# Contribution to Teaching Strategies of Primary School Teachers in Encouraging Artistic and Creative Skills as Impetus for the Development of Wisdom

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## Abstract

*How do we teach students to recognize their own value in creating benefits for the common good, not only for individual interests, and how do we enable them to perceive common and individual goals being the same? The divergence of goals can cause dispersion of attention and fruitless wandering, but it may also enable personal growth through intrinsic incentives. The paper shows how teaching practices enable the development of capabilities for the autonomous development of children of primary school age and how art and creative workshop practices enable and encourage the emergence of capabilities for more self-understanding and development of empathy for the needs of others. The paper discusses the meaning of a role model as a preferred matrix and the responsibilities of teachers as role models in the process of creation and learning how to recognize exit strategies and solutions. The paper indicates that school cannot teach wisdom, but that students can be prepared for wisdom.*

**Key words:** *balance; creativity; empathy; teacher; wisdom.*

## Introduction

In Ancient Greece, according to Assmann (1994) and Robinson (1990), wisdom was deemed to require more than cognition; it called for gaining transcendental quality. In the 6th book of *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle writes about two (intellectual) virtues – wisdom: *Sophie* (contemplation on the nature of the world) and *phronesis* (practical wisdom, combining the ability of rational thinking and specific knowledge, facilitating

*Sophie*), and also defines the notion of *eudaimonia* as a meaningful kind of happiness, welfare. He indicates the connection between wisdom and wise and good life, which is a desirable transfer of sense and knowledge into good decisions.

According to Baltes, Smith, and Staudinger (1992), wisdom is a supreme insight into human existence and meaning.

Sternberg (2001) claims that wisdom is a specialised type of problem solving relying on tacit knowledge and balance.

In human nature, we can distinguish between numerous inborn and acquired characteristics of personality, perfections and balance conditions that shape a man in synergy. Wisdom is a condition considered by great many psychologists to be supreme insight into human value and understanding of circumstances that occur in life, both as its sense and meaning. Research conducted on the issues of wisdom uses interdisciplinary interactions and methods arising from developmental, social and cognitive psychology.

Regardless of the fact that the notion of wisdom has been historically and culturally differently referred to regarding certain aspects of the way of life, habits and behaviour, there are some common characteristics present in all cases, such as: living in an intense experiential way with sensitivity and courage, development of self-confidence, permanent spiritual growth and mental development and emotional and intellectual balance.

The importance of overviewing various research findings regarding characteristics and emergence of wisdom lies in the possibility to instigate the established values through school curricula, as the only way to equally and justly offer the same conditions to every individual to develop those characteristics defining the concept of wisdom. A society with such organised initiative is recognised as a humanist and a developed one.

## Several Perspectives

Understanding is a consequence of equilibrium generated by simulated tasks leading towards necessary competences.

Lanzadel Vasto, also known as Shantidas, writes in the comment on Ghandi's book Hindi Swaraj: "There is no other truth: to know yourself, and he who knows himself, knows others as well, knows the world, knows God. He who ignores himself, ignores everyone. There is only one power, one freedom, one justice: to control yourself. He who controls himself, has conquered the world. There is only one good: to love others as you love yourself, in other words, as if the others were you. All the rest is an apparition, an illusion, vanity" (RAND, 2013).

Thinking about nature and the development of wisdom compose connected, factual and procedural knowledge and they are necessary to perform a task (pragmatism of life). Knowledge requires learning through selective coding, comparing and combining of information (Guthrie, 2013). Sternberg (2001) draws attention to the significance

of *tacit knowledge,* which he considers to be acquired through experience rather than the immediate teaching. Accentuated contextual nature of tacit knowledge leads Sternberg to understand and support the view that wisdom cannot be learned directly, so he suggests teachers should build/shape such learning environment for students themselves to have an opportunity and support to make their own wise decisions. He claims: "You cannot tell someone who is wise the way of acting applicable to every occasion. You can make possible the experience of learning that will help a person make his/her wise decision" (2001, p. 230).

Many are of the opinion that to define wisdom is a mission impossible (Staudinger & Gluck, 2011). Asmann (1994) considers wisdom to be a concept for value incorporated into cultural context, which makes it variable. In any case, it is a matter of knowledge that helps us solve the problems and find answers in life. Wisdom is a virtue valuable in a broader social sense, even if being present in just a few individuals.

## Aspiration

People aspire towards enlightenment, regardless of individual deviations. The continuity of desire for spiritual growth lasts from the emersion of consciousness. Axiomatic metaphors of growth enlarge this inborn instinct. "The schemes of climbing and vertical symbols are axiomatic metaphors par excellence" (Durand, 1991, p. 104).

The moving itself, the perception of movement, lies in the groundwork of all deceptions. The real perception stands still, it is not pliable, it does not move, because it is a premeditation, which is the choice of the majority who find in such condition an illusion of living. Countless facts of non-movement actually make up the idea of movement. Such movement requires memory, and an impression lies in the feeling – of speed, moving, excitement, instinct, desire… *The reality* in perception is in recognising the eternal moment of non-moving. Such upgrade requires awareness.

For such shift, it is necessary to discern perception from recognition.

Also, when we think about the words used in communication or interpretation of a view, we run into a barrier of the meanings of words not being the same for all. To the majority of people, the word *problem* means an undesirable circumstance, whereas a creative individual – an artist, sees a problem as a starting point for elaborations, variations.

## Harmony

*"If you wish to understand the Universe, think about energy, frequency and vibration,"* said Nikola Tesla. Ever since the time when the light was recognised as a particle and a wave, depending on the observer and the intention of what one wishes to see, there has been a gradual acceptance of the belief that the so-called *reality* is a consequence of the observer's expectations, rather than something independent, autonomous, *a matter per se.* Reality is not unambiguous, like a correct result; it escapes like the completion of a work of art escapes an artist.

The meaning of the notion of harmony needs to be understood, since it does not signify primarily something that surrounds us but what fulfils us. However, harmony is wrongly considered to exist in *relationships* between people. Harmony is an active principle. True harmony is something that comes out of us as our perception of reality. Can we influence such postulates? Can we touch the spirit with circumstances that we surround it with?

We know of fruitful and fruitless imagination, of conditions in which a person is lost from reality melting in an imaginary world, but we also know of creative imagination that we recognise as an attribute of a personality. The difference between them is both a big and a small one; imagination can create contradictions of imagination and desires. Imagination, the same as emotions, should not decide on our behalf. When we use them as a tool, they become a powerful means for expressing oneself, possibilities and creativity.

When mentioning the emotion of love, we inevitably think of the notion of happiness. Happiness is often thought to be a feeling. In such conditions, happiness will not be able to remain a permanent condition.

The feeling of respect does not trigger instincts, desires, uncontrolled intentions, but closeness and understanding. Admiration, on the other hand, is not a good starting point for the feeling of balance, harmony, true love.

Can we talk about truth? Can we talk about truth without being sentimental, without doing certain measuring and deriving statistical data? How to indicate a *road* leading to truth?

## Balance

In the article titled *Balance theory of wisdom* Sternberg (2001) defines the concept of wisdom as an application of tacit knowledge, as mediated values towards achieving general welfare through balance of several intrapersonal, interpersonal and extrapersonal interests in order to create environment. In the very title, the author mentions the concept of balance that has a significant role in understanding the optimum values of human characteristics.

Croatian synonyms are *ravnovjesje, usklađenost, ujednačenost, sklad…* In English, the notion of balance includes expressions like: *balance, compensation, equation, equilibrium, equipoise, poise, equable, sedate, staid, steadfast, true, balancing, sobriety, stabilize.* It is obvious that the notion of balance by far exceeds *equation between the left and the right side.*

We mention balance in all fields, thus in the field of fine arts theory as well. There are three fundamental types: symmetrical, asymmetrical and optical. Many fine artists would agree that their engagement in creating a work of art essentially consists of achieving *all the possible* balances that can be felt by their sensibility and that are opening as de-balances during a working process, thus encouraging an author to step out and improvise, leading him/her by completely unforeseeable circumstances

of investigation/performance of work. After such struggle, the feeling of endeavour/ aspiration to achieve balance is what the spirit of an artist *remains* in.

Balance is a widely spread term retaining in numerous fields the meaning of harmony between different positions, without one or several of them being imposed on another or the rest of them. The idea of *democratisation* is almost its synonym. The concept, regardless of being a noun or not, has in itself a potential active aspect (pro-active), as if it were a verb signifying its achieving.

Aspiration to balance is an inborn instinct both of the nature itself and the nature in us. Carmen Rivier-Zurak says that it would be desirable to contemplate balance on all levels of our existence, to react to the first signs of de-balance. We should not wait, because on a deeper level, our connectedness/balance with Nature in a broader sense is realised in a more intense way, provided that our personal psychological and physical system is harmonised (Rivier-Zurak, 2014).

On the *International Day of Non-Violence* on 2 October a part of the text by Luis Campana, a peace activist of Ghandi movement *La communaute del' arche Lanza del Vasto*, was published on *RAND's* site: "My friend, Adolfo Perez Esquivel, a Nobel prize winner for peace, asked in the last years a Guarani leader on the borders between Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, how the word 'development' could be translated into their language. "The word 'development' does not exist in our language." "Then, what word should we use to understand each other?" He continued: "We have the word 'BALANCE', balance in the universe, with the environment, with the Mother Earth, harmony with others, with ourselves, with God. And this balance, it is life. And when this balance is shattered, there begins violence and its consequences" (RAND, 2013).

Balance does not mean standing still; it aspires towards a *better position*, an active act. Cosmos in its nature does the same: in mega spatial and eternal time frameworks, it lives the drama based on an (escaped) balance; permanent establishing of balance is probably an important aspect for crucial issues of its understanding.

An aspect of temporariness is immanent to the concept of balance, as if the word balance gives us a sense of the feeling of momentariness that cannot last but is rather just an idea, which we open-heartedly aspire to as the best solution, yet just occasionally succeed in achieving - *it.* It is exactly this understanding that can be suggested to be the aim of education and upbringing. Such educational tasks cannot be mastered without efficient approaches in upbringing, necessary to understand complex subject matters.

Balance is a condition aspired to, sought by human spirit as a place of recreation, a condition that every form in its manifestation tends to satisfy. Balance is an attribute for a supreme characteristic, or as Tašković and Marković (2003, p. 313) would say: "an aesthetic preference of a position of an element" in a composition. It is generally achieved or just maintained (attempted to be maintained).

In our existence, due to the circumstances inherited by upbringing or various other (historical) ones, we stress the significance by individual attributes. By such

determination, we can recognise the so-called historical and stylistic periods. Again, it is verbalisation that makes the basis of misunderstanding regardless of consensus relativity as to the meanings of certain expressions.

## Emotions As a Tool

When mentioning the term *feeling* as an important and an overly used word, we find a notion that makes us unstable as a rule, leads us towards the so-called stressful conditions. Thinking means that we are going to express something with words, which will rather often be formed in a thought only by being pronounced. On the other hand, we have a possibility to achieve the very perception and *allow* the nature in us and around us to interact on the basis of concepts – indisputable facts *per se* that make up the reality despite the differences and  interference in our feelings, opinions and conclusions. The idea of pure observance is to achieve active peace, functional behaviour without overly accentuating feelings, subjectivity, opinions… it enables living in a lasting unit of a moment (*Kairos*), without losing a bit of all the given attributes in life; we only avoid misusing them by too strong accentuation, where we ourselves reciprocally suffer as victims of our own actualisation.

Thinking that mind consists of thoughts and feelings is wrong. But, different thoughts themselves tend to conflict. A feeling itself is not a thought and from this notion we can solve any conflict arising on these grounds, since they do not come from the same area. Instead of thoughts, one should use concepts that are able to introduce order into thinking. By expressing our own concepts, we make it possible to create the new ones, and by creating possibilities of perceiving everything, we enable access to our experience, which makes us more resilient and wiser.

It is equally important not to separate outer perception (usually recognised as the only concept of perception) and senses from self-perception, because their harmony is important for balance. Any separate perception (of them) creates conflicts.

Carefully cultivated nature of a student can show its achieved results on an example of being expressed with materials and subject matter of fine arts. The working process itself is based on sensitivity to a problem (Guilford, 1967), but also on the ability of easy communicating with various aspects that participate in the creation. In an approach with giving assignments, a teacher uses analytical methods: observation, perception, providing students with an insight in the character of nature as a dimension of a greater spectrum of dimensions than consumed so far.

The affective dimension in motivation enables a student to use the acquired emotional cognition without any inhibition in the way to transform it into something that is thereby created. In this way he gets an intrinsic return of given sensitivity for fine arts elements and principles of composition that he does not recognise as his performance, due to the seemingly invisible emotional presence, since emotion served him as an impetus for concentration or focus.

## Wisdom and Age

"At fifteen, I started showing an earnest interest in research. At thirty, I started to play my role. At forty, I got no more confused. At fifty, I knew the Commandments of Heaven (*T'ien-ming*). At sixty, I was calm, regardless of what I heard. And now, at seventy, I can follow the wishes of my heart (I can give wings to my thoughts), without going wrong against moral principles (*chu* or the law of *tao*)" (Lun-yu, 1995, p. 31). These Confucius' thoughts indicate that our age refers to cognitive and metacognitive aspects of our awareness. Experience that we lack in an early age cannot be compensated in any way whatsoever. Looking at the examples of child prodigies, we meet specific process abilities on the *adult* level of development. However, in spite of these abilities, there is a large segment of children's behaviour which remains at a developmental stage characteristic of their age. This means that what makes a child special and conspicuous does not necessarily imply these aspects will still be exceptionally developed in later stages of his/her life (Mozart, for example, was not characterised by wisdom in either social or existentially sustainable sphere, while, throughout his life, Ravel remained faithful to his children's room and playing with lead soldiers. Furthermore, artists were often sponsored by patrons, being thus protected in terms of existence – Van Gogh was supported by his brother Theo; Nadezhda von Meck supported both Tchaikovsky and Debussy; Michelangelo was sponsored by Pope Julius II, Leon X, Clement VII and Paul III, etc.).

Wisdom is not necessarily a product of age, but on the other hand, it is inseparable from life experience.

## Early School Age

Encouraging empathy, developing social skills, easing the acquired inhibitions from family and other types of environment, creating adequate/responsible atmosphere in school and society to monitor the development and creating conditions for children's needs, providing equal support through mentorship for every student through individualised programmes that make it possible – it is a desirable perspective of school.

It is crucial for a society to recognise such possibility and need as its own strategy of development and to provide all the material conditions and organisational and professional support as well.

Elementary school teachers' competences include great many qualifications in various fields. But, is it enough for them to support every child in his/her development, by recognising a child's preferences and possibilities not only in general? A gradual development of child's persistence needs to be activated from what a child is (already) *inclined* to. By making it possible for a child to successfully express himself/herself above average, we create conditions so that he/she might seek (and transfer) the acquired feeling of competence in other fields.

Evaluating, coming to conclusions, reasoning on the level of balanced assessment, reflecting, determining conditions for valuable self-perception, feeling of identity as well as age relevant moral judging through subject matters accessible for easy understanding and children's empathy – these are the possibilities we can achieve in working with children.

## Sensitivity

In the paper on learning wisdom, Sternberg (2001) points to tacit knowledge as an important base acquired by experience processes. With such practice, direct teaching is not the method of work. He thinks that the area of tacit knowledge is exactly the place where an attribute of wisdom can be found. Therefore, teachers need to include their subject matter to the maximum extent in linking concepts that give learning a living and understandable sense.

Regarding wisdom and age, Sternberg thinks that individual differences regarding reciprocity of these factors make it impossible to make a conclusion on the existence of rules. It is the fact that the impossibility of a society's influence on circumstances surrounding a child generates initial differences, which are very important in creating the necessary conditions. As to Confucius, he probably would not have agreed with the possibility that any form of wisdom can occur at primary school age, since (only) "at fifteen, he started showing… an earnest interest in research" (Sternberg, 2009, p. 31). However, this does not mean that upbringing and learning cannot include exactly *the things (the methods)* that will enable wisdom to develop later on.

The fact which also does not contribute to the development of creativity and maintaining intrinsic motivation at this age, according to Čudina-Obradović (1990), is puberty with its enhanced sensitivity and interest in one's own physiological development, as a demotivating and deconcentrating process.

## Mentorship

An optimal teacher – a mentor, according to Torrance (1986), is someone who him/herself possesses attributes (s)he wishes to achieve/encourage with students; in other words, care for gifted children should be taken over by artists – mentors. Or, according to Čudina-Obradović, "some of these characteristics can be acquired only with the help of identification with an already developed creator" (1990, p. 133).

At primary school age and upper primary school age, significant support can be shown by teachers with their mentorship, which strengthens the aspect that students lack -  mindful and holistic understanding of causal relationship between various aspects of subject matter. One should bear in mind that empathy at this age is an important receptor for students to acquire experience.

In learning for artistic performance, unlike in a great part of the curriculum where success is achieved by giving *correct answers,* in working processes during creative assignments a mentor helps by giving support to a student in making his/her own *decisions*, without offering any protection in the form of rules.

In such work, children ask (themselves) questions as well, thus articulating problems and facing possibilities of numerous answers to any question raised/found. Also, through the development of creative ability, children understand that solving problems in complex structures is rarely unambiguous and that a way out/solution changes considering a potential intervention in an earlier step, etc. It is exactly through work in an artistic-creative field that multiple perspectives are a consequence of actualising performance processes and learning about many ways that exist to interpret the world.

Children are taught through performance processes of fine arts and creative assignments that problem solving in complex forms is rarely fixed, that it is changeable considering the conditions. Such work requires abilities and readiness for unexpected possibilities of work that are developed in a process.

The mentor monitors conditions of students in processes, since certain circumstances emerge that no verbal expression can explain, which shows that language barriers do not determine barriers of our cognition; the mentor's role here is to encourage such efforts with his/her presence and to explain that they are possible and justified, even necessary.

Such work inevitably develops subtleties. Since the structured nature of a performance is getting more and more layers, the work actually becomes work through subtleties, also developing a special sensitivity for *instruments* – the material itself, since performances, their possibilities and solutions depend on its features. Understanding the material as the most direct basis for structures to be built on is a characteristic of inspired living process strategies. All types of arts have used in their evolution various means to realise an idea.

In such processes, the mentor's role is a very complex one, since there are often attempts of subsequent interpretation – by poetic streams of developed work, so that students themselves examine their own poetic capacities to find the desired corresponding verbal expressions. Specific experience and living through a creative process path is not possible in any other way. Such experience reveals the range and variety of what we can feel, with the mentor helping to understand the feelings and supporting readiness for research.

The very amount of school lessons in which competences for artistic processes are developed and their representation in educational process, unambiguously indicate to children/youngsters what their mentors *actually* believe to be important, regardless of declarative formulations used by the society to (falsely) present itself.

## Conclusion

Guthrie (2013) mentions that in the perception of some people teachers remain in memory as examples of those they might have remembered as wise people.

In its social orientation, school environment with its types of social interactions is favourable and important for the development of skills advantageous for the development of wisdom. Ardelt (2000) thinks that early experiences in life contribute partly to the successful ageing.

Ardelt (2010) thinks that people with university education will be wiser than their peers, due to a number of possibilities given by education, as well as higher motivation for further education/development. Naturally, this requires caution with regard to economic conditioning of people to be able to afford it. In his paper, Sternberg (2001) claims that the idea of wisdom needs to be a part of schooling, since its appearance, either individually or collectively, brings unquestionable benefit to the society. He thinks that declarative knowledge is nothing else but having insufficient information for a wise decision. He sees the role of a teacher as someone who provides students with space for thinking about self-realisation, the role in a community, the relation between values and interests, pointing out that there exists a variety of perspectives, a dialogue that connects several views, dialectical thinking. He finds it very important for students to learn about the fundamentals of balanced thinking in school before entering puberty.

In the WICS model (wisdom, intelligence, creativity and synthesis), Sternberg, Jarvin, and Grigorenko (2009) point out that lessons for wisdom, through the development of intelligence and creativity, need to be a priority in education, thus resulting in a successful life.

Hence, lessons for wisdom are nothing else but optimum education for life, where knowledge achieved by a teacher himself/herself in his/her development process becomes a valuable presumption for work at such/the same development of children.

In the development of fine arts and creative competences as an impetus to the development of wisdom, primary school teachers' strategies set the following basic goals for work and realisation of desirable mentoring relationship between teachers and students: the development of maturity characteristics, responsibility, intense interests, perseverance in performing complex processes, ability of self-assessment, independence and self-confidence (enabled by research aside from the current and anticipated assignments and programmes, regardless of having or lacking approval and their strengthening through growing up).

Theories about the need to develop preconditions for the emergence of wisdom as optimal education (relationships in education) correspond with fostering creative competences as a universal aspect of personality of every individual. The strategy assumes conditions for students to make decisions without using any rules but a developed ability to make assessments.

Understanding that a performance process is irreversible and that working phases as a way to achieve a fine art solution are reciprocal, and understanding of solving problems of complex structures as unforeseeable and non-fixed ones contribute to strategies that help to achieve conditions for a successful life.

Achieving literacy in students capable of critical thinking is a precondition for their ability to shape a reality in which their satisfaction will be actualised by personal realisation and verified through life as an ability to reshape their own worlds.

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# Prilozi za strategije učitelja i nastavnika u osnovnoj školi u razvoju likovno-kreativnih sposobnosti kao poticaju za razvoj mudrosti

## Sažetak

*Kako odgojiti učenike da svoju vrijednost prepoznaju u stvaranju koristi za opće dobro, a ne samo za osobne interese te kako omogućiti prepoznavanje zajedničkog i pojedinačnog cilja kao jedinstvenog? Divergentnost ciljeva može biti uzrok raspršivanja pažnje i besplodnog lutanja, no može omogućiti osobni razvoj putem intrinzičnih poticaja. U radu se govori o tome koje nastavne prakse omogućuju razvoj sposobnosti autonomnog razvoja djece osnovnoškolske dobi te kako likovno-kreativne i radioničke prakse omogućuju i potiču pojavu sposobnosti za veće samorazumijevanje i razvoj empatije za potrebe drugih. Govori se o smislu uzora kao poželjne matrice i odgovornosti učitelja kao nosilaca tog atributa pri stvaranju i učenju prepoznavanja strategija izlaza i rješenja. Rad ukazuje na to da se u školi ne može učiti mudrost, ali da se za mudrost može pripremati.*

**Ključne riječi**: *empatija; kreativnost; mudrost; ravnoteža; učitelj.*