

## **APPROACHING LANDSCAPES IN FINE ARTS, WITH YOUNG SCHOOLCHILDREN, THROUGH FLIPPED CLASSROOM STRATEGY. APPLICATIONS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF eTWINNING PROJECTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In the present study, we conducted analyses of artwork that represents elements from the natural and man-made environment and established their compliance with the real world. We also present a comparative approach of young schoolchildren's artwork, having the landscape and other environment elements as a main theme. The research took place throughout the 2015-2016 school year, on a representative sample of 20 pupils from Romania, participants in the eTwinning programme. We used the flipped classroom learning strategy in order to introduce the pupils to the Impressionist plastic art form of expression. The teaching experiment included five stages: initial testing, studying a tutorial at home, practicing painting techniques in the classroom, getting feedback from the teachers, and final assessment. We analysed the pupils' artwork from the point of view of framing in the plastic theme. We have taken into account the sub-criteria: to observe the norms of the artistic movement, the chosen technique, the type of chosen tool/material, and the manner of brush strokes.*

**Keywords:** *Impressionism, primary education, eTwinning, Visual Arts, Earth Sciences tutorial*

## INTRODUCTION

According to the definition provided in DEX (2009), the **landscape** is a "part of nature which forms an artistic assembly and it is covered at a glance", "a specific aspect of a certain territory, resulting from the combination of natural and man-made factors". The *landscape* is defined, in the same source, as a "painting or graphic genre particularly having the rendering of landscapes as a main focus", "a painting, photography rendering a landscape".

In this paper, we aim to analyse artwork performed by young schoolchildren (aged 7-9 yrs.) in order to establish:

1) the efficiency of flipped classroom learning strategy and of the Impressionist manner of making a landscape or of other environment elements by using lines and dots;

2) the extent to which the landscape made by young schoolchildren by use of plastic means reflects reality.

To achieve the research objectives, we applied the flipped classroom learning strategy. The analysis of an artwork is carried out in accordance with Piaget's cognitive development stages (1965), and of Luquet's (1927), Widlocher's (1965), Lowenfeld's (1947), Royer's (1995), Edwards's (1979) drawing development stages.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Flipped classroom learning strategy was the topic of many articles in the literature of the past years (Szparagowski, 2014; Strayer, 2007; Tucker, 2012). The flipped classroom-learning strategy is a strategy by which the environment where the traditional contact with the informational content – the classroom – is reversed into an actual information-practising environment – the home. The flipped classroom learning strategy may be accompanied by other methods such as the project or the tutorial (Flipped Learning Network, 2012). Thus, the learners benefit at home from teacher-made tutorials, as a primary means of organizing the learning experiences, whereas, in the classroom, they are practising and benefit from the teacher's feedback as a way of guiding the exercise, of assessing, and checking students' performances (Flipped Learning Network, 2012).

In the literature, flipped classroom (and flipped learning as well) is stated to be applicable to all school subjects: in Chemistry and Maths in middle and secondary education (Tucker, 2012; Strayer, 2007); in Astronomy in colleges and universities (Szparagowski, 2014); in logical-

mathematic subjects in middle education (STEM) (Talley and Scherer, 2013); in engineering and technology at an academic level (Toto and Nguyen, 2009) (Davies *et al.*, 2013); in Visual Arts in primary education (Crişan and Albulescu, 2017); in Maths, Geography and History (Papadakis *et al.*, 2017).

Since we have not met yet studies to apply the flipped classroom strategy in Visual Arts in primary education, we consider that this research is of great importance in establishing the efficiency of this strategy within the framewok of artistic-plastic activities at this level and in this subject, in relation to environmental awareness and representation.

## **METHOD**

*Participants.* The present study was carried out on a sample of 20-second graders, aged 7-9, from "Avram Iancu" Gymnasium in Turda (Romania), participants in the eTwinning ARTmania project, conducted throughout the 2015-2016 school year. The research involved Mrs. Gabriela Crişan, the primary school teacher in charge with these pupils in the classroom and the middle school Arts teacher, who contributed to the tutorial with providing and offering feedback to the pupils.

*The content sample.* In this research, we selected *the dot and the line* as content elements from the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade *Visual Arts and Practical Abilities* curriculum.

*Procedure.* We went through several stages in this teaching experiment.

*Stage I.* As an initial assessment, two topics of their choice: *Natural landscape and Still nature/fruits and vegetables* were proposed to the, who were given the opportunity to choose their own artistic manner of expression, working technique, and tools.

*Stage II.* Pupils watched at home a tutorial on Impressionism, tutorial designed by Mrs. Gabriela Crişan, with the assistance of Mr. Alin Bîlcu, the middle school Arts teacher. In this approximately 10-minutes tutorial, the pupils were explained and demonstrated the way a piece of artwork in the Impressionist style is made. The tutorial was then posted on the eTwinning space, i.e. the Twinspace platform. It was translated into English in order to be accessible to our partners from Poland and Turkey. Each pupil had access to a computer and internet connection to visualize the tutorial.

*Stage III* took several weeks. Face-to-face activities on *Impressionism* lasted for a total of approximately 8-9 hours. The pupils were involved in several painting activities of 1-2 hours each, in which they painted Impressionist artwork using the dot and the line. They were given

the task to paint: a) A Landscape; b) A Tree c) Still Nature; d) Flowers; e) a topic at choice.

*Stage IV.* As their *final assignment*, the pupils made their own choice of the theme, working tools, keeping the Impressionist style as compulsory.

*Data collection and processing.* In order to analyse the changes in the pupils' performances as a result of the use of flipped classroom learning strategy, we designed and applied a criterion-based evaluation grid that we used during the initial and final assessment stages of the pupils' artworks. The research tool contained three criteria, divided into subcriteria, with performance descriptors for Very well, Good, Sufficient, and Insufficient grades.

In this paper, we took into consideration the *Accordance to the theme* criterion. Its subsequent subcriteria were: to observe the norms of the artistic movement, the chosen technique, the type of chosen tool/material, and the manner of brush strokes. The *Accordance to the artistic movement* sub-criterion took into account the following peculiarities of the Impressionist movement: the light-shadow alternance, the use of "coloured commas", the use of cool colours for rendering distance in the background, of warm ones for closeness in the foreground, the use of bright colours, the delimitation of the ground plane from the airspace, avoiding grey shades and earth tones.

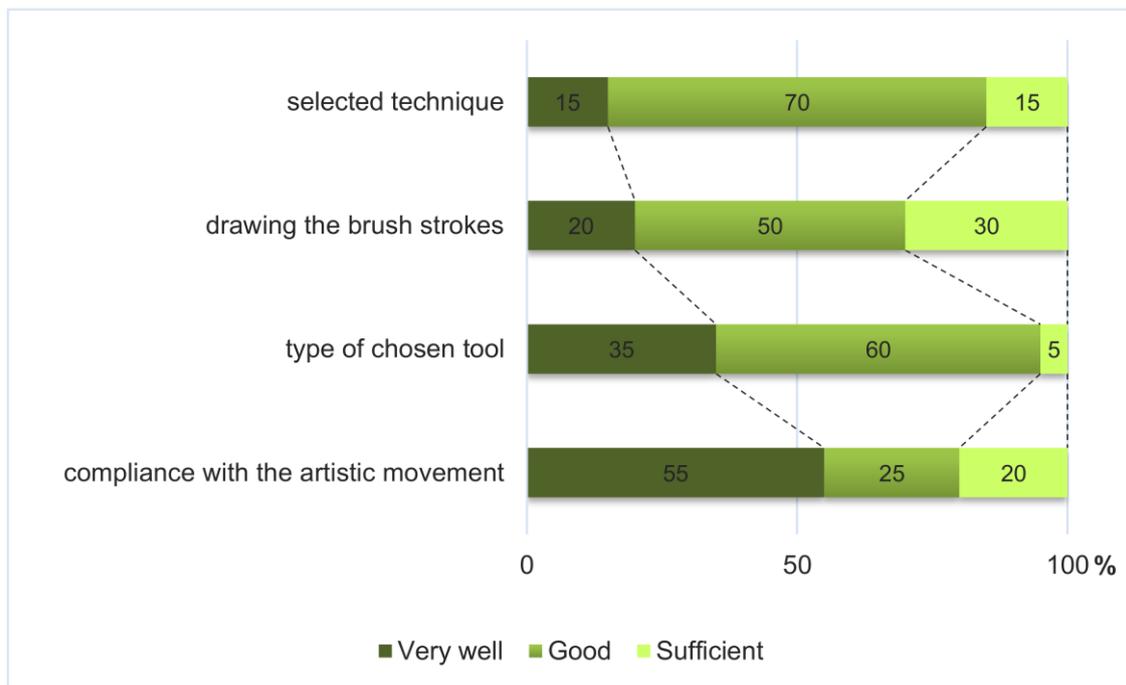
In the *Selected technique* sub-criterion, we analysed the presence of some of the techniques set out in the curriculum of choice: shading, modulated line, repetition, brushing, collaging, printing, tamponing, and sprinkling. In the *Type of chosen tool/material* subcriterion, we assessed the selection of one of the tools mentioned in the curriculum of choice: watercolours, gouaches, tempera paints, sponge, brush (of different thicknesses), finger, stamp, paper/canvas, crayon/coloured pencils, wax pencils, etc. In the *Manner of Shade lining* sub-criterion, we evaluated the presence of main shade types in the artworks: thick, gentle, strong, fine, short (dots), and horizontal/vertical/oblique.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **a) Analysis of students' artworks in view of the *Accordance to the theme* criterion**

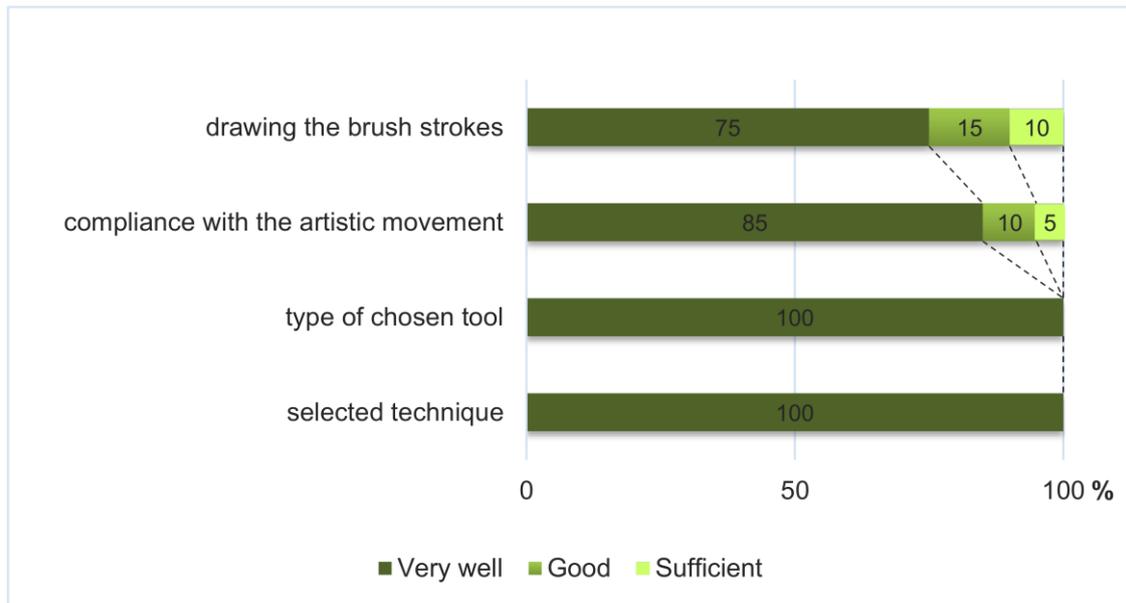
In the initial stage, the majority of pupils painted landscapes and still nature. 11 pupils (55%) fell into the proposed theme, while five pupils (20%) had difficulties in including sufficient key elements. Regarding the selection of painting techniques, only 3 pupils (15%) correctly used and combined the techniques in order to complete the artwork and three pupils (15%) used one technique only, sometimes in a confused manner.

The largest part of the sample pupils – 14 pupils (70%) – correctly used one painting technique, without combining it with others. The tools were correctly selected and used by seven pupils (35%), while only one pupil (5%) applied them with some errors. Most of them (12 pupils, 60%) generally made correct use of the tools. 5 pupils (20%) demonstrated deep knowledge of the theme by using strong strokes, whereas 6 pupils (30%) just made an attempt towards it. In their works, the represented topic is not clear. No pupil got Insufficient during assessment (Fig. 1).



**Fig.1.** Pupils' results at the initial assessment stage for the *Accordance to the theme* criterion

After the application of the flipped classroom strategy, an increased ability to use the painting techniques, specific tools and materials was highlighted in the final assessment (Fig. 2). 85% of the pupils' artworks (17 pupils) showed that they complied with the proposed artistic trend – the Impressionism – and that they included all key elements, only 5% of the works (1 pupil) displayed few specific elements. All the pupils (20 pupils) correctly used and combined the painting techniques in making their works and choosing varied tools, their familiarisation with them being evident because of the performed exercises. In 75% of the works (15 pupils), the pupils made strong strokes and demonstrated a deep understanding of the topic, whereas in only 10% of the works (2 pupils) did the pupils fail to prove that.



**Fig. 2.** Pupils' results in the final assessment stage for the *Accordance with the theme* criterion

### **b) Analysis of portraying the landscape elements**

Firstly, we analyse two artworks performed by the pupils in the initial assessment stage, before the formative intervention.

The work with the theme **Landscape** (Fig. 3) contains several elements of the natural environment often met in the children's works at this development stage (7-9 yrs.): sun, trees, forms of relief, and grass. We notice a concern for delimitation of the ground plan from the airspace plan, with the help of a modulated line. The elements are correctly set, their dimensions complying with the foreground-background relation. The tree trunks appear as a whole, the branches being a juxtaposed element with them. There are concerns for rendering the soil, the grass and the atmosphere, by means of lines. The sun is positioned on the left, ensuring balance to the image. There is an obvious tendency to render several seasons in the same work: they used autumn colours for the trees, while the plants on the soil were depicted in just two green tones.

In the work performed on the theme of **The Tree** (Fig. 4), there is a tendency specific to this development stage to tell what they know about familiar aspects. Both the colours used in rendering the treetop and their setting in the art space highlight this aspect. Therefore, the message transmitted by the artwork is that the tree leaves change their colour according to season. Autumn becomes the time of the year when the tree

leaves turn very colourful and fall onto the bare ground. The absence of the sun and the blue spots in which some leaves are coloured suggest the change in the air temperature.



**Fig. 3.** Landscape (by D. P., 8 years old)



**Fig. 4.** The Tree (by C. C., 8 years old)

Next, we look into an artwork belonging to each proposed theme to be performed by students in an Impressionist manner and using artistic means. These artworks were made after the formative intervention.

**The theme of *Landscape*.** The artwork in Fig. 5 reproduces the shown pattern in the tutorial. The pupil rendered an autumn landscape in painting in an Impressionist manner. The common elements, reproduced by the 8-year old pupil from memory are: the delimitation of the ground plane from the airspace, natural elements, the haystack, and the shades. It is specific to the Impressionist manner to render the natural element components by means of the line and dot (as in the case of pointillism). Thus, the tree branches appear as hardly visible, while the leaves are illustrated by colour shades of different thickness.

The selection of colours is also interesting to notice. The child keeps the autumn colours in the tree leaves whereas, the colour of grass is more like of another season. The haystack largely goes by the rules of the tutorial (positioning, colours), but we also notice a detachment from the constraints of the Impressionist manner and the resort to using the splash of colour alongside the line and the dot.

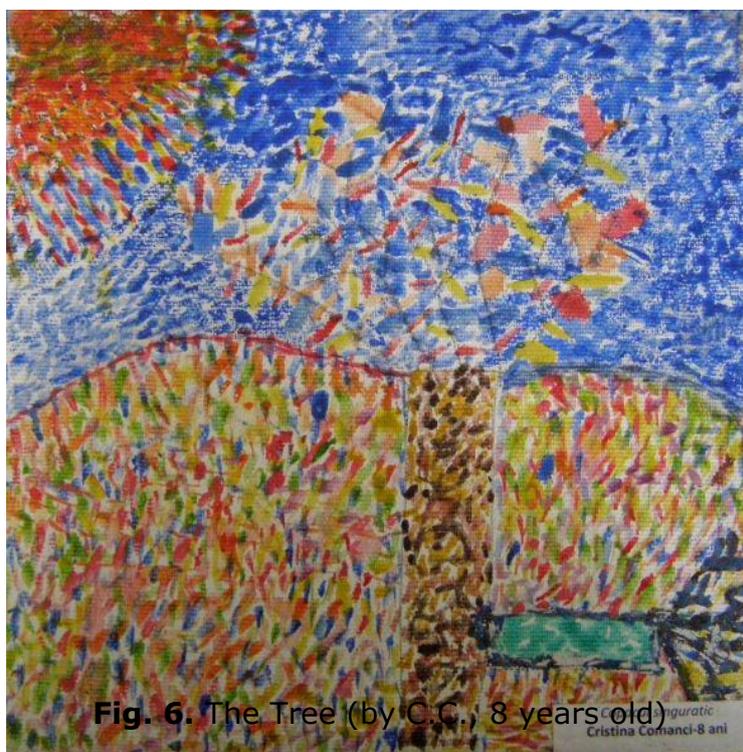


**Fig. 5.** Landscape (by B.S., 8 years old)

The line, which is mostly used in the pupils' works to represent flat surfaces, now becomes sinuous, rendering forms of relief as well. The sketching of hills poses the problem of the perspective and the concern for keeping the right proportions. Therefore, the tree in the background is represented as shorter than other trees in the foreground and because of its positioning on the hill interfluve.

The manifestation of creativity is thus obvious in an attempt to find a solution to the balance of the plastic image: the tree in the foreground, lying at the foot of the hill, would be leaning to the right if the darker colour shades (another delimitation from the artistic movement) were not present on the left side.

**The theme of *The tree*.** The tree (Fig. 6) represents a cutout from the previous theme on landscapes, its main purpose being the successive detachment from the model in the tutorial and operating with the elements characteristic to the Impressionist paradigm. In the chosen work, the rendered natural elements are the tree, the sun, the grass, the hill. The similarity with the first theme is obvious in the presentation of the plans, of the bordering line, of the blossomed tree in autumn, with almost invisible branches. However, the 8-year old pupil is more consistent in following the model shown in the tutorial, illustrating the same season at the ground level as well. The pupil also keeps the tree shade in the tutorial, but using the green instead of the blue. Creativity manifests itself in keeping the balance of the painting and in finding the solution of placing the sun on the left, in order to counterbalance the shadow weight.



**The theme of *Still Nature*.** Through this theme (Fig. 7), a combination of some natural component elements, fruits and artefacts, elements of the man-made environment, immediate and familiar environment, the basket, and the jug are brought forward. The difficulty in rendering still nature is more evident than in the case of the other themes, as the pupils have to detach themselves completely from the model in the tutorial and paint from their imagination, yet based on their previous representations. However, the influence of the tutorial is obvious in tracing the borderline between different plans and in the autumn colours used in the plan at the foot of the plastic surface. An example of detachment from the Impressionist manner is obvious in the outlining of the objects. Their setting in this plastic surface is similar to the one shown in the tutorial. The slant position of the elements gives the impression of movement, slightly leaning to the left.



**Fig. 7.** Still Nature (by R.C., 8 years old)

**The theme of *Flowers*.** Flowers are one of children's favourite topics. In approaching this theme (Fig. 8), an aspect of the tutorial model is being developed, i.e. the representation of the plants on the ground. The work contains only two elements of the natural environment: the flowers and the sun. We notice the lack of the borderline between plans, this being substituted by the imaginary line formed by the upper part of the flowers'

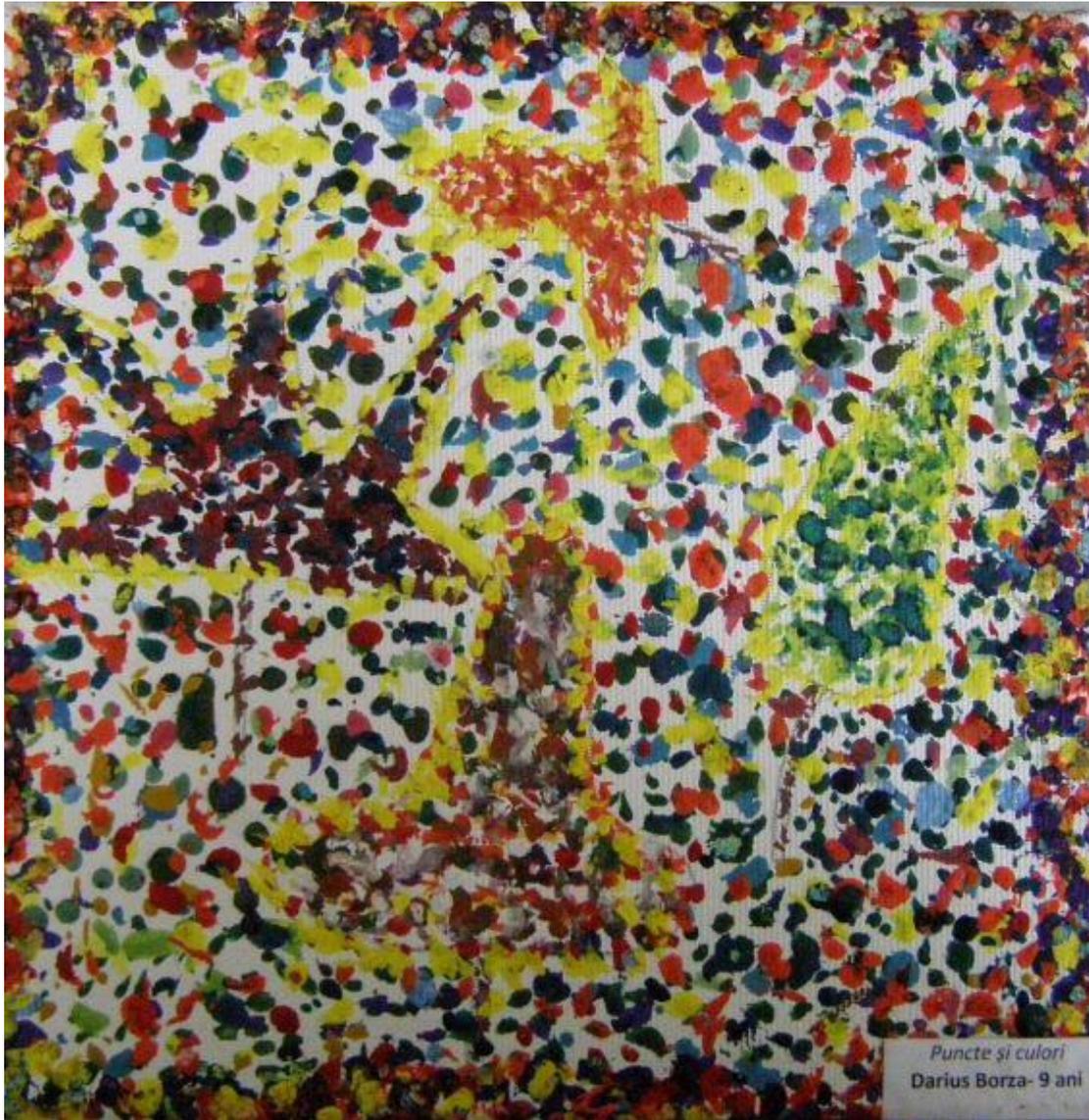
crown. By tracing this line, we get the sinuous line of the hill from the previous two themes. The ground surface, the soil is missing, as well as the grass. Colours are used in contrast (warm-cool), distance being suggested by the successive shrinking of flower size. Flowers are rendered by an economy of means: some superposed adjacent strokes. The balance is given by the central position of the sun and by the iteration of the red colour in its representation.



**Fig. 8.** Flowers (by V.K., 8 years old)

**Theme at choice.** The elements from the natural environment are a frequent option for pupils. Within this activity, a drawing representing

leaves (Fig. 9) may create the impression of total detachment from the tutorial. The setting of the leaves follows the pattern in the tutorial, sun-trees-haystack respectively. Primary colours are juxtaposed, with a clear intention to create the illusion of their combination: red-yellow, in the top leaf, blue-red in the left and at the bottom, blue-yellow in the right leaf. Lines are reduced to dots, pointillism, and a version of Impressionism thus being discovered.



**Fig. 9.** Theme at choice (by D.B., 9 years old)

Given the observations made for each theme, we can depict some elements specific to the tutorial, which, with a few exceptions, have been kept throughout the final stage of the study: the line that is delimiting the plans,

the positioning of the elements, the balance of the image, the correct rendering of proportions. By analysing the pupils' artworks, we notice some artistic peculiarities of the landscapes within the 7-9 yrs. old age group. The similarities and the delimitation elements between the real environment and its components and the artistically rendered natural landscape are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Similarities and differences between the real natural landscapes and the artistically rendered ones

Similarities	Differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- they include elements of the natural environment: trees, grass, sun, clouds, water, birds, insects, mammals, people, soil, etc.</li> <li>- they render major forms of relief: mountains, hills, plains</li> <li>- they associate colour with the object</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the painting depict symbols</li> <li>- children draw what they know and not what they see</li> <li>- the artistic images illustrate the interior model or the scheme</li> <li>- difficulties in rendering perspective in painting</li> <li>- some difficulties in rendering proportions in artworks</li> <li>- children use pure colours or colours straight from the box, without mixing/combining them</li> </ul>

In the children's paintings, the natural environment elements are rendered by means of symbols based on personal patterns and reflect their life experience, but also the cognitive development stage and the stage of drawing development corresponding to the pupils' age. Based on these works, we observe that, at this age, children make accurate associations between colours and shapes, with some difficulties in rendering proportions, especially regarding the top-bottom relation. They use colours mainly in their pure form or straight from the box, without combining them. There is a certain attempt to shape the three-dimensional space.

## CONCLUSIONS

The artistic image in the 7-9 year olds reflects rather an inner reality than the objective one, but yet in accordance to the scheme. The natural environment elements are rendered by means of symbols. Children draw what they know, mainly concerned with the place of each element in the artistic framework and less with its real image. Generally, the proportions of

the natural environment (mountains, hills, plains, trees, the grass, flowers, beings, etc.) are observed, each element being representative for the category it falls into. Object-colour associations are made, which facilitates, for example, map orientation (colour-forms of relief). The reading of map symbols can be enabled by approaching natural landscapes in the artworks.

At the end of this study, we consider that the flipped classroom learning strategy and the artistic manners are efficient ways to take into account the curricular contents, contributing to pupils' competence building, and also to their motivation, enhancing their pleasure to learn.

In this research, as well as in the previous ones (Crișan, 2013, 2014, 2017), we noticed that the eTwinning Projects constituted an excellent environment for practicing modern strategies, for learning by cooperation, for an exchange of visions related to the teaching act. And finally, yet importantly, *Visual Arts* require, by means of content-made bonds, skills from different fields of knowledge, Geography and Environmental Science knowledge included.

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