

## **A STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF PLASTIC ARTS CLASS UPON THE PLASTIC SKILLS OF PRE-SCHOOLERS**

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### **Abstract**

*Preparing the child for adult life and socio-professional integration involves the complementary achievement of the desiderata of intellectual, socio-moral, technological, psycho-physical education and, in close connection with these, aesthetic education. The major objectives of aesthetic education at the pre-school age imply both the creation of the premises for building aesthetic attitude and the identification and enhancement of the children's creative skills in all the domains of art, from the literary to the musical, plastic, choreographic and theatrical. Through the experimental study, conducted during the 2013-2014 school year, we have tried to highlight a non-formal way of exploiting the plastic skills of 5-6 years old pre-schoolers (the Plastic Arts class) as well as its widely formative impact. Besides the results presented in the study, there was also found a series of collateral effects such as the enhancement of artistic sensitivity, improving relationships with classmates, the pre-school teacher and parents, relevant contributions to the socio-moral and intellectual formation.*

**Key words:** artistic-plastic skills, artistic-plastic education, creativity, non-formal education through the Plastic Arts class

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### **1. Some arguments for the impact of artistic-plastic education upon the development of pre-schoolers' personality**

Artistic-plastic activities play a relevant role in building human personality, art representing both a way of communication at an age when verbal skills are yet limited and of practicing and developing creativity. The long-term effects of artistic-plastic education activities in kindergarden

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occur in the sphere of understanding the meaning of new concepts, building aesthetic sensitivity, expressiveness and creativity. All its components contribute to building skills in exploration, stimulating control of hand movement and eye-movement coordination, exploring visual and tactile sensations, developing chromatic sight, as well as distance perception and the sense of proportions (Voiculescu, E., 2003). All the cognitive processes as well as creativity are stimulated through drawing, painting, modelling. Identifying plastic forms from the surrounding environment, producing tangible works and analysing them implies performing certain exercises of analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization, abstraction.

Through plastic art, pre-schoolers may develop their psycho-motor skills and refinement. Practicing special exercises for building fine motor skills, drawing/ painting/ modelling by various movements of different amplitudes and in different directions, practicing them in diverse contexts leads both to automating and perfecting moves.

Plastic art may also be an efficient tool for knowing the pre-schoolers' personality. The children's works may give therapists clues on the children's problems of expression, learning difficulties, behaviour and adjustment issues, stress or emotional traumas suffered in the past or at present (Voiculescu, E., 2003). At the pre-school age, plastic game-exercises are a spontaneous expression of inner feelings and needs, because children operate with affective relationships and their plastic works mirror their emotions and feelings. Receiving arts and expression through plastic language contributes to training and stimulating, through specific means, the predispositions to colour, line and spatial form present at every child in a unique pattern, meaning that dimension of plastic specificity of the fundamental human capacity.

Every work of art, whether produced or received, triggers intense emotions and feelings of admiration, joy, peace, harmony, which may be short-lived or may influence children on a long term (Voiculescu, E., 2003). Completing plastic works, learning and improving specific technical procedures, achieving increasingly better results with every stage covered (each child will be compared only with his own achievements), lead to developing will, self-control, perseverance, self-discipline, freely-accepted discipline etc.

Plastic education contributes to building creativity, with effects in cultivating personal autonomy that, in its turn, facilitates and enriches social relationships. The release and cultivation of plastic potencies contributes to building a personality sensitive to the exigencies of art. Creative children are not shy, do well in situations that demand divergent thought. Artistic-plastic education aims at building artistic sensitivity that, from the psycho-pedagogical perspective, is an engaging,

instrumented plastic function contributing to the refinement of the entire personality structural system.

## **2. Creativity at pre-schoolers**

At present, great emphasis is placed on creativity, the priority objectives of education in this respect being those of building skills in creativity, critical thought, problem solving, self-control, self-confidence, autonomous decision-making at young people. At the pre-school age the child frequently manifests imagination in all the actions undertaken, that is why the best time for stimulating the creative potential is when the child steps into the kindergarten. The role of the pre-school teacher is major in achieving this desideratum since she/he should display understanding towards the child, be able to show empathy and live, together with the child, the strong feelings experienced by the latter and create situations that may stimulate the child's mind. Building creativity implies the use of strategies aimed at stimulating the child to be spontaneous, original, display logical thinking based on analogies, find solutions through active learning. Games represent the strategy characteristic of the pre-school level. Didactic games and role plays engage children emotionally and cognitively, building their ability to be empathetic, competitive and collaborative in their relationships with the others.

Playing and drawing are ways of training creation, amplifying freedom of expression. More than other activities, the artistic-plastic one constitutes the widest frame and means for activating and stimulating the creative potential. Colours, plastic shapes, points, lines are the children's means of expression as of a very small age. It is known the fact that pre-schoolers have a strong desire to express feelings, ideas through drawing and colour, living intensely the revelation of their success. The children's attraction for artistic-plastic activities is the product of their desire to express themselves, compose stories in images, render a reality that sometimes crosses into the realm of the fabulous, which is, for them, their world. They create carefully, meticulously, using the techniques the pre-school teacher teaches them, sometimes innovating these techniques. Encouraging the creative spirit by the pre-school teacher should be in the foreground of the aesthetic education of children. The children's creations should be exploited to the maximum (even by decorating the space of the kindergarten, as this fact encourages them and raises self-esteem).

Among the formal and non-formal activities with a strong impact in achieving the finalities of artistic-plastic education along the coordinate of stimulating creativity, we shall mention several of the most relevant ones: *1. contests* on various themes – these give children the chance to prove practically what they learnt at school or at home, draw different aspects, dismantle toys. The

contests with prizes are useful in building the children's creativity. The tasks exploited on such occasions may comprise actions of performance, recitation, but also the highlighting of skills and abilities formed during practical activities; 2. *the school celebration* - by means of its content, students gather a richness of ideas, impressions, experience authentically, spontaneously and sincerely the enacted situations. Stimulating/ educating attention and practicing memory constitute relevant objectives that may be achieved by means of the celebration. The intervention, at the timely moment, with the role that each child has to play, sustained by the emotional-motivational support contributes to raising the stability of attention and, in time, increases endurance to effort. Artistic reading, dancing, singing become strong stimulations of aesthetic sensitivity. The aesthetic value is also enhanced by the organizational frame: the room of festivities, a landscaped corner decorated for celebration. The child's contribution to preparing and performing an artistic show should not be regarded like a purpose in itself but through the lens of offering something to the audience: entertainment, spiritual uplifting, aesthetic pleasure – all these enriching life, making it more beautiful and full of meaning. It is an extraordinary success, a wonderful experience when it succeeds in stirring feelings in the spectators' soul. The success of the show echoes in the audience, and the spectators' prompt reaction stimulates the children to do all their best. Another quite pleasant activity is 3. *the trip*. It supports the child's intellectual and physical development, civic and patriotic education. The trip reassures the child, giving him the possibility to acquire relevant social experience, but also to enrich his cultural scientific horizon. By means of trips, pre-schoolers supplement and consolidate school training by means of acquiring new knowledge. It represents the finality of a long activity of psychological training of children, aimed at making them look at trips not only from the perspective of escaping from the work atmosphere, but also as an act of enhancing one's cultural level. 4. *Watching movies collectively* is a very popular activity among children, not only because of the fascination exerted by the movie upon them, but also because of the desire to be part of the group of friends and classmates, with whom they can exchange impressions. Whereas at kindergarten and the younger grades the children are more attracted to cartoons, as they grow, they begin watching other shows as well (historical movies, documentaries of the life of plants and animals etc.). A particular role in stimulating creativity is played by 5. *the school library*, that puts the child in contact with books otherwise unavailable for buying. Reading helps develop and enrich one's vocabulary with beautiful words and expressions that the child may use anywhere.

The current reform of pre-school education gives pre-school teachers more freedom, initiative and creativity in the educational act, the creative activities being allotted more time in the curriculum. Cultivating the child's creativity with its specific forms of expression, at the pre-school age, may

constitute a premise for developing and asserting creativity at the level of coming ages, including at adult age.

### **3. Artistic-plastic skills at pre-schoolers**

*Creativity* is the general disposition of personality towards the original, the novel, being defined, according to the bipolar model elaborated by Paul Popescu – Neveanu, as “optimum interaction, that generates novelty, between skills and attitudes” (1978, p. 157). *Artistic creativity* is a species of general creativity manifested in creating products that incorporate aesthetic value. Its forms are: literary, musical creativity, plastic arts creativity (graphics, painting, sculpture) and scenic or acting creativity (Popescu, 2007, p. 83-84). The manifestation of general or specific creativity can be understood only in close connection with skills that become operational systems.

*The skill* is a “trait or system of traits of the subject that mediate success/ performance in an activity” and that is manifested like an alloy of the hereditary and the acquired (ibidem, p. 59-60). There are highlighted general skills (intelligence) and special skills, among which the *artistic-plastic skills* (drawing, painting, sculpture).

The *building of skills* is regarded as comprising three stages. The first stage is one of exploration, observation and testing the child’s inclinations by parents and educators, at ages when not all the inborn elements have been triggered. Then there follows the stage of potentiality, at which the native equipment is supplemented with acquired, learned skills, then the stage of skill at which skills reach their maximum of efficiency and psychological finesse. It is difficult to distinguish between what we owe to heredity and what to learning. Nevertheless, it is known that artistic skills largely depend on predispositions, therefore on the native, hereditary factor, but even here performance is obtained through assiduous training – from easy to difficult and harder, through effort. At the pre-school age there occurs an “authentic need for creative expression” (M. Garboveanu, 1981), which determines a wide range of manifestations: music, plastic arts, choreography, theatre, technique. The kindergarten activities help build elementary skills in the domain of modelling, drawing, performing a role or poem.

As a result of neuro-functional development and due to the diversification of activities, the sensorial component of the different skills develop significantly. At the pre-schooler, there are manifested particularly the artistic, musical, execution (instrument, voice) skills, bandmaster and even creation skills, choreographic and artistic gymnastics skills, plastic skills (drawing and modelling), dramatic, theatrical, cinema and technical skills (remarkable in setting the plays,

building games). Within the artistic skills, habits and inclinations are improved, interests are enhanced, artistic taste and capabilities are developed (U. Schiopu, 1976).

#### **4. The Plastic Arts class, an opportunity for exploiting the pre-schoolers' artistic-plastic skills**

The Plastic Arts class Crearisimo conducted its activity throughout the 2013-2014 school year, between October 1<sup>st</sup> – May 1<sup>st</sup> 2014, at the “Lizuca” Kindergarten from Bacău, the big group A, 32 pre-schoolers. The activity was organized as a one session per week, with a number of 16 children from the big group, selected following the application of initial evaluation tests. The 16 children who were not selected constituted the control sample within the conducted experiment.

The Crearisimo Plastic Arts class included, among its activities, a diverse range of activities, such as: visits to the arts museum, exhibitions, contests; activities for familiarizing with new working techniques; activities for practicing painting, modelling, drawing skills. During the activities from the class there were used various educational means, both classic ones, such as boards, images, reproductions of famous works of art, and modern, such as computer, DVD, video projector etc.

The evaluation was applied by means of exhibitions with the works made by the pre-schoolers selected for the class, viewed by the parents' children.

*The general aim of the class: building the pre-schoolers' artistic-plastic skills.*

*Objectives of the Plastic Arts Class Crearisimo*

*Frame objectives*

- Enhancing skills in plastic works, drawing, painting, modelling;
- Rendering, through elements characteristic of plastic arts, objects, beings, shapes from the surrounding reality;
- Cultivating will and motivation towards work, aesthetic sense;
- Stimulating the creative potential and expressiveness in creation;
- Familiarization with new working techniques for painting, drawing, modelling;

*Reference objectives*

- create plastic creations such as drawing, paintings, modelling works;
- practice the known working techniques, obtaining plastic effects through spontaneous or elaborated forms;

- operate with simple elements characteristic of plastic art, rendering shapes and colours as close to the surrounding reality as possible;
- know the working tools and materials, using them appropriately;
- compose the plastic space in an original way, respecting the working proportions and techniques;
- critically analyse their own creations and those of their classmates, expressing their aesthetic experiences;
- observe the transformations of the materials while handling them;
- analyse simple works of art, adjusted to the age level, such as portraits, landscapes;

*Examples of learning activities*

- Activities of familiarization with the working tools and materials;
- Activities exercises for using brushes and colours;
- Activities exercises for putting colour on paper;
- Activities exercises with splashes of colour;
- Activities for recognizing primary colours (red, yellow, blue), secondary colours (orange, green, violet), non-colours (white, black);
- Activities exercises for identifying and obtaining secondary colours;
- Activities exercises for obtaining warm and cold colours;
- Activities exercises for obtaining dark and light shades of grey by mixing white and black;
- Activities exercises for obtaining darker and lighter tones of colour by mixing them with white/ black;
- Activities for making drawings, paintings by using simple elements of plastic language, such as the line, the splash of colour, etc.
- Activities for modelling various modelling materials, using various modelling techniques;
- Activities for becoming familiar with famous works of art, but appropriate for the pre-school age;
- Activities of visiting the Arts Museum, participating with works in exhibitions and contests for pre-school education, organizing exhibitions with the works made during the class.

## **5. The research methodology**

The experimental study was aimed at the *identification of the effects that the non-formal organization of aesthetic education through the class of Plastic Arts has upon pre-schoolers*, in particular upon children with plastic skills, the extent to which these may be objectified and stimulated at the age of 5-6 years.

*General hypothesis:* Engaging pre-schoolers of 5-6 years of age in the activities of the class of Plastic Arts Crearisimo may lead to stimulating their artistic skills (improving creativity, power of concentration/ focus, building motor and finesse skills, building vocabulary, stimulating communication through the expression of feeling).

*The research objectives are:*

- the initial evaluation of plastic skills (visual memory, imagination, creation, focus, finesse) with a view to selecting the experimental group and the control group;
- designing the curriculum for the class of Plastic Arts Crearisimo;
- transposing into practice the activities of the Plastic Arts class Crearisimo;
- final evaluation of plastic skills;
- formulating conclusions, suggestions, proposals for optimizing the non-formal processes of artistic-plastic education.

The investigation covered the following stages:

*a. The stage of initial evaluation (observational)* was conducted between September 23<sup>rd</sup> – October 1<sup>st</sup> 2013, at the “Lizuca” Kindergarten Bacău and materialized in the application of a set of 6 tests for the initial evaluation of the pre-schoolers’ level of plastic skills:

- the test on plastic skills – drawing ;
- the creativity test;
- the test on the level of visual memory development;
- the test on plastic skills - painting;
- the test on plastic skills - modelling;
- the test on the level of visual attention development.



The tests were applied individually, frontally or in groups of 5-6 children, in relation to the aimed objectives and at different moments of the day. We used the pretext of the game in applying the tests and recording the data, in order to obtain results as objective as possible. For recording the data, we used, in some cases, audio-video devices, in other cases we filled in the observation sheets of the test. All the children from the group were initially subjected to a series of tests and, following the results, the children who obtained the most numerous marks of *Well* and *Very well* were included in the class of Plastic Arts.

*b. The formative (ameliorative) stage* was conducted between October 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 – May 1<sup>st</sup> 2014 at the “Lizuca” Kindergarten Bacău, on a sample of 16 children. The experiment materialized in designing, organizing and conducting an experimental model of activities regarding the particular objectives of aesthetic education at pre-schoolers, especially through the non-formal organization of artistic education within the class of artistic-plastic education Crearisimo. The selected children participated, over a school year, to all the activities from the class of painting. Thus, the children studied plastic works of art appropriate to their age, executed various exercises for stimulating and cultivating imagination, creativity, attention, psycho-motor skills, cultivated their team spirit, practiced drawing, painting and modelling by using varied techniques and different materials.

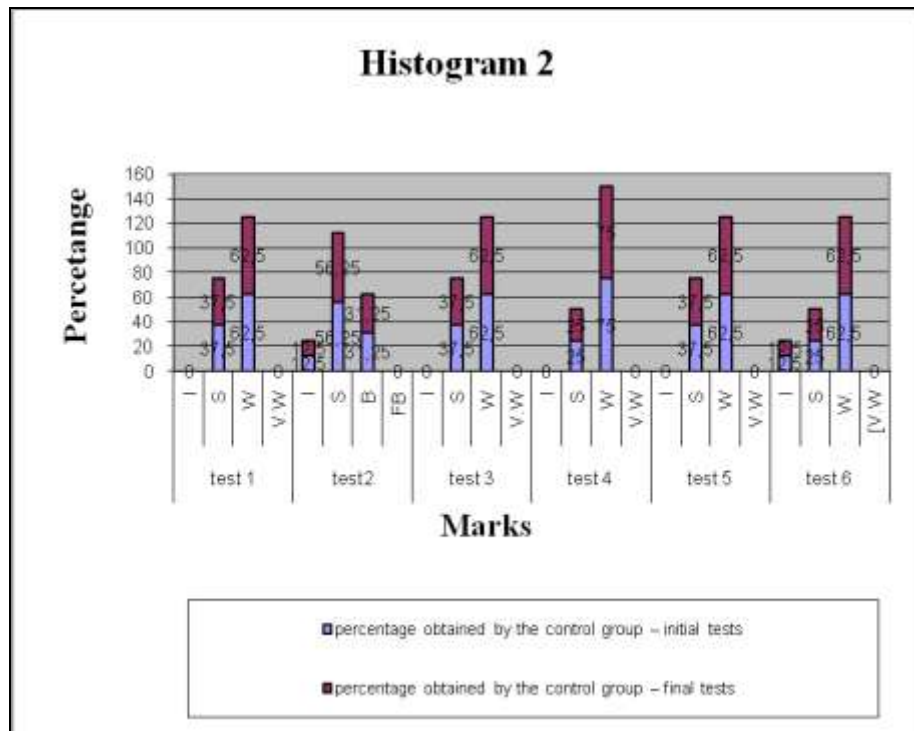
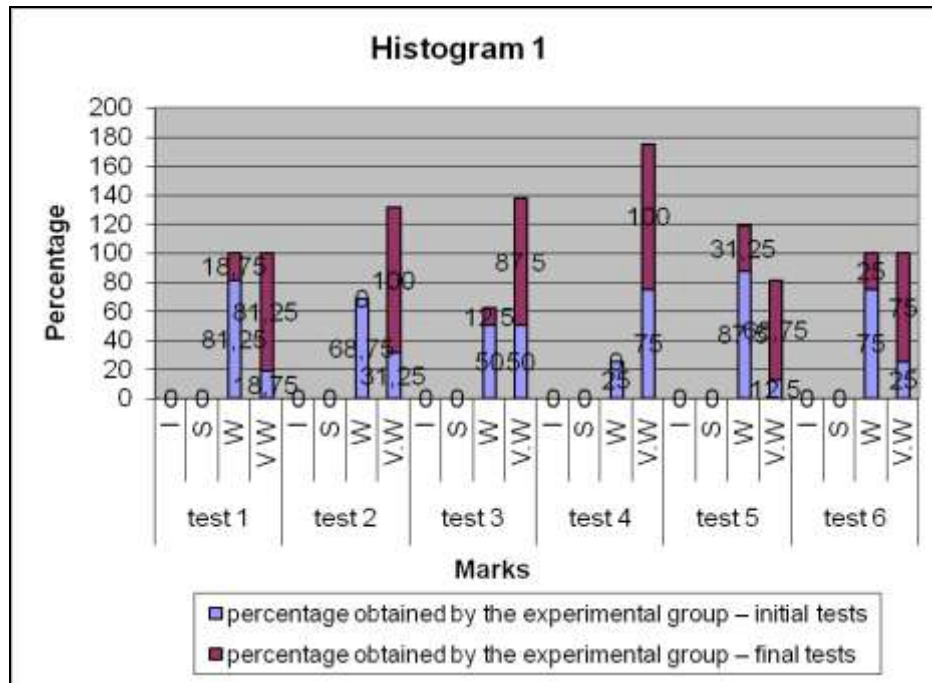
During these activities we observed the children’s behaviour, analysed the products of their work, in order to keep track of their evolution over the experiment, record all the data needed for highlighting the pre-schoolers’ progress and level of artistic-plastic skills.

*c. The final evaluation stage* was conducted between May 1<sup>st</sup> – May 15<sup>th</sup> 2014, at “Lizuca” Kindergarten Bacău. It consisted in retesting the experimental group (the children from the Plastic Arts class) as well as those from the control group (the children who did not participate in the actions of the Plastic Arts class) and recording the progresses by using the same evaluation samples as in the initial evaluation phase.

## **6. Highlighting the progresses achieved by the pre-schoolers**

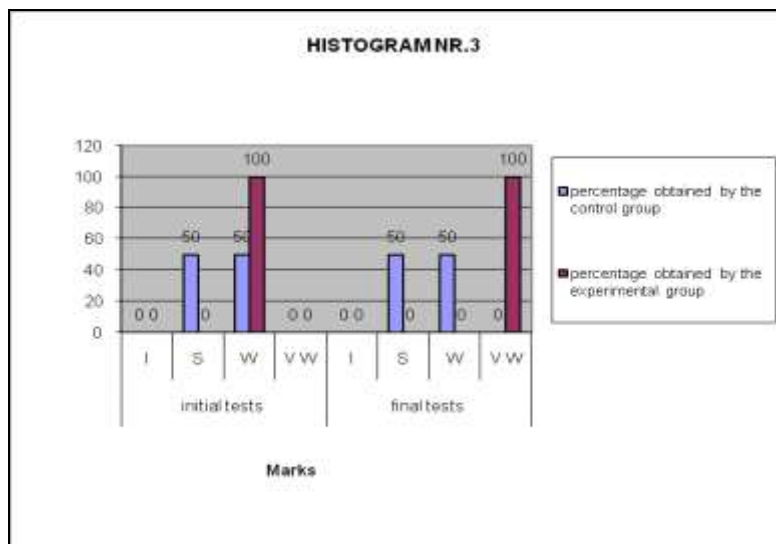
We shall present, in Histogram 1, the progresses recorded by the children from the experimental group (group A) following their participation in the class’s activities, comparing the results obtained from them to each of the 6 tests, both in the initial phase (1) of the testing, as well as in the final phase (2). Along with this presentation, we shall reveal, in Histogram 2, the progress recorded by the children from the control group (group B), those who did not participate in the

class's activities. The synthetic table no. 1 indicates the final data obtained by comparing the progress recorded by the two groups (A and B).



**Table 1.** The results obtained by pre-schoolers

Marks	Drawing test	Creativity test		Visual memory test		Painting test		Modelling test		Visual attention test			
		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2		
Group A	Prevailing mark	W	V.W.	W	V.W.	W	V.W.	W	V.W.	W	V.W.	W	V.W.
Group B	Prevailing mark	S	S	S	S	W	W	W	W	W	W	S	S



Histogram 3 reveals the significant evolution of the children from the experimental group. Comparing their progresses with those of the children from the control group, we may find that the results of the children from the control group recorded no progress, maintaining the same marks both in the final and initial tests. On the contrary, all the children who participated in the Plastic Arts class succeeded in evolving from the mark of WELL to VERY WELL.

The obtained data confirm the research hypothesis and support the beneficial influence of the activities conducted within the Plastic Arts class in the direction of stimulating the children's artistic skills.

## **5. Conclusions and implications for future research**

Our experiment was aimed at revealing the impact of a non-formal activity, the class of artistic-plastic education Crearisimo, upon the stimulation of pre-schoolers' artistic skills. The data obtained at the end of the undertaken experiment confirm the research hypothesis, highlighting the richness of a child's creative force, the spontaneity, individuality and force of a child's creative flair.

On this basis, we conclude that the systematic stimulation of creativity at the age of the first childhood (particularly in a non-formal way!) may be of major relevance both in maintaining an active creative potential and boosting its further evolution, precisely because in cultivating and stimulating infantile creativity there lie the premises for asserting creativity in adulthood.

In approaching this topic, we have given particular attention to artistic-plastic activities because drawing contributes significantly to the pre-schooler's acquisition of skills such as enhancing movement effort and amplitude, improving freedom of hand movement on paper. In building the pre-schooler's moral profile, this type of activity becomes a source of pedagogical influence in educating love for work, building community spirit and volitional qualities. Activities of drawing, painting, modelling are appropriate in educating patience and perseverance at pre-schoolers.

We have tried to emphasize the idea that at the basis of building the pre-schooler's creative potential there lies the building of the child's plastic vision, that is formed and built through all the well-organized drawing activities. In order to build the child's plastic vision, in activities of drawing after nature, thematic and decorative drawing, the children were taught to draw a phenomenon or object in its wholeness, observe and detach the elements of the studied phenomenon or object and identify the essential. Children also built skills in analysing shape, colour, hues and tones.

We believe that, through this process, we have succeeded in identifying and stimulating the children's artistic skills, enriching and cultivating them, raising and maintaining the interest of children and their families in the creative process by means of the artistic-plastic activities. At the same time, we have promoted a differentiated activity with a view to supporting children with a higher potential, in order to encourage them to go beyond the ordinary, bolster the creative spirit that emerges during such activities, leaving an open field for creative imagination as of this age. This is because the creative activity is regarded as representing the highest level of human behaviour, able to engage and focalize all the other levels of biological and logical conduct as

well as all the personality structures in the direction of creating products characterized by originality, novelty, value and social usefulness.

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