

Home alone – creative results of quarantining

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Abstract

The paper presents current creative outputs of students of the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University in Brno - future kindergarten teachers that were created during the lockdown due to the coronavirus epidemic. The initially contact taught practical art seminars of the spring semester turned into a systematic individual work on a personal project, whose aim was to be strongly connected with the personalities, interests and hobbies of the students. Consultations, inspiration, mutual interactions and the presentation of the process of creation and the resulting works all have moved to virtual space. Despite the feelings of insecurity and fear, the sudden and unexpected situation allowed many to slow down and avoid distractions, stay at home, immerse themselves more, and begin to fully create.

Key words: kindergarten teachers, art education, creativity, virtual space, art projects

Introduction

At the Department of Art of the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University (PdF MU) in Brno, the students comprise from not only educators of Art subjects from high schools, elementary schools and other art institutions, but also future kindergarten school teachers. In the curriculum of the undergraduate program Preschool and Extracurricular Pedagogy of the Preschool Education major you can find, among others, disciplines aimed at the development of productive, receptive and theoretically-artistic levels of subject competence. Art disciplines attempt to equip the students of the given field with necessary knowledge and skills that will subsequently lead to qualified project planning and leading of art activities of the children in such a way to comply with the current goals of preschool education. Art has always been an integral ¹part of the preschool education even in its previous conceptions. One of the major contributors we want to mention is Jaromír Uždil (1915-2006), a significant character of the Czech art education¹, who was instrumental in establishing the theoretical and methodical foundation of art education. This highly regarded expert on child's artistic expression and art education has been advocating for the contribution of creative preschool activities already in the second half of the past century. The content of many of his publications was guided specifically towards the recognition and respecting of the unique artistic expression of a child and the possibilities of its development. Uždil has also been introducing the thoughts of many period foreign experts in his theoretical texts, e.g. Read, Arnheim, etc. ² He has started to promote the creative approach to art education in kindergartens since the 60s. He was aware that art activities in kindergartens should be based on authentic experiences and imagination of the child. He pointed out that the "child, in its artistic activity, doesn't stop at only simply illustrating situations and ideas, it communicates contents that have symbolic values and are tightly bound with its own personality, with its deeply placed fond of avocations, needs and visions," (Uždil, 1980, pp. 70.). We are mentioning this fact because, even despite Uždil's efforts and many other Czech theoreticians and art educators, in the real-world applications we still see many

¹ Jaromír Uždil was instrumental to the founding and operation of the Czech section of INSEA; he was the President of the Czechoslovak committee INSEA from the beginning for three election terms (between 1967 and 1984). Prof. Uždil also participated, in 1964, on establishing the worldwide exhibition of children artistic expression in Prague, which was internationally praised. In 1990, the USSEA awarded Jaromír Uždil with the global award The Edwin Ziegfeld Award for contribution in art education. He was also awarded, in memoriam, by the Sir Herbert Read Award, which is presented only to the most important personalities by the global INSEA.

² Uždil for example references Herbert Read (1893-1968), who dedicated an extensive chapter on the child's artistic expression in his book *Education Through Art* (1954). He also mediated the ideas of Rudolf Arnheim (1904-2007), who was developing the findings of psychology of shapes in connection with artistic expression and its formal characteristics (Uždil, 1980, pp.18).

problems stemming for example from the lack of knowledge of the specifics of a child's artistic expression or of the current goals of preschool education and the possible role of art activities as a device in their fulfillment. The offered art activities can also be followed by formalism, aiming towards purpose-built products or excessive expectations put on the child, which is unable to perform the given tasks on its own. This causes suppression of the unique artistic expression and creative solution of the task through imitation of the presented template, and creations that exactly follow the given method, or direct interventions from the teacher into the child's work, which is in direct contradiction to the goals of the current preschool education. The current curricular document in effect – *The Framework Education Programme for Preschool Education* (FEP PE, 2018) accentuates personality focused preschool education, demands respecting developmental specifics of a child; these specifics should be projected in the educational content, forms and methods. Preschool education should allow for the development and education of every single individual in the scope of their own personal abilities and needs (FEP PE, 2018, pp.5). These intentions are also supported by the educational content sorted into five educational areas.³ These areas include space for applying art activities (there is no Art as a subject in preschool education). It is therefore important for the teachers to not only support spontaneous creation by the children, but also purposefully offer creative activities as a tool of preschool education.

We need to project this importance into professional training, just like it should also respond to topics and problems that the art discipline is currently facing. Experts tried to term these phenomena. They consider the influence of new media, information and communication technologies on art as the most acute. Another sector is child's artistic expression and educator's influence (from copying templates, to celebrating free spontaneity, opportunities to develop creativity in perception, creation and interpretation). They also reflect upon the list of offered creative methods (which roles can classical creative methods and techniques and digital media play, what can they bring for the children). This is closely related to the view on the meaning of contemporary art education – what role can expressive fields play in general education. Can we justify their benefit when facing the children, their parents, colleagues from different fields? Should we direct the content of art education towards visual literacy (teach "symbol reading") and replace the spontaneously creative core of art education? Does art keep

³ Educational content is in FEP PE (2018) divided into five instructional areas: biological, psychological, interpersonal, social-cultural and environmental; they're labelled: *Child and its Body*, *Child and Psyche*, *Child and Others*, *Child and Society*, *Child and the World*. The possibilities of application of art activities as an educational tool are specified for example in the publication Stadlerová, H., Novotná, P., Plesníková, K., Tuřáková, K., & Francová, J. (2011). *Po O. The Possibilities and Inspiration for Art Creation of Children in Preschool Education*. Brno: Masaryk University.

being the referential frame of art education or should it rather be the whole area of visual culture?
How is art education related to art in practice?

Similarly important problem of the present-day art education is the personality of the art educator and the competencies which he should have. We're dealing with, among others, the questions such as – should the art educator command classical artistic methods and technique, should he “know how to draw”? These questions also affect, up to a certain point, preschool education and the professional training of preschool educators, which has its own specifications and is, at least at Czech faculties of education, approached in various ways. Specifically, on PdF MU, are art disciplines taught by the Art Department's professors who lean towards the art-centric approach to artistic education, which has a long tradition here. According to Slavík's definition, art-centric approach always attempted to strengthen the dimension of the artistic and esthetic form, “its foremost goals is the establishment and increase of the interest in art, mainly the interest in modern art” (Slavík, 1997, pp.16). However, as mentioned before, creativity is also affected by other visually-figurative expressions. Art and social life, especially its commercial and political aspects, are, according to Slavík, continuously more and more intertwined. They're becoming more dependent on each other than it might seem at a first glance (...) “Teaching future generation to understand power or powerlessness – that of their own and that of others – and to be able to cope with them, is among the important goals of contemporary education. That's why art in education must not lose its role of an urgent call, a call that ought to be heard: a call for focused reflection, for learning, for thinking, for novel approaches to things yet unheard of or assumed granted, for their new interpretations and explanations in yet unforeseen connections. But for all this to make sense, it has to be preceded by the first encouragement, which art turns to us with – the encouragement to experience and to being together (Slavík, 2011, pp.32).

Therefore, the students of the Preschool Education major are motivated to be interested in art, find inspiration for their own creations and subsequently also for educational projects in the duration of their studies. Functionally taught subjects are focused on the creation process, perception, sharing and visual contents reflection. They are simultaneously supplemented by a discipline, that pursues introduction of a child's artistic expression of preschool children including psychomotor development, engages in the topic of spontaneity, typology of artistic expression, but also creativity. These topics are introduced not only on the theoretical level, students are also asked to develop a case study on artistic expression of specific children. They're also introduced to the works of artists, who are significantly inspired by childhood or principally base their work on children art. In further years, the functionally

taught subjects include didactic context⁴. Experience with your own artistic creation, authenticity of experience and expression, developing of artistic thinking and sense, and most importantly the experience of creation, that is reflected, constitutes a significant component of professional training. Reflection (from the latin reflecto, i.e. turn back, return to what's been before) allows for the return to the experience. In reflection, according to Slavík, we lose the naive imminence of the feeling, that the world "is as it is": experienced past gives itself up to us for pondering and for a new level of cognition. The goal of reflection therefore isn't simply repeat the original experience, but to examine and interpret it (Slavík, 2011, pp.40).

The experience from the creative process significantly contributes to the cultivation of the character of the future teacher and creates trust in the options of development of not only own artistic abilities and creativity, but eventually even those of the entrusted children. For a teacher who has lived through a positive artistic experience, found possibilities of developing their own creativity, is able to confide in children, believes in their natural ability to artistically express themselves, accepts and understands subjective depictions of the world. Such teacher doesn't need to offer children the trusted, but stereotypical models, appealing patterns, own notions or finished conserved knowledge about the world. On the contrary – they create opportunity for the children to discover the world on their own, maybe even the artistic way. Even though The Framework Education Programme for Preschool Education is in effect since 2007 and subsequently underwent several revisions, some new ideas and approaches to child education, which the teachers should apply in practice, are being taken up only very slowly. This situation is documented for example by realized interviews with the faculty's mock teachers and by many records from observing specific situations from educational practice as well.

It is important for the students to be able to identify the phenomena, that do not correspond with the goals of preschool education, but most importantly to learn from the experienced situations and demonstrate their professional knowledge through the offered activity projects and their realization. In the case of art activities they need to plan such activities, that also follow informal and wider goals (e.g. fine motor skills development). Since kindergarten teachers have a certain freedom and autonomy in concretization of education goals and its contents, selection of the instructional methods and styles, etc. However, they're also expected to make competent decisions, be educationally flexible, empathic, apply creative approaches, etc. The professional training at the Department of Art supports

⁴ The first semester offers the following subjects: Creation and Child of Preprimary Age and Art activities. Second semester brings students a practical discipline – Artistic Play and Creativity. The third semester carries Methodology of Art Activities, followed by Art Projects and Reflected Practice. Both practical and methodological subjects are closely linked to students experience through preschool teaching practice.

the development of most of the required competencies of future preschool teachers, not limited only to subject, didactic and psychodidactic, but also diagnostic, interventional, social, psychosocial and communication and competencies professionally and personally cultivating as well (Vašutová, 2004). It mainly accentuates the necessity of a creative teacher.

Participants

Artistic activities and their outputs, which we will subsequently examine, were realized by 63 freshmen of the Preschool Education major, who are preparing for their future profession at the Department of Education of Masaryk University in Brno. The outputs were created during the Spring semester of 2020 in the subject Art Play and Creativity.

Objectives and contents

To restore the students' sources of creativity in such a way for them to experience the flow of artistic process and be able to creatively express something fundamentally personal and to reflect it is the purpose of the subject Artistic Play and Creativity. We are inspired by Slavík's (2011) idea, which talks about the desire to overcome the stereotypes of average everydayness, that stems from ordinary life, but whose main domain is art. According to Slavík, art permeates leaning towards remarkability, originality, unusualness, for which we have a set term enhancement/embellishment. "Enhancement/embellishment is a name for a specific mental and creative activity that elevates ordinary things and events from the average everydayness and places them in front of our astonished senses, as if we were seeing them for the first time" (Slavík, 2011, pp.37). This practice focused discipline accentuates the principle of play in the sense of Homo Ludens, a human that explores, deepens his abilities through play, whose "purpose is in itself and is followed by the feeling of suspense and joy and by the consciousness of 'other being' than 'ordinary life'" (Huizinga, 1971, pp.33). We're putting emphasis on finding of an own way to solving the artistic problem, on work with chance, on developing of imagination and ability to immerse oneself into the creative process. Students discover alternatives and transformations of creation, develop their divergent thinking. The result is a realization and introduction of a sequence of art experiments. In pursuance of reflection, the students should try to trace down a certain shift or a development in their own creative work and thinking. We encourage sharing of new practices and experiences from creating and mutual communication. Lessons also include individual etudes and art tasks inspired by creative art, a visit to a gallery, but also by artistic research of, at first glance "ordinary", materials, objects, and phenomena. The purpose of this subject is not to try out new and attractive creative techniques, to learn handcraft or methodical processes, but to the contrary, it is to use ordinary, available art expression tools for artistic exploration, development of sensory perception, and acquiring of room for a fresh and novel solution of a creative task.

Results

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, most of the instruction during the 2020 Spring semester moved online. Students were receiving thematically oriented, openly designed creative tasks with references to specific artworks, galleries, videos and other sources of inspiration. These were to be used as stimuli for working on personal long-term projects that were assigned as the end output of the class. Students had to conduct a set of creative experiments or a series of creative activities, reflect the creative process and recognize a certain shift (development, progress) in their own creative work and thinking. The project should be strongly connected with their personality, hobbies, interests, it should be playful and interesting to them, bring satisfaction from the time spent this way, even though it observes the development of their professional and other competencies. Students were asked to evaluate acquired experience from the previous classes and consult their own ideas through email or online. The texts reflecting the process and the experiences from creation, along with photographs and videos, were continuously uploaded to the online platform, that allowed for further mutual communication and reflection of the emerged projects. This created more interactions between the students and the teachers.

Phenomena used as inspiration were for example a children's hobby of collecting, sorting and creating collections out of various discovered items. This activity is own even to some artists, we can reference the works of František Skála, Petr Lysáček, Jan Švankmajer, Otis Laubert, and others, which became a theme for some of the students' creative activities. Namely, a project using small children toys. Shifts in possible perception of the shape of the little plastic animals, play with their shapes, multiplication, combinations and composition became the foundation of an art cycle "Toy Animals". The author observed: "During the quarantine, I've spent most of my time at home cleaning, thanks to which I found various "treasures". I decided to use a pile of rubber zoo animals, that I was collecting with my siblings when we were children. For a better image, every toy is about 2cm long. I decided to use these toy animals as tiny colorful objects, from which I create new original things. I enjoy sorting through them, lining them up, utilizing recurrence of their colors." (See Figures 1a-1g).

Among the creative principles that these student projects are often based on belongs for example playful enhancement/embellishment and reshaping of at first glance ordinary items and transformation of ordinary materials and tools into creative expression devices. The inspiration for the following activity was found in the work of the artist Sakir Gokcebag, who was creating extraordinary installations and objects out of daily use items. Similarly, one of the students used pieces of fabric, wrapped them around trees, threw them into the air, wrapped different items and herself into them, let the

fabric “flow” out of a pump instead of water. The student photographed all these actions and installation from different angles (see Fig. 2a-2f).

Another student utilized her favorite art tool – colored pencils and enhanced/embellished areas around her house with them. Color fillings changed the appearance of empty spaces, holes and gaps in a similar way as when artist Willi Dorner was “rejuvenating” empty city spaces with people in colorful clothing in different positions (see Fig. 3a-3g).

An important role in the realized projects were played by engagement of multiple senses, innovative examination of the topic or material (tool, technique, etc.), observing their transformations, noticing of own personal experiences. A lot of projects had exploratory format, as shown in the following comments: “The material I’ve decided to examine, was modeling clay. My first idea was to spread the clay on paper, (...) I was also interested how does the clay act in water. When you tear it up and form into thin slices, it floats on the surface. I was thinking about little children, that they would enjoy this very much too (see Fig. 4a-4c).

Not being afraid and discovering your own path, original combination, observe and creatively use oddities, curiosities, errors, imperfections and faults. This approach also formed some of the projects. These students were discovering the possibilities of unconventional creation or were lead by joy from creation by the form of experiments, as shown in the following comments: “When I was little, I was fascinated by the salt crystallization experiment. (...) I believe that these experiments are not solely about chemistry and physics, but there is artistic originality in them as well (see Fig. 5a-5g).

Playful art examination wasn’t concerning only materials and tool, but also phenomena. Light in art as an expressive device became one of themes included in the inspirational materials that were further developed by the students (see Fig. 6a-6d).

Another one of very often used themes was the coping of an individual with the epidemic measures, or experiencing uncertainty, which is documented by the following text: “I decided to implement daisies into everyday activities and transform items of everyday use through them. I used a black and white filter on the photographs representing how somber and frustrating the current situation could be, but on the other hand daisies are adding a drop of positive energy, that is much needed. Let’s enjoy the little things – the nature waking up, a sunny day or a lawn dotted with daisies, because these things can make me smile, even if you can’t see it under the facemask (see Fig. 7a-7h).

Another student photographed herself during activities throughout the quarantine, that emanate craving for social life. This in turn can make the pictures seem strange, almost absurd. “I tried to show that with a tiny little change, you can make ordinary things seem strange, different and weird. At the same

time, I wanted the photographs to show that you can find uniqueness, beauty and extraordinariness in all the unusualness and oddity (see Fig. 8a-8e).

The facemask, a symbol of and an integral part of the life under the pandemic, also became a part of the art games. "We should wear it every time we leave our homes. How many times did you have to return for a forgotten mask? Suddenly, we can't be without a piece of sewn cloth. Facemasks became our constant companions. But, how are the facemasks themselves feel about this?" This piece of fabric "came to life" and became the main actor of a composed photography cycle called "The Life of Masks". Facemasks are caught on film walking around, enjoying "wellness" (being boiled) or a "facelift" (ironing) etc. (see Fig. 9a-9c).

One student documented her days under the quarantine with a time-lapse photography cycle called "Barricaded Window" along with automated texts (see Fig. 10a-10d).

Mask – a veil partially covering the identity of the person under it, became a theme in series of a sensitively approached collages (see Fig. 11a-11f).

Experiments with (own) appearance or identity became a significant element in other outputs as well. The body project "Interconnection" was carried out using land art and body art activities in a forest: "My goal is to merge. I felt, for a little while, as an absolute part of the forest." (see Fig. 12a-12c).

The connection with nature appears in the form of imprints of nature's products on a body or completing a face in another art project (see Fig. 13a-13b).

Art activities of the students were inspired by random phenomena and interesting details, which is put in concrete terms by this students' testimony: "It all started in the kitchen, where I was preparing to cook lentil soup. Several grains got stuck to my hand." (see Fig. 14a-14f).

Socially themed happenings and experiments of Kateřina Šedá, which were included in the virtual inspirational materials initiated another project, with which the author tried to connect people despite the special measures: "I contacted several of my friends throughout the Czech Republic. (...) I asked them to think, in times when they have lunch or eat something. Think of me or of other friends and to create a message from their food. (...) Thanks to this idea, in a couple of week I was getting photos from various cities and regions. I realized how many great people I have around myself and how well they can cook (see Fig. 15a-15c).

Another happening called "Life of a Car" has been captured on several photographs by a student. She was able to manipulate an old vehicle and got her whole family involved. "After driving the car (...), I cleaned and polished it in different ways, then made it dirty, dusty again (...) The I drove it into bushes

(...) Because I couldn't get out of it, I made it look abandoned, because I didn't want to destroy it (...) Together we flipped the car upside down and rolled it around several times, until all the windows cracked, the sheet metal and the front bumper were all dented and the whole structure of the car got deformed. I felt deep sadness." (see Fig. 16a-16h).

Reflections

Outputs from individual projects (videos, photographs, texts) placed on the online platform (we used a private group on Facebook) urged for further communication between the classmates and their teachers. More and more interactions and mutual creating experience sharing took place. From the students' reflections we can say that a lot of them imagined the results of their projects quite differently. However, they let themselves be led by the creative process. Through it they were coming up with more ideas, every single one more interesting and original than the one before. This transformed and enhanced their process. From the total number of the students (63), a vast majority finished their projects by the end of June 2020 (53), only ten students made use of the extended exam period and turned the project in in September. Publication of every project and their outputs was followed by a wide interest and many reactions. Browsing through the online virtual gallery, that was accessible only to registered students and their teachers invoked very active interest in the exhibits. Selected student works representing the creative groups of Preschool Education freshmen will gradually be exhibited in various exhibition spaces in the Department of Education. First compositions in the form of large-format photographs that carry a body art character will be presented in Gallery Jednatřicítka at the Department of Education from October 5th until November 4th of this year.

Conclusion

To have the courage to overcome the fear of an adult from unexpected results of creative play and not being afraid of one's own spontaneous reactions, being inspired by randomness and unexpected circumstances, be able to freely make mistakes, be open and perceptive, let oneself be led by joy from own creation, those are the manifestations of a creative person. Finished projects showed in many ways the validity of prof. Uždil's opinion – who valued creativity specifically because "it allows for taking unusual paths to unexpectedly good result, for being able to react to life event in a novel way, without templates, for being able to solve crises, for being able to keep concentrated focus and carrying the ability to transform stable relations between things," (Uždil, 2002, pp.104). Despite the appearing feelings of uncertainty, an unexpected situation allowed many students to stop rushing and distracting themselves. The fact, that they have to stay home led to a different approach to creating the projects. Stopping became one of the moments supporting creativity, contributed to the students' need to engage something in depth and with interest. Continuous observing of the results of their

colleagues, engaging in the discussion on the online platform, and virtual consultations supplied the students with inspiration and often also the necessary courage to overcome doubt, following the beginning of their work. It has been confirmed that every person has creative potential, but it is important to create opportunities to develop it. Because creativity is necessary not only for artistic self-realization of the student. We accentuate creative approach on a more general level as well. Fulfilling the demanding goals of preschool education requires a teacher able to overcome and change dysfunctional and outdated contents and methods of education, that limit a child's development. Art disciplines can contribute to developing this competence.

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