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The model of instructing students of pedagogy in the field of education through art

ABSTRACT:

This article presents an original concept of pedagogy students' education in the field of education by art. It shows the meritocratic competence and practical training of the future kindergarten and elementary school teachers. The program was prepared by a team of researchers of the Institute of Preschool and School Pedagogy (Department of Artistic Education).

The basic question is: who can be entrusted with the conduction of art classes in early childhood education? This is a very current topic, inspiring a lot of emotion, especially among teachers, always recurring during the important changes taking place in the Polish education system.

KEYWORDS: competencies, education through art, teacher

Introduction

The article is devoted to the presentation of the author's original concept of instructing students of pedagogy in the field of education through art. It demonstrates the way in which the substantive and practical competences of future kindergarten and grade 1-3 teachers are developed. The program has been prepared by a team of scientific employees of the Institute of Pre-school and School Education (Department of Artistic Education) of the Pedagogical University of Cracow.

The basic question is, who, in early childhood education, should be entrusted with the task of conducting art classes? It is a very current topic, arousing a lot of emotions, especially among teachers, always coming back during important changes in the Polish system of education.

I will try to base my considerations on my many years of experience

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as a university teacher – on the one hand, an educated, active artist, and on the other hand, a pedagogue working in the area of artistic education. This experience has allowed me to make some summaries and has also given me an opportunity to take a specific stand.

Therefore, let us look for an answer to the question posed at the beginning:

- Who should conduct art classes in early childhood education?

The answer seems simple. It is contained in the provisions of the Core Curriculum of 2008, where we can read the following:

«In grades 1-3 of primary school, the education of the children shall be entrusted to one teacher. The task of conducting classes in music education, artistic education, physical education, computer science, and a modern foreign language may be entrusted to properly qualified teachers. Health education classes may be conducted with the participation of a specialist in the field of public health or nutrition – a nurse or a school nurse»².

This simplicity is only apparent.

The key to solving this problem may be competences, which are a prerequisite for a well-performed profession (in this case, one of a teacher).

The competences of teachers

The idea of competences has been and will be the subject of discussion for many researchers.

In *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku* [The 21st-century Encyclopedia of Pedagogy], we can find the following definition:

«[...] one of important teaching concepts, to which it is difficult to assign a clear meaning due to the colloquial connotations of this term, strongly rooted in the pedagogical thinking, and, as a result, its susceptibility to interpretation with value judgments».
(Pilch, 2004: 693)

One may be tempted to say that the competences of teachers are a compilation of personality characteristics (certain predispositions),

² <http://bip.men.gov.pl/men_bip/akty_prawne/rozporzadzenie_20081223_zal_2.pdf> (last access: 30.03.2014). Own translation – KŁD.

knowledge, and skills (gained in the course of professional preparation, as well as during actual work). Therefore, what should be the competences of a teacher implementing a curriculum in the field of artistic education in grades 1-3?

The Core Curriculum clearly specifies the objectives that should be accomplished at this level of education; these in turn determine the area of competence.

«A student graduating from grade 3:

1. in the field of artistic perception:
 - a) defines his or her cultural affiliation through contact with selected works of art, monuments, and with tradition in the family, local environment, and at school; participates in the cultural life of these environments, is aware of the existence of cultural institutions operating for their benefit,
 - b) uses media messages; uses their creations in his or her artistic activities (in accordance with elementary knowledge of the author's rights),
and further:

3. in the field of artistic reception:
 - a) distinguishes between such areas of human artistic activity as: architecture, visual and plastic arts, and other specified disciplines of art (photography, film) and media messages (television, the internet), as well as artistic crafts and folk art,
 - b) recognizes selected works of architecture and visual or plastic arts being part of the Polish and European cultural heritage; describes their characteristics (using basic terms proper to these areas of artistic activity)»³.

The teacher as the first guide to the world of art

To children, their teachers become the first guides to the world of art, helping discover and explore its mysteries. Proper preparation for work together helps successfully accomplish the tasks set. Each encounter with

³ <http://bip.men.gov.pl/men_bip/akty_prawne/rozporzadzenie_20081223_zal_2.pdf> (last access: 30.03.2014). Own translation – KŁD.

a work of art should be an effective and professional activity, leaving a permanent mark (not only in the form of a product, but also in the processes of internal transformation); therefore, first and foremost, what we should require from teachers is their awareness of values emerging from work on an artistic creation, as well as specialist knowledge and specific skills. This knowledge is related to (at the basic level) knowledge of selected artistic and cultural phenomena or works of art, and the ability to use professional terminology (characteristic of particular artistic disciplines). At a higher level, it pertains to gaining qualifications in the field of analyzing works, their forms and contents.

This approach allows the teachers to consciously work on educational strategies. It also helps them professionally develop and shape a sense of connection with national traditions in their pupils, which is to serve as an attitude of respect and tolerance for its diversity, and a belief in the need for participation in cultural life. Moreover, it will also introduce the children into the world of art, in which they will discover not only its branches and disciplines, but also their characteristics. This is the first, professional encounter, in which the ability to assimilate values and operate symbols, and to use the language of art (at the basic level of accessibility by children) is developed. The teacher's task is to create an opportunity for pupils to actively participate in culture by means of taking part in permanent and temporary exhibitions organized by museums and other cultural institutions, by means of taking part in important artistic events organized at school and outside of it, and giving them the possibility of publicly presenting their artistic works.

Another task of teachers is to develop children's expression. As we can read in the Core Curriculum,

«In the field of expression through art:

- a) [a student graduating from grade 3] undertakes creative activity, using such means of artistic expression as shapes, colours, texture in flat and spatial compositions (using specific materials, tools, and artistic techniques),
- b) completes simple projects in the field of applied art, including ones helping shape his or her identity and environment, and spreading culture in the school environment (using specific tools and media creations)»⁴.

⁴ <http://www.nck.pl/files/2012-08-02/men_tomom_7.pdf>, p. 38, (last access:

Here another scope of teachers' competences is found – the ability to properly design the learning process in the field of artistic education. For this purpose, one needs knowledge of developmental psychology and psychology of creativity. The detailed issues are concerned with the creative process, in which such phenomena as imagination – the basic factor of artistic creativity-, perception – the basis of shaping creative imagination-, and expression – revealing the need for artistic creation-, appear.

Another element is knowledge about the gradual conceptions of the development of artistic creativity in children. It is this knowledge that allows the teacher to be aware of their creative abilities, conditioned by their overall psychophysical development. Thus, he or she may rationally observe and control the changes that occur during the creative process. As a result, the teacher can properly stimulate them, developing the children's potential talents, or correcting their deficits. Here appears the ability to 'read' children's works; more specifically, the ability to analyze them in terms of the language of artistic expression through insightful and multi-faceted identification of the characteristics of creative expression. This analysis is concerned with such issues as:

- determining the level of skill in using means of artistic expression in the field of composition, characteristics and values of iconic forms, spatial presentations, graphic and colour values;
- determining the level of the child's artistic expression, including his or her ease, spontaneity, and fluency in using means of artistic expression, the existing inhibitions, constraints, or deficits, the emotional level and the contents of the works;
- determining the creative values.

An accurate analysis allows an insightful and detailed identification of all aspects of the work. It helps the teacher discern the great value of children's art, the essence of which is contained not only in a spontaneous gesture aimed at the world, at the viewer – the image created by the child is a meaningful example of his or her multiple competences, including the ability to explore the world and to transform his or her experiences into an intelligent message.

The ability to read children's drawings is also helpful while assessing their works – the teacher is able to determine whether the task

(according to the curriculum) has been completed and whether the resulting product complies with standards set out for a given age group. In this way, he or she avoids dangerous, subjective assessment.

For the learning process in the field of art to take place, it is necessary to know the ins and outs of techniques and forms used while working with children. Working with children is an idiosyncratic activity often requiring, in addition to traditional solutions, the application of untypical and non-standard techniques. The selection of those should be conscious, subject to the implemented curriculum, so that the children can understand them through practical implementation (learning through fun, learning through action, learning through independent solution of problems).

In artistic education at the level of kindergarten and grades 1-3 of primary school, we usually use the following techniques:

- drawing techniques;
- painting techniques;
- sculpting and modeling techniques;
- graphic techniques;
- paper techniques – flat and spatial;
- combined/mixed techniques.

Each of these groups of techniques utilizes specific means of expression. Their conscious use helps the children understand the language of art and affects their development processes. By drawing, painting, modeling, tearing, or cutting (working with different materials and tools), the child learns, above all, the fluency of movements, exercising his or her hand and finger muscles; he or she practices coordination, develops reconstructive and creative imagination, as well as expands his or her social and emotional space. It all helps achieve the best results possible (not only in the field of artistic creativity), guaranteeing better academic performance.

The knowledge of the mysteries of art requires that the teacher have appropriate practical preparation, as it is the creative process in which he or she can discover his or her own creative capabilities and 'touch' artistic issues. In direct contact with matter, the teacher can verify his or her own creative abilities in the artistic medium.

Therefore, I will now return to the question about who should conduct art classes in kindergarten and in grades 1-3. Among the people who could conduct such classes, there are three groups of teachers:

- specialists in the field of pre-school and early childhood education;
- specialists in the field of artistic education;
- artists with pedagogical preparation.

The preparation of future early childhood teachers for conducting art classes

My further considerations will be focused on the first group. Undoubtedly, in this case such a teacher should be 'prepared' from basics. Usually, pedagogy students have little knowledge (concerning artistic issues) and scarce practical skills – it is caused by the low quality of artistic education at particular stages of education. It can be proved by surveys conducted among students of the first years of pedagogy (major: pre-school and early childhood education), which clearly demonstrate the cultural illiteracy of the young generation.

«In the years 2010-2012, 320 people participated in the survey⁵. The questions asked were as follows:

1. Name at least five Polish artists (and their works) that you know.
2. Name at least five world-renowned artists (and their works) that you know.
3. Describe the characteristics of the culture and art of the region in which you live. If you can, name the most important monuments located in the area of your residence.

The collected results were in line with the predictions – it turned out that the long-term collapse and huge negligence in the artistic education of the young generation have caused its cultural illiteracy. None of the surveyed students were able to name the maximum number of artists, neither Polish nor foreign ones. Problems appeared also in case of attributing works to the proper artists. The most frequently named Polish artist was Jan Matejko (appeared in 95% of the answers). Then, there was Stanisław Wyspiański (70% of the answers). There were also single answers such as Olga Boznańska, Józef Chełmoński, Julian Fałat, the Kossak brothers, Jacek Malczewski, Nikifor Krynicki, Witkacy.

Among world-renowned artists, the most frequently named one was Pablo Picasso (80% of the answers), then Vincent van

⁵ The survey was conducted among students of the first years, in the years 2010-2012. Its aim was to determine the extent of the young people's knowledge about selected cultural phenomena.

Gogh (75%), Michelangelo (60%), Leonardo da Vinci (62%), Salvador Dali (30%); single answers concerning less-known artists also appeared. Here, the respondents were more successful in attributing particular works to their authors.

The third question tested the respondents' knowledge about the nearest art and culture. The majority of them were able to name the characteristics of a given region (this information is all the more valuable that our students come from different parts of Poland). However, naming examples of this art was not as easy – few students enumerated examples of regional art or named folk artists living in a given area». (Łapot-Dzierwa, 2013: 138)

Another problem surfacing during the process of educating students of pedagogy is their scarce awareness of their own creative capabilities. Such classes are a great challenge to them, in which the process of opening to art in a conscious way takes place.

Therefore, how should a future early childhood teacher be prepared to conduct art classes? He or she needs to be equipped with proper knowledge and skills that will prepare him or her for independent, creative use of selected artistic concepts for the purpose of carrying out art classes with kindergarten and grade 1-3 children.

Therefore, the curricula should include concepts of the theory of art and culture. This field of knowledge will enable the students to become familiar with selected cultural and artistic phenomena in the context of artistic education of small children – this context is of great importance here and needs to be accentuated, as it is the knowledge necessary to implement the concept of education through art (in kindergarten and grades 1-3). Not only do young people organize their knowledge, but they also have the possibility of shaping their analytical and interpretation skills in terms of works of art, which allows them to make conscious choices of works for the process of education, developing the ability to classify them with the use of the right key (that is, with the use of all functions of the work). Therefore, it is important to introduce concepts related to the basic language of artistic expression (works of art).

Then, the students should learn the basics of the development of creative processes in children. Here, knowledge of developmental psychology and psychology of creativity (including the psychological basics of the creative process) is vital. Introduction of these concepts helps the students understand the specificity of young children's

artistic activities, and illustrates how these processes take place and why children's works of art are the way they are – surprising and incorrect, yet charming. As a result, it helps them carefully analyze the works and design activities on the basis of methodological assumptions (typical of artistic education in the pre-school and early childhood period).

Another stage should be about broadening knowledge and developing skills in the field of the objectives and curriculum of artistic education, the forms and methods of class organization, the design, organization, and implementation of educational directions, and the promotion and presentation of children's art. As a result, the students are able to prepare for independent, creative development and implementation of learning processes in the field of artistic education.

An important element is the introduction of concepts related to the use of electronic media, including computer and information technologies, into the artistic activities of children.

The most difficult area in the education of students of pedagogy is their own creative activity. This proposed 'encounter' with arts is full of uncertainty caused by the lack of faith in their own abilities. It is not surprising, because in most cases artistic instruction (practical) at lower stages of education (kindergarten, primary school, junior high school) is a seriously neglected area, and the student's own activity is limited to a small number of techniques, and thus, only a small range of means of artistic expression. Moreover, in the process of education a significant break occurs; it takes place in the period during which important changes occur in the artistic activity of a young person. After passing the stage of ideoplastic art and embarking on the stage of physioplastic art, after the period of the crisis of one's own art, each secondary school student can define himself or herself in the field of art. Unfortunately, he or she is robbed of this possibility, as in school curricula there is no place for artistic creation. Therefore, we begin our meetings with students with their re-introduction into the world of art. The first stage involves gaining knowledge and practical skills related to artistic forms and techniques (for the purpose of working with children). Aside from some basic knowledge, the students develop their skills in the field of artistic techniques and their means of expression. We begin with uncomplicated examples in order to proceed to more diverse forms, and finally to experimental and unusual solutions. In terms of their topics, the tasks are related to the material covered in kindergarten and grades 1-3 – they are concerned mainly with teaching

artistic literacy, and aimed at the development of imagination, dexterity, and emotions; namely, at development in the field of the language of artistic expression.

Another stage is participation in classic workshops – the students are able to experience the process of drawing and painting from nature and models. They perform such tasks as drawing or painting still life compositions, portraits, or figures, as well as develop their skills in the field of using diverse and experimental artistic techniques and their means of expression for the purpose of independent creation of the form and content of an artwork.

Conclusions

Therefore, what guarantees the proper preparation of students of pedagogy for conducting art classes in kindergarten and grades 1-3?

Above all, well-prepared study programs providing for the introduction of the abovementioned content. These programs, on the basis of which the students will be able to gain knowledge and skills indispensable for their future professional work, as well as – most importantly – to develop social competences, including their own cultural awareness.

«Since the dawn of time, the development of cultural identity has been entrusted to the elites of a given country. They, as the best educated environment, show the way for the whole society to follow. This task is still important today, as the political changes of the last decades, difficulties in acclimatizing to the new reality, and looking for one's own place in united Europe have put this concept in the shade. Meanwhile, one should note that culture is a value that enables whole nations to exist – one may say that there is no society without culture, and there is no culture without society; culture makes a young generation become a nation, and a country – its homeland» (Czapski, 2000: 31).

Research projects carried out by students, in which the field of exploration is broadly-defined artistic education in kindergarten and in grades 1-3, prove that a properly managed process of education in this area is possible. A well-prepared (equipped with knowledge and skills) graduate of pedagogy is able to earnestly conduct such classes.

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