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Methodological Issues of Children's Drawings Analysis: Thematic Analysis of the Student's Perceptions of Museum

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Contribution

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In recent years there has been a shift from a de-contextualized, psychological focus on children's drawings towards an increased interest in children's meaning making through drawing, and a focus on the socio-cultural contexts of drawing activity (Anning, 2003). However, children's drawings cannot be easily understood out of context. Researchers are using techniques that allow children to express their perspectives. In this article, the issues for the child and researcher of using the draw and write

technique as a research methodology are explored. Furthermore, in the basis of this research was the Kuhn's (2003) model of data collection and analysis which combined thematic drawing and focused, episodic interview. The Kuhn's model of analysis of children's drawings was originally used in kinesiology for the evaluation of children's attitudes about the game and sports activities in the school area and has been implemented in research conducted in Germany. The Kuhn's method is adjusted using the draw and write technique as a research methodology. The authors used draw and write methodology framework depicted in several research studies (Gabhainn, & Kelleher, 2002; Horstman, Aldiss, Richardson, & Gibson, 2008; Reeve, & Bell, 2009).

The methodological issues raised by the adjustment of Kuhn's model are in the focus of this research proposal. Reflections on the technique are drawn from our experience of using it in study with students aged 8 to 10 years. This was part of a larger mixed methods study undertaken to investigate the relationship between the way younger school-age students perceive the museum and degree of didactic structuring of museum contents. The young students were asked to draw a picture showing their museum visit to Museum of Ancient Glass in Zadar (Croatia) and to write a shot text about it. Free written expression of students and their drawings illustrate children's abilities to convey their opinions when there is an enabling climate created and allow school and museum professionals richer and more complex insight into the nature of pupils' perceptions of the museum as an educational environment and its contents. The adjusted Kuhn's method in this research, using the draw and write technique, has enabled us to notice orientation of students in the experimental and control groups on social interaction in peer groups and communications with adults, level of perceptual focus of pupils included in both groups in the direction of museum exhibits, the number and precise spatial positioning of exhibits displayed in the museum, as well as identifying contents of imagination and their semantic dimension in the context of children's perceptions.

Method

The technique of content analysis of children's drawings in the educational research on student's perceptions of museums was used on the larger mixed method study with 431 research participants from primary schools in three towns which differ by population size and institutional offerings (Zadar – large town/municipality centre; Benkovac – smaller town and Privlaka – smaller place) in Croatia, undertaken to investigate the relationship between the way younger school-age students perceive the museum and degree of didactic structuring of museum contents. Since the pedagogical experiment was used in the study, students of the experimental group were involved in the pre-visiting didactically structured activities at school while students from the control group had no preparatory activities prior to the museum visit. Using Likert scales in the survey enabled us to quantitative or numerical description of the research problem. Open questions in the survey enabled us to collect free written expression of students and their drawings. Semi-structured interviews with teachers were also conducted. A technique of analyzing children's drawings enabled us to identify: museum artifacts which the pupils of the experimental group met during their pre-visiting activities, some abstract values expressed on children's drawings, social interactions within peer communication, as well as social interactions between children and adult persons in museum environment.

Expected Outcomes

The Kuhn's model of analysis of children's drawings was originally used in kinesiology for the evaluation of children's attitudes about the game and sports activities in the school area. Its adjustment on thematic analysis of the pupil's perceptions of museum, in context of educational research directed towards efficient modeling of the school curriculum, enabled us to

enrich the image of pupil's perceptions of the museum. Analysis of children's drawings has provided insight into the structure of student's perceptions, its orientation and content. At the same time it provided us with the information about the process of perceiving museum exhibits and museum environment by the students who were involved in the pre-visiting curricular activities and those who were not involved in them, as well as the information on the pupil's perception of social interaction and abstract values that can be seen in the drawings. Such data allow school and museum professionals richer and more complex insight into the nature of pupil's perceptions of the museum as an educational environment and its contents, which is important for the simultaneous modeling of the school curriculum and museum activities.

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