

# Art Education in Distance Learning in Kindergartens in the Czech Republic

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**Annotation:** The paper deals with teaching of art education of children in Czech kindergartens using distance education. It reflects the current situation of full-time teaching of art education, and ascertains what the possibilities and forms of teaching in distance mode are, how to share teaching material, what inspirational sources for material creation can be including demonstrations and possibilities of mediating art in order to maintain aesthetic and creative art activity. It is based on the Framework Educational Programme for Preschool Education, and it considers aspects of incorporation of distance education. It also introduces the issue from the parents' point of view as parents are indispensable partners in distance education, for both the teacher and the child, and it describes what the associated risks are.

**Key terms:** arts, kindergarten, distance learning, aesthetics, art mediation, art activity, Framework Education Program

## Introduction

“It should be stressed that the benefit of art-making of pre-school age children has changed in the context of educational priorities. However, we can say that drawing and other art activities in pre-primary education were not included as isolated, focused solely on the mastering of art techniques or as the tool strengthening fine motor skills of children, etc. There has always been space for the spontaneous artistic creative activity of children.” (Stadlerová et al., 2011). Now, the context of educational priorities is dramatically changing considering the global pandemic situation. The reflection of the existing anchorage of art education in pre-primary education is coming up. How is the art education in kindergartens ongoing? Is the staff adequately qualified to deliver arts? Can we find some support in the Framework Education Program which is binding for schools? Art education should newly be implemented into the distance learning and a platform for this type of education should be available – to define possibilities and forms of education, methods of sharing, search for inspiration sources, etc. The parent himself/herself is a vital part of this process; the parent plays an absolutely new role and becomes a direct actor in the education. Times are difficult, in many aspects negative. On the other hand, there are also positive aspects – elimination of dysfunctional systems and

possibilities for change and cooperation with people with whom, under normal conditions, we would not come in touch.

### **1 Art Education in Kindergartens Here and Now**

“A didactic style of education of children in kindergartners is based on the principle of educational offer, individual choice, and active participation of the child. The teacher is a mentor of the child on his/her way to knowledge. The teacher awakens interest and taste to look around, hear, and explore. Not the person assigning “tasks” to children and supervising their completion.” (RVP PV, 2018). A daily schedule<sup>1</sup> in the kindergarten is based on the long-established tradition where the art activity is usually offered as a morning-hours controlled, indirectly controlled, or independent activity. From the artistic point of view, indirect controlled activity and independent activity should be the most preferred options. In an indirect controlled activity, the child works independently; however, the initial impetus comes from the teacher. The teacher thinks over the work well in advance and supplies his/her instructions to children to carry out the activity. The artistic creation itself is fully in the hands of children and the teacher recedes into the background, as an observer (Fig. 1). Besides, the independent activity is very effective from the point of the art education; the role of the teacher is only at the very beginning of the activity as a motivator, supporter, and assistant. The activity is developed directly by children and is not outlined by the teacher in advance. The child either works independently or cooperates with other children (Fig. 2). Such activity enables children to choose their own procedures and methods of solution, choose the material, and tools. The project-based learning can be considered – art projects or art series<sup>2</sup>, offering educational content in a natural context. The controlled activity should be the least preferred (Fig. 3). From the artistic point of view, the controlled activity does not support the natural development and progress of children - development of psychomotor skills, thinking, feelings, will, emotions, and imagination. In some cases, the controlled activity can even suppress them.

#### **Fig. 1, 2, 3**

The individuality of the teacher is always important. What activity the child prefers depends on the teacher: controlled, indirectly controlled, or independent. “A fundamental mistake which adults do – no matter if parents or carers – is that they apply their aesthetical criteria to the evaluation of child’s artistic manifestations.” (Stehlíková Babyrádová, 2014). Hana Stadlerová shares the same view as “the

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<sup>1</sup> A daily schedule is organized in certain “blocks” in which educational process takes place, such as 6.30-8.45 AM free play, 9.00-10.00 AM learning event, 10.30 AM snack, 11-12 AM outdoor activity etc.

<sup>2</sup> The art project is a coherent group of tasks, which build upon each other. The art project is based on the meaningful task, interesting theme which pupils want or need to solve. Art series are short and simple units, developing selected theme. (Exler, 2014, p. 17)

child perceives, understands and interprets the world differently than the adults do and expresses his/her experience in his/her own way. However, the child should not be forced to accept a notion of perception of reality of adults, no matter how elegant or cultivated it is. The child searches the path to his/her personal artistic interpretation; the teacher is expected to be a guide in this way, who sensitively accompanies the child on his/her way on a deeper exploration of the world” (2011).

Some educational streams focus on art education more intensely, such as a philosophical approach Reggio Emilia<sup>3</sup>. This concept of kindergartens is not widely spread in the Czech Republic; nevertheless, the concept might be very interesting and effective for many teachers. “The philosophy Reggio Emilia is an approach in education, stemming from spontaneity, and joy from learning. The learning involves thematic projects, based on the interest of children. An impulse to new, more thorough understanding can be a fact fascinating for children or something they want to find an answer.” (Safirka, nd). Hana Stehlíková Babyrádová holds the opinion that “drawing, painting or spatial or action activity can only be initiated for the pre-school children: gates to children’s phantasy may be opened ...” (2014). This gives us a lot of space to introduce children with arts and mediate arts to them. However, there is one great pitfall. So as the art could be mediated by kindergarten teachers, they must be well oriented in the arts. Unfortunately, the prevailing majority of teachers in kindergartens are not well oriented. This fact is caused by a system defining pre-requisites for the exercise of the post of the teacher in the kindergarten in the Act on Pedagogical Staff<sup>4</sup>. Creative activity, which – among others – includes also art education, is an everyday content of the educational process in the pre-primary education compared to the primary and secondary education. Under such conditions, the space for the creation of quality didactic materials, which would facilitate the work of teachers, is made (Fig. 4). A well-designed working sheet inspired by the art introduces and educates children, but also peacefully introduces teachers with the arts. At the same time, it would have sufficient aesthetic value. Thus, it would fulfil educational aims, offer, expectations, and would avoid possible risks identified in the Framework Education Program.

#### Fig. 4

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<sup>3</sup> The Reggio Emilia is an educational philosophy based on education and upbringing which continuously develop and respond. Teachers define general objectives and try to forecast responses of children to prepare the best environment for their learning, specific activities, and projects. The learning usually takes place as the project, created at the initiative of children or teachers. Sometimes, the project can be based on some problem or specific event. In fact, projects are an intense building of knowledge, child-led learning, where adults help to acquire sources and information and offer children other ways and guidance. Projects can last a few days only or several months, can be reshaped to other issues, problems, and projects. The main principles: the child as the active participant in learning; role of environment is important, teacher-child-parent co-operation in the learning process, and documentation of the learning process (<http://www.reggioemilia.cz/cs/principy.php>)

<sup>4</sup> Kindergarten teacher acquires his/her professional qualification by tertiary education, vocational professional education and/or secondary education with school-leaving examination.

## 1.1 Support in the Framework Education Program for Pre-School Education

The framework education program for pre-school education (hereinafter referred to as the “RVP PV<sup>5</sup>”) is a very well prepared program. The program clearly formulates aims, concepts, and specific features of the pre-school education, methods, and forms of work<sup>6</sup>. The educational content is divided into five sections<sup>7</sup>. A huge contribution is that each section, in great detail, defines educational sub-aims (what the teacher supports in children), educational offer (what the teacher offers to children), expected outcomes (what the child is usually able to do at the end of pre-school period) and risks (what can threaten educational plans of the teacher). Art education is, more or less, included in all educational areas, primarily in two areas. The first one is the part Child and His/Her Psyche – sub-section Cognitive Skills and Functions, Imagination and Phantasy, Thought Operations. The educational offer (what the teacher offers to children) should consist of direct observation of natural, cultural, and technical objects and phenomena, experiments with materials and objects, various games supporting creativity, imagination, and phantasy. The expected outcome is that the child should be able to express his/her imagination and phantasy in creative activities, including arts. The second is the section Child and Society. The educational sub-aim (what the teacher supports in children) should be the introduction to the world of people, culture, and arts and development of social and aesthetical style. The educational offer (what the teacher offers to children) should consist of artistic projects, artistic creative activity, receptive artistic activity, and meeting with arts beyond the kindergarten. Last but not least, also activities showing the child the world of culture and arts. Lack of opportunities for the development of artistic responsibility of the child and creation of his/her aesthetic relation to the environment, culture, and arts is a serious risk (what can threaten educational plans of the teacher) (RVP PV, 2018).

In these schools, the schools will create their own school education program (hereinafter referred to as the “ŠVP”). The accomplishment of the program in the full-time study should not be problematic. However, what to do with arts and the above-mentioned principles and their accomplishment in the situation when the school is forced to apply distance learning? Definitely, art education is an integral part of this complex, but in the context of the crisis situation, it might be pushed to the background.

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<sup>5</sup> “RVP MV” is a document defining aims, forms, content, and duration of education. Each school formulates its own School Education Program on its basis.

<sup>6</sup> Aims – indicative aims, key competences (for the learning, problem solution, communicative, social and personal, activity and civil), sub-objectives, sub-outcomes. Methods and forms of work – experience and cooperative learning by play and activities, situational learning, spontaneous social learning.

<sup>7</sup> Child and His/Her Body, Child and His/Her Psyche – Language and Speech, Cognitive Skills and Functions, Imagination and Phantasy, Thought Operations, Self-identity, Emotions, and Will, Child and The Other, Child and Society, Child and the World.

Therefore, art education must be included in distance learning. The method of application will need a little time and search for optimum solutions, practically tried-and-tested.

## 1.2 Will Art Education and Creative Activity Be Maintained in Distance Learning?

Essentially, the world has turned upside down from day to day and teachers faced an entirely new and unknown situation: remote teaching. Each school, each teacher coped with this challenging task in his/her own way. In July 2020, the government of the Czech Republic passed an amendment to the Education Act, implementing distance learning, which also includes pre-primary education, but only for the pre-school children<sup>8</sup> with compulsory attendance. It is assumed that also parents of younger children would welcome study materials.

The survey between teachers indicated that they used worksheets (Fig. 5), live stream videos (on-line learning), or video tutorials for the specific task or photographic instructions (Fig. 6) as shared materials most frequently. The study material was distributed often by e-mail, communication applications (WhatsApp, Messenger, etc.), through social networks, parental portals (Edookit, EduPage, Bakaláři, etc.), or on the websites of the particular institution. The school should define the only one platform to be used; thus, parents do not have to master various learning environments. We live in a technological era. Also, the generation of teachers, who still favor traditional methods of communication, must keep pace with this communication trend.

### Fig. 5, 6,

Parents often spoke highly of on-line learning. Children were in touch with their teacher and a professional explained to them the subject-matter or assigned task. Sometimes, parents claim to lack sources (computer, notebook, or tablet); however, smartphones can be used for most of these materials. The extent of curriculum and idea to focus only on the main subjects and suppress arts and crafts, as some experts try to enforce, is also questionable.

One of the possible solutions on how to avoid overshadowing of arts and crafts, namely art education, could be an offer of the platform with already prepared art-creative activities. Some projects already exist. We could mention, for instance, the project entitled *Bez názvu. Nedatováno. (Untitled. Undated)* created by the Faculty of Education of Palacký University. Its websites and Facebook include methodological support in the form of worksheets (Fig. 8), ideas for creative activities, or teaching cards (Palacký University in Olomouc, 2020). Česká televize, which responded to the situation very

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<sup>8</sup> Compulsory school attendance in the pre-primary education applies only to the pre-school children, i.e., children six or seventh year of age.

quickly, enriched the distance learning by its tutorial program entitled “UčiTelka”; websites of this program also include the section dedicated to arts. (CT edu, 2019).

#### Fig. 7

All the above-mentioned forms of sharing and possibilities of sharing are realistic also for the arts lessons, which definitely should not be eliminated from the distance learning of pre-school children based on reasons referred to in Chap. 1 “Arts in the Kindergarten Here and Now”. The crisis was a new experience for teachers – to a larger extent they became authors of art-creative didactic materials and used various inspirational sources (Pinterest, websites, Facebook, groups, or arts as such). In addition, teachers had to consider the material to be used for creative activity. Not every family has the necessary artistic equipment which, on one hand, can be limiting; on the other hand, such fact makes space for creativity and creativeness of teachers and children (Fig. 8).

#### Fig. 8

### 2 Parent as a Teacher

In all educational approaches, the parent is represented as the co-author. Co-participation of parents is also included in the RVP PV, where the co-operation works on the basis of the partnership relation. Parents have the opportunity to participate in school events, co-participate in the planning of the kindergarten program, attend programs, enter games of their children, and co-participate in the solution of problems (RVP PV, 2018). It is a question to what extent parents can really be involved. There are also approaches for engaging parents in the educational process far more. In a crisis, these parents have a certain advantage. The example can be the above-mentioned philosophical approach Reggio Emilia, which accepts parents as the partner in the education of the children, whose role is crucial in the learning of the child. Reggio Emilia tries to engage parents into the learning projects, thus creating a community for education and upbringing of children. Teachers and parents communicate with each other much more. The school invites parents to joint events with children as well as events purely for parents so as the parents could share their problems and interests, educate themselves in parenthood (Reggio Emilia, nd). During the crisis, the parent becomes an equal partner to the teacher. This is an absolutely new situation for many participants. They have a common goal, and their effective communication is very important, facilitating effective education. Teacher, creating activities for distance learning, should take into account that too much burden on parents can be undesirable and demotivating. On the contrary, empathy for parents working from home, fulfilling their work tasks, is desirable as they need to occupy their children with activities which the children can do by themselves or with a very little help. Three problems are indicated in the research report published on 14 April 2020 by the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics of Charles University – lack of time, limited resources,

and lack of knowledge and skills. “Many parents go to work or must do the same quantity of work from their home office as if they went to the regular work ... Oftentimes, there are more children in the family, it is necessary to teach several school children or take care of a younger sibling so as the older child is not disturbed during his/her schooling ... Many times, there are not enough PC devices in the family; it happens that the parent must do his/her home-office job on the family computer and, at the same time, education of one or more children should run ... For instance, they do not know how to motivate the child or explain the subject matter.” (Faculty of Mathematics and Physics of Charles University, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

In the beginning, we have defined key questions related to art education in pre-primary education. Art education is based on the long-term tradition as to the school daily schedule. Other approaches, based on other pillars and maybe more reflecting needs of the specific time, are moving to the forefront. Erudition of pedagogical staff rather differs from teacher to teacher, school to school. The legal obligation to complete education and meet qualification pre-requisites, defined very broadly, plays an important role. The Framework Education Program might be beneficial, as it is rather a good program. However, interpretation and subsequent transformation into the school education program are very differentiated, in the hands of teachers and the reality is often far away from the original vision. There are methods for the distant teaching of arts. Over time, social discourse about this topic has been opened; new platforms are arising, existing methods are improved, educational materials are created, and supporting software developed. Let's hope that the elimination of arts and crafts would not become a valid paradigm of distance learning and that artistic and creative activities will be maintained in distance learning.

“Neither text nor its coherent parts has been published or delivered for publishing in another journal, anthology or monography.”

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**Key terms – English:** art education, kindergarten, distance education, aesthetics, art mediation, art activity, framework educational program

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