

THE ROLE OF REVERSE CHRONOLOGY IN THE CONTEMPORARY DECONSTRUCTION OF THE ART HISTORY LEARNING APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The reverse chronology method is being explored as an alternative to linear, chronological teaching in art history. Researching art historical issues from contemporary problems backward through history can be an excellent way to make teaching visual art in secondary schools more relevant. It can also be a powerful tool for deconstructing art historical narratives and creating independent knowledge constructs, as deconstruction becomes evident in a new approach to historiography and the subject of instruction. The paper examines the role of reverse chronology in a constructivist, problem-based approach to learning, along with its application in the Croatian Visual Arts Curriculum. A qualitative analysis of students' mental maps shows that the method's success depends on the relevance of a topic to students' life experiences, timeliness, controversy, and historical reversibility.

KEYWORDS:

art history, constructivist learning, problem teaching, reverse chronology, grand narrative

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents research on reverse chronology as a method that can deconstruct grand narratives of art history and enable independent, individual constructions of knowledge. Learning art history has always been closely related to grand historical narratives and methods, best illustrated by the very name of the discipline, which contains the word history. The chronological continuity of periods and styles was considered a solid structure that dictates plans and programs and organizes knowledge

within time sequences explained by a specific social context. After the 1960s, the interpretation within grand metanarratives was abandoned, and preference was given to recent or so-called small narratives. This was to the greatest extent influenced by Jean-François Lyotard's theory of skepticism toward grand metanarratives.¹ A doubt regarding reality and the past also questioned the objectivity of historiography. The reconstruction of the past always involves selection and the filling of gaps, allowing for the historian's subjective interpretation, which depends on moral values, worldview, ideology, and culture. Educational systems and subject curricula reflect scientific metanarratives and are formed following similar rules. A recent reform of the Visual Arts Curriculum² in Croatia introduced changes that depart from the methodical modernist paradigm of learning based on the visual language and placed critical thinking about artistic phenomena, processes, and artworks at the center of the learning process. This led to exploration of new methods aimed at bringing art history education closer to a problem-solving and constructivist approach to learning. One possible methodological alternative is reverse chronology, a process contrary to linear, chronological learning, which does not follow a predetermined and well-established historical structure of periods, styles, and famous masterpieces but allows for the creation of small narratives. It is suitable for problem-based teaching because it presents a contemporary visual phenomenon as a research problem and then traces its origins deep in history. It also shares similarities with the constructivist

1) Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, vol. 10. (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

2) *Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Likovna kultura za osnovne škole i Likovna umjetnost za gimnazije* [Curriculum of Visual Culture in Elementary Schools and Visual Arts in Grammar Schools] (Zagreb: Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja, 2019), accessed September 15, 2023, <https://mzo.gov.hr/istaknute-teme/odgoj-i-obrazovanje/nacionalni-kurikulum/predmetni-kurikulumi/likovna-kultura-i-likovna-umjetnost/757>.

approach to learning, in which the student independently constructs knowledge. This paper demonstrates how reverse chronology can be helpful in deconstructing art history narratives and creating independent knowledge constructions.

DECONSTRUCTION OF ART HISTORY NARRATIVES

The history of art has traditionally been taught following a chronological, linear model and based on canonical masterpieces selected by art historians and curators. After the emergence of identity politics and the contributions of feminist and postcolonial theories in the 1960s, a reevaluation of the interpretation of art history as a grand narrative written from the ideological perspective of the Western European world began. This shift was heavily influenced by Jean-François Lyotard's theory of the postmodern condition and the skepticism toward grand narratives because they lost their credibility.³ The grand narrative is a broad, all-encompassing story that explains the nature of human existence, culture, and history and legitimizes knowledge.⁴

Lyotard identifies the central aspect of the postmodern condition as a distrust of grand narratives constructed as totalizing narratives that provide a framework for cultural practices. This postmodern distrust of grand narratives has impacted theories of knowledge and models of their transmission. The rejection of grand narratives opened space for accepting alternative small narratives or *petit récit*.⁵ The idea of the pluralism of micronarratives has disrupted the understanding of history as a linear progression of periods.

3) Ibid., 37.

4) Ibid., xxiv.

5) Ibid., 60.

Because their work was often fragmented, diverse, and specific to particular contexts, cultures, or individuals, artists began to embrace a more fragmented and pluralistic approach. They explored multiple perspectives, personal stories, and different cultural influences, which provided them with greater artistic freedom and the opportunity to experiment. Instead of providing clear answers, they left interpretation open to the viewer, allowing for multiple readings and meanings.

The objectivity of historiography is also questioned because the reconstruction of the past always involves the filling of gaps with the historian's subjective interpretation, which depends on moral values, worldview, ideology, and culture. Educational systems and subject curricula are formed according to the same rules and reflect these grand scientific narratives. The contemporary alternative to the grand narrative of art history is identity politics, which interprets art from the perspective of marginalized and neglected groups.

The discipline of art history has undergone radical changes in the last 60 years. Influenced by postmodern philosophy and the deconstruction of knowledge, it has become more open, inclined toward questioning, self-critical, and challenging.⁶ It mentions terms such as radical, social, and critical art history, which are unified under the concept of New Art History. The term New Art History has been used since 1982.⁷ It encompasses all new disciplinary methods, approaches, theories, and research objects that have emerged as alternatives to traditional disciplinary practices due to the demands of a new era and approach to art production.⁸ This broadly defined concept has

6) Jonathan Harris, *The New Art History: A Critical Introduction* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), 3.

7) Ibid.

8) Ibid., 6–7.

allowed for inclusion of all hermeneutic innovations stemming from the Marxist theory, feminist critiques of patriarchy, the psychoanalytic role of visual representation in constructing social and sexual identity, semiotic and structuralist concepts, and methods of sign and meaning analysis.⁹

Traditional art history examines the historical conditions of artwork creation and the technological constraints that partially determine the visual characteristics of the artwork. In determining the value of an artwork, it uses aesthetics, which was observed within immutable laws of form, even though changes in styles in the history of art have proven that nothing is as changeable as aesthetics. Traditional art history emphasizes the suppression of ideological potential, the variability of artworks, and their role in constructing social and cultural history as critical issues of its practice. What is crucial in today's teaching is to investigate the ideological potential and develop a critical stance toward the messages conveyed by images. Traditional art history also identifies the overreliance on the old canons of the Western world as a significant archaism in the discipline, which examines artworks hermetically, within their characteristics and strict conditions of appearance, without uncovering the role of art in conveying dominant ideologies.

Ljiljana Kolečnik emphasizes that Critical Art History emerged in the early 1990s as an approach relevant to all forms of new theoretical practice marked by its critical stance toward traditional art historical methods.¹⁰ It encompasses both the theoretical and the methodological aspects of the

9) Ljiljana Kolečnik, "Kritička povijest umjetnosti. Polazišta, dometi i perspektive" [Critical Art History: Foundations, Achievements, and Perspectives], in *Umjetničko djelo kao društvena činjenica. Perspektive kritičke povijesti umjetnosti*, ed. Ljiljana Kolečnik (Zagreb: Institut za povijest umjetnosti, 2005.), 354.

10) Ibid.

contemporary analytical-interpretative perspectives.¹¹ Following this methodological shift, Critical Art History turned to French post-structuralism, employing semiotics as an analytical tool and relying on feminist literary theory. The application of the deconstruction theory leads to the reexamination of dominant perspectives, through which various art historical narratives are interpreted, thus opening the possibility to introduce alternative approaches that advocate for different and diverse views on art history (feminism, gender theory, theory of gaze, etc.). As Sonja Briski-Uzelac emphasizes, the transition from traditional to Critical Art History is grounded in an entirely different interpretative approach.¹²

One of the significant changes that marked the epistemological shifts in the discipline of art history is the new approach to art history often expressed through the phrase “end of art history.” This phrase was coined by Hans Belting, who was guided by the ideas of the end of history.¹³ Belting suggests that, according to the historical approach, artistic events are understood as images within which the written history of art is constructed. When he speaks of the end of art history, he means liberation from this framework, which is evident in the change of discourse.¹⁴ The framework is defined as the cultural horizon the art history has been trained to perceive.¹⁵ What Belting is discussing is not the end of art exploration but rather the abandonment of the model of art history as an idea of progress guided by the development

11) Ibid., 366.

12) Sonja Briski Uzelac, *Vizualni tekst: studije iz teorije umjetnosti* [Visual Text: Studies in Art Theory] (Zagreb: Centar za vizualne studije, 2008), 10.

13) See Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (Mineola, New York: Courier Corporation, 2004); Herve Fischer, *L'histoire de l'art est terminée* [The History of Art is at an End] (Pariz: Fenixx Réédition Numérique (Balland), 1980).

14) Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art*, trans. Christopher S. Wood (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 10.

15) Ibid., 30–31.

of Western civilization and the determination of perspective.¹⁶ The concept of style, through which art history has reflected the idea of history, is crucial to the old model of art history.

Belting leans toward the possibility of a third history of art, which he calls image history. Unlike art history, image history focuses on the history of images rather than just art. It does not rely on the retrospection of styles but seeks to find a way to view ancient and modern art through the same methodology.¹⁷ In such a model, art history would be assimilated into a much broader concept of visuality.¹⁸

CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO TEACHING ART HISTORY

When it comes to teaching art history in secondary and high schools, teachers tend to prepare their lessons in the same way they were taught when they were students.¹⁹ It seems that many art teachers believe that teaching art history must solely serve the purpose of conveying information to students through slides. Unaware of alternative approaches, art teachers tend to rely on traditional methods, perpetuating instructional models they themselves once questioned.²⁰

According to Penny McKeon, the subject of art history is vividly described as an orphan in teaching visual arts.²¹ A chronological presentation of art history allows students to

16) Ibid., 31.

17) Ibid., 278.

18) Ibid., 287.

19) Angela M. La Porte, Peg Speirs and Bernard Young, "Art Curriculum Influences: A National Survey," *Studies in Art Education*, no. 4 (2008): 362.

20) Amy Michele Bergh, "To the Ages of Ages: Reconceptualizing High School Art History Curriculum," (PhD diss., Virginia Commonwealth University, 2011), 2.

21) Penny McKeon, "The Sense of Art History in Art Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, no. 2 (2002): 100.

organize vast amounts of information. However, there are many points of intersection connecting contemporary art with the traditional linear history of art. Recognizing the connections between contemporary art and linear history of art facilitates the formation of new ideas and helps students understand traditional and contemporary art.²² Delaying the teaching about contemporary art until the end of the school year prevents students from understanding the connection between the present and the past.²³ Incorporating contemporary art into the curriculum encourages students to engage not only with formalistic perspectives on art but also with contemporary art, which tends to defy traditional definitions of art.²⁴

Examining typical curricula related to art history reveals that most instruction relies on a chronological presentation of facts and the recitation of Western art canons, with very little consideration for placing artists or artworks within any societal context. A successful art history teacher must find ways to connect art history to students' daily lives and help students discover meaningful connections.²⁵ Therefore, students need skills and tools to dissect and consciously retrieve the meaning of these images. Activities that encourage students to analyze movies, TV series, music, dance, theater, magazines, advertisements, and video games to find references to works of art help them recognize that art is present in their lives. Images can also be examined to uncover the messages conveyed by the image's content. Moreover, students should be encouraged

22) Tara Page, Steve Herne, Paul Dash, Helen Charman, Dennis Atkinson and Jeff Adam, "Teaching Now with the Living: A Dialogue with Teachers Investigating Contemporary Art Practices," *International Journal of Art & Design Education*, no. 2 (2006): 154.

23) Kerry Freedman, "Recent Theoretical Shifts in the Field of Art History," *Art Education*, no. 6 (1991): 40–45.

24) Bergh, "To the Ages of Ages," 5.

25) *Ibid.*, 4.

to find references to historical events not only among traditional artworks but also within contemporary art.²⁶

Art history classes often involve viewing reproductions on a screen in a dark room, the so-called *art in the dark*, where the focus is primarily on taking notes, reciting facts, and conveying interpretations that are considered part of universal truth. Such an approach to teaching art history has shown poor results regarding information retention and negatively impacts motivation. This traditional approach to art history leaves most students with the impression that art is boring and irrelevant to their lives. When this approach is applied, the teacher does most of the work while students' minds remain idle.²⁷

John A. Steinspring and Brian Steele further describe the chronological approach to teaching as a favored organizational structure for inexperienced or subject-focused teachers (as opposed to student-focused teachers).²⁸ Presenting historical material in chronological order is an appealing approach because it appears entirely logical and implies a cause-and-effect relationship between events. Besides inaccurately suggesting that the sequence necessarily has meaning, chronology can be easily misinterpreted, implying continuous progress with the contemporary era representing the highest form of human achievement. Teachers must connect traditional artworks with contemporary ideas and contemporary artworks.²⁹ Understanding the connections between contemporary visual culture and the past is critically important if we want students to develop an understanding of the complexity of their visual world.

26) Ibid.

27) John A. Steinspring and Brian D. Steele, "Teaching Art History: Getting Started," *Art Education*, no. 2 (1993): 7.

28) Ibid.

29) Bergh, "To the Ages of Ages," 5.

Approaching art history instruction in reverse chronology essentially means shifting the primary focus to the contemporary era and tracing logical paths backward to learn about significant historical, cultural, and traditional styles and art forms. Reverse chronology, as opposed to the usual approach that starts from the past, follows cause-and-effect events to better understand their influence on an artist's works, styles, themes, media, techniques, and approaches.³⁰ Reverse chronology in teaching is still a relatively new approach, and further research is needed to explain its benefits more precisely. Ultimately, most students are more interested in current social and political issues and situations they can personally relate to. Because of this orientation toward the present, teachers face the challenge of taking students back in time.³¹

REVERSE CHRONOLOGY – TEACHING IN THE PRESENT MOMENT

Reverse chronology is a method that starts from a contemporary problem and explores it backward through history to its very beginnings. This method was first applied in history teaching as a response to students' lack of interest in linear teaching models, which were uninteresting and demotivating to them.³² Some of the reasons for applying reverse chronology in history education were highlighted in the November 1971 issue of *The Social Studies*. Traditional chronological approaches to teaching history were ill-equipped to effectively engage students, as

30) Thomas Misco and Nancy C. Patterson, "An Old Fad of Great Promise: Reverse Chronology History Teaching in Social Studies Classes," *Journal of Social Studies Research*, no. 33/1 (2009): 78.

31) Craig L. Pfannkuche, "A Modest Proposal for History Teachers," *Social Studies*, no. 6 (1971): 244.

32) Misco and Patterson, "An Old Fad of Great Promise," 72.

students did not see a direct connection to their lives and found it irrelevant and uninteresting.³³

What are the advantages and disadvantages of the chronological approach? The chronological approach has the status of a grand narrative and imposes itself as logical and natural because time in history flows linearly. It gives us an analytical insight into the cause-and-effect relationships between artistic changes of different periods and styles and gives us a solid structure for observing artistic changes in a socio-historical context.

Unlike the regular chronological approach, reverse chronology does not start from the earliest occurrences of a specific representation in history to follow it linearly to the present day. Instead, it begins with a contemporary problem, which it investigates backward through history to its origins. It developed in history teaching as a methodological response to students' lack of interest in linear teaching models, which were uninteresting and demotivating for them. Students are dissatisfied with traditional chronological approaches because they do not see a direct connection to their lives.³⁴

The reverse chronological approach has specific characteristics that can be advantageous (**Fig. 1**). The greatest value of reverse chronology lies in connecting the past, present, and future, the three inseparable temporal constructs.³⁵ Another advantage of reverse chronology is that it is a natural problem-solving approach. It starts from a specific situation and seeks a solution that will branch out in several directions. This will lead students toward creating alternative narratives that we rarely find in the

33) Ibid., 71.

34) Ibid.

35) Michael L. Simpson, "Why the past comes last," *Indiana Social Studies Quarterly*, no. 2 (1983): 6.

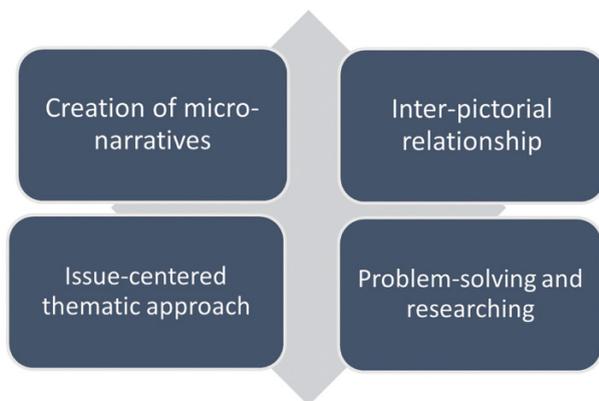


Fig. 1. Characteristics of the reverse chronological approach.

literature, so we can say that this is the application of knowledge in new situations.³⁶ This approach requires exploring the genesis of pictorial representation and understanding the changes in the context of culture, not just artistic aesthetics. By identifying a common problem within the same topic, examining it from multiple perspectives (of which history is just one possibility), and creating a new, challenging, and open situation, students are encouraged to engage in critical and reflective thinking. This results in the recontextualization of familiar information, creative adoption and presentation of new knowledge, and development of skills and self-confidence to construct meanings. Unlike the previous emphasis on chronological coverage of teaching issues, a transhistorical approach to learning and teaching art allows for comparing and contrasting examples from different historical periods and creating direct links between past and present art, including contemporary visual phenomena that shape our daily lives.

The applicability of knowledge in solving everyday problems that reflect students' needs is the main characteristic of all

³⁶ Gerald H. Davis and David M. Laushey, "Tampering with the temporal order," *History Teacher*, no. 3 (1972): 44.

reformed curricula. Although reversed chronology is related to the chronological approach as it considers the historical distance between examples, it differs because it does not follow a linear course of historical periods due to gaps between historical segments. This allows us to skip historical components irrelevant to the problem at hand and thus reduce content, leading to faster and more efficient memorization of facts. While understanding the conditions and ways of life from the perspective of people in the past is essential, it is even more critical to observe the past through the lens of contemporary questions and issues.³⁷

THE ROLE OF REVERSE CHRONOLOGY IN PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING

Reverse chronology and problem-based learning are two distinct concepts that can be connected to educational methods and teaching approaches. Contemporary teaching is based on an active learning strategy, which stems from a holistic and humanistic approach to the curriculum. Such a curriculum aims for the comprehensive development of students by actively engaging the affective domain of the individual, not just the cognitive and psychomotor domains. An essential aspect of the humanistic curriculum is individualization in approaching students, allowing them to choose the form of work and the content.³⁸ In this open type of teaching, the roles of participants in the teaching process, namely the teacher and the student, undergo significant changes. The teacher becomes a mentor who guides the student through the learning process, while the

37) Misco and Patterson, "An Old Fad of Great Promise," 79.

38) Jeffrey Broome, "Commentary – The Case for Humanistic Curriculum: A Discussion of Curriculum Theory Applied to Art Education," *Journal of Art for Life*, no. 1 (2014): 2.

student becomes an active constructor of their knowledge.³⁹ Immersion or active involvement of the student in learning is possible only if the student is emotionally and physically engaged. It is essential to take an interdisciplinary approach to content and enable the blurring of boundaries between academic subjects.⁴⁰

Active learning can be interpreted through a constructivist approach to teaching, which reduces teaching to stimulating and guiding. In contrast, learning is seen as the independent construction of knowledge and a context-dependent process.⁴¹ The roles of students and teachers change because, with this learning approach, the student becomes an active participant. In contrast, the teacher is a facilitator who creates problem situations and offers various tools for problem-solving. The fundamental characteristics of a constructivist understanding of learning include learning through discovery, individualization of the learning process, the absence of objective knowledge and comparative evaluation of student knowledge, and the minimization of the role of frontal teaching in education.⁴² Teaching promotes independent learning while learning involves questioning, checking, confirming, or rejecting individual knowledge constructions. The constructivist approach to learning is explained through two models applied in the classroom context: the radical constructionist model of learning, which views learning as individual sense-making, and the social constructionist model of learning, which focuses on the creation of knowledge in cooperation with others.⁴³

39) Milan Matijević and Diana Radovanović, *Nastava usmjerena na učenika* [Student-Centered Teaching] (Zagreb: Školske novine, 2011), 29.

40) Senka Gazibara, "Aktivno učenje kao didaktičko-metodička paradigma suvremene nastave" [Active Learning as a Didactic-Methodological Paradigm of Modern Teaching] (PhD diss., Filozofski fakultet u Zagrebu, 2018), 13.

41) Ibid., 18.

42) Ibid.

43) Milan Matijević, Tomislav Topolovčan and Višnja Rajić, *Konstruktivistička nastava: teorija i empirijska istraživanja* [Constructivist Teaching: Theory and Empirical Research] (Zagreb: Učiteljski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 2017), 48.

What they have in common is that students actively acquire knowledge, build upon previously acquired insights, and create interpretations.

Problem-based teaching is a situation rather than a method that provokes and stimulates interest and a thirst for knowledge and understanding. Learning through problem-solving results in understanding because students are placed in situations where they must think deeply about the problem, gain new insights, connect old and new knowledge, expand it, and apply it to a unique case. Problem-based teaching or problem-based learning is a strategy that directs learning toward real-life problems rather than the issues of the discipline itself.

Reverse chronology can be used as a pedagogical tool within problem-based learning aimed at engaging students in a more immersive and reflective exploration of complex issues. Starting with a recent event or outcome related to a specific topic, educators can use reverse chronology to trace the steps, decisions, and events that led to that outcome. This approach helps students understand the historical context and the issue's evolution. Presenting the case in reverse chronology encourages students to critically analyze and consider different viewpoints on real-world problems.

Reverse chronology can be a valuable instructional approach within problem-based learning because it provides a structured method for exploring and understanding complex real-world issues by tracing their development over time. It encourages critical analysis, multidisciplinary thinking, and reflective learning, all of which are essential components of problem-based education.⁴⁴

44) Misco and Patterson, "An Old Fad of Great Promise," 79.

The reverse chronology method can serve as a model for teaching aimed at developing social awareness and critical thinking within an issue-centered curriculum adopting an interdisciplinary approach to socially relevant and controversial themes.⁴⁵ Confronting controversial topics, often avoided in schools, helps enhance students' civic competencies.⁴⁶

THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE NEW VISUAL ARTS CURRICULUM

The curriculum reform officially implemented in 2019 brought many innovations that made the previous practice of teaching visual arts different.⁴⁷ The curriculum was designed as a semi-open model with prescribed topics. Still, it is the teachers and students who choose examples and methods for achieving outcomes, directing the teaching toward critical issues. The curriculum reform started from ground zero by asking why learning visual arts is essential for students' lives. This prompted us to observe the subject's essence from the student's current position. It is possible only by starting from the present moment and slowly returning to the past. This approach focuses on problem-based learning and puts the student in the position of a detective who, step by step, discovers the past.

With these changes, visual arts education has come much closer to problem-based learning: a thematic approach to content, the expression of a critical attitude in the analysis of artworks, the change from a chronological to an issue-based approach, and a more flexible approach to the analysis of artworks. The outcomes still focus on artworks, while popular culture is cited as a stimulating element for comparison with artworks. Such

45) Ibid., 80.

46) Ibid., 83.

47) *Kurikulum nastavnog predmeta Likovna kultura za osnovne škole i Likovna umjetnost za gimnazije.*

changes are firmly rooted in the epistemological shifts within the discipline of art history, especially in Critical Art History.

The methodical requirements of the new curriculum are significantly different from those in the old plan and program. The main principles are: connecting learning topics with students' daily experiences and interests; problem-solving approach involving research and presentations on given topics; creating independent knowledge constructions; developing critical thinking and argumentatively defending attitudes; interpreting artistic phenomena in different contexts.

A lack of a chronological approach in the curriculum structure does not mean eliminating the historical component of teaching. The methodological guidelines of the curriculum (in the elaboration of outcomes) state that the order of subtopics is not imposed, and that the teacher chooses either a synchronic or a diachronic approach to a particular topic, outcome or sub-outcome.⁴⁸

While the synchronic teaching model does not use time as a framework for progression, the diachronic model tracks changes over time using chronology. Before the curriculum reform, the content of the visual arts subject was organized chronologically, from prehistory to the contemporary era. With the new curriculum, chronology is abandoned as the guiding principle for content organization, and problem-based themes are introduced, within which a chronological sequence can be followed but is not mandatory.

These themes create an environment conducive to critical thinking about artistic phenomena and enable a continuous journey through history, connecting contemporary phenomena

48) Ibid., 72.

with the past. This was not possible in a chronological approach. A diachronic approach to a theme does not necessarily have to be chronological; it can also be reverse chronological. By applying reverse chronology, we engage with history but do not follow it linearly according to the logic of time. Instead, we make leaps in history connecting cultures and periods that otherwise may not have been viewed as connected.

RESEARCH

The research explores the potential of reverse chronology as an alternative to chronological teaching in art history. Additionally, it investigates how studying art history in reverse can promote problem-based learning and the creation of self-constructed knowledge and micro-narratives.

In line with the stated goals, two research questions were identified:

RQ1: What is the role of reverse chronology in deconstructing the art history narrative?

RQ2: Does the reverse chronology method meet the requirements of the new visual arts curriculum?

RQ3: What does the success of the reverse chronological approach depend on?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is structured as a small empirical action research aimed at improving the teaching practices of future art teachers. Students explored a topic using the reverse chronology method, starting with a contemporary artwork that was controversial or

intriguing to them. They conducted research in reverse, seeking artworks or objects that could have influenced the initial piece. They presented their concept by creating a mental map using the digital tool Canva. The interpretation will provide a qualitative content analysis of mental maps created by students during art history methodology classes using the reverse chronological approach in the research of topics.

The participants in the study were second-year students of the graduate program in visual culture at the Academy of Arts and Culture in Osijek during the academic year 2021/2022. A total of six students participated, and for the qualitative analysis, the mental maps of two students were selected.

RESULTS

After researching the assigned topics, students created mental maps, two of which will be presented in the results and subjected to discussion. The first student explored self-reflection through the theme of portraiture, while the second student examined the semiotics of the representation of the Crucifixion of Jesus.

The first student's exploration of the portraiture within the project *Cast of a Soul*⁴⁹ began with Marc Quinn's *Self*, the artist's self-portrait. The artist's blood is used as a material to sculpt a head, which is then submerged in frozen silicone. To maintain its frozen appearance, the work requires electrical power. This dual role of the sculpture's materiality serves both a symbolic

49) Artworks of the concept *Cast of a Soul*: Marc Quinn, *Self* (1991, 2001, 2006, 2011); *Mask of Agamemnon*, 1550–1500 BC, discovered 1876 at Mycenae, Greece by Heinrich Schliemann, National Archaeological Museum, Athens; *The death mask of a ten year old Roman girl named Claudia Victoria*, 100 B.C., Lyon, France; *The death mask of 18th century sailor Richard Parker*, 1797, Hunterian Museum in London; François Carlo Antommarchi, *Death mask of Napoléon*, 1881, Musée de l'Armée, Paris; *Death Mask Of An Infant*, 19th century.

and a practical function. The artist created a new one every five years, resulting in a series of sculptures that collectively reflect the passage of time and provide an ongoing self-portrait capturing the artist's aging and evolution. The student's exploration developed into the concept of casting, focusing on burial customs from the Middle Ages that persisted until the late 19th century. The student was guided by the belief that the mold revealed the soul of the deceased. By independent research, students could make conclusions not directly found in academic literature. They critically selected examples that supported their narrative and connected facts in a novel manner. It is unlikely that these examples would have been uncovered by researching self-portraits in art history books.

The second student researched the theme of the Crucifixion.⁵⁰ The student was inspired by photographs by artist Igor Grubić recently seen at the Slavonian Biennale in the Museum of Fine Arts in Osijek. The artist presents various sculptural and visual interpretations of the crucified Jesus that symbolize many diverse individuals. These representations encompass various personas, including anti-fascists, abolitionists, socialists, unionists, feminists, situationists, utopians, pacifists, and more. Within the project *In Theory and Practice* (call him by his names), different ways of interpreting Christ precisely embody the concept of advocating for the common good and higher human values. The artwork promotes freedom of expression and fosters tolerance for differences. The student's research makes him conclude that the image of Christ's crucifixion symbolized the Christian faith in the past. In modern society, it

50) Artworks of the concept Crucifixion: Jani Leinonen, *McJesus*, 2015, Zetterberg Gallery; Sebastian Errazuriz *Christian popsicles*, 2012; Serrano Andres, *Immersion (Piss Christ)*, 1987; Chris Burden, *Trans-Fixed*, 1974; Salvador Dalí, *Saint John of the Cross*, 1951, Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow; Velázquez, Diego, *The Crucified Christ*, 1632, Museo del Prado; Berlinghieri Bonaventura, *The Crucifixion*, 1260, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

is most often used as a symbol for something else, suffering or criticism of society, such as criticism of consumerism.

Both mental maps demonstrate that the reverse chronological approach, employed as a research and presentation tool, successfully deviates from the linear course of chronological art history. Some lesser-known yet intriguing examples were discovered, not typically found in art history anthologies. This method of teaching, in which students are not given pre-packaged narratives and interpretations of art history, can be likened to problem-based learning because it presents students with issue-centered problems that are intriguing enough to delve into history. The research process, the critical selection of examples, the interpretation of their meanings and connections, and the presentation in the form of a mental map confront students with a series of methodological challenges, which they independently address to varying degrees of success.

CONCLUSION

Reverse chronology as a teaching method can be considered an alternative to the chronological approach in teaching art history for several reasons. It is closely tied to a problem-based and critical approach to learning because it requires exploring a problem from the present to the past.⁵¹ This approach ensures that the problem is connected to students' experiences and relevant to their understanding of societal issues.⁵² It also allows for the deconstruction of grand narratives in art history, as researching backward can lead us down unexpected paths and uncover artworks not featured in written art history overviews. Each research and its contextualization demonstrate the

51) Misco and Patterson, "An Old Fad of Great Promise," 79.

52) Pfannkuche, "A Modest Proposal for History Teachers," 244.

characteristics of a small narrative and independent knowledge construction, which are key aspects of a constructivist approach to learning.

The inverted chronology method perfectly matches the requirements of the new Croatian Visual Arts Curriculum due to its alignment with a critical and problem-based approach to learning. The curriculum content is organized into themes, within which teachers and students choose examples and presentation methods. The inverted chronological method can encourage an investigative and problem-oriented approach to these themes. It also fosters critical thinking, especially when the topics are issue-centered and reflect contemporary social problems.

Working with students has shown that the success of the reverse chronological approach depends on the connection of the issue with everyday life, the relevance and the controversy of the issue, and historical reversibility. Connecting teaching content with students' everyday experiences is one of the most effective motivators for learning because it establishes a functional link between the learned content and their experiences. The issue's relevance ensures that the issue is contemporary and aligned with students' interests and needs. The most important advantage is the historical reversibility of the theme and its ability to trace representation throughout history across different historical periods and styles. Based on these characteristics, reverse chronology can be accepted as a method that can successfully respond to the demands of the new curriculum and make learning art history more up-to-date and problem-based.

