CONCEPT MAPS IN CULTURAL EDUCATION. A CASE STUDY ON DANCE THEATER

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Abstract. The paper presents an innovative experience on recording the conceptual representations of primary school students using concept maps, in order to explore their construction about the concepts “human body” and “dance” before they take part in a cultural project about dance theater. The outcomes of the process gave the opportunity to design and implement a more appropriate educational approach.

1 Introduction

Concept maps are based on the theory of constructivism. In a constructivist frame a person develops cognitive models that serve future thinking or acting. The process of knowledge construction depends on our conceptual representations. Effective learning means structuring new knowledge models using, expanding, revising or erasing the pre – existed representations. Thus, the study of representations is a crucial matter in order to design appropriate educational environments.

Concept maps are able to present a student’s knowledge structure before teaching. The methodological approach proposed in this paper was applied in real class conditions before the implementation of a cultural project about dance theater, in which participated 22 children of Greek primary schools from 9 to 11 years old.

2 Theoretical Framework

Contemporary psychological approaches of learning and didactics create a new, common base for the design and the materialization of various subjects. Nowadays the aspect that learning procedure is not possible to be materialized if it doesn’t take under consideration the conceptual representations of students and the process of knowledge construction is becoming more and more acceptable. Thus, learning is not a knowledge collecting process, is not being acquired or transferred. On the contrary, it is possible only with the conceptual contribution of the person that learns and it is taking place when the exploration of the student reveals inconsistencies between current representations and experience. In that case, student tends to change his/her conceptual model not necessarily in order to replace it by the objectively right but by the viable (Viennot, 1979). Therefore, starting point of learning is what a person knows or ignores before teaching. Often traditional teaching slightly effects the conceptual representations of a student not only after a course but even after adult age (Ravanis, 2003), because of the indifference of conceptual representation during teaching. It is clear that an educational approach based on constructivism has to study the conceptual representations of students.

Concept maps are a cognitive tool variously used in learning process. Were first presented by Novak and Gowin (Novak & Gowin, 1984, Novak, 1990, Novak, 1998) and were based on the theories of Ausubel (Ausubel, 1968). They are a popular way to represent knowledge (Novak, 1990, Jonassen et al., 1994, Fisher, 1990) and to reveal the representations of the person that takes part in learning process (Fisher, 1990, Star et al., 1990). A concept map is consisted by concepts and links. Links represent the relations among concepts and can be labelled or not orientated or not. Linked concepts form propositions.

3 Methodology and Outcomes

Given that the subject of the dance theater isn’t included in the official curriculum of Greek primary schools we had no experience on a proper didactical approach. In order to design a curriculum that could really serve the needs of our students we used concept maps. Our goal was to monitor and study their conceptual representations about dance. Thus, students constructed concept maps with two given concepts “human body” and “dance” in eleven pairs, before teaching. The concept maps were qualitatively evaluated in order to reveal their conceptual representations. The outcomes highlighted significant misconceptions. The majority of the participants, ten out of eleven pairs, on one hand doesn’t consider dance as an art and on the other hand combines modern dance to sports than to dance. Only one pair of students defines ballet as an art. The same pair doesn’t consider modern dance as an art. Also ten pairs don’t combine dance with expression of feelings, even if they combine human body with the expression of feelings.
Concluding, it was obvious that before the implementation of the dance theater project should be designed special activities which would help children to construct new knowledge about the modern and classic dance as forms of art which provide people means of expression, through human body.

![Figure 1](image.png)

**Figure 1.** Translated concept map from Greek, constructed from one of the 11 pairs of the case study.

4 Conclusions-Future Perspectives

We believe that the case study presented above succeeds in highlighting the use of concept maps as a sensitive method of monitoring conceptual representations and designing a curriculum. Also the implementation phase of the project which followed, highlighted that the designed activities were very suitable for children’s educational needs and created a new common base of understanding for the class, in order to participate in the innovative project of dance theater in school.

A future perspective should be the monitoring of a wider sample of children, in order to study in a more quantitative way the conceptual representations of children of primary schools in Greece about dance and body. Additionally, a comparative analysis of concept maps constructed by primary students of other countries, would be able to reveal significant information about the possible influence of cultural background on students’ representations.

References


