

Creating a Museum Suitcase for the Enhancement of the Educational Play of Early Childhood Children by Secondary Technical Education Students in Greece



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ABSTRACT: On the occasion of the celebration of the 200th anniversary of the Greek Revolution of 1821, a targeted educational program for the awareness and preparation of adult students of secondary vocational education for the museum education of early childhood children was carried out during the school year 2022-2023. The aim of the action was, within the framework of the subject Creative Occupation in Early Childhood II, the specialization of Nursery Assistants, to enrich the knowledge and enhance the skills of adult students of vocational high school in museum education through the creation of a museum valley. The objectives of the project were for the students to approach the events of the 1821 revolution historically and critically, to get in touch with art by getting to know great painters and works of art, to learn how to organize a museum visit and to understand the limitations and ways of implementing an effective museum visit. In particular, the aim of creating the museum cavalcade was for students to use it pedagogically appropriately as a source of stimuli for play and learning through art in early childhood children. Finally, the present educational programme was carried out taking into account on the one hand the role of play in the learning of early childhood children and on the other hand the role of visual arts through which experiences, ideas and emotions are expressed, while at the same time the senses, memory and perception are activated (YPEPTH-PI, 2010).

KEYWORDS: museum suitcase, play, early childhood children, nursery assistants

1. INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a critical stage in the development of infants and toddlers in areas such as cognitive, motor, sensory, social and emotional development. In recent years, the study of child development has become 'interdisciplinary' (Lightfoot et al., 2009, p. 47), as theories from many disciplines, including those of biology, linguistics, neuroscience, psychology, anthropology and sociology are used. Children's developmental contexts include 'the physical environment, cultural beliefs and practices, family and peers, neighbourhood and community, and institutions such as schools and the state' (Lightfoot et al., 2009, p. 49) through which children are offered opportunities for learning. One of these spaces that contributes to building the knowledge of early childhood children is early childhood and pre-school centres or nurseries.

Shaffer's Early Learning Model (2020), outlines fundamental 'key elements' for the process of building knowledge in the child. According to her, the constructivist approach places the child in a central position, recognising him/her as an active individual engaged in dynamic situations of exploration, learning and getting to know the world around him/her (Shaffer, 2019). Earlier, Helm & Katz (2011) had emphasised the importance of experiential learning, as the experiential - communicative approach to the educational process shapes a particular climate in school life, which is far from that of the traditional school.

Learning during early childhood and pre-school years is directly linked to play. It is the main means of learning, as it enables children to develop cognitive, motor, aesthetic, emotional and social skills. Furthermore, play is about a flexible, self-directed experience, which serves the needs of each child and the future of the society in which they will live as an adult (Jarvis, 2006). An important dimension of play is presented by Van Oers & Duijkers (2013, p. 190), who consider play to be "the result of social processes, human decisions and cultural values and meanings".

At the same time, Carroll (2002) argues that through play, children learn to communicate with others, to express themselves and to find ways to solve their problems, Pantazis (2004) states that play is the main source of a child's development, as it is his/her main occupation and is directly linked to his/her daily life, while Birbili (2016, p. 4) notes that it is important for educators to understand

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"what attracts today's children (not children in general) to modern games and what new opportunities for learning and possibilities for play arise from them".

But how can we enhance learning and quality play for early years and pre-school children through play combined with museum education?

According to the literature, museum education contributes to the cultivation of early childhood children's aesthetic education by linking education and learning with arts and culture (Xochellis, 2008). This refers to all the activities that a museum can offer, regardless of the age, educational level or social background of the audience (Desvallées & Mairesse, 2014). According to Chapman (1993) (see Stamatis, 2015), art is only meaningful to children when they experience it as a basic form of expression and as a response to life, while Vemi (2006, p. 7) stresses that children from an early age can acquire a "positive attitude towards cultural heritage" as a result of their involvement in activities aimed at cultivating and educating them on issues that touch on cultural heritage. Also, Nikonakou (2011), argues that the didactic importance of objects in museums is twofold, as the pedagogical dimension of the museum is also linked to opportunities for learning through objects. The museum becomes the most suitable place for the cultivation of aesthetic and cultural sensitivity, for historical, social, political, political, economic and cultural knowledge and perception of all exhibits (Alkistis, 2008). Also, the museum is a space of experience, encounter, research and revelations not superficial, but in depth, which can then be verified by the reality of the environment, both from the historical and anthropological point of view (Alkistis, 2008; Vaos & Bahouma, 2001; Bahouma, 2001).

In relation to what was presented earlier, Kyriakou & Manolidou (2020, p. 198) come to emphasize that the use of programmes that promote museum pedagogy contribute to the development of the aesthetic field through "art forms that make the visual arts accessible by using methods that promote visual experience, initially without verbal forms of understanding works". Therefore, the implementation of museum education programmes in kindergartens aims, on the one hand, "at the child's right to knowledge and culture" and, on the other hand, at enabling children to become "aware of culture, to respect, reflect and be inspired by their cultural heritage" (Vemi, 2006; Katsarou, 2018, p. 338).

Early childhood children, however, usually face particularities in terms of moving out of daycare due to their young age. Therefore, in cases where children cannot visit the museum, it has been considered by many museums at home and abroad to take the museum to the school through the museum baggage. According to the literature

"Museum luggages – or museum suitcases - contain material appropriate to the age of the children, their interests, knowledge and needs. They are taken into the classroom and presented to the children as a whole or in sections. Usually, the museum suitcases are real suitcases with a variety of objects and themes according to the content of each museum. They include, among other things, representative objects from the museum's collections, audiovisual material, information leaflets, miniatures of clay objects, educational leaflets and suggestions for creative activities in the classroom, board games, posters, etc.' (Vaos & Bahouma, 2001, p. 197).

This teaching approach, however, has both positive and negative elements. The positive aspect of portable educational museum equipment is that it facilitates the contact and cooperation between the museum and schools (Kontogianni, Váos & Bahouma, 2001, p. 197). The museum "visits" the school space familiar to the children with its material, which is often accompanied by the museum teachers (museum educators), in order to better implement the planned activities in the schools (Kontogianni, Váos & Bahouma, 2001, p. 197). The negative aspect of the use of the museum bag lies in the fact that many teachers use it as the only way of getting acquainted with the museum. Many times, the phenomenon is observed that even when there is the possibility of visiting the 'real' museum this never takes place (Kontogianni, Vaos & Bahouma, 2001, p. 198).

Finally, according to Alkisti (2008), the museum cavalcade can be combined with a number of activities such as: Discussion, Crafts and models, Plastics, Puppetry and shadow theatre, Storytelling, stories, poems and Drama, which can be adapted according to the developmental stage of the targeted children.

2. WORK STRUCTURE

This section will present in detail the structure of the project and the steps that were followed until the completion of the project with the students of the Evening School in the region of Eastern Thessaloniki. In presenting the information we will avoid mentioning any persons in order to ensure the anonymity of the participants.

2.1 Information on the implementation of the project

The cultural programme with which the third class of the speciality of Nursery Assistants of our school, during the school year 2022-2023, is entitled: "We learn the history of the Greek Revolution of 1821, through the paintings of Greek and foreign painters" and is approved by the Directorate of Secondary Education of Eastern Thessaloniki.

The project involved 18 students and had a total duration of eight months (October 2022 - May 2023). Within the framework of the cultural programme, the students had the opportunity, among other things, to visit the Telloglion Foundation of Arts of the Aristotle

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University of Thessaloniki, to search for information about Philhellenes and Greek painters on the subject of the Greek Revolution of 1821 and to create their own museum easel, designed for early childhood children.

2.2 Aims - objectives

During the implementation of this cultural project, the adult students of the Evening School in the region of Eastern Thessaloniki had the opportunity to:

- to approach historically and critically the events of the revolution of 1821,
- to come into contact with art and with great painters and works of art,
- learn how to organise a visit to a museum,
- to learn about the limitations and ways of implementing an effective museum visit
- to create a museum cavalcade that corresponds to the theme of the programme
- provide the stimuli for play and learning through art for early childhood children.

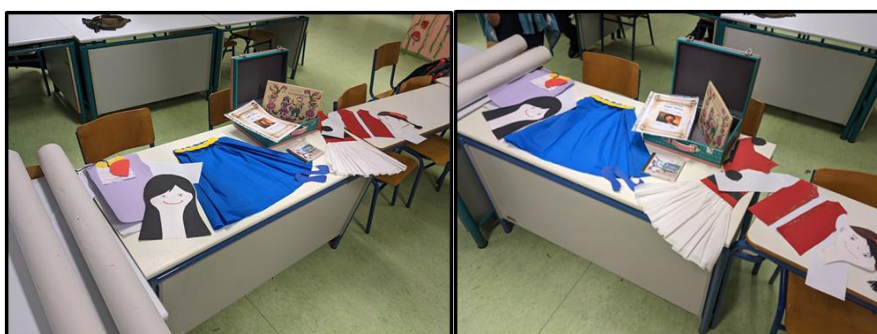
2.3 Project methodology

The methodology followed was based on active learning with the use of ICTs. In particular, in terms of teaching techniques, the following were used: the ideostorm, the inverted classroom technique, the Project method and collaborative group learning. A decisive role in achieving the teaching objectives of the programme was played by the visit and guided tour of the students to the exhibition of the Teloglio Foundation of Arts of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki on the theme: "Treasures of Philhellenic Painting" from the Collection of the Foundation Antonios E. Komnenos.

2.4 Teaching or other relevant material (form, content, didactic use)

The specificity of the age group in which the museum's exhibit is intended to be used led us to create material that corresponds to the particular characteristics of early childhood and was primarily aimed at learning about historical events through a playful approach. To this end, and after a careful review of the literature, the students created the content of the museum cavalcade with the following educational material (Table 1 and Pictures 1, 2 & 3):

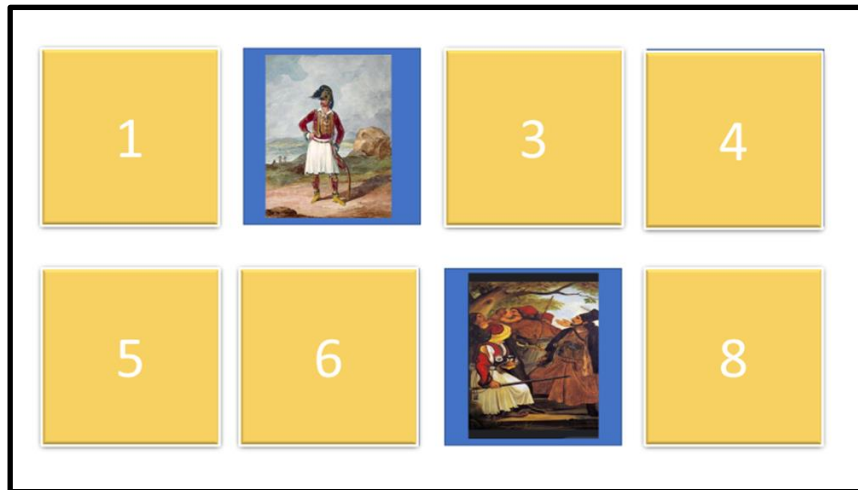
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| List of the educational material included in the museum case |
| Illustrated children's book "The Greeks" by Eugenia Fakinou |
| Two pieces of measuring paper with the outline of a child (boy and girl) in normal dimension |
| Traditional Costume of a Greek Girl and of Cholias |
| CD with an audio extract from the Thurion of King Feraios |
| Tablet with memory cards of paintings chosen by the students |
| Brochure with the Thurion of King's Thurion in a form of text |



Pictures 1 & 2: The educational material of the museum case

The selection of educational material was based on the developmental level of early childhood children. In this direction we were helped by the material of the textbooks 'Aesthetic Education' and 'Creative Activity in Preschool Age II', of the 2nd and 3rd class of the speciality of Nursery Assistants. It should be noted here that for the creation of the digital interactive memory game, the students initially selected four paintings from the collection in which they were guided during our visit to the Teloglio Foundation of Arts, U.P.Th. Then, based on these paintings, they created an interactive memory game for children of early childhood. This game was installed on the tablet and added to the rest of the museum's manipulative material.

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Picture 3: Digital memory game part of the educational material of the museum case

Shaffer's Early Learning Model (2019) was mentioned earlier, it describes fundamental 'key elements' for the child's knowledge building process. According to her, the constructivist approach places the child in a central position, recognising the child as an active individual engaged in dynamic situations of exploration, learning and getting to know the world around them (Shaffer, 2019). Also, Helm & Katz's (2011) view had been presented, where the importance of experiential learning was emphasised, as the experiential - communicative approach to the educational process shapes a particular climate in school life, which is far from that of the traditional school. It is worth noting at this point that all students were engaged both individually and in groups throughout the project.

2.5 Teaching steps

Within the framework of the cultural programme that was the impetus for the creation of the museum suitcase, specific teaching steps were followed, which will be presented below:

Introduction - Brainstorming

First of all, the students were asked about the information they know and what they would like to gain from their contact with the programme in the context of the lesson. After individual study and group discussion, the information that the students knew about the topic was presented, followed by a discussion in smaller groups and finally in the whole class. In this way a categorization of the known and unknown for the students' topics was made concerning the Greek and foreign painters who were involved in the creation of paintings about the 1821 Revolution.

Visit - Guided tour

During the visit, the students were guided through the exhibition of paintings and were informed about the information related to each painting by the guide/educator of the Art Foundation of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. The students focused their attention on the subject matter and style of the paintings and after discussion were asked to focus on the historical information that had been provided.

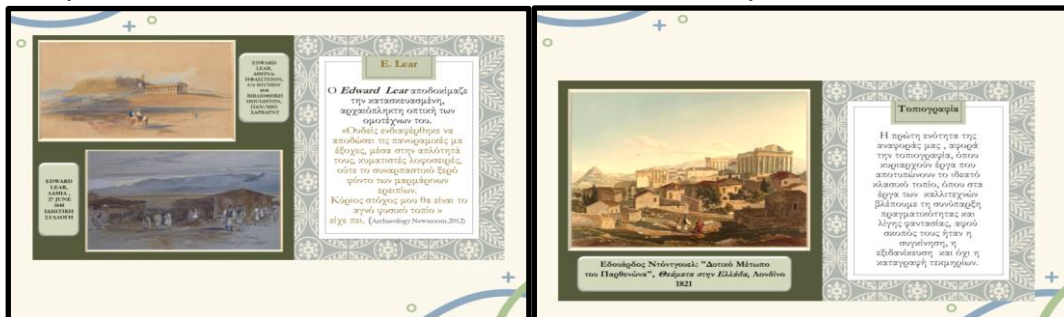


Picture 3: Our guided tour to the Telloglio museum of Art

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Creating digital presentations

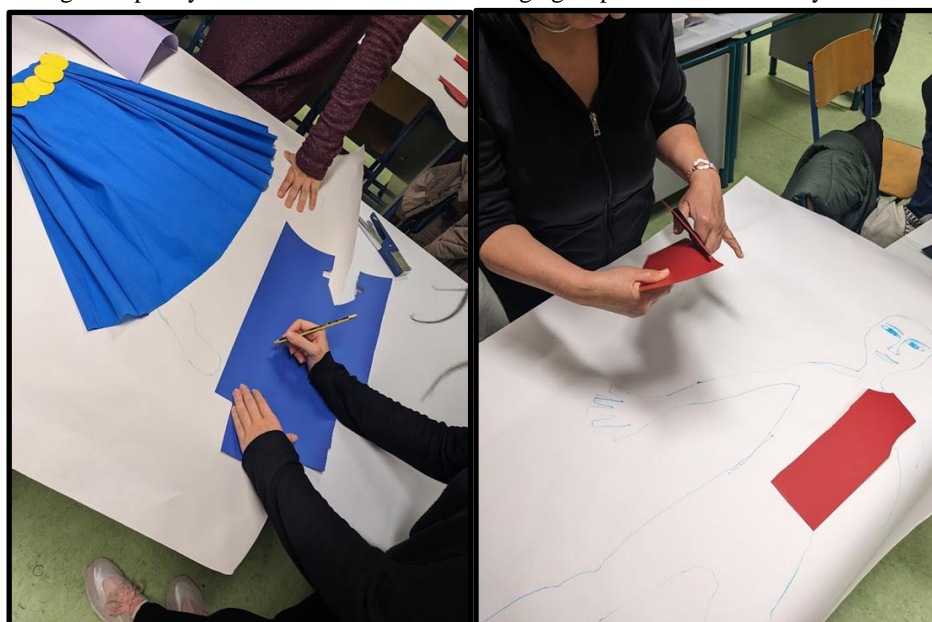
After the visit to Telloglio Institute of Arts A.U.Th., the students first created digital presentations as a group. The students used New Technologies to create digital presentations. The digital presentations included material directly related to the paintings they encountered during their visit to Telloglio. Afterwards, the students looked for relevant material from the internet regarding the life and work of the artists who curated the specific paintings. After these presentations were completed, they were discussed in class and at the end of the year, this information was disseminated to the school community.



Pictures 4 & 5: Powerpoint presentations created by the students

Creating the museum suitcase

The actions of the cultural program continued and concluded with the group creation of a museum suitcase, with educational material developmentally appropriate for children of early childhood. The students, with undiminished interest, supervised the creation of the museum bag with plenty of materials suitable for the age group of children of early childhood.



Pictures 6 & 7: Creation of the museum case by the students

2.6 Evaluation

The purpose and the individual objectives of the action are considered to have been achieved successfully, because on the one hand the museum case created by the pupils/students to enhance the play of early childhood children, is fully aligned with the relevant literature and the learning and development needs of early childhood children and on the other the pupils/students took an active role in their learning by fully achieving the teaching objectives of the program. Based on the above, we as teachers must follow practices aimed at extroversion of the museum spaces and put the collections in conversation with our students of all ages (Kyriakos & Manolidou, 2020).

As stated by the Professor of the NCAA Konstantinos Malafantis (2020, p. 25) "it is important to understand from the academic community that Museopedagogy, with the almost unlimited educational possibilities that it can provide to students and tomorrow's citizens, should be incorporated as an essential subject of basic academic training in the Curricula of future educators".

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