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Boys' and Girls' different appreciation and application of Art

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Abstract

Studying the way in which art is employed for learning languages by girls or boys will reveal the attitudes and beliefs of a society. The best way we can analyze the differences laying in between girls and boys in the real life is to observe them using art as a tool while learning. In this study the researcher has focused mainly on learning English as a second language. This study is an attempt to explore the status of gender differences when applying art. The main purpose is to provide an inclusive collection of gender differences when applying art in order to learn the second language. As a whole asymmetries between boys and girls are depicted through art as a medium. Overt expression of art appreciation and application is observed in different terms. This paper elaborates on the above theme by providing practical documents of a limited number of students from the upper level families of the northern part of the Capital of Iran, Tehran. The participants are in pre-school level. Both classes are taught by the same instructor. The proper teaching amount is almost the same. The author has taught both classes through holistic approach, while a class is held only for boys and the other held only for girls based on Iran Educational System rules and regulations.

Keywords: Holistic Education, Arts, indirect teaching, Boys and Girls difference

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1. Introduction

Robin Ann Martin (2003) describes this further by stating, "At its most general level, what distinguishes holistic education from other forms of education are its goals, its attention to experiential learning, and the significance that it places on relationships and primary human values within the learning environment." (Paths of Learning)¹

Teaching through the Soul is the aim while the medium of reaching the soul is art. It's distinctively beneficial to integrate individuals physically, emotionally and mentally while presenting a new concept. In the holistic approach a teacher facilitates the process of learning by connecting and linking the body and mind.

The modern world has focused mainly on facts and skills but it has ignored the other dimensions of the human. Art is an important factor to connect mind and soul. Miller, 2011 described that the basics of holistic education are: connectedness, inclusion, and balance. Accordingly Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925) had sought to decipher the problems of the education and society by imagination, inspiration and intuition (McDermott, 1984).²

Holistic education is a philosophy of education based on the premise that each person finds identity, meaning, and purpose in life through connections to the community, to the natural world, and to humanitarian values such as compassion and peace. Ron Miller, founder of the journal Holistic Education Review (now entitled Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice).³

As a teacher I believe that creating a situation to connect all the other dimensions of a student to a new concept can bring a lot of success to the classroom. Specifically learning a language through art can bring a lot of happiness and aura to the class where students can engage in every single thing they do and learn in the class. The process of learning will be facilitated through connecting to the art.

The teacher can provoke students' curiosity to show them the way to get to different sources of information rather than of being the sole source of information.

I am positive that every single human being needs a secure, fun and caring atmosphere to learn a language since such condition can facilitate the process of learning for them. As an educator it is my ultimate goal to provide a caring, safe and entertaining atmosphere in which all students cooperate in the process of teaching and learning; where the teacher is not the sole speaker, a wise on the stage but a guide on the side.

Holistic education feels that meaningfulness is also an important factor in the learning process. People learn better when what is being learned is important to them in a way that they involve in the process of learning which will help them not to forget all they have learnt through fun and creative activities.⁴

The modern world is such a routine and boring place where every human being is eager for new and fun ways of learning. Learning is not a solid , strict activity just to give information and data to a living human but it is a way to entertain humans by shocking and interesting activities and engaging them into the process of learning. The modern human is much smarter and would like to gain most of his time by learning and being entertained and engaged in every single learning steps.

¹ Robin Ann Martin (2003) (Paths of Learning); Paths of Learning: www.pathsoflearning.net – great resource on holistic education. Online library.

² McDermott, Robert A. (Ed.). (1984). *Essential Steiner: Basic Writings of Rudolf Steiner*. San Francisco: Harper & Row.

³ Miller, Ron. "Holistic Education." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 04 Jan. 2013. Web..

⁴ "Tools/Teaching Strategies of Holistic Education." *K12 Academics*. N.p., n.d. Web.

The age of the learner is not very important but the process of learning is important to learners as well as what they need to learn.

People come with different IQs to the classroom which the previous generation would think some are smarter than the rest. But this idea is no longer accredited which it is proved that students come to the class with different talent potentialities. So when as a teacher I started to teach the students of two girls and boys groups separately of the same age level, I learned that there are noticeable differences in how boys and girls learn. The culture meanwhile is an important factor which will be taken in to account later on.

To me as an educator it matters if we have to apply the same art curriculum in both boys' and girls' classes. The question rose in my mind when I was asked to teach the same amount in the same way in both boys' and girls' classes. The big problem was that the English department aimed in expecting both sections with the same result. At the very beginning I did my most to fulfill the department expectations but later on I decided although both sections have the same amount of students, the same amount of instructional hours as well as the same age level but it was to me as I am teaching on Earth and Mercury at the same time. At the beginning my goal was to determine a time limit for boys as well as girls for a special amount of teaching material but little by little I found that the expectations in the boys' sections can't be fulfilled in the same time limit, even the level of learning was quite different. So I decided to focus on their differences and present my findings. What came to my mind were the first things I noticed in their art work differences. According to Maria Montessori students can take responsibility for their own education by making choices as little scientists in a classroom which stood as their laboratory. I recognized that we are limiting the students to our own beliefs and we are ignoring their entire inner world. Below I explain the very different world of boys' and girls' artistic emersions.

2. Female and Male Brain Differences

From the very beginning, the gender differences in the brains of unborn babies are evident. According to an article by M. Michele article, Dr. Bennett A. Shaywitz, a professor of Pediatrics at the Yale University School of Medicine, discovered that the brain of women processes verbal language simultaneously in the two sides (hemispheres) of the frontal brain, while men tend to process it in the left side only.

In general, female brains tend to employ both sides of their brain to process information while male brains tend to rely primarily on their dominant or language side to process. As the dominant hemisphere tends to be analytic, problem solving, task oriented, detailed, and verbal this helps to explain male behavior. A female brain can also process in this manner, but the non-dominant hemisphere that can process emotion, meaning without words, empathy, tone, and disposition is also engaged by the female.⁵

Those whose half-right brain is more advanced (like boys) also have some different advantages. Boys have better math skills, and if they want to deal with the problem, they can fix it much earlier than girls can.

As Dana Fenton in her article⁶in mentioned; there exist 8 physical differences between males and females. What the above author has described is summarized by the researcher as followings with exact quotations of the original article:

(1) Total brain size: Males' brains weigh more than women's' brain.

(2) Cell number: Males' brains have more brain tissue and cells.

⁵ Miley, Michelle. "Difference Between the Male & Female Brain." *EHow*. Demand Media, 15 Sept. 2009. Web.

⁶ Fenton, Dona. "Female vs. Male Brain – Is There A Difference?" · *Healthy Living Articles*. N.p., n.d. Web.

(3) Cellular connections: Men have more neurons while women have a more neuropil (the space between cell bodies) which help them render better communication among neurons.

(4) Corpus collosum: Mostly women have larger Corpus collosum which help them transfer information between right and left hemispheres.

(5) Language: Women have larger Broca and Werinckie area that are language brain centers.

(6) Inferior parietal lobule (IPL): It is the center of mathematical abilities which is larger in men than in women.

(7) Orbitofrontal to amygdale ratio (OAR): It is the emotional center and as this area is larger in women it signifies that women can control their emotions better.

(8) Limbic size: The limbic system in women is larger in size than that of men's'. So in response to such difference women can socialize better and are more prone to depression.

As a whole, Dana Fenton states that men's brains are more specialized for very specific tasks meanwhile women's brains are wired to manage a couple of tasks together. Men would prefer a task oriented conversation while women would enjoy a creative conversation. Men would separate information in each field while women would like to link everything.

These subtle but important differences may help educators to differentiate their expectations while organizing educational curriculums.

3. Distinction between girls' and boys' drawing

Most differences can be seen in painting at the age of 5 to 8 years to distinguish them from each other.

More coordination is seen in the paintings of girls. They are more delicate and more deliberate in their choice of color.



Girls tend to copy each other and their paintings are very alike.



Boys' paintings are, full of daring, loud colors where the colors are chosen with no specific criteria.



You can observe the violence in boys' paintings easily.



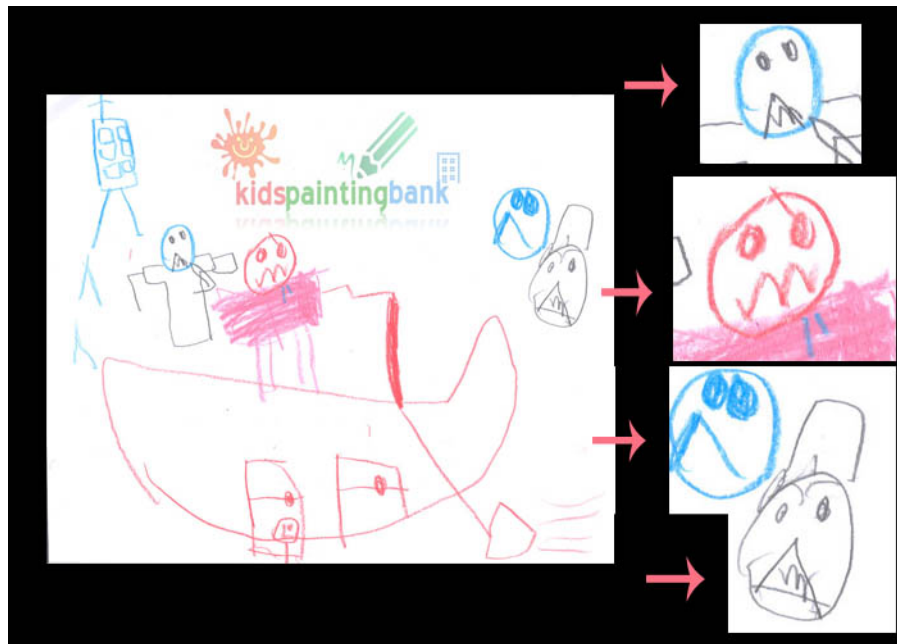
Boys work very seriously and quickly and carefully paint with any color of their choice and they are determined to show their work immediately after completing painting. They draw shapes that vary with the girls; they draw less human images than girls and are more willing to draw machinery including aircraft, automobiles, and trains.



6 year old children show their awareness of gender differences by putting the hair, face and clothing differences, as the paintings show. It is very well depicted in the girls' paintings rather than the boys' paintings.



Boys tend to pay attention less to details as we can see in the following pictures.



Girls have better control of the pencils and they use more colors in their paintings and they tend to keep coloring within the borders.



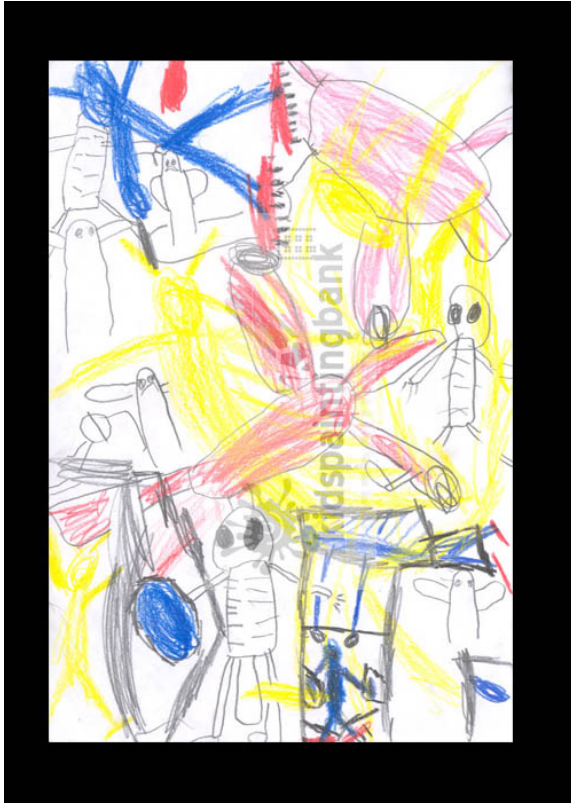
Girls like to draw more than one human in their paintings which shows their tendency toward having a social life and having a family.



Boys cannot limit coloring within the borders.



Boys tend to use the paper vertically.



Boys' paintings are less alike and each has a specific model.



Boys' choice of color is not very specific and many strange creatures can be seen in their paintings.



4. Boys' and Girls' different use of Modeling Clay (play dough)

The instructor gave the same amount as well as the same colors of play dough to the class of boys and girls. The instructor introduced the concept of clown by showing a poster of a fair. Seeing the picture almost all students learned what a clown is and as the instructor gave them all play dough, she asked them to make clowns.

As soon as getting a piece of paper (A4 size) and they all started making their own clowns. Boys' and girls' final artwork was distinctively different.

This 6 months study has focused on a limited number of students from the upper level and high income families in the northern part of Tehran, the capital of Iran.

Final analysis of the artwork was reviewed by an Art professional. She focused mainly on the final artwork as the other factors have been controlled in both girls and boys' sections by the educational instructor.

In regard to the art professional; Fattaneh Bolourieh, Girls mostly used different materials in addition of play dough. They would like to use different materials such as crayons and color pencils to complete their pieces of artwork.



Girls love to enjoy every single spot of their paper bestowed to them as it is a holy gift from their teacher. While working they were all quiet except for some whispering and some murmurings.



Girls mostly depicted their very social natures through demonstrating more than one human being in their artwork which it shows their very social abilities which is inborn and very natural. It shows their kindness and warmth of their social characters. If they had one human they brought different elements such as flowers, birds or butterflies to their artwork.



Girls used almost all colors to bring brightness and happiness to their clowns. Their choices of colors were more logical. It is apparent that girls' brains are more complex and more developed at their age. A "Sun" specifically in children's paintings is the symbol of father. Girls tend to depict two suns when they are supported very well from their dad's side.



All the girls used the page horizontally and posed their clown in the centre of the paper.



Paying attention to details was very significant in girls' depictions. Very elaborate details such as eye lashes or a bow for their clown is vividly illustrated. Clothes buttons were not forgotten as well as shoe laces.



The balance of the head and body was completely presented. Their idea of a human is more completed rather than boys'.



In contrast 90% of the boys' depictions were deficient in the body part. There was no balance between the head and body. As a whole, their concepts of a human were very incomplete. Their emphasis was mainly on the head which is the symbol of "Power".



Anything disordered, ugly, bizarre or incredible is called Grotesque. Disharmony is the most important character of this school. Cave paintings drawn by primitives are mostly grotesque and their origin is in Italy. Such paintings are mostly abnormal and gross. Grotesque is anomalous and distorts the truth and presents it as strange as possible. Another distinctive feature of Grotesque is exaggeration. Grotesque is very straightforward and direct.



Boys placed their grotesque creatures in a very unconventional part of the page.



Their grotesque creature was the only important element on the paper.



The color did not matter to the boys.



All the boys used the paper vertically.



5. Girls' and Boys' Difference in Short Term Memory and Song Memorization Abilities (Concentration Chart)

According to a study ran by Lauren E. Banks, Kennesaw State University, named "Gender differences", women have stronger short term memory than men. Females can recall things better than their male counterparts.

In the girls section where the English department is located, the school authorities set some standards for a defined period of time.

In the beginning as the instructor I was very bound to time limits and standards which were set and I was supposed to cover the special amount of material in a time limit. After some time I recognized the girls were more opt to memorizing not only the songs but also very short phrases or sentences that I used to say regularly in the class. But ' were full of excitement that they were not even paying attention to the rhyme of the songs. This was not only recognized by me as the English teacher but also by the Music Instructor, who teaches in both Girls' and Boys' sections. Girls listen more attentively from the beginning and rehearse what they have learned immediately; either they know the meaning or not. Boys were very eager to know the meaning but as soon as the song was played they started to move around, dance and jump up and down. The excitement of the song was the only thing that boys enjoyed. In the girls section I decided to play one song 5 times and I repeated the words while all girls were listening in a circle and after the 3rd time they would cooperate in singing along the song with the teacher.

In contrary, the same song was played for the boys for 5 times while I sat them in a circle and repeated the song but by the first time all the boys jumped into air and danced and pulled each other's hands to dance around .None of them would listen to the teacher or even cared about what is played repeatedly. It continued until I placed them at their seats and played the song again and again but none of them could even say a single line. The instructor devoted 30 minutes to the same song for 10 days and finally some of the boys could repeat only some versus of the line whilst after the 3rd day in girls section all the girls could repeat the lines fluently.

6. Girls' and Boys' Drama Understanding

I decided to teach the clothes by drawing all the clothes that were supposed to be learned on colored papers. Then I cut them out and stuck them on the wall. Then I role played a conversation in a shop with an imaginary client while I was the shop keeper.

- Customer entered the shop by a clicking noise showing her entrance.
- Shop keeper: Hello, what do you want?
- I want a (T-shirt).
- What color do you want?
- I want a blue T-shirt.
- Here you are.
- How much is it?
- It is 5 dollars.
- Here you are.
- Thank you, bye.

Later on I added some more sentences:

- It is expensive.
- I like it.

- I do not like it.

The girls were all very amazed by what I played in front of them. The class was full of laughter and joy. Then very immediately they understood they can role play. All but one who knew English better than the rest, no one volunteered to act out what just was played in front of them. They were all shy whilst very eager to learn what I was repeating over and over. Little by little anyone who learned most of the dialogue lines jumped to the stage to show off what she had learned for others. What I noticed was that girls desire was to copy everything they had seen. While one was playing all the others were listening pretty attentively.

The same process occurred in the Boys' section whereas the reactions were totally different. While listening to the teacher students were quite speechless and astonished by the play. As soon as the play was finished almost all 19 students jumped and volunteered to act out the play whilst none of them knew even half a line of the dialogue.

They all insisted on touching the paper clothes stuck on the wall. They wanted to buy more than one piece which was mentioned by the teacher. They all loved to participate only to do something. Boys ignored the lines which were harder and liked to buy blue colored objects as they thought the pink and red objects are for girls.

While saying the lines after the teacher, the boys were still very ignorant to the lines and just acting out was a matter to them. While one was playing all the others were pretty ignorant.

7. Girls' and Boys' Writing Ability difference

The Instructor found a significant difference in boys' and girls' writing ability. The students were assigned to write according to Phonics Books Series. The girls and boys vary totally in writing skills.

Girls writing abilities are much stronger. They were more unconfident and they rely on what the model is and what the teacher asked them to do. They were more careful to the size of the pre-written forms by their teachers and their ultimate goal was to copy exactly what they were seeing.

In contrast boys were very ignorant to the size and shape of the new letters. They instead were very confident in holding pencils and starting to write. They were drawing very unfaithfully to the real model written in their notebooks by the teacher.

Girls were very careful to control their hands in order to write between the assigned lines but boys were not so. Writing between the lines was meaningless to them and they mostly needed more time and attention of the teacher in order to learn how to control their hands.

8. Participants

The initial sample participating in this study consisted of 38 pre-school students (both male& female) who had enrolled in pre-school academic year 2011-2012 in girls section named as Shahid Mahdavi Educational Complex⁷ and Boys section named as Day School. In this research, the instructor taught two classes of the same size. The students were chosen from upper class families living in the north area of Tehran city; Capital of Iran. In this research 38 students were selected to participate in this research.

9. Material

⁷ Shahid Mahdavi Educational Complex; <http://www.mahdavischoo.org>

The researcher was supposed to teach 9 units of the "Pockets"⁸ series. The researcher as the instructor has implemented the same amount of instruction in both boys and girls section with the same material of education. The instructor has used different artwork for teaching the students and involving them into learning process. In some sessions the students were supposed to use clay, or play dough or painting to manifest what they have learned. Music and songs were used to improve students' verbal skills in both classes.

10. Method

After determining 38 candidates and recognizing their special features in character and learning I decided to do a research to make sure I am not mistaken. As a fun way to find their differences I ran a practical case study by implementing art into classes. I do believe in Holistic teaching and I chose holistic teaching as my approach.

The goal was to teach the same material in both girls and boys' section. In this study the boys and girls were studied individually through their artwork.

Both girls and boys were very positive in art application but their behavior to the type of art and their capabilities were totally different.

11. Conclusion and Implications

I have 7 years of solid experience in teaching girls and working predominantly with the girls of different age groups. I enjoy every single minute in the classroom and breathe the aura which makes me feel alive. After a year of working with my dear professor he offered me a job to teach a class of 19 boys which was entirely a new experience for me. And frankly speaking I would have never thought that it would be such a challenge for me. In the beginning I was teaching and working like a robot with the same expectations that the department expected me and my colleague but later on I decided that by thinking and expecting these little creatures to behave the same as girls I am insulting 19 humans with their special different characters; entirely dissimilar to that of girls.

I had lot of courage and decided to change my expectations. I knew it may be not very welcomed but I had to analyze the students' needs and curiosities so that I could plan on more and carry out the expectations regarding their type of favor, likes and dislikes.

Through this study it became clear that the theory of implementing the same material to both boys and girls is not a very wise decision. Indeed, studies should be run to explore very needs of students. A thorough study is needed to identify the male and females' needs in order to build the right curriculum for each student individually. A floating curriculum may help the teachers to have an open spectrum for teaching which will definitely help them to satisfy their expectations.

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⁸ Herrera, Mario, and Barbara Hojel. *Pockets*. White Plains, NY: Longman, 2005. Print.

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