Abstract

This study constructs a theoretical framework and argument for the development-advancing functions that art education can have during childhood as based on the theories of child development, imagination and art central to the Cultural-Historical Constructivist theory of development of the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Building on Vygotsky’s theory of development and his definition of imagination this theoretical study argues that during childhood imagination is in a particularly sensitive and important stage of development. At this stage its growth and ability to influence the development of other functions hinges on the ways children’s activities use and develop their imagination. Visual art education can be understood as one such activity: developing the imagination, and through it, developing the whole psychological system of the child. However, not everything called ‘art education’ for children has the characteristics needed to best develop the imagination. This study will also outline some guiding principles for art curriculum and teaching methods that can, following from Vygotsky’s theory, make art education an activity that fosters development.

Keywords: Vygotsky; art education; imagination; creativity; child development