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RELIGION LESSON- VECTOR FOR STUDYING ARTS.
TRANSDISCIPLINARITY VIEW

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Abstract

The astral time for Romania represented the time of celebrating the Great Union, on 1st December 1918, that attracts the attention of various media, but especially the subject of new projects at all levels of education, promoters out of a sense of duty towards the ancestors who sacrificed themselves and the responsibility they have in future perspective. The study would like, in this context, to value the vision of teachers to link religious education to arts education in working with students at primary and secondary schools, believing that the religion class is a true catalyst of knowledge in areas which meet naturally therein. As a corollary, students are offered deciphering Romanian history as surprised by the Great Fresco from the Romanian Athenaeum, which values the entire journey from the perspective of worship, the Orthodox religion, in which the soul of the nation developed, from the first Christian century. The aim of the research is to demonstrate valences time religion, its value to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and to provide students with a near fields of knowledge and the arts, particularly fine arts, in an experiential manner, offering valuable knowledge and insight for training and personal development of children aged 6 to 14. As research methods, we used the observation and teaching experiment in role play and analyse three-dimensional works, which were found constantly in exhibitions which were selected and collected in an album that constitute the fruits of a study that lasted for almost ten years.

Keywords: transdisciplinarity; Religious education; arts; multidisciplinary; nonformal education;

1. INTRODUCTION

A 100-year balance sheet carried out in various fields, as the Romanian society is now trying, requires a careful and objective look that can detect matters worthy of being retained and promoted for the next centenary. "What have we learned?", "What have we done wrong?", "Who supported us?", "What are we owed?" - are these the questions from which it would be right to start the analysis? In terms of education, including religious education, it can be considered as having three stages, over the course of these 100 years: 1918 – 1945 (1947), 1945 (1947)¹ – 1989, 1989 – 2018 (the two-year difference explains the distance between the moment of the first government's introduction of the communist regime and the dissolution of the political parties, the king's abdication and the beginning of the implementation of the

program that led to reforms in the field of religious affairs and education) (Tudor Vișan-Miu, 2016, pp. 123-133). The importance of religious education in the interwar period is recognized, (Tudor Vișan-Miu, 2016, p. 80) and the syncope met with the establishment of the communist regime as well. The resumption of religious education after 1990 was a gesture of repair and, at the same time, the way to show that the school is also back to the traditional values of the Romanian people.

2. THE BEGINNING OF RELIGION LESSONS. CASE STUDY: THE KINDERGARDENS *ARC-EN-CIEL* AND THE ORTHODOX PEDAGOGICAL HIGH SCHOOL „ANASTASIA POPESCU”

After the foundation *Preasfânta Fecioară Maria* and the first Kindergarden *Arc-en-Ciel* were set up, teacher Anastasia Popescu (Mama Sica - as all called her) started to teach Religion lessons in 1994 within these. This is the beginning of the first attempts to give children an education of beauty, by resorting to the beauty that the Church assumes and which is a gift to the Godhead as Anastasia Popescu said. The very way the child held hands before making the Holy Cross was explained by Mama Sica: the right hand we worship with rests in the palm of our left hand as a treasure in a sip (discussions with Mother Sica written by the fellow teachers).

We believe that, starting from this point, Religion lessons were different. The way of addressing Religion lessons was as a crowning of education, not just as a moment of transmission of information (Mama Sica, 1995, p. 23), so „education becomes a modelling personality for each individual” (Anghel, AG, 2017, p.10) We can establish exactly the directions within religion lesson: did we do aesthetic education during the time of Religion lesson? In these conditions, to what extent is it able to help the child to correctly receive both the theological message, the bearer of cultural information, but also the spiritually and the aesthetic formative, determining the taste for beauty and discernment, the guide of the reception of works of art under the God’s providence?

We plan to look at the way parables are offered to little children between the ages of 3 and 6 and a half, in the same way as Mama Sica used to do, at a time when there is still no structured Religion lessons, much less pre-school, proximity to the plastic image, either with the icons brought in the classroom or in the Church. The prayer, the icon of the Mother of God and the Child in particular, but also the angels, or the saints whose names the children bear, are as many steps toward achieving a double goal: the child understands the love with which God protects them and their family, but it also retains the essential aspects related to iconography - the colors of the vestments, the aura of the saints, the name of the saint represented in the icon. After Mama Sica left for the Lord, the plastic art teacher, along with the new teacher of Religion, proposed to the children works where the mother's face would appear. Then they took the step to the icon because they explained to the children, the Mother of God is our Mother, loves us and protects us not only children but also our parents. It was an essential moment when the children managed their first icons, whose naive and pure beauty made. Mr. Sorin Dumitrescu says "The characteristic of this atypical icon production is the way, impossible to define by words or concepts, in which combines three distinct steps as a spiritual attitude: genuine perception, cultivated faith, and the canons for painting the holy icon. Consequently, their icons are sudden and genuine, and cult, and correct, so that they can easily be paradigms for the adult painters of icons. Most of this is annoying to any painter of icons that positive and blessed envy that makes her/his more talented and more faithful” (Sorin Dumitrescu, 2000).

In the following years, children in each kindergarten and classroom studied the icon in the same time with plastic arts themes such as flowers, clothing, various buildings, human expressions, color studies and line games and dots, following the schedule of the plastic education classes, in parallel with the Religion ones. They were also joined by the project "Easy, Easy, Walking in the Arts World" where the children had a section dedicated to the icon - "A child - an icon" and where they could work with their parents. These activities were represented by two albums with works of plastic art and icons, in which both children's paintings and works of the parents are found. In order to gather inspirational material, the children participated in many visits to the country and even abroad, where they met museums and works of secular and religious art. They worked in museums, participated with their own works at numerous

exhibitions, competitions and were even selected as winners. The Religion lesson opened this opportunity over time and, thanks to it, the children were encouraged not only to acquire certain knowledge related to Orthodox cult, national and universal heritage, Romanian traditions, but had the opportunity to expressing themselves, defining their own vision of a particular spiritual theme, practicing the line, color, finishing a work. But since the technique chosen was that of the glass icon, it involves certain stages, ranging from drawing, framing, or even embellishing the pattern and color frame. This set of skills succeed in adding new, particularly important valences, because the workshop itself addresses the child on multiple plans, often reveals a potential that other disciplines do not train and places the class of religion among those with a high dynamism that requires unceasing valorization

Our study is based on an extremely large number of works, taking into account that, annually, the children participate with their own works at least two large exhibitions devoted to Christmas, and to the mother, the Annunciation (on 25th of March). The last exhibition, on March 2018, contained 450 icons, mostly dedicated to the Annunciation, as well as to some saints and angels. The themes are diverse and the children are allowed to let the creativity work after explaining the "canon" which was specific to the theme of the chosen icon. Working on the icon implies praying, but also viewing works - albums, icons, religious paintings, frescoes - with the subject. At the base of each completed work are several pencil sketches, as well as conversations related to the theme, teamwork, or individual, alternating each time. At the end of a chapter in the religion curriculum, the children also make simple drawings, such as those with the Protector Angel, the saint whose name they wear, or, in competitions organized by the Inspectorate, the Church or the Deanery, even serious studies about themes which children are able to handle with their application, proving to be the very good results at the competitions and olympics they attend every year. Even the prizes are not only the fulfilment of children's goals, they make a serious work, they develop their talent, perseverance, and they enjoy and feel encouraged in this way. From this point of view, the contest "Saints, the children's friends" which involves teamwork and harmoniously combines the theoretical knowledge from Religion, with the ability to paint the icon of a saint among those studied in the classroom, is relevant. It is a clear proof that Religion lesson can - and is particularly good - support the skills development to work an icon, but more than that, the grinding of children's talent, the formation of taste, the development of aesthetic sense, all pleading for perceiving the time of Religion as a joint of several fields, of which the artistic is especially privileged. Along with the icon, the drawing, the collage, the children may be interested in molding in clay, or in other less difficult materials to buy, which they find easily in the specialist stores. Along with the first icons, the children of our school have often made surprising themes with the help of clay. The work thus obtained could be burned in the furnace, another point of interest for the students who are keen to know. Again, the Religion lesson highlights its potential for transdisciplinarity. One of the most loved themes was the "Noah's Ark", which allows every child to put into practice his skill, but also the imagination, and brings satisfaction, from this point of view almost without exception, to all who start working. As an extension of these Religion classes, groups of preschoolers or students can participate in ceramic workshops organized by the Piscu School, not far from the Monastery Țigănești. Frequently carried out in the open air or within the Church, the Religion lesson becomes the best opportunity to know the richness of the traditions and crafts of the place, thus being a bridge between generations and a chance to take in the history of places and society. The "Piscu's Pots Museum", whose foundation stone was set up last year, was designed to bring together children from all over the country to familiarize them with the arts, but not by any means, but by incursion into everything that means faith and tradition. This is also within the Religion lesson, atypical, but with the same objectives: the formation of the child's character (Vladimir Ghidionescu, 1911).

As basis of the study, along with conversations with students, their parents, religion teachers and art teachers, specialists, priests, monks, and monks with whom we have built up our learning spaces and practical applications, we also propose the albums edited by "Anastasia Popescu" School ("Anastasia Popescu" Pedagogical High School integrated the preschool, primary and gymnasium levels of "Anastasia Popescu" school). This is the album "A child - an icon" that appeared in 2011, with the Blessing of His Grace Patriarch Daniel, as well as by the "Art Gallery (Art) Gallery of Children", accomplished in a project funded by the Cultural Fund Administration National in 2013.

The album "A child - an icon" has 80 works made by children between 7 and 14 years. In the beginning part, the process by which the child approaches the icon and becomes "iconar" is surprising: "Children open windows ... windows to heaven. Sometimes they see angels. Sometimes they recreate a biblical scene and bring it to the level of what is familiar to them, eluding even the Holy Tradition. But they are pure and so deep in the beauty of their innocent prayer. Children recreate the way of the popular artist who feeds on the very essence of ancient wisdom. They have vision, they have color, they have open minds. We just have to bring around a few tools, stories and stories by Pateric, a church wall. [...] And so the icons of the children are born: an icon, a child - a window to heaven." (Sorin Dumitrescu).

The icon that opens the album is "Increasing the mind (Sporirea minții)," suggesting the prayer that children are saying before an important activity: "Always your work / starts with God!" From the 80 works, 62 are dedicated, or contain the Mother of God, the others representing Jesus Christ or Saints Nicholas, Elias, George. The album manages to highlight two essential dimensions for the present research: on the one hand, children are proving their understanding of mysterious icons and prayer by inserting such small compositions belonging to them and ownership information material - theoretical and transfiguration in a sublimed form, personalized by the child's sensitivity (the prayers "My little angel", "The Angel" as well as "A mystery, a miracle") and, on the other hand, the highlighting of some plastic elements whose accomplishment also belongs to the transfiguration to which the child subjects the iconographic material, and remains, however, as Sorin Dumitrescu emphasized in the "canon". This presents extracted and highlighted: a gentle dove depicting the Holy Spirit, the flower that was given to Virgin Mary by the angel Gabriel and the child's vision may be lily white, but becomes red rose. Also, detail of column turns the Jesus's Christ birth cave into a palace, Moon and Sun guarded the Savior's crucified body, purple flowers that caress Icon of the Mother grieving, Archangel Gabriel's face, bringing the Good news, the horse of St. George, the Holy of Holies, like a fairytale house, the Virgin Mary's hands, clasped in prayer, an angel wing and a hand that blesses. It is, therefore, an illustration of what we might call the power of Religion lesson to infuse the classes and activities of the fine arts, as well as those devoted to other subjects, such as Romanian language and literature, or even foreign languages, because the album includes translations into French and English in class, by the children, under the supervision of specialists.

The children's album "Album of the Gallery" has as motto an apparently simple statement, taken from an edition of the Romanian Television's "Professionals": "When I go out of an exhibition, I feel better." Because usually the phrase chosen by most is "I feel (better)". Here, however, art has the power to make us better, as a prayer, and the children chose to say so. This project was the result of a partnership between three schools - Gostinu - Giurgiu, Botoșani and Bucharest, integrating children with hearing deficiencies from the Holy Mary School, and the aim was to familiarize students with traditional crafts such as carving of wood, knotweights with knots, objects made of corn cobs and clay technique. To this was added the use of recyclable materials. The Bucharest team chose these latter themes, which they treated, in part within, or starting with Religion classes. The chosen subject was Noah's Ark, which, as we have already shown, fascinates the children through its epic side, through the teaching, but also through the possibility of molding a multitude of animals and birds. But for children, the challenge theme was to fail to implement in practice what they know from Genesis (Genesis 1:24-31 the 6th day): "Then God said, "Let earth bring forth the living creature after his kind their animals, creeping things, and wild beasts by their kind." That's why it was chosen to add to this project a Noah's Ark of recycled materials. Here the children's benefit was special because they were organized in teams, collected old newspapers, various remains for the invisible part of the works, and first built the ark, then the large animals that would be really impressive and attract attention to environmental issues. Another valence of the time of religion is so valued, because the Bible speaks of Creation and man's responsibility to animals (Genesis). An arc of impressive size, about 4 m / 2.5 m, was produced, and the animals, in their turn, were larger than a childhood state. The message that the project was able to convey this way become the stronger, since virtually all secondary school were involved, and thus Religion classes, Arts and Technology / practical skills and they've lost boundaries separating them usually discipline demonstrating that religion has nothing to remain isolated in the pages of a textbook expert, however well made as this, it is necessary and manages to bring the children in a position to perceives connections between domains, to

understand the miracle of Creation and the responsibility that Man has for himself and for the rest of the creatures.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, we consider that our working hypothesis, that the religion class is a vector for the study of the plastic arts, is proved by the listed projects and, in addition, by the current activity of the children in the class, given that any of the studied themes can be reinforced by a plastic work done at the end of the hour, or the time itself can move into a cult, church or monastery, where art meets children and expects (only) "tamed" by the Religion teacher's explanations, either alone or together with the fine arts. As many times His Grace, Patriarch Daniel shows that the icon is not merely an ornament in the Church, but the confession of the belief that the unseen Christ has been seen. The confession is made by word and icon, Father Patriarch says. "The sight of angels and glory in the kingdom of heaven is seen mostly in the icons. True Orthodox icons have the golden background because gold symbolizes the unapproved, unspoiled and non-invisible light in the Kingdom of Heaven. Around the head of the saints we have the aura or the nimbus, also in golden color, which means the light of the Holy Spirit within the human being that is perceived by the mind and heart and is an arvone of the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven in which the saints are. So, Orthodoxy is not only a confession with the word, it is not a confession only using the words of the Creed, but Orthodoxy is also a confession of images through the image of holy icons, because God's Word has not only been heard with ears, as in the Old Testament, but taking the form of man, taking our human nature, He was seen". (Gheorghe Cristian Popa, article „Mărturisirea se face prin cuvânt și prin icoană”, Ziarul Lumina, 21 February 2010)

As a corollary, the students were asked to decipher the history of the Romanians, as it is surprised by the Great Fresco from the Romanian Athenaeum which valorizes the whole path from the cultic perspective of the Orthodox religion, in which the soul of the nation was born, starting with the first Christian century. In a working visit to the Athenaeum, after a prior documentation and viewing of the material made by Trinitas TV about the Great Fresco from the Athenaeum, at Religion lesson, children are offered the opportunity to revisit the work in all its grandeur, in a lesson that combines the history of the Romanians with elements that are specific to the plastic arts and points out the importance given by the great rulers of their emblematic foundations: the scenes in which Emperor Trajan appears, having Apolodor from Damascus, Mircea the Ancient, Stephen the Great, Neagoe Basarab and Mrs. Despina, Al. I. Cuza, Carol I, King Ferdinand and Queen Mary, and the children are invited to try to imagine themselves instead of the painter Costin Petrescu, who has thought this project for frescoes for thirty years - since the fresco was inaugurated in 1938, after five years of work. The overwhelming history of this stunning story that becomes another lesson that children add to the knowledge of the rulers and their foundations.

So, it was demonstrated that through a fresco, children can be taught in a cross-curricula way, adapting to social life. So "the internalization of norms and values that orient the individual's behaviour is the result of a transfer process involving collective consciousness elements in the individual consciousness, as a source of social role". (Anghel, AG, 2017, p. 99)

The purpose of our research was to demonstrate the valences of Religion lesson, its ability to facilitate the transfer of knowledge, and to give pupils a close proximity to fields of knowledge and arts, especially to the plastic arts, in an experimental manner, providing valuable insight into the personal formation and development of children aged 6 to 14. This approach is much closer to the real life and real society. We consider that the material collected is an eloquent basis to assert that the Religion lesson should be regarded as a potential vector for the study of the plastic arts, but also in other areas that harmoniously intertwine and give the child a fair view of the world, giving him the essential milestones to be able to position himself with a degree of discernment, as well as related skills useful in the years following the school. Moreover, this way of looking at things in their spiritual core will stir them up and feed the desire of the child, and to the adult of tomorrow, to study and learn from books, from nature, from people with moral principles and views.

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