



## Abstract

The visit of Mario Urlass in October 2013 gave rise to various enriching experiences during the week in which he presented his didactic approach to teachers in Chile. He emphasized the importance of creative work for the integral development of a person and the importance of promoting and channeling artistic skills from an early age. He argued that children should not be coached by being presented with artworks from famous artists as they are able to create their own artistic expression without the expectation of fitting into a particular style. Urlass also noted that children have the ability to attribute their own meaning to the images they choose.

# GREATER FREEDOM IN ARTISTIC EXPRESSION INCREASES LEARNING SKILLS

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The following document presents three instances from the visit of Mario Urlass, Professor at the Pädagogische Hochschule / University Heidelberg, in October 2013.

## 1.- At the Education Ministry.

At the Ministry, Mario Urlass gave a presentation about the effects of imposing a certain manner of creating an image – such as an artist's style - to children. Children are inherently capable of expressing their own emotions and thoughts. When confronted with a certain style children feel they are unable to portray their thoughts and subsequently their creativity is restricted. Urlass showed the result of this malpractice: the final work of several children which did not exhibit their individuality. The showcased pieces were all alike: the same colors, the same shapes and the same dimensions.



Figure N° 1 (Mario Urlass presenting typical mistakes committed by art teachers as they ask their students to imitate works of famous artists.)

## 2. Participating on a course of improvement

that was provided for 30 art educators at the Professional German Institute for teacher training "Wilhelm von Humboldt". On this occasion Urlass's presentation focused on creativity and childhood. As an experimental activity, he encouraged those attending to create a package for an object of choice. Through this process he proved that the personal meaning attached to an object may bring the creator closer to his work.



Figure N° 2 (innovative packaging for personal objects)

Figure N° 3 (commenting on the outcomes of the workshop)



Figure 4 Two exceptional art teachers Miguel Zamorano (Chile) and Mario Urlass (Germany)

The following interview was conducted by Patricia Gallardo (P.G.) with Professor Urlass's (M.U.) about the arts and education with a focus on the teaching methods of Chilean art teachers.

**P.G.: 1.-** How important are the arts in general in school education? What is their contribution to the development of youth and children?

**M.U.:** One can survive without the arts, but in today's world, especially in the areas in which the economy, cognitive thinking and adaptation dominate, art compensates with emotion, subjective expression, imagination and fantasy. These are essential components of human beings and among them the most important aspect is that of providing freedom.

If art is authentic, it is always free; it is not ruled by other things. Then, I think that, based on that, the kids can learn what it means to be free. When they receive this freedom in class, they simultaneously can experience what democracy is.

**P.G.: 2.-** In your opinion, what is the ideal age for a child to strengthen the contents of visual arts?

There is no ideal age, hardly a child is born, the process of self-education already begins and this process lasts a lifetime. Artistic aesthetic expression is an important component of a person. When you are in the formative process and are confronted with art, this may be an impulse, a permanent incentive for further education as a person. There is no ideal age because personal evolution is also changing the look you give to the world.

There is a very interesting book by the German neurobiologist Gerald Hüther "Every child is highly gifted", which is to say that every child has their own view of the world, the author argues that we must foster that personal sense of view, of difference, of "stubbornness". However, the school is responsible for lowering this personal view. For many teachers this personal sense is not desired, it is inconvenient, (could be because they cannot handle and/or because they have a wrong way of doing pedagogy). Art education must be the prime developer of this

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personal sense, the amazing thought following an unconventional direction. Art must help people to be as they are and not just as they should be.

3.- Have you noticed changes in young people's behavior motivated by art? Can you give us some examples?

Artistic experience with children in elementary school shows that they already have certain qualities in their personality, acquired in their short stage of development such as: self-awareness, responsibility and self-determination. This allows them to be aware of their responsibilities in their level. Then, when you delegate responsibilities in carrying out their own projects and they have the opportunity to define how to develop them, the teacher assumes the role of counselor, companion.

Another important aspect is that children become more tolerant of the work of their peers and also of the approach to different art experiences. These are personal skills that do not specifically belong to artistic fields, but determine the human quality of children. The idea is to learn these qualities for life while acquiring aesthetic taste.

4.- What would you recommend to teachers of arts and music of our country?

I would recommend them to have the courage and to be willing to risk by starting open classes, which are somewhat unpredictable, but consciously developed; understanding open classes as an adventure. Often the situation arises that teachers are like a tour guide pointing the way forward, the idea is for them to move along with their students on an expedition.



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Teachers have to help children to be themselves, first as an artist and then as teachers. The natural art of teaching in Chile is an educational failure – which I have observed here - because students are instructed about the history of artistic concepts and knowledge. Alongside these aspects, technical aspects play an important role too, but these are only one facet of art. The other facet is what basically determines what art is, and that is subjective. This remains somewhat delayed here. The pure knowledge, which can be found anywhere, is not essential: the key is the ability to configure, to create subjectively and to find personal meanings and identity associations for that moment. Intensity is required, especially in projects that are developed in the long-term, at least to experience in part what it means to express one self.

**Only if the teacher has a plural understanding of pedagogy can s/he fulfill this facilitator role.**

In short, his comments and teachings brought new light and greater freedom to the educational-artistic practice in Chile, which since late 2012 has been governed by a new curricular foundation for elementary education. Now Chilean art teachers have the task of amalgamating Mario's contributions to the new guidelines to enhance the quality of education.

## REFERENCES

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