we paint due to

the wrong education and experiences at school are not admired or we consider ourselves incapable (Erkul, 1996, p:266) as we have bad experiences due to the fact that we can't paint admirable pictures and lastly it is thought that art is not an intellectual occupation but is merely made by hands are all important problems. (Kırıçoğlu, 2005, p:4). As a result of this the number of people who lack aesthetic appreciation, who are out of touch with art, who are not productive, who do not accept new things (*narrow-minded*) and who think that art is just a passing fancy is increasing. However, art is neither an emotional relaxation nor is it a mere pleasure. Art's cultural, communicative, informative, enlightening and progressive functions make it versatile and crucial (Kırıçoğlu, 2005, p:7). As in other fields the need for studies that gather and analyze a number of new and different studies in the field of art is the starting point of this study. In this study it has been intended to show that art education is a requirement for adults as much as it is for children, by means of art education given by the experts of the field a desire for art can be motivated especially among people outside this field and also being involved in artistic activities would make them more sensitive and thus their aesthetic appreciation would improve. This study is noteworthy because of the fact that it shows the studies and their results on this matter.

2. Method

2.1. Data Collection

This study is a qualitative research that shows that art education is necessary at all ages and the researches and the results of researches of art education for people outside the field of art and for elderly people were examined through discussions, the data was gathered by document analyses and the achievements were explained and interpreted. Besides this, in order to support literature scanning, by using quantitative techniques like observation and interview, a woman participant aged 87 was given art education for two years and she painted pictures. Qualitative research is a process that uses observation, interview and document analyses techniques and perception and events are presented in a natural environment realistically and holistically (Yıldırım&Şimşek, 2008, p:39). Researcher acted as a "participant observer" and in this way aimed to gather data more actively. For the reliability and the validity of the research *participant confirmation* was applied. Immediately after the interviews and observations the information related to the gathered data was summarized and the participant was asked to tell her ideas and feelings to verify the information. Apart from this, as this study continued for more than two years "individual confirmation meetings" were held with the participant. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2008, p:173, 268- 269) stated that observation process could be as long as it was necessary and in the natural course of time. The research was completed due to the fact that the participant had defect of eyesight. The participant's feelings and ideas, which she wanted to add, related to her experiences were added to the data. In addition, the participant exhibited all her paintings to her neighbors, relatives and friends at home and the researcher added the visitors' comments to the observation notes.

First of all because of ethical concerns the participant was informed that her name and the data gathered at the end of the research would be kept secret as long as she participated. The participant aged 87 was a Chemistry engineer and retired and had never before got a brush in her hand and paint, so she was a person outside the field of art. Because of her age she was living at her home with her daughter who was looking after her. The participant had no physical or mental illness. As the behavior should be observed in its natural environment and the information gathered in this way would lead to a higher degree of validity (Yıldırım&Şimşek, 2008, p:173) and also considering her age, painting lessons were given at the home of the participant in due with her will to do so. The participant turned one of her rooms at home to a studio. As she was eager to paint pictures, lessons were given two or three days a week for two years. Easels, canvas, some paint and brushes were supplied in the studio and everything was arranged considering the comfort and demands of the participant. The lessons on painting were regularly given and after each application comments were made on the works of the participant together with her and her paintings were photographed and recorded in the video. The participant passed away one year after the completion of the studies. Some of the 75 original paintings of her were bought by her family or by the people who admired them.

2.1.1. Data Analysis

In this study where the fact that with correct type of education, when desired and worked in a disciplined way, people at all ages can develop their artistic talents is emphasized, the researches and their results were examined through discussions and the data was interpreted by document analysis. In addition, descriptive analysis was conducted in the data (observation notes, photographs, video recordings, answers to the interviews and painted pictures) gathered through observation and interview. In descriptive analysis in order to reflect the views of the individuals interviewed or observed strikingly, direct quotations were frequently given (Yıldırım&Şimşek, 2008, p:224). For this reason, while the data was presented the comments of the participant were sometimes given exactly as they were and as the number of her paintings is high some of them were chosen and were interpreted relying on the observation and interview data.

3. Findings

This study, which aims to show that if we motivate desire for different and exciting artistic experiences at older age artistic sensitivity would develop, was made with an eager participant through face to face interviews and practices. First of all it should be stated that the participant had never took the brush and painted pictures before. But in addition to her being eager, her respect and admiration for every field of art were important factors for her being chosen for this study. Her designing the room with the brightest light of her house and taking painting lessons regularly for two years with great enthusiasm and desire were some proof to show how determined she was. Kırıçoğlu (2005, p:11) emphasized the fact related to this context that learning in art is a complex but still a systematic process; it takes a long time to grasp the knowledge, needs constant repetition and in order to ensure the continuation of the experiences one should do exercises and devote energy for this and learning in art is the result of a continual process. We can say that everybody can create but being more or less hindered, prevented and frozen, he needs education for a short or long period of time (Sungur, 1992, p:61). Surely the fact underlined in this study is not that everybody could turn into an artist but a person eager, enthusiastic and taught by experts can get something from art when works with determination.

There is an obvious transformation especially in adult education on account of giving importance to more collaborative experimental methods. Actually when one is “devoted”, the more actively he takes part in the learning process, the more will be the possibility that he will learn (Knowles, 1983, p:126). In this study great care was given to highlight “motivation” and “desire” so that people who would like to express themselves could get rid of the concerns of being incapable and not being admired. In this way it is believed that participant’s devotion is far more important than his being loaded with knowledge. West (1996) when studied motivation in adults with psychoanalytically oriented life story approach stated that adults have some motivations like reshaping their lives, identities and personalities rather than having simple economic and professional targets; and this is important (as cited in Tusting&Barton, 2011, p:68). Within this context Erkul (1996, p:266) supports this view saying that no matter how old a person is he doesn’t have to wait for ability if he wants to learn how to paint and wants to paint; learning the technique, knowing the method and being determined are enough.

Firstly the participant was provided with a lot of tools and materials that she could use freely in a well illuminated environment (Yılmaz, 2005, p:22) so that she could feel herself free in that environment, develop her creativity and be persistent. Application process is shortly like this: Considering she had no experience, she was first of all technically informed about paint and different kinds of brushes and how to use them, then for about six months she was told to experience various artistic material with different techniques. She was given lessons on applying visual designing elements and principals by doing several experiments on paper, cartoon, cardboard and canvas with press, spraying, collage, finger paint and colored painting techniques. The participant who stated that she had been happy and excited to have gone through different experiences completed this process in six months. She added that especially in finger paint touching the paint with bare hand was a great pleasure and at that age colors had activated and excited her and thus comforted her. In the learning process through experiencing and living, not only our thinking system but also our senses, feelings, perception, memories and imagination, that is nearly all

our existence, should be included (Atasü, 2005, p:47). So as to help the participant express herself freely in the applications, she wasn't exposed to a painting or reproduction in certain patterns which would lead her to some sort of form and concept. Because the creator should keep away from common activities and shouldn't apply the same techniques and study patterns all the time (Yilmaz, 2005, p: 22). In the matter of creativity, the guiding teacher took the role of the advisor to encourage the person (Sungur, 1992, p: 68) to express and test her ideas, played music while she was painting and motivated her more. It was observed that the participant, being excited, started moving to the rhythm of the music and sang as well; and while she was creating her composition she fully integrated with the elements of her painting and started talking to the colors and lines. It is influential that she used statements like "now I am moving my brush", "the colors are dancing". It was also observed that she was worried and questioned herself several times about where and how to put each line, stain and color in the most appropriate place. Most of the time she expressed her concern about the design of her painting by saying things like "I don't want to spoil this beauty", "where shall I put the green color?" and "how shall I do? I liked this piece very much".



Figure1. Participant's house



Figure2. The Bride

Occasionally she wanted to exchange ideas with the researcher and confessed how difficult it was to paint. She frequently said that it was very good for her to study a few times a week and added that she didn't realize how time passed while she was painting. The researcher helped the participant by briefly answering only some technical questions and her questions about how to use the material by referring to the information provided in the previous lessons and aimed at her finding the answers by flexible thinking. When necessary she was helped to find and understand the relation between cause and effect with some stimulators like hints, feedback and corrections (Özsoy, 2003, p:140). Especially after each lesson watching and criticizing the painting done by hanging it on the wall enabled the participant to reorganize and motivate a lot of knowledge in the following lesson. Owing to this, within the course of time she made considerable progress in gaining an aesthetic point of view by the method art criticism. Another point is that great concern was shown for the paint used to be water base and not to be unhealthy. Considering that elderly people may have problems like shortness of breath, humidifier fever and having an allergy on skin, oil paint and solvent decomposer (catalyst) were avoided. Necessary health and security measures must be taken bearing in mind that people could be discomforted by the smell this kind of material leave behind while drying as the drying of this sort of material is late (Güler, 2003).

After the first six-month period, the participant said that among the rich variety of tools and materials she could best express herself on canvas and insisted that she paint on canvas and went on painting with acrylic paint on

canvas. The researcher reacted positively to this request and motivated the participant who had enough knowledge. It is a known fact that especially during artistic studies the individual is afraid of making mistakes and being criticized, so rather than giving her a lot of technical knowledge it is far more important for the participant to feel herself ready, eager and satisfied psychologically and making art, which she aspired to for years, something achievable by painting freely and at the same time getting rid of the fear of being admired by others. The participant wanted to have her finished products hung in the hall and sitting room and said that seeing the colors she felt herself comfortable as long as they were there and added that these paintings refreshed most of her memories (Fig1). She also said that colors “cheer her up” and in this way she revived her good memories and experiences in her mind. These were sometimes the lyric and tonality of a piece of music she remembered or sometimes some events that affected her deeply. Two of her neighbors, nearly at the same age, visited her regularly and expressed that they admired her desire and determination. They said that they were also eager to paint pictures from the early ages and this study then strengthened their feelings more. In our age it is accepted that artistic creativity develops adults’ self-confidence and success (Hubalek, 1997, as cited in Ravid-Horesh, 2004, p:304). During the process the reactions of most of the visitors coming home were observed and their making different comments on colors and stains that effected them most without being asked to do so excited the participant and made her feel more confident.

The participant sometimes emphasized the things that affected her in her daily life or sometimes her memories and she related the form to the things that affected her by giving meanings to colors. For instance someone she knew well got married and visited her in her wedding dress and this affected her deeply and touched her heart. She said “You’re the most beautiful bride I’ve ever seen”, and soon after this in her first painting she made “a wedding ceremony” and “a bride” (Fig.2). She stated that the “white stain” in front of the composition was the bride and the stains and lines at the back symbolized the happy crowd. She gave the name “the bride” to this painting and said that whenever she looked at that painting she remembered that event and added that the color white and the bride symbolizes innocence and comfort.

During the art education the participant was not only given painting lessons but also was informed about art movements and artists from time to time. Specifically expressionism and Vincent Van Gogh affected and motivated the participant most. When asked why she was excited so much, she answered that “Van Gogh’s using the colors freely and highlighting the texture by painting the colors thick with brush strokes affects me much. In my paintings I will also paint with my brush like this and I will use the same technique” (Fig.3).



Figure 3. Participant’s painting



Figure 4. Participant’s painting

In most of her paintings she experienced the effects of those brush strokes and used the paint intensively and made a thick layer. At other times only with linear effect she made designs with forms on the surface by free brush strokes and by using the paint transparently (Fig.4). In another painting in which she made the turbulence in the sea, it was seen that she used the colors blue and red freely and reflected her feelings to the picture with the effects the turbulence made on her (Fig.5). She said that she tried to keep the balance by using the dark red color outside lighter and in small pieces in the center of the painting. She expressed that in this way she expressed her improvised feelings with colors as she liked, she didn't need anyone to give meanings to her paintings, she saw her life, her memories and her imagination when she looked at her paintings and that this was enough for her.



Figure5. The turbulence in the sea

Her saying that thinking hard on how to design the parts on a surface in the best way not only made her forget the thoughts in her mind but also forced her to do brainstorm is very important. It is a fact that adults gain self-confidence and a viewpoint in expressing their ideas and feelings by becoming freer with artistic creation (Ravid-Horesh, 2004, p: 304).

4. Discussion and Conclusions

It can be acknowledged that artistic creativity is a natural aptitude which is closely related to socio-cultural environment and which everybody has at every age (Sungur, 1992, p:62). Yet this aptitude doesn't come out at an advanced level, sometimes it has been hindered and sometimes it has been repressed. Most of the time people's desire has been dampened down due to wrong type of education. We often hear from adults statements like this "When I was young I couldn't draw even stick figures" or "In fact I really wanted to but I don't have talent for painting". Especially adults' being more experienced than children and the different qualities of these experiences (Rousseau, 2011, p:8) can help turn them into more effective lives by the help of appropriate art education. In particular in the "productivity" stage theory that covers middle ages, the idea that the most essential function of the character is to produce, create and to have an emotional link with the things produced and created (Erik Erikson, as cited in İlgar,2008, p:64), shows itself in art which is the most suitable field for rich and creative activities. Such an art education should direct itself in a broad scope to artistic realities of the universal life of contemporary individuals; from child, teenager, the young and the adult, with intensive knowledge about art scientifically and methodologically, a must of the century, without causing the individual to be a stranger to his age (San, 2003,

p:203). Developing the taste and sensitivity of individuals in other words, reshaping art as an educational subject will enable training and education (Özsoy, 2003, p:15). The idea of art's being something that can be taught shouldn't be limited to formal education in childhood and the fact that people at all ages can get involved in all fields of art freely shouldn't be disregarded. Of course the prejudices in people's minds (biased opinions in people's minds) that art practices are solely peculiar to those who are talented or to those who wants to make a career should be disabused so that creative processes can flourish. At this stage considering the person's desire, the power of his motivation shouldn't be shifted away. Motivation is a person's being influenced and being pepped up to do the thing he is expected to do (Madsen, 1968, as cited in Usta, 2006, p: 154).

In the study, as a result of the painting lessons which lasted for two years with an elderly person, exhilarating progress in the participant was observed. A person who had never taken even a brush in her hand set off for this journey at the age of 87 and continued this for two years with determination, ended up with approximately 75 paintings. It was seen that the participant's expressing herself through her paintings during this process arose desire in most of the people. The participant involved in the process stated that after each study she comforted herself by expressing herself, she enjoyed interpreting her pictures and colors relieved her; being involved in visual arts a lifetime makes a person well-educated and makes her feel a valuable part of a fully-lived life (Özsoy, 2003, p: 52) and this shows the positive impact of art on one's psychology. In this way, self-discipline, teamwork and determination, which are essential for visual arts (Özsoy, 2003, p: 43), will make elderly people's lives more meaningful and will give them the will to live by being reflected in the rest of their lives. This study, which develops the hidden talents of people at different ages in accordance with their abilities, makes it evident that with determination and appropriate education everybody who are desirous can make progress in this way.

As a consequence in this study we have come to the conclusion that art education is influential on people's viewpoint on art, on the development of aesthetic sensitivity and creativity, on their success and gaining self-confidence and on their expressing themselves. How significant a role art education has in enabling especially elderly people to think creatively as much as it enables children to do so and also in the process of one's discovering oneself and in giving meaning to his life by means of art education given by the experts of the field to the people outside this field was observed. Though ability is not something needed in creativity in visual arts, the excitement and pleasure of achieving success in producing a creative work of art create desire for developing ability (Özsoy, 2003, p:48), and thus people at every age can produce creative works of art. In the education process of helping artistic talents come out, educating a balanced and complete person rather than an expert should be the main concern (Simmern, 1961, as cited in Kırışoğlu, 2005, p: 26) and it shouldn't be assumed that art education should only be given to the people who will become professionals and it should be known that these ideas prevent the desire of adults to learn. Besides this, the importance of art in making elderly people's lives more meaningful shouldn't be ignored.

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