

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES IN TEACHING HISTORY OF FINE ART AS PART OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

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Abstract

The paper discusses the problems of using information technologies and applying innovative methods in educating seniors within the University of the Third Age. It pays attention to possibilities of using ICT in teaching fine art history not only in the form of lectures, but also through active use of available exercises at the Department of Fine Arts and Education of the Faculty of Education at Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra.

Key words: information technologies, innovative methods, fine art history, educating seniors, university of the third age.

INFORMAČNÉ TECHNOLOGIE VO VYUČOVANÍ DEJÍN VÝTVARNÉHO UMENIA V RÁMCI UNIVERZITY TRETIHO VEKU

Resumé

Príspevok je venovaný problematike využitia informačných technológií a uplatneniu inovatívnych metód v edukácii seniorov v rámci univerzity tretieho veku. Zaoberá sa možnosťmi uplatnenia IKT v rámci vyučovania dejín výtvarného umenia nielen v podobe prednášok, ale aj aktívnym využitím dostupných možností formou cvičení v rámci vzdelávania študentov Univerzity tretieho veku na Katedre výtvarnej tvorby a výchovy Pedagogickej fakulty Univerzity Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre.

Kľúčová slova: informačné technológie, inovatívne metódy, dejiny výtvarného umenia, edukácia seniorov, univerzita tretieho veku.

Introduction

The study of fine arts history is provided by several universities in Slovakia. Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, which provides a wide scale of study programmes within life-long education, also offers a study programme Fine Arts and Its History since the beginnings of the University of the Third Age (U3A) at the CPU. The uniqueness of the programme lies in the fact that it offers complex information about fine art history from the oldest times to the present, as well as enables participants to examine their creativity in basic fine art disciplines such as drawing, painting, moulding, graphics, a textile production. Students learn about the history of fine arts through lectures followed by discussions on a given topic. The U3A students are exceptionally active percipients and they frequently join dialogues about arts. They include also learners who graduated at other schools in related study programmes (history, architecture, building engineering, etc.), or students who fulfil their dream to study art history and fine arts. Not least important is the fact that they are usually students who have travelled a lot or are still travelling, and wish to learn more about monuments they have seen. They make a demanding audience since they attend university courses “voluntarily”, motivated only by their desire to know more. They are full of expectations and expect the lecturer’s maximum performance.

It is not necessary to specifically discuss the need to apply new information technologies and the use of the internet for the improvement of educational process at higher education institutions. With regard to the U3A, it is even more important to present the most recent information and new scientific discoveries, as well as valuable and interesting images of architectonic monuments and illustration photos of artworks, made accessible through arts databases. In addition to free databases, the teachers have access, through library services, also to the licensed databases of artworks from the collections of most known museums and galleries. Many free websites of world and domestic galleries and museums, offering surveys of their collections with a good quality graphics and design and being equipped with a detailed description and characteristics of the presented artefacts, or offering virtual tours of their expositions, serve as a source of information for educational needs (both for teachers and students), or simply for a meaningful spending of free time connected with education. The aim of this paper is, however, not to explain this form of using information and communication technologies (ICT). Even though it is a very important field for educational process, from the aspect of its possibilities of the innovation of methods and forms of teaching history of visual arts within the U3A, as far as students are concerned it is a passive form. My aim was to find such suitable application of ICT in the educational environment of the 3AU which would ensure creative participation of students in the use of innovative methods and forms.

1 Interactive Online Visual Activities

Of the free interactive online visual activities, offered by the National Gallery of Art in Washington, I decided to include into the U3A education the following activities: Faces & Places, Still Life, Dutch Dollhouse, Collage machine I and Collage machine II. Here follow their brief characteristics and a possible application in the context of teaching the history of art.

1.1 Faces & Places

The programme consists of two parts – presentations named Faces and Places (available on: <http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone/faces.htm> and <http://www.nga.gov/kids/zone/places.htm>). Both of them were inspired by American naïve art and were composed of the elements of more than 100 paintings located in the collections of National Gallery of Art in Washington. Due to a great variability of elements they allow the creation of various portraits and landscapes. In case of the portrait (named Create and Portrait), in addition to the selection of people, creation of the nature of face (eyes, nose, mouth), adjustment of hair and head complements, animation, also the complements of the interior can be adjusted (curtains, window, furniture, animals, adjustment of the background). As for the country (Create a Landscape), from the offer of tools one may select various kinds of background, types of skies, trees, buildings, people, dancers (maximum two dancers may be included into a selected motive), means of transportation, animals. The elements may be transferred, enlarged, contracted and moved along the area. Due to these functions and a panoramic nature of the background this programme is suitable for interpreting the issues of perspective, compositional and proportional relationships. Since the application is focused on the American countryside and folklore, it is supplemented by the auditory presentation with a possibility of choice from three samples of folklore music, or melodies. The programme's interesting supplement is the animation of figures with the functions of walking, jumping, running, rhythmical movement imitating dancing, falling, and standing up. Both presentations

are very suitable didactic aids and make up an innovative form of the acquisition of basic concepts and expressive means related to portrait and landscape painting. The created work may be copied to a sketchbook, adjusted and saved, or printed through the screenshot functionality (Ctrl+PrtScr).

1.2 Still Life

The programme Still Life is available on the website www.nga.gov/kid/zone/stilllife.htm. It allows creating still life places through a wide offer of various kinds of fruits, background, draperies and additional objects, taken over from the works of old masters found in the collections of the National Gallery of Art in Washington. The background may be varied through the selection of colours, increasing or decreasing light shade, setting the direction of the casted shade; the used elements may be increased, decreased or transferred. The application is supplemented by auditory effects. The programme is a very suitable didactic aid to supplement lectures connected with the development of painting in the period from the Baroque to the 19th century, when classic still life as a genre was under great development. Graphic development and visual quality of elements applicable during the creation of still life places allows the creation of aesthetically very impressive places and the interpretation of basic concepts from the history of art. Also in this programme the created work may be copied to a sketchbook, adjusted and saved, or printed through the screenshot functionality (Ctrl+PrtScr).

1.3 Dutch Dollhouse

The programme Dutch Dollhouse, available on the website www.nga.gov/kids/zone/dollhouse.htm, evokes an atmosphere of old Dutch houses from the period of the Baroque, mostly due to the elements which were inspired by the paintings of Dutch artists, such as, for example, Johannes Vermeer, Pieter de Hooch, Jan Steen, and other significant Baroque painters reflecting in their production the scenes from common life of the Dutch. The programme offers two alternatives of composition, the interior (In Dutch) and the exterior (Out Dutch). The functions allow a gradual selection of individual rooms of the house: kitchen, room, artist's workroom, courtyard, then allows composing elements from the offer: figures, furniture and animals. Within the composition the elements may be moved, and the presentation is even complemented by auditory effects (children's laughter, sounds of broken dishes, bubbling of boiling water). As for visual effects, it is possible to change colour and décor of some parts of the house – wall, floor, tablecloth, plate, and frame of a painting. One can change the illumination of a composition, substitute sfumato for chiaroscuro, change the intensity of light penetrating to the interior through the window. This programme, like the above-mentioned, may “serve” during the creative activity of students as illustrative material explaining compositional principles, significance of light effects and contrasts in painting, etc., and, importantly, allow students the creation of compositions based on their own imagination. Also in this programme the created work may be copied to a sketchbook, adjusted and saved, or printed through the screenshot functionality (Ctrl+PrtScr).

1.4 Collage Machine I, Collage Machine II

Programmes Collage Machine I, Collage Machine II, available on the website www.nga.gov/kids/zone/collagemachine.htm, are intended for children of all age categories. Their aim is rather to produce fun. Despite these two facts, they may be included into the U3A education, since the applications may be an adequate didactic aid to address the 20th

century's avant-garde movements, especially cubism and Dadaism. Although the principles and substance of collage as a visual technique may be tried only partially through these programmes, many application functions allow creating absurd, irrational and playful photomontages, thus contributing to the interpretation of theoretical principles of, for example, Dadaism whose basic expressive means included irony, chance, absurd and playful associations, imagination or negation. The application's functions offer a gradual selection of individual elements: various objects, forms, to be composed on an area whose base colour may be changed. The selected elements may be enlarged and contracted, turned, transferred and moved along an area, based on the need to change the intensity of saturation of all elements' colours. Unlike the classic, traditional collage, or photomontage, which is, naturally, also recommended to students, the Collage Machine I and II programme's great advantage includes unlimited possibilities of variations and subsequent corrections. Also in this programme the created work may be copied to a sketchbook, adjusted and saved, or printed through the screenshot functionality (Ctrl+PrtScr).

Conclusion

To conclude, one may say that in the current age of a great development of information and communication technologies, not even the educational environment of the University of the Third Age can avoid the modernisation of teaching and the application of innovative methods and forms, even in such field as the history of visual art and visual creation. Based on pedagogical experience, and drawing on the finding that also the U3A's students welcome education through electronic media and digital technologies, it is advisable to introduce into educational activities the adequately selected and suitable timed innovative methods related to the work with computer. I do not claim, however, that any sophisticated virtual form could substitute for an artistic effect, impression and experience from a primary and direct contact with original architectonic, painting or sculptural works. The original of an architectonic monument, painting or a sculpture, perceived in real space, communicates visual and haptic qualities of visual expression at the same time, and in addition, allows the observance of proportional relations between the artwork and the environment in which it is situated, allows the perceiver to enter into real spatial relationships, into the unique world of art.

Literature

1. www.nga.gov/kids/zone/zone.htm (Dated 19th April 2012).

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