

# Investigation of training needs of primary school teachers of Achaia prefecture in Greece on the art and its use in the educational process<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*This project presents research during which the training needs of primary school teachers regarding art and its best use in the educational process were investigated. More specifically the training needs of primary school teachers in the Achaia prefecture of Greece regarding art were explored, how they make the best use of art and the training they have received regarding art in the educational process and what their views are about the method “Transformative learning through aesthetic experience” as a method suggested for training them. The research plan that was adopted was action research. Teaching intervention of this method was carried out by primary school teachers on the subject “Teachers’ gathering”. A qualitative approach was chosen and the interview was the main way of collecting data. The conclusions that were made are particularly important as they are related to the purpose of this research.*

**Key words:** training, primary school teachers, art, “Transformative learning through aesthetic experience”

## Introduction

Teachers’ continuous training is necessary both for the improvement of education and for the professional and personal development of teachers. The same applies to teachers’ training in art. Through their training in art, teachers evolve individually as independent and continuously teaching personalities but also as teachers who know that art can contribute to both a child’s education and the

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development of his character. One method that can be used in training teachers in art is "Transformative learning through aesthetic experience".

## **The need for training in art**

In primary school, students are exposed to art and culture either through the subject of "Aesthetic education" or through the *Flexible zone: Time for projects* program, which allows the development of innovative programs and cross-sectional work plans.

This presupposes that teacher-training program in arts education are instated in schools. According to the Pedagogical Institute (2010), "it is, therefore, understandable that teachers have to broaden their pedagogical and skillset range through art and differentiate their role by training further" (p. 9). Furthermore, through self-evaluation, teachers demonstrate that they do not lack knowledge on the majority of subjects they teach and, therefore, training in these is considered redundant. However, they claim that they lack knowledge of crafts, music and new technologies and, so, they need further training (Pedagogical Institute, 2010, pp. 18, 28).

Through training in art, teachers improve themselves both personally (as autonomous and continuously learning personalities) and academically, by acknowledging the impact of art on the students' education and character development. The importance of aesthetic experience in primary school students (which aims to their holistic development) as well as its importance for teachers as professionals but also as continuously developing adults is analyzed below.

Art contributes to an all-round personality development. Mega (2011) claims that "arts activate a stochastic mood in students" (p. 21), which includes three components: "a critical look in things, a creative perception for them and the existence of a supportive environment, that promotes opportunities for thoughtful processing of certain conditions" (p. 32). Through contact with art, students enhance their critical thinking skills. This constitutes the basic principal of teaching (FEK, 2003, p. 3742). In addition, one of the structural elements of critical thinking is metacognition (Matsagouras, 2011, p. 75), which is also the pursuit of the educational system, according to the Greek Analytical Program (FEK, 2003).

In addition to the above, aesthetic experience, which is "the systematic observation and analysis of pieces of art" (Kokkos, 2011a, p. 71), contributes to the cognitive development of individuals. According to Kolb (cited in Chatzigeorgiou, 2004), many people perceive reality through sensory experience and emotion, by using their intuition and senses (p. 340).

For those people, who perceive information in an evident sensory way, contact with art is important during the learning process. Furthermore, Hirst (cited in Chatzigeorgiou, 2004) asserts that humans learn about the world in seven different ways, one of which is literature and fine arts (pp. 510-511). In his theory of Multiple Intelligences, Gardner also claimed that humans acquire eight separate intelligences (i.e., linguistic-verbal, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, visual-spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic), which are developed in different degrees in each person (Chatzigeorgiou, 2004, pp. 349-352). The educational system must have as its goal the development of all eight intelligences for the achievement of complete personalities. In this respect, Kokkos (2011b) asserts that “the aesthetic experience serves this purpose completely, because it offers to its trainees the possibility to process a multitude of symbols” (p. 73).

According to Dewey, “aesthetic experience is the main mean for the development of imagination” (Kokkos, 2011b, p.74) which is a particularly important element for learning. In addition, aesthetic experience is “a challenge for thought” (Kokkos, 2011b, p. 74), according to Dewey and the training of the mind, according to Perkins (1994, p. 6). Arts sensitize the observer aesthetically and work as an “anchor for the senses”, as observed by Perkins (1994, p. 83).

Furthermore, art in primary school and in particular arts and crafts, that are based on students’ spontaneous action and reaction, constitute a fundamental condition for their psycho-intellectual development, as they contribute to their intellectual, emotional and social development (Vigopoulos, 1982, p. 10). Arts and crafts affect psychoanalytically and therapeutically students’ personality, eliminating any kind of suppressive and negative emotions, whilst reinforcing his/her confidence (Vigopoulos, 1982, p. 10). They also have a social effect, as “art is a remarkable mean of communication and contact with other people” (Vigopoulos, 1982, p. 12). Engaging with any kind of art builds up perseverance, patience, order, organization skills, observation, resourcefulness, fair competition, social skills, creativity, self-emotion, confidence (Vigopoulos, 1982, p. 11). The contact with art for teachers as adult learners contributes, as mentioned, to their development as integrated personalities (both professionally and personally). Professionally, because in order to get educated and use art as a teaching tool, they ought to know its contribution to the development and learning of the students. Personally, because they develop themselves in terms of personalities and professionals through their aesthetic experience.

Contact with art contributes to the activation of teachers’ critical thinking skills, their imagination, observation, continuous cognitive development, emotional, social and cultural development. However, contact with art is not only about providing adults with knowledge, skills and attitudes, but also leading them

to critical reflection (Kokkos, 2011b, p. 71). Otherwise, there would be no difference between adult education and that provided to students. If that were the case, education would 'treat' adults like teenagers, which is something that Knowles (1998, p. 61) regards as undesired. The main purpose of adult education is the engagement of trainees in a critical reflection process, which helps them to critically re-evaluate their ideas and emancipate themselves from the ideologies that oppress them and being forced on them (Kokkos, 2011b, pp. 71-72). This should be the main educational purpose of teacher training sessions.

Mezirow et al. (1990) believe that critical reflection is a key element in transforming individuals' views, knowledge and perceptions. According to him, *critical reflection* means "assessing the validity of the conditions, on which our mental habits are based, as well as exploring the sources and their consequences" (p. 16). For Mezirow, critical reflection refers to the fact that the person is reflective, turns back to the experience, but also makes an assessment of what he or she thinks, assesses how he or she understands experiences and reality, thinks, talks, decides, acts (Lintzeris, 2007, p. 4). Furthermore, Mezirow believes that critical reflection develops with age and is a characteristic of learning during the adult phase of human life, since it is only then that a person's personality is complete (Kokkos, 2005, p. 80). Art plays an important role in transforming people's dysfunctional assumptions.

### **Transformative learning through the aesthetic experience**

One method that can be used in training teachers in terms of art is transformative learning through aesthetic experience. The method applies to the field of adult education. It is relatively recent and has been applied to several adult education groups. It has all the advantages of the contribution of art to adult education. Prior to this research study (2017), there was no published application of the method to teachers. It should be noted that efforts have also been made to implement it in formal education.

The method *transformative learning through aesthetic experience* was first introduced by Alexis Kokkos at the *8th International Conference on Transformative Learning* (Kokkos, 2010). It is a method that highlights the role of aesthetic experience in transformative learning by allowing the critical approach of various topics through the systematic observation of works of art. It is a method that utilizes art to reinforce critical reflection. According to its inventor, "*this method can become a tool for adult educators to the extent that it allows not only the emergence of emotions and imagination – a process necessary in education and intertwined with aesthetic experience – but also at the same time developing critical reflection on issues related to the meaning of the works*" (Kokkos, 2011b, p. 72).

The implementation steps of the method are six and are summarized below (Kokkos, 2011b):

- i. **Examining the need for critical reflection:** The trainer recognizes the need to critically investigate some of the learners' perceptions on a subject that are distorted. He invites trainees to a discussion in order to understand the disorienting dilemma they are facing and that their assumptions are dysfunctional in adapting to reality. If the trainees want to critically examine the subject, then the application of the method begins.
- ii. **The participants express their opinions:** The learners write their views on the topic.
- iii. **Identifying the views to be considered:** The trainer examines the trainees' views, identifies the medium that need to be critically approached and critical questions are posed.
- iv. **Selection of works of art:** Trainer and trainees choose the works of art they will focus on.
- v. **Critical reflection through aesthetic experience:** With the help of the trainer, the trainees observe and critically reflect on the works of art. In order to observe and reflect on works of art, Perkins' technique is used, where "the observer adopts a documented view of the work of art" (Kokkos, 2011, p. 82) and does not simply develop judgments of whether he or she likes or dislikes the work of art.
- vi. **Re-evaluation of the assumptions:** The trainees record their assumptions on the topic examined from the fifth stage of the analysis. The final assumptions expressed by the trainees are compared with the initial assumptions expressed in the second stage.

## **The purpose of this research**

The purpose of this research was to try to find out the training needs of primary school teachers in Achaia prefecture in Greece regarding art and its best use in the educational process. More specifically, it investigated the training needs of teachers regarding art through the *transformative learning through aesthetic experience* method as well as the teachers' opinion about using art and the method in primary school classes.

## **Research questions**

The questions of this research were the following:

1. What are the training needs of primary school teachers in Achaia prefecture regarding art?
2. How do primary school teachers in Achaia prefecture use art and the training they have received about art in the educational process?
3. What is the opinion of primary school teachers in Achaia prefecture regarding the method *transformative learning through aesthetic experience as a method* that is suggested for their training?

### **The methodological frame of this research**

The main method that was used to conduct this research was collecting data. Action research was used and specifically participatory action research. This research studied a practical issue (which is the training needs of primary school teachers) and by using the method *transformative learning through the aesthetic experience*, it tries to empower teachers regarding their training in art as well as their teaching at school and to enhance their self-development and self-definition. Participatory action research was deemed the most appropriate as, according to Creswell (2011), action research “focuses on teachers’ development and students’ learning” (Creswell, 2011, p. 641), “encourages teachers to reflect on their practices” (Creswell, 2011, p. 640) and “promotes a process of testing new ideas” (Creswell, 2011, p. 640). Action research aims at “processes that are useful for dealing with practical problems in schools and in classrooms” (Creswell, 2011, p. 83), in order to introduce improvements to the educational process.

The qualitative approach was used as a working method. Data was collected through interviews which were semi-structured and were conducted in person. The questions of the interview were open, non-directional and unprejudiced, allowing the participants the maximum possible flexibility as to how they would respond. Also, they were clear they were written in plain language and were non-lengthy and unambiguous. The sample of the research consisted of twelve primary school teachers, who work in public primary schools located in various areas in Achaia prefecture.

The *transformative learning through aesthetic experience* method as well as the interview questions were piloted by two teachers of the target population. It should be noted that two years before the research study was conducted, a teaching intervention using the same method had been carried out with students of the third grade of a primary school in Patras. That intervention triggered this research. It is a teaching intervention adapted to the particular characteristics, needs and abilities (i.e., perceptive, cognitive) of students and had almost the

same works of art and the same topic but with a different title: *Team – participation and cooperation in the team.*

## **Teaching intervention of the method *Transformative learning through the aesthetic experience***

All six steps of the method were followed.

- i. **Examining the need for critical reflection:** A group in which teachers are involved is defined as the group of the teachers of the school in which they teach. However, many times this group does not act as a unit where everybody participates, discusses, expresses their views freely without any hesitation and without the fear of becoming unpleasant for fear of arguing with the other teachers or objecting to them. Everything mentioned above challenges the fact that teachers must have certain abilities to meet the requirements of their profession. One of these abilities is cooperation among themselves. Thus, this need to consider the teachers' group of a school as a team, with common goals and functional rules, was studied.
- ii. **The participants express their opinions:** The teachers expressed their views on the topic "Teachers' group of a school" in writing.
- iii. **Identifying the views to be considered:** The following issues surfaced during their discussion: a) The importance of participation in the "Teachers' group of a school" and b) The function of the "Teachers' group of a school". The critical questions that were considered were the following: a) Why is it important for teachers to perceive the "Teachers' group of a school" as a team? b) How can teachers have a good and effective cooperation while being part of the "Teachers' group of a school"?
- iv. **Selection of works of art:** The works of art chosen by the teachers were: a) "The scream", painting by Edvard Munch, b) The "Children playing dice" painting by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, and c) The "City" sculpture by Ioannis Avramidis. All these are authentic works of art, which were chosen according to the principles of critical theory, and specifically of Adorno and Horkheimer (Kokkos, 2011a, pp. 74-75). Below are the works of art.

**Table 1: Painting 1**

Title	The scream
Painter	Edvard Munch (1863 – 1944)
Characteristics	Tempera & pastel in cardboard 91cm. x 73,5cm.
Year	1893
Source	<a href="http://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/en/collections_and_research/our_collections/edvard_munch_in_the_national_museum/The+Scream%2C+1893.b7C_wljU1a.ips">http://www.nasjonalmuseet.no/en/collections_and_research/our_collections/edvard_munch_in_the_national_museum/The+Scream%2C+1893.b7C_wljU1a.ips</a>
Museum/Gallery	National Museum of Norway (Oslo, Norway)
	

**Table 2: Painting 2**

Title	Children playing dice
Painter	Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618 – 1682)
Characteristics	canvass 146cm. x 108,5cm.
Year	1675 - 1680
Source	<a href="http://www.pinakothek.de/bartolome-esteban-murillo">http://www.pinakothek.de/bartolome-esteban-murillo</a>
Museum/Gallery	Old Gallery of Munich (Munich, Germany)
	

**Table 3: Sculpture**

Title	City
Sculptor	Ioannis Avramidis (1922)
Characteristics	bronze 200cm. x 210cm. x 60cm.
Year	1965-1968
Source	<a href="http://www.nationalgallery.gr/site/content.php?sel=604&amp;artwork_id=64702">http://www.nationalgallery.gr/site/content.php?sel=604&amp;artwork_id=64702</a>
Museum/Gallery	National Gallery of Athens (Athens, Greece)
	

- i. **Critical reflection through aesthetic experience:** The systematic observation of all three works of art was made using Perkins' technique, through which "the observer adopts a documented look at the work of art" (Kokkos, 2011a, p. 82) and does not mere articulate positive or negative opinions about the work of art.
- ii. **Re-evaluation of the assumptions:** The participants/teachers expressed their views on the topic "Teachers' group of a school" in writing. It was clear that they revisited their initial views and realized the need of the "Teachers' group of a school" as a team with common goals, functional rules, cooperation rules, consistency, parity, freedom of speech, mutual understanding.

### **Findings of the research**

The sample consists of twelve primary school teachers, eight women and four men. Some of the participants' demographical elements are presented in the tables below.

**Table 4: Level of studies**

Highest Level of Studies	Male	Female
Bachelor	4	8
2nd bachelor	0	3
Master	0	2
Doctorate	0	0
2nd bachelor and master	0	1

**Table 5: Region of schools**

Region of schools	Male	Female
Highland	2	2
Lowland	1	2
Seaside	1	4

**Table 6: Years of teaching**

Years of teaching	Male	Female
1-10	1	2
11-20	2	5
21-30	0	1
31+	1	0

The participants in the research in their majority (10/12) have not taken part in art training programs. However, two of them, who answered that they had been trained had participated in mini training programs.

All teachers would like to participate in art training programs in the future and the reasons are mentioned in Table 7.

**Table 7: Future training on art**

	Teachers want to take training in art in the future because:	Time mentioned
1	Art and everything about it are of interest.	4

2	They want to achieve certain educational goals when they teach.	2
3	To explain to their student's difficult concepts-topics in an easy way.	2
4	To be able to "give messages" to students in an easy way.	3
5	Critical reflection and critical thinking are cultivated.	1
6	Art helps people to express their feelings.	1
7	Through art, we can deal with difficult situations in life from different perspectives and discover how others think and act.	1

Participants did not specify the art field they would like to be trained in. All teachers claimed to use art during the educational process. They use it when they:

- teach any cognitive subject
- work on an environmental or cultural issue with their students
- study an environmental or cultural issue with their students without undertaking an innovative program, but dealing with the subject is the result of the daily educational process.

Seven teachers reported that they use art in specific lessons, such as History, Mathematics, Environmental Studies, the Greek Language. The forms of art that they usually use are painting, music, theater, cinema, (children's) literature and poetry.

All primary school teachers expressed their enthusiasm for the *transformative learning through aesthetic experience* method. They noticed that this is a "new", "innovative", "interesting", "impressive" method they did not know. Moreover, teachers reported that they liked the process of educational intervention, and they were enthusiastic because they worked together and formulated original ideas.

According to the views of the sample teachers, *the transformative learning through aesthetic experience* method can be utilized and implemented in primary school in several ways, as shown in Table 8.

**Table 8: Exploiting the “Transformative learning through aesthetic experience” method in primary school**

	<b>The method can be used in primary school for:</b>	<b>Times mentioned</b>
1	Deep studying of different terms and meanings.	6
2	Teaching any school subject.	3
3	Achieving certain educational and teaching goals (e.g., oral speech/writing, critical thought, arguments, fantasy).	3
4	Changing traditional ways of speaking.	2
5	Reducing conflicts between students.	1
6	Students’ moral development.	1
7	Students’ deeper understanding of a piece of art.	1

All teachers mentioned that they would like to be trained in the *transformative learning through aesthetic experience* method. The reasons why they would like to be trained in the method are shown in Table 9 below. It is observed there is convergence of views among teachers. It is worth noting that teachers linked their responses concerning the training they would like to receive about the method to the answers they gave when asked earlier about the reasons they would like to be trained in art in general.

**Table 9: Training about “Transformative learning through aesthetic experience” method**

	<b>Teachers are interested in being trained to the method because:</b>	<b>Times mentioned</b>
1	It helps them develop their professional abilities.	8
2	This training will benefit the teaching and educational process.	7
3	They will be able to learn better this method.	7
4	They are interested in art and anything related to it.	5
5	Training will benefit both their personality as well as their students.	1

In addition, participants identified the length of time they would like to have a training program related to the method in Table 10 below:

**Table 10: Length of time of a training program related to the method**

	<b>Hours of the training program:</b>	<b>Times mentioned</b>
1	6 hours	3
2	10 hours	2
3	25 hours	4
4	30 hours	1
5	50 hours	2

The majority of teachers claimed that they would like their training in the *transformative learning through aesthetic experience* method to be carried out over the course of many months in order to achieve maximum expected results. Six teachers had a similar reaction when they expressed their views on their future art education in general. Then they claimed that they would like their training to be organized, planned and carried out by competent trainers.

No teachers responded positively to a question about whether they would have any money for attending a training program on the *transformative learning through aesthetic experience* method. The reasons that would prevent them from giving money are financial. They believe that nowadays giving money for training should not exist especially “when teachers are paid far less than what they offer”. They claimed that it is the government’s obligation to take care of their training “especially if it is something innovative, such as this method”.

## **Conclusions**

The conclusions that came up are summarized below:

1. Primary school teachers in Achaia prefecture in Greece in their majority have not taken part in art training programs. However, all of them they would like to be trained.

2. The main reasons why teachers want to take art training in the future are:  
a) Art training will help teachers to respond better to their professional role. b) Spending time on art and anything about it is of interest to them.
3. The majority of the participants in the research did not specify the field they would like to be trained regarding art.
4. Teachers in the Achaia prefecture have not been given the opportunity to use art training in the educational process because they have not received any such training. However, they use art in the educational process in various ways: while teaching cognitive subjects (with the help of school course books), while doing innovative programs and while studying environmental or cultural issues. The forms of art teachers usually use are painting, cinema, music, theater, (child) literature and poetry.
5. Primary school teachers in the Achaia prefecture were not aware of the *transformative learning through aesthetic experience* method before the teaching intervention that took place. They were enthusiastic about it and would like to be trained in it, mainly because they believe that it will help them more in the professional field of their life.
6. Primary school teachers believe the *transformative learning through aesthetic experience* method can be used in primary schools. According to them, the method is mainly suitable: a) when studying concept- topics (e.g., family, friendship, diversity, environment), b) when teaching most of the cognitive subjects, c) when serving teaching and educational goals, d) to be used as a reversal of the traditional way of teaching by giving it a playful dimension.
7. Primary school teachers wish to attend training programs on the method mainly: a) to respond better to their professional role, b) because they believe that it will help students' education and formation of character, c) to "get to know" the method better, d) because they are generally interested in art. The participants in the sample finally realized that art and the transformative learning through aesthetic experience method can effectively serve the goals and the expected results of education policy primary school.
8. More than half of the primary school teachers in our sample would like the training in the method to be of average duration about 25-50 hour (not merely a seminar) which is well-organized, planned and carried out by competent trainers.

9. None of the teachers were willing to spend money in order to participate in a training program on the *transformative learning through aesthetic experience* method mainly for financial reasons.

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