

## AMERICAN ART EDUCATION IN THE LIGHT OF GLOCALIST APPROACH

Review of the volume *Current Streams in American Art Education* by Elena Polyudova, Cambridge, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018

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**Abstract:** *Current Streams in American Art Education*, written by the American researcher of Russian origin Elena Polyudova, is a prevalent work on the topic. The author analysed the realities of the American curriculum design in the light of current concepts, using the key for deciphering current social challenges. With a formative background in the pedagogy of liberal arts in Moscow, Elena Polyudova manages to offer a valuable book, enriched by the light of comparative analysis and of the glocalist approach.

**Keywords:** art education; aesthetic experience; glocalist approach.

### 1. ELENA POLYUDOVA: SCIENTIFIC PROFILE

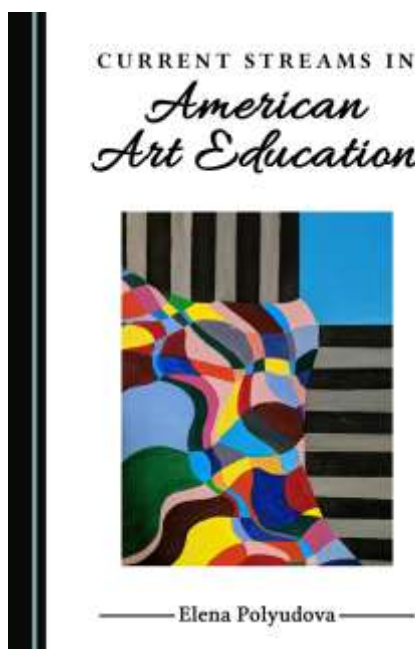


FIG.1 Elena Polyudova, *Current Streams in American Art Education*. Front cover.

Elena Polyudova is a complex scientific researcher, having graduate studies in the field of arts in Moscow. She glides along research topics ranging from of philology to education sciences. She is an independent scholar, who manages to reasonably cover all her areas of interest in research because of her extraordinary capacity to synthesize.

She innovates therefore by bringing into her research theories, models, instrumentalities and methods belonging to related knowledge areas. Currently a Distant Associate Scholar at the Institute of Art Education and Culturology at the Russian Academy of Education, Russian and English language instructor at Berlitz Language Center in Palo Alto, California and in other several institutions in Silicon Valley, California, member of editorial committees in Italy and Russia, Elena Polyudova has been an independent researcher and distant research fellow at the Russian Institute for Art Education Studies in Moscow, the Head of the Research Group at the Moscow State Palace of Child and Youth Creativity in Moscow and the founder and head of the School for Teachers' Education in the same city. Her education, also complex, encompasses her initial training as a philologist and aesthetician through bachelor and master studies (with an interest in researching the Russian futurism in Vladimir Mayakovsky's literature and in Elena Guro's paintings), then as specialist in teaching Russian as a foreign language – all of these at the Lomonosow Moscow State University –, and as a specialist in art education through doctoral studies at the Russian Academy of Education, Institute for Art Education Studies, Moscow, Russia. She founded and led several research centres in art education. She published and edited important articles and books in Art Education, such as: *Current Issues and Strategies in ES Studies* (2014), *Once upon a Time in the Contemporary World: Modern Vision of Old Stories* (2016) and *Soviet War Songs in the Context of Russian Culture* (2016).

*Current Streams in American Art Education* is Elena Polyudova's latest work, the result of an external analysis on the American educational system, focusing on Art Education and on currents related to this educational dimension. The book also includes the comparative analysis of the Russian and American educational systems regarding Art Education. The investigative approach is organized on chronological coordinates. The author structured the book in a deductive and historiographical projection on four chapters, dealing with the forefront aspects in the development of artistic education in the United States of America: I. *Art Education in the USA*; II. *XX century: Classic Era. The Concept of the Aesthetic Experience in American Art Education*; III. *XXI century: Wind of Changes* and IV. *Current Streams in Modern American Art Education*. Therefore, Elena Polyudova proposes a prevalent and interesting work, analyzing Art Education in the USA from a historical and comparative perspective, organizing the contents around a transcultural and transdisciplinary concept: the aesthetic experience.

## **2. ART EDUCATION IN THE USA**

Elena Polyudova's work first proposes a framework for defining concepts tightly related to the two cultural spaces: Russian and American. Art Education in the United States means „the basic form to describe the process of teaching visual art” (Polydova, 2018:6), and in Russia it has a broader range of meanings, referring to visual arts, music, dramaturgy, art craft and so on. The equivalent term for the Russian meaning is “aesthetic education”. Interestingly, in Romanian pedagogy the phrase “plastic arts education” stands for “art education” in the USA, and “aesthetic education” (see, for example, the *School Programme for Plastic Education*, 2017) stands for the Russian meaning. Differently, in the Republic of Moldova, the term “art education” is applied to the same content as in the Russian school, although it is subordinated to the concept of “aesthetic education”: “Art education (...) is done by getting to know/understand beauty, through different arts: literature, music, drawing, painting, dramaturgy, choreography, etc.” (Morari, 2016:63).

For an adequate placement in art education analysis in the USA, Elena Polyudova proposes a succinct presentation of the American education system – with comparative references to European and Russian education – highlighting the additional role of arts education in the American curriculum:

Traditionally, the most important subjects are math and science- related ones, but the humanities and art-related subjects are considered as additional, even supplemental, to the core disciplines (Polyudova, 2018:12).

However, the child's encounter with art education occurs early – even if American pre-school education is not considered as important as in Romania, for example („many preschool institutions provide only day care services”, Polyudova, 2018:15) – and supposes in elementary and middle education the allocation of 1.5 to 4.5 hours per week, depending on the specialization and the tradition of aesthetic education proposed by V. Lowenfeld. Therefore, for a thorough approach, the author designs both the framework for defining and applying art education, and the pedagogical fundamentals of the subject. Art education starts formally since the introduction of Technical Drawing in the curriculum, as a proposal of Boston Committee for the Congress in 1870, and informally with J. Dewey's pedagogical school. The American psycho-pedagogy fundamentals are the pragmatist pedagogy of W. James and G.S. Hall, the methodology of G. Brunner, the polycultural education of W. Bronfenbrenner, J. Verch and J. Reed, the behaviorism of B. Skinner and the humanistic psychology of A. Maslow and C. Rodgers, all based on the pedagogical projection of J. Dewey. The parallel between the most important representative of the Chicago School, John Dewey, and the most important representative of the Russian school of pedagogy, Lev Vygotsky, is very interesting both in terms of setting the foundations of education sciences and the organization of education systems in their countries, and regarding the convergence of their approaches:

After J. Dewey experience as a core concept of education because an essential part of any educational movement in American art education, turning scholastic and theoretical pedagogy into live experimental science that teaches through actions and experiments. These ideas simultaneously resonate in the works of another great scholar, Russian psychologist L. Vygotsky, who defines as the leading process, playing a crucial role in a child's development (Polyudova, 2018:8).

As she analyzes education in the United States, Elena Polyudova describes with refinement the deepening of the issues concerning: artistic perception, creative expression, historical and cultural context, aesthetic valuing, connections, relationships and applications, on different levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced placement, based on Visual and Performing Arts Standards, commenting and exemplifying each particular projection.

### **3. STREAMS IN AMERICAN ART EDUCATION IN A LONGITUDINAL PERSPECTIVE**

In later chapters, dealing with aspects of Art Education in the USA, Elena Polyudova describes models of artistic experience based, in accordance to Dewey's perspective, on “aesthetics and aesthetic aspects of philosophy, psychology and didactics”, despite the fact that these concepts remain largely vague or inadequate.

Starting from this non-rigid projective reality, the author proposes a way of understanding both facets of aesthetic education, namely artistic competence and individual perception.

The models of aesthetic experience that exemplify the implementation of formative requirements in American Art Education are deepened and explained at the level of broad public understanding: Abigail Housen, with her Visual Thinking Strategies;

Michael Parsons, with the Stages of aesthetic development; Stanley E. Horner, who proposed „eight stages of reaching a balanced and complex response to an art object”; Colette Dufresne-Tasse, with her model of museum education and with the “three types of discourse with a work of art”; Boyd White, the author of an aesthetigram, highlighting the social and cultural human values expressed in art. But, Art Education dramatically changes as the term “aesthetic experience” is replaced by other concepts that become more and more relevant in relation to art objects, and for expressing the expansion of personal experience with real and virtual art objects in the visual era. The exemplification concerning the of preoccupation for the possibility to adapt the new requirements of artistic education based on the studies of Professor P. Duncum from the University of Illinois is enlightening for a proper understanding of the context. Again, just as important is the radiography of the specialized literature, including her own recent articles, reflecting current trends in American Art Education, even if in the visual era the role of Art Education did not change; it still remains marginal, additional, somewhat secondary.

Art Education has strong cultural roots. The American society is characterized by phrases such as “national polyphony” and “multicultural environment” (Polyudova, 2018:63). Consequently, the multicultural dimension of the American Art Education becomes one of the fundamental dimensions, that radically alter the perspective on curriculum development in the area. Elena Polyudova argues in her previous articles in favor of the use of “personal culture” as a concept meant for the American youth due to her education in a different cultural space and to the major influence of philosophers and specialists in pedagogy such as V.P. Zinchenko, V.S. Bibler, A.G. Asmolov, D.A. Leontyev and V.M. Rosin:

Generally speaking, the term „personal culture” is close to all-over-the-culture competency that may be improved through education, communication, and other personal and social activities. This term could be expanded via development of different directions of a person’s inner world. Accepting and implementing cultural codes and patterns, a persona carries them in his personal space. (Polyudova, 2018:69).

This perspective is very valuable. In a multicultural environment, Elena Polyudova uses her experience of understanding and applying the concept of “personal culture” to Russians, where it is translatable through cultural competence (meaning “education + erudition”), respectively for Americans, where it means social competence (social “skills + responsibilities”). Putting together the different angles under which the the American educational system is approached –from the perspective of Art Education – encompassing different challenges in a multicultural manner – means using the term “dialogue”, its maieutic virtues, but rather in M. Bakhtin’s personalized understanding of the term, i.e. a unitary structure of language (with all associate meanings formed in the Russian educational system, by reference to S. Rubinstein, L. Vygotsky and V. Bibler). Dialogue as an educational principle is the fundamental proposition of Elena Polyudova’s work.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Elena Polyudova’s book *Current Streams in American Art Education* is a very important work, that radiographs Art Education in the USA from an external and comparative perspective, by means of a longitudinal analysis that also touches the aspects of the current perspective on this subject: the heightened speed of visual perception, the high level of creativity and weak skills in evaluation. In addition, placing American Art Education under the sign of multiculturalism – „In recent Art Education studies (National Art Education Association 2012-2017) multiculturalism is intertwined with the concept of socialization” (Polyudova, 2018:93) – Elena Polyudova manages to propose a prevalent work.

The book should be read neither as a study having a pronounced national dimension (even if its title refers to a national curriculum), nor as a globalist approach (even if the Americans are the promoters of the current). The book should be read as a moderate and inclusive glocalist approach, where glocalisation should be understood as a phenomenon specific to school life.

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