

Why future generalist teachers don't like art education?

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Abstract: Art is an irreplaceable creative and expressive activity for children, a means of cognition and abreaction, and its significance is also enshrined in the curriculum for primary education. Distance teaching in primary schools caused by covid-19 has confirmed that art education is not a subject to which teachers, founders or parents would attach high importance. The long-standing problem of underestimating art education in the primary school is made visible by the fact that teachers have not used or have not been encouraged to use the educational, creative, mentally hygienic or therapeutic potential of the subject. However, it also points to the attitude of primary school generalist teachers to art education. Qualitative research conducted among final year teacher-training students completed in January 2020, a month before school closure, has showed that future teachers have a contradictory attitude towards art education, often shaped by their own negative educational experiences, and the lack of confidence in their knowledge and skills. Equipped as such, teachers are virtually unable to offer good-quality teaching in a standard teaching mode, let alone in the mode of distance learning. On the other hand, these findings suggest the direction in which to take the training of future teachers in primary education so that their own experience and low self-efficacy do not adversely affect their future teaching practice.

Key words: art education, self-efficacy, teachers' self-efficacy, quality in education, primary education, curriculum

Introduction

Art education is not one of the so-called 'main subjects', but it is one of the disciplines that present a different kind of cognitive challenge to children, especially in the primary education. In art education, it is primarily the ability to provide space in which children could be subjective, expressive and creative in their own way. In the words of practice, art education is considered a leisure-time subject without high demands on the transmitted educational content. School managements, teachers, children and parents identify with this. As research shows, in terms of its importance art education is almost at the bottom of an imaginary list of all educational subjects regardless of national borders (Eisner, 1989; Garvis, Twig, Pendergast, 2011; Lemon, Garvis, 2013; Rabkin, Hedberg, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 2012; Welch, 1995). The decoration of schools and the presentation of art products are sufficient evidence to the quality of art education at a given school (Řepa, 2019; Štěpánková, 2019). While art education has no ambition to compete with the lessons of the mother tongue or mathematics, the core subjects of the entrance exams for secondary schools and grammar schools, it is necessary to think about the position of art education and the quality of art lessons.

Recent experience with distance school teaching during the covid-19 pandemic has shown that galleries, primary art schools¹ and museums have been able to offer a meaningful range of thoughtful and targeted art activities. These are institutions that employ art-educated professionals and that appreciate the value and benefits of art education. In a time in which especially children

¹ Primary art schools are public schools (founded and organised by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic) that offer basic education in arts to children from 5 years of age but also to adults. Depending on the size of the school, after-school lessons are given in music art, visual art, drama art and dance. (translator's note)

were exposed to a high level of stress from an unknown and threatening situation and from social isolation, these institutions realised fully the educational, leisure-time and therapeutic importance of art. At the request of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, primary school² teachers focused pragmatically and quite understandably on other subjects. The question to consider is whether generalist teachers would be able to offer meaningful didactic content in art education at all.

Numerous foreign studies show that the quality of art education at primary level is negatively affected by insufficient or absent art training of future generalist teachers at universities (Garvis, Pendergast, 2010; Lemon, Garvis, 2013), by insufficient support for students in their pedagogical practice by teachers (Garvis, Twig, Pendergarst, 2011) or by the still narrowing space for art education in the curriculum of primary schools (Davis, 2008; Rabkin & Hedberg, 2011; Russell-Bowie, 2010, 2012). Eisner (1997, p. 17) comments on the dislike of the subject due to the professional uncertainty of future teachers as follows: 'We are expecting generalists teachers to teach what they do not know and often do not love.'

However, the situation in the Czech Republic is different. Art education can rely on a long historical tradition (David, 2008; Pospíšil, 2019). Art education has a firm place in the curriculum for primary education (RVP, 2017), and in the university training of future generalist teachers, there is a systematic education in practical and theoretical art disciplines throughout their studies. Given these conditions, a higher quality of art education as well as a positive attitude of future generalist teachers to the subject would be assumed. Nevertheless, the practice of art education at primary level in the Czech Republic is described similarly regardless of the geographical context. Generalist teachers present recurring ideas for art making activities, offer limited range of art media, emphasise art products rather than the process of art creation (Day, Hurwitz, 2012; Bates, 2000; Štěpánková, Pířová, Slavíková, 2016). Generalist teacher-training students are afraid of teaching art education in their pedagogical practice, they do not have confidence in their own abilities, they express a negative attitude to their own art skills and to the subject itself.

The aim of this study is to reflect the complicated relationship of future generalist teachers with art education, and to point out that their relationship with the subject is formed at the beginning of their own art education at primary school. The research focused on the personal memories of future primary school generalist teachers and on the specific experiences that shaped their attitude to the subject. The theoretical concept of TSE (teacher self-efficacy) shows the fundamental importance of confidence in one's own professional ability (Housego, 1990; Bandura, 1994, 1997, 2006; Pajares, 2002; Russel- Bowie, 2012; Garvis, Twig, Pendergarst, 2011) for teaching practice.

Art Education in the Curriculum

In the system of mainstream education, art education stands in the opposite of the subjects that prioritise memory learning, tasks with one correct solution and a convergent way of thinking. Art has an important cognitive, expressive and communicative function, especially in childhood. Thanks to its potential to enrich the children's personality, to develop their creativity, to mediate knowledge of the culture of society, and to create desire to actively participate in it, it is not substitutable in school for another subject (UNESCO, 2006, 2010; Baronne, Eisner, 2011).

² Primary school in the Czech Republic is for children aged 6-11.

The curriculum for primary education in the Czech Republic (RVP, 2017) defines high goals for art education and describes the importance of art as a *'specific way of knowledge'*, the language of art as a *'unique means of communication'*, understanding art and culture as *'inseparable parts of human existence'*, art making activities as a means of *'self-awareness as a free individual'* and as a path *'to a creative approach to the world, the possibility of actively overcoming life stereotypes and enriching emotional life, etc.'* (RVP ZV, 2017, s. 83). At the same time, it provides teachers at all levels of education with great freedom in choosing the content of their lessons and in its didactic transformation. The philosophy of this approach assumes that the freedom offered to teachers will help them achieve a higher quality of teaching than it would be achieved by a directive curriculum (Maňák, Janík, Švec, 2008, s. 76). Despite the possibility of individually forming the content of the curriculum, art education at the primary level is usually reduced to work activities. Children's art production thus reflects the discrepancy between the planned and implemented curriculum.

Quality in Art Education and Teacher's Self-Efficacy

Quality in art education, its characteristics, ways of achieving the quality and overcoming its obstacles are all important topics of current research in the field (Eisner, 1989; Garvis, Pendergast, 2010; Hetland, Palmer, Seidel, Tishman, Winner, 2009; Pospíšil, Řepa, Šobáňová, 2019; Lemon, Garvis, 2013; Slavík, Janík, 2012; Šobáňová, 2012; Štěpánková, 2016). The relationship of art teachers to art education and the impact of it on the quality of teaching is not usually the subject of research, because it is assumed there is a positive connection between the teacher and their own qualification. The situation is different for future generalist teachers, whose education is broad, rather than specialised in one or two disciplines. Their relationship to art education is often problematic (Welch, 1995; Eisner, Day, 2004; Garvis, 2008, 2012; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010; Lemon, Garvis, 2013; Štěpánková, 2013; 2019; Collins, 2016, Tavşancil, Yalçin, 2016; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). It is commonly shaped by negative experiences with art lessons in their primary school or is influenced by a critical self-assessment of their own skills. The teacher's belief in their own professional abilities fundamentally influences their pedagogical performance and the quality of the teaching they provide (Bandura, 1994, 1997; Garvis, 2012). Bandura (2006) clarifies that *'The construct of teachers' self-efficacy is grounded within self-efficacy theory, emphasising that people can exercise influence over what they do.'* He defines self-efficacy as *'beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments'* (Bandura, 1997, p.3). *'Faith'* is a key concept and expresses that it is more about what I believe I can do than what I will actually do (Bandura (2006, Pajares, 2002, 2006). A high level of self-efficacy and a strong belief in one's own ability make it possible to perceive difficult tasks as challenges rather than as threats to be avoided. On the other hand, a low level of self-efficacy affects the level of set goals of an individual, as well as the level of commitment and perseverance in achieving them. (Bandura, 2006, Pajares, 2002, 2006). Research shows that a teacher whose teachers' efficacy is high will devote more energy to the subject and their own training, applying more inventions while actively seeking educational opportunities and resources (Housego, 1990; Wertheim, Leyser, 2002; Garvis, Pendergast, 2010; Garvis, Twigg, Pendergast, 2011; Lemon, Garvis, 2013; Oreck, 2006). Conversely, if a teacher's professional self-concept is low, they will most likely avoid the subject, teach it routinely and without invention (Cox, 1992; Garvis, Pendergast, 2010, Lemon, Garvis, 2013, Bandura, 1994). In their lessons, they are more likely to apply a directive approach and to pay more attention to class management than to support children's inner motivation for learning and creativity (Pajares, 2006). With their professional self-concept (Bandura, 1997; Lemon, Twigg, Pendergast, 2011; Lemon, Garvis, 2013), teachers themselves

significantly influence not only the quality, the meaning and the goals of the subject, but also contribute to the formation of children's self-efficacy (Pastorelli et al., 2001).

Sources of Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1994, 1997; 2006; Pajares, 2002, 2006) sees the main sources of self-efficacy in: 1) *mastery experience*, which provides a positive experience as well as the experience of mastering a task. It is considered the most important source for building a strong belief in one's own ability. 2) *Vicarious experience* is the experience gained by observation, in which the idea of how to solve the task is created and the certainty about one's own ability to handle the task is strengthened. 3) *Verbal persuasion* and encouragement mobilise effort and perseverance. Criticism and error-orientation, on the other hand, undermine self-efficacy. 4) *Somatic and emotional states* help in evaluating situations, and influence whether we perceive these situations positively or negatively. Stress is usually accompanied by a somatic response (sweating, palpitations, anxiety), which is considered a threat and therefore has a negative impact on self-efficacy.

When the main resources are regularly saturated and the teacher provides children with support, as well as positive feedback, motivation and objective information, then such a teacher builds positive self-efficacy. When a child is criticised by a teacher, 'convinced' of her/his insufficient potential and skills, such a child tends to avoid situations in which s/he could fail. Distrusting one's own ability often leads to the creation of a 'label' ('I can't draw', 'I don't have a talent'). A child identifies with this label, sometimes for life (Pajares, 2002, Rosenthal, Jacobson, 1968; Jussim, Robustelli, Cain, 2009; Štěpánková, 2012). Nevertheless, when building self-efficacy of children, it is important to focus not only on increasing self-confidence, but most importantly on supporting their real skills acquired through personal experience and success in activities (Bandura, 1994; Lummis, Morris, Paolino, 2014).

Research

At the beginning of the research, the question was why students of the primary education, who will deal with art education throughout their pedagogical career, are very often afraid of art education, value their own artistic abilities and skills very poorly (*'I cannot draw', 'I do not have a talent', 'art education has never worked for me'*), or they openly express a negative attitude towards the subject (*'I do not like art education'*). The teacher's personal relationship to the subject taught, their professional self-concept and professional equipment are absolutely essential for their pedagogical performance. If the future teacher knows beforehand that art education is a subject they do not like, it is obvious that they will not be able to provide art lessons of good quality in the future and, in addition, they will expose themselves to long-term stress.

The importance of the teacher's professional self-concept, the impact it has on their pedagogical performance and the quality of their teaching has been well analysed (Bandura, 1996, 1997, 2006; Pajares, 2006; Garvis, 2008; Garvis, Pendergast, 2010; Lemon, Garvis, 2013; Russell-Bowie, 2012; Collins, 2016). However, less known are the events and experiences that have formed the relationship of future generalist teachers to the subject. This relationship had been formed much earlier before the university. The research therefore turns to the questions: *'How and by what means was the self-efficacy of future generalist teachers in art education formed', 'What effect of a*

generalist teacher is perceived as negative even after years,' and 'What formed a positive relationship of students to art education'.

Method

The research took place during two winter terms in the academic year 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 at the University of Hradec Králové in four groups of students in the final years of their study. Research was concerned to students of the primary education (n = 26) and education (n = 26) within the subjects of 'art expression' and 'artfiletics'³. These seminars are not conceived as traditional art studio teaching but stand on the border between 'process-oriented art education' and 'artistic/creative art therapy approach'⁴ (Karkou, 2006, p. 89). The aim of the course is to present alternative approaches to art education, which are applicable in art education at primary school. These approaches emphasise the communicative, reflexive and expressive component of artmaking activities.

A qualitative survey was implemented at the beginning of the course. In the form of an essay with assigned topics, students retrospectively recorded memories of art education they experienced at their own primary school. In particular, they focused on the course of art education, its educational content, teachers and their pedagogical guidance, their relationship to the subject, positive and negative experiences. The form of an essay was chosen deliberately to make it easier for students to 'travel into the past' and recall memories from a long time ago. The assignment was communicated in such a way that prevents suggesting 'desirable' answers, such as increased critical evaluation of the quality of teaching, the expertise of the teacher, the implemented art ideas. Students were also asked what professional skills they would need to feel professionally confident in art education. Students' texts were coded, and based on the coding, key topics were defined, and individual categories were created (Miovský, 2006; Gavora, 2010). Within the categories, the frequency of keywords was analysed, and this data was quantified. The analysis of texts took place at the beginning of the semester in order to understand students' relationship to art, to define obstacles, and to consider a suitable way of working with students, which would allow them to rewrite or re-evaluate their attitudes to art education or to their own skills.

³ Artfiletics is a reflective, creative and experiential conception of education, which is based on visual culture or other expressive cultural expressions (drama, music, dance). The aim of artfiletics is to enrich children's cultural capital, to develop their social competencies and to prevent psycho-social failures through artistic activities and expressive play reflected on in children groups in the so-called reflective dialogue (Slavík, 2001).

⁴ The artistic/creative approach is based primarily on the artistic component, but the therapeutic competence allows the art therapist to choose the material, technique, theme and method of reflection. Karkou (2006, p. 89) characterises this practice as follows: 1. The therapeutic process consists in supporting the client to engage in artmaking activities involving them in the creation as much as possible. 2. The aim is to support the client and enable them to be as open and spontaneous as possible. 3. To enable the client to work with the metaphor and relate it to real situations that can take place in real life.

Results

Remembering Art Education

Thanks to the topics assigned, the students' essays clarified the roots of their relationship to the subject and shed light on how their self-efficacy in art education was shaped.

What are your memories of art education at the primary school?		
Positive	8	15,4 %
Boredom and stereotype	20	38,5 %
Negative	19	36,5 %
I don't remember	5	9,6 %

The analysis of the essays showed that **15.38 % of respondents have positive memories of art education**. Students appreciated the teachers, their commitment, the atmosphere in the classroom (*'I only have good memories', 'artmaking was fun', 'interesting topics and techniques', 'we would often go to draw in nature', 'we were always creating something'*).

However, a larger group of respondents (**38.46 %**) assessed their art education classes as **lessons without content**. Although the students' emotions were not explicitly negative, the subject and its content were described as **stereotypical**, boring, template-based, routine, as 'teaching without teaching'. The biggest criticism was addressed to the way in which art activities were conducted. Instead of applying creativity and motivating children to create original and well thought-out artworks, the work was done according to the teacher's templates, patterns or verbal instructions (*'all works were the same', 'we had to copy everything according to the teacher', 'no one was allowed to deviate', 'the work was uniform, according to templates'*).

A comparable number of students (**36.5 %**) evaluated the subject **significantly negatively** in retrospect. Their accusations were directed towards **the absence of educational content**, stereotypical choice of art means and themes (watercolour, pencil; seasons and holidays). Criticism was directed primarily at the teacher, their (non)interest in the subject and their didactic abilities (*'we were not allowed to create the way we wanted', 'exact instructions of what and how to do it', 'the teacher interfered in our work', 'evaluation of drawings without clear criteria'*). Respondents particularly strongly criticised the absence of teacher's efforts to 'teach' and to pass on the content (*'I did not learn anything,' 'they did not teach us how to draw, but only evaluated what we can or rather cannot do'*). The directive and instructive way of assigning art activities according to the teacher's vision, or emphasising exemplary 'good' works, the impossibility to express themselves in their own way, the use of templates for pre-drawing, which led to the production of the same works by the whole class and minimal space for one's own invention were also subjected to much criticism. Particularly negative in their evaluation of the subject were those students who were secretly or openly evaluated by the teacher as untalented (*'s/he never praised me for anything', 'receiving the F grade in art education was common', 'I do not remember the teacher fondly, all s/he was doing was criticising me', 'I have no positive experience'*).

The traditional characteristics of art education as a **leisure-time** subject did not form a separate category. Students always associated it with either 'boredom and stereotype', that is, a **lesson**

without content, or with a negative memory of the way the teacher led the lessons. The relaxing mode of the lessons was interpreted by students as having a looser regime in the class (*'we could talk to each other during lessons'*) but did not positively affect the overall evaluation of the quality of the subject. The absence of the content of the subject and its low educational potential were much perceived by students (*'we did not learn anything, and therefore we know nothing'*, *'teachers gave nothing to the subject'*, *'the teacher gave us a job, and then paid no attention to us'*, *'always the same techniques and topics'*, *'glue, scissors, watercolours the entire primary school'*).

The category of **'I do not remember'** consisted of five respondents (9.6 %). The harsh statement *'I don't remember'*, *'I have no memories'* is difficult to evaluate. To assume that it was teaching so uninteresting that it was simply not remembered, or rather pushed out from memories, would be misleading. When comparing with the answers to the question of competencies, it is possible to say that only one of this group of respondents assessed themselves as significantly uncertain in their artistic competencies. The other four respondents did not experience a deficit in their own artistic skills. They perceived the need for further training and improvement, but their belief in their own self-efficacy was high enough.

Professional Competencies of Students

The second set of questions focused on professional competencies and professional self-evaluation. In most cases, students reported deficits in multiple areas simultaneously.

Which art related skills do you need to feel confident?		
I don't need any	13	25 %
Didactic skills	12	23,0 %
Theory, art history	11	21,2 %
Artistic skills	11	21,2 %
Techniques	10	19,2 %
I just can't do it	5	9,6 %

25 % of students said they **lack nothing** to have greater professional confidence, they are not aware of lacking anything or do not know (*'I do not feel that I am lacking something'*, *'I do not know at all'*, *'The only thing I lack is the understanding of my parents and teachers for the new approach to art education'*). As a matter of fact, these are the same students whose relationship was formed on the basis of positive or neutral experiences, or whose personal creative needs were saturated outside school. It is not possible to say that students' claims about their own competencies are objective. Pajares (2006) states that one usually tends to overestimate their own skills. However, a slight overestimation seems more useful for life than an underestimation, as it allows you to increase your efforts and perseverance when facing a challenging task (Bandura, 1994, 1997, 2006).

Didactic competencies (23.0 %) represented the most significant deficit for students. In particular, they doubted their ability to didactically transform the pedagogical content knowledge, to find an educational motive, to motivate students to engage in artmaking, and to encourage their creativity (*'how to prepare a lesson to be creative'*, *'how to motivate children'*). In terms of frequency, the same level of insufficiency was reported for the **subject-matter knowledge** in practical art skills (**drawing and painting**) **21.2 %** and theoretical knowledge (**art history**) **21.2 %**. However, students did not show deeper knowledge of techniques that would provide them with a 'greater sense of confidence'

(19.2 %) in art techniques (such as printmaking techniques, painting techniques), but only in art procedures (e.g. blowing colours, embedding or casting paints, colour stain prints). These procedures are an integral part of experimenting with art material. If this experimenting becomes the only goal of teaching, then it points to the helplessness of the teacher and to their goal to just simply fill the lesson. 9.6 % of respondents summarised their competencies on a flat-rate basis and declared themselves to be a 'hopeless case'. They labelled themselves as incompetent (*'I'll never be sure of art education', 'I've had problems with art education since I was a child, so I prefer to avoid it', 'I don't have enough artistic talent', 'to be a good art teacher, I would need to change my personality – more creativity, ideas and courage'*).

Discussion

The results of the research showed that for **75 % of respondents was not art education** at the primary school connected with positive experience. They associated this experience with the suppression of creativity, the absence of educational content and the incompetence of a teacher. **75%** of students feel professionally insecure and perceive that they lack one or more subject competencies for their pedagogical practice. Their self-efficacy belief is low, and as a result, the risk of repeating the educational strategy of pedagogical 'role models' from their own history is high. Such strategy involves the emphasis on the form, accuracy and purity of the work, the adoption of proven artistic practices that lead to a certain goal, that is, the stereotype and uniformity criticised by students. It is gratifying that, at least in singular cases, students perceived their limits not as obstacles but as an opportunity for their own learning. They acknowledged gaps in skills or knowledge but were convinced that they would learn from their own mistakes.

Especially in the context of students who were assessed as entirely incompetent, it is important to perceive that people with low self-efficacy tend to perceive their poor performance as a result of the absence of talents (Bandura, 1994). Rather than with effort and perseverance, students often associate artistic disciplines only with talent and natural ability. Self-efficacy theory states that we strive for what we believe we can achieve and avoid or do not strive for what we believe we cannot achieve. The conviction of future teachers about their own abilities and competencies in the field of art, thanks to self-fulfilling prophecy (Pajares, 2002; Rosenthal, Jacobson, 1968; Jussim, Robustelli, Cain, 2009), influences their current performance in a given subject, the quality of their future pedagogical performance and personal well-being.

Furthermore, we can see that the strongest formative influence on students' self-efficacy was the absence of mastery experience, which was not mediated due to the low professional competence of the primary school teacher. The students who evaluated the subject positively had the opposite experience. Their memories of art education were based on creative experience, the diversity of the offer of ideas, art resources, erudite or at least engaged teacher approach to the subject. All of these students also believed in their artistic skills. If they showed uncertainty, it was either in the area of didactics or art history, a discipline that they did not identify with talent, but which needed to be 'learned'. The rest of students experienced the impact of *verbal persuasion* in the opposite sense, which means that in primary school they were convinced by the teacher more about their own shortcomings than competencies.

A retrospective evaluation can weaken or intensify some memories. An informed view of a student and at the same time almost graduated teacher is also different from the view of a child. Therefore,

it cannot be said that art education as a subject at the primary school would not bring students any benefits, joy and satisfaction from creation. However, for the practice of future generalist teachers, the feeling of incompetence carried into the present and low self-efficacy is important. This, as has already been said, is not about real abilities, but about the faith in one's abilities.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the form of art education at primary school is shaped not only by the quality of university teacher-training programs, but above all by the firmly rooted previous experience of the future generalist teacher. If students of primary education program enter art education with a negative experience, low self-efficacy, no intrinsic motivation and determination to achieve at least a certain level of skills, the process of studying is for them very difficult and benefits limited. If we cannot help to change the already formed attitude of students towards art education and their own skills within the university training, most likely these students will fail as future teachers of art education.

Therefore, it is necessary in particular:

- to support future generalist teachers' courage and joy of artmaking,
- to strengthen students' faith in their own abilities,
- to help students' build a positive relationship with the subject.

Both challenge and necessity for art training at the university-level studies is to reconsider the way future generalist teachers are prepared. It is important not to focus only on artistic skills and knowledge (drawing, painting, art history) in which they are lacking, but to work with students' motivation that can overcome these weaknesses. The same applies to the research and evaluation of teaching. It is not enough to collect only data, but it is necessary to try to monitor the teaching process and to perceive the dynamics of changes that shape the practice.

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