

## RECOMPOSITION AND PHOTOMONTAGE AS A STIMULUS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVITY IN TEACHING VISUAL ARTS

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### Abstract

Recomposition and photomontage are an integral part of contemporary art and should be implemented in the contemporary teaching of Visual Arts. This paper aimed to determine whether the use of recomposition and photomontage in Visual Arts classes stimulates student creativity. The research was carried out from 2019 to 2022 among students at the Department of Teacher Education and the Department of Preschool Education at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split, who applied the methods of recomposition and photomontage in Visual Arts classes. The research was qualitative, with the use of observation method and descriptive method, and a total of 133 students participated in the research. The resulting artworks were divided into groups according to the degree of creativity that the students expressed in those works. After the research, it was concluded that the use of recomposition and photomontage stimulated student creativity. However, a significantly greater degree of freedom could have been reached in terms of combining, using imagination and creating new ideas.

**Keywords:** *Creativity, photomontage, recomposition, student, teaching Visual Arts.*

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### 1. Introduction

The social changes in the 21st century require changes in all areas of life, especially in the field of education while the demands for changing the paradigms of acquiring knowledge require a quick reaction from educational institutions (Stoll, Fink, 2000). Redesigning and rethinking the existing educational concepts are complex and necessary processes because the strengths of tradition and inertia in theory and practice with their insensitivity to progressive turmoil partly suppress the path to the affirmation of more efficient, functional and rational educational work.

The term creativity comes from the Latin word *creare*, which means power of creation, invention and production, but it can also be translated as the art of creation and participation in something useful or valuable (Simel S., Gazibara S., 2013). In the vocabulary of psychology, creativity is described as an activity that gives new and original products, in the material or spiritual sense (Petz et al., 1992). Creativity is not an unambiguous phenomenon that can be precisely determined, so today we distinguish a multitude of different definitions and understandings of this concept. Majl points out that creativity implies connecting previously unrelated things and being creative means shaping the unshaped (Majl, 1968). According to Furlan, creativity is original, unique and adaptable in terms of using knowledge, as opposed to imitation (Furlan, 1950). Stevanović sees creativity as a way of finding new and original solutions and as a kind of intellectual inventiveness (Stevanović, 1986).

In pedagogical terms, there are two definitions of creativity: it is a synonym for creation, that is, creating new and original solutions, and also a trait or set of traits to be expressed in the act of creation (Kardum, V., 2011).

As it can be seen, there are many understandings of the concepts of creativity and creation, however, what they have in common is creating something new and original, giving original ideas, taking other positions, a new way of approaching problems, a successful step into the unknown, openness to experience, perceiving new relationships between phenomena (Kardum V., 2011). Stimulating student creativity requires innovation, changing and improving existing ideas and thinking outside the box (Simel S., Gazibara S., 2013). Creative work always has the power to release creative energy and encourage class participation (Stevanović, 1986).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Paul E. Torrance showed in many studies that creativity in the classroom could be encouraged in the following ways: by taking into account unusual questions; imaginative and unusual ideas; by respecting and appreciating ideas; by ensuring the time in which ideas are evaluated; by combining evaluation with causes and consequences (as qtd. in Bognar L., 2012).

In Visual Arts activities, there are different artistic methods that students use to express themselves creatively. One of these methods is recomposition. "Recomposing represents the process of decomposing a previously created composition in flat or space-plastic design and newly composing the decomposed elements in a completely new way, into a new form, a new visual content" (Jakubin M., 2000: 136). These activities are useful for students because they help to develop divergent thinking, reasoning, creativity and creation.

## 2. Design

Aiming to explore the impact on the development of student creativity, research was conducted from 2019 to 2022 among the students at the *Department of Teacher Education* and the *Department of Preschool Education* at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Split. During eight academic hours of Visual Arts, students applied recomposition and photomontage while painting. Recomposition was achieved in two ways in student works. In one group, students used two previously created old artworks to recompose them in new artworks during four academic hours. In another group, students achieved recomposition using the photomontage technique (during four academic hours). A total of 133 students participated in the research. Participants were happy to respond and participate in the research.

## 3. Objectives

The research *subject* was the Visual Arts activities of students in the Department of Preschool Education and the Department of Teacher Education.

The *aim* of this study was to examine whether recomposing as an artistic method would encourage creativity in student artistic expression.

Based on the research aim, we have defined the following research *tasks*:

1. to examine whether there are differences in artistic creativity between student artworks created using recomposition and those created using photomontage
2. to examine whether this kind of artistic expression will stimulate stereotypical and schematic artistic expression in students.

After identifying the research *subject*, *aim* and *tasks*, we formulated the research *hypothesis*. The research starts from the general hypothesis that there are differences in the degree of creativity between student artworks created using recomposition and those created using photomontage.

To properly analyze the main research hypothesis, two sub-hypotheses were formulated:

H1 It is assumed that students will show a high degree of creativity in works created using photomontage.

H2 It is assumed that recomposition and photomontage will not stimulate stereotypical and schematic artistic expression in students.

## 4. Methods

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies were applied in the research. The qualitative methodology was based on the observation and analysis of student artworks. The works were evaluated by the authors of the research (art pedagogues) using the following criteria for assessing the creativity of student artworks: a) an unusual representation – an original idea, b) unity in the artistic composition, c) good technical presentation, d) successfully combined artistic elements in the new artwork.

According to the above criteria, three groups of student artworks were identified and coded with numbers: 0 - no elements of creativity, 1 - with elements of creativity, and 2 - creative artwork. The analysis of artworks was carried out according to the above criteria. For the purposes of the analysis, the percentages were calculated, which included the quantitative methodology in the research analysis.

## 5. Discussion

The artistic method of recomposition enables students to organize their artwork on new bases, i.e. it encourages students to think creatively about new ways of connecting and structuring the decomposed artistic and compositional elements. In this process, based on their knowledge and experience, students apply creative activity to come to new artistic insights and artistic results in a different way. Thus,

students have enough time to develop creative ideas and their artistic creation occurs spontaneously as a result of a divergent activity.

Creativity and creation establish the modern concept of education, and the development of artistic creativity is a specific feature of artistic creation and an indispensable need during artistic activities if aiming to spark creative artistic ideas that will arise as a result of the affirmation of divergent/creative thinking in students. Creative thinking should be developed because it improves intellectual functioning and problem-solving in students, not only in artistic situations but also in external activities, thus resulting in success in different areas of life. The atmosphere of creativity and creation during artistic activities does not arise from the curriculum or the artistic content of the work, but from the approach to the artistic problem that enables the openness to diversity, to rare, unexpected, original procedures that do not support conformity in thinking, but point to the risk of coming to a different solution, exploring the unexplored; the elastic, flexible and paradoxical concepts of work and direct empirical experiences in the process of artistic expression. During their work, students were given complete freedom in their artistic creation.

In the first research task, we wanted to examine whether there are differences in artistic creativity between student artworks created using recomposition and those created using photomontage. We started from the assumption that students would show a high degree of creativity in the works created using photomontage. The first group of artworks was created using the method of recomposition during four academic hours with 72 participants. During the artistic activities, the students decomposed shapes, colors, sizes, surfaces and completely recomposed their two old artworks. Creating new visual compositions enabled a dynamic restructuring of the existing visual content. By observing student artworks and the course of their work, we noticed they showed interest and motivation in creating new artworks, using mainly the collage of old artworks. Students themselves have chosen which old artworks to recompose and create a new composition from them. Playing with ideas and materials, students tried to create a new abstract composition. Almost all students completed their artwork within the agreed time frame. An analysis of the artworks showed that the artworks were of different artistic qualities. Examples of individual artworks by category are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Exemplary coded student artworks – recomposition (using old artworks).


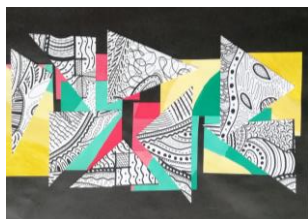

| 0<br>No elements of creativity  | 1<br>With elements of creativity  | 2<br>Creative artwork  |
|---|---|--|
|  |  |  |




Table 2. Student artistic creativity expressed in recomposing the old artworks.

| 0  |     | 1  |     | 2 |    | Σ  |      |
|----|-----|----|-----|---|----|----|------|
| f  | %   | f  | %   | f | %  | f  | %    |
| 47 | 65% | 21 | 29% | 4 | 6% | 72 | 100% |

Table 2 shows student creativity according to the above assessment criteria in using the methods described (coded with 0, 1 and 2). From the above results, we can conclude that almost 65% of student artworks showed no elements of creativity. Such elements were observed in 29% of artworks, while only 6% were identified as creative works. Artworks with elements of creativity and creative artworks (code 1 and code 2) belong to 35% of students who managed to make a step forward in creative artistic expression, which is a high percentage, knowing that divergent thinking is the most difficult to encourage and achieve.

The second group of artworks was created using the method of recomposition-photomontage. Exemplary artworks according to the explained criteria are shown in Table 3. A total of 61 students participated in this activity, and artworks were created for four academic hours. In this part of the research, the participants were also happy to cooperate and create their compositions with interest. They used photographs from different magazines and collage paper. In some artworks, a sense of humor was observed.

Table 3. Exemplary coded student artworks – photomontage.

| 0<br>No elements of creativity  | 1<br>With elements of creativity  | 2<br>Creative artwork   |
|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |

In Table 4, we can notice that students were more creative when using photomontage and the recomposition performed by photomontage gave them better possibilities in creating new artworks. According to the results, a total of 49% of artworks showed no elements of creativity. Such elements were observed in 36% of artworks, and 15% were identified as creative artworks.

Table 4. Student artistic creativity expressed in recomposition using photomontage.

| 0  |     | 1  |     | 2 |     | Σ  |      |
|----|-----|----|-----|---|-----|----|------|
| f  | %   | f  | %   | f | %   | f  | %    |
| 30 | 49% | 22 | 36% | 9 | 15% | 61 | 100% |

In this part of the research, we confirmed the first hypothesis that students would show more creativity in artworks created using photomontage, thus confirming the general hypothesis.

In the second research task, we assumed that recomposition and recomposition-photomontage would not encourage schematic and stereotyped expression in students. Schemes and stereotypes in artistic expression presuppose a lack of involvement, an impersonal and unimaginative way of artistic expression that does not require thinking and that prevents the creator from trying to perceive and express something new. Schemes and stereotypes in artistic expression have an imitative-reproductive character, therefore they are considered undesirable and prevent artistic creativity. They do not allow innovation and improvisation, which are essential in achieving creativity. Since creativity is one of the important human characteristics, implying freedom from role models, it is important for personal growth and development, but also for the successful development of many social activities. Table 5 shows exemplary stereotypical and schematic student artworks.

Table 5. Exemplary stereotypical and schematic student artworks.



| Recomposition   | Photomontage   |
|---|--|
|  |  |

Table 6. Stereotypes and schemes in student artistic expression.

| 0  |     | 1  |     | Σ  |     |
|----|-----|----|-----|----|-----|
| f  | %   | f  | %   | f  | %   |
| 20 | 66% | 10 | 34% | 30 | 100 |

In table 6, artworks including no stereotypical and schematic elements are coded with 0 while stereotypical and schematic student artworks are coded with 1. Table 6 shows that out of 30 works in which there are no elements of creativity, 66% of them do not include stereotypical and schematic elements, and 34% include such elements. In the second hypothesis, we assumed that recomposition and photomontage would not encourage stereotypical and schematic artistic expression in students. The results show that most students (66%) did not apply stereotypical and schematic solutions in their artistic expression, which confirmed our second hypothesis. The participants achieved a creative shift away from the usual way of thinking.

## 6. Conclusions

Using the artistic method of recomposition, students were offered greater freedom in artistic activities in terms of imagination and combination in creating their artworks. The offered artistic material (old artworks, magazine collage) was a good incentive to spark a number of ideas and unusual imaginative artistic combinations. However, we expected that the student artworks created using the methods of recomposition and recomposition-photomontage would be more creative, since these methods allow manipulating ideas and creating unusual artistic representations. A certain number of artworks with elements of creativity and creative artworks indicate that student creativity was initiated, but we believe that these methods could have better stimulated students to express themselves creatively. Schemes and stereotypes were observed in 34% of student artworks, which indicates that a large number of students managed to think creatively and create new interesting artistic compositions. Creativity should be encouraged in the classroom whenever possible because it plays a significant role in educating creative, innovative and capable students.

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