

Social Media Art Sharing

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Abstract: The case study presents the project Make art, Not Faces!, which was created especially for distance online art education during the COVID-19 lockdown and school closures. The description of the project consists of main goals characteristics, technical and methodological set-up and resulting examples. The paper reflects on conditions, limits and challenges for future pregraduate art education of teachers.

Keywords: Project, art education, contemporary art, social media, interpretation.

Introduction

In the spring of 2020, a pandemic caused by the COVID-19 paralyzed the whole world. This fact led to big restrictions and it also affected education. The immediate forced school closures and the transition to distance forms of teaching at all levels of the education system confronted teachers with the need to look for new and also functional forms of education without the possibility of personal interaction. The unpreparedness to teach in this new situation has highlighted gaps in the pregraduate and lifelong teacher education that needed to be filled. Some disciplines dealt with this situation relatively quickly and successfully. For others, such as art education, the transition to distance learning was more complicated because of the very nature of the subject and predominant emphasis on hands-on forms of teaching.

1 Context

The project presented in the case study held place at the Technical University of Liberec, Faculty of Science, Humanities and Pedagogy, Department of Primary Education, Czech Republic, Europe. The department provides master degree study programme of Primary School Teaching. Primary school teachers in the Czech Republic are generalist teachers and they are educated in all domains that are taught at primary schools, including arts – visual arts and music (obligatory), drama (optional). As in other parts of the world, art education is an underappreciated subject (Koopman, 2005), often used for producing school decorations and school market and festival products. The prevailing approach of teachers consists of an emphasis on production of art pieces according to step by step instructions regardless of the national curriculum documents, which require a balanced art education composed of three equivalent parts: perception, creation and interpretation (RVP ZV, 2007). The most general goal of this field is not to learn to be an artist, but to learn to be able to express and communicate our opinions, emotions, values and attitudes (Kitzbergerova et col., 2019). Art education is a

necessary and irreplaceable part of general education as it enables people to stay oriented and active in visual, changing reality.

The study programme for primary school teacher trainees includes a limited number of art subjects during the whole 5-year programme, which combines studio, hands-on forms of teaching as well as lectures and seminars. The summer semester 2020 started in February and it moved to distance teaching platforms after four weeks. The Czech government closed schools from day to day in March, 12, which was the middle of the week. On Friday, the faculty management issued an order on distance education from Monday of the following week. The teachers had one weekend to create a lesson plan for the following 10 weeks of the semester and to be ready to implement it forthwith.

2 Multi-purpose idea for a wide range of participants

A university needs to provide quality education for its students and it also has its social role for communities. Therefore, a faculty of pedagogy is intended to provide a service to teachers at schools in the form of workshops, organizing conferences, continuing education courses and conducting research, which would be published or would lead to a concrete improvement of pedagogical practice.

During the first lockdown weekend, the project, spontaneously called Make Art, Not Faces!, was founded. The chosen name should evoke a clear idea in the participants that we can have fun even in difficult times and that art can help us in such situations. The general goal of the project was not only to create educational content, but also to reflect the given situation in which we all unexpectedly found ourselves and, moreover, it was for the first time in our lives. No one at the time had any idea what to expect and what would happen in the whole world.

The effort was to create such a concept of a project, which would be useful and applicable as a study material for:

- A, university students as a form of distance learning in primary school teacher training programme,
- B, primary school teachers and art educators as a form of an inspirational resource for their pupils,
- C, kids (and their parents) as a possibility for online and creative free time activities,
- D, wide public as a form of relaxation and fun activity and also a social connecting channel.

In search of a suitable platform, we tried to ensure that the participants would not need to download new software or to learn a new complicated program, but that they would use a platform which they already knew and used and which was easily available. The choice of a Facebook open group was supported by the fact that this social network was used by our participants also for other reasons than our project and therefore the project would intermingle with their lives and it would naturally become part of it.

3 Achievable goals to keep it clear

The objectives of the project were defined broadly due to the wide range of participants (as mentioned in chapter 2). In addition to the educational goal, it had its social, resting, anti-stress and inspirational level.

Make Art, Not Faces! project consists of series of easy art tasks published daily on the wall of the Facebook group. Majority of the tasks have the same structure: a short, personal, funny, reflective and motivational text, an artist and introduction of their, and a task assignment. Minority of the tasks challenge the participants to look for an artist or an artwork upon certain criteria. Each post is accompanied by a sample of the author's work, the text does not exceed 150 words and each task contains a call to share the participants' results. For example:

Task: Buy a bar of chocolate in foil. Eat the chocolate (whole, do not divide it for hygienic reasons!). Use the aluminium foil as a material. Show your creativity. Create a Mini-anything inspired by nature. If you don't name it, we'll guess what it is :)

Inspiration: Toshihiko Mitsuya (born 1979): A Japanese artist living in Berlin. As a child, he transformed aluminium foil (like most of us) into objects using his imagination (probably better than most of us). This passion remains also in his adulthood. He uses cold industrial materials to create mainly natural objects and organic forms, and this contrast is also contained in his crossing the boundary between the true depiction of authentic objects and imaginative creation. See Fig. 1.

The choice of a given structure was driven by the main goal of the possibility to complete the task without deeper art skills and with involvement of problem solving and subjective input, and by following specific educational goals:

- 1) Introduce art – as part of art education, visual art should always be present. Thus it refers to US VCAE disciplinary field of study and practice within art education and one of current Czech approaches to art education: Art-centrism. The project presented contemporary, living and active artists using various media and techniques. We also tried to focus on artists that were not always recognised worldwide but they presented themselves through modern channels, such as Flickr, Pinterest, Webpages, Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, and they gained their renown also with the help of their fans and not only thanks to decisions of expert commissions. It is considered to be valuable to show the participants the transformations of visual art marketing and promotion strategies.

For example: Nicholas di Genova (born 1981): The Canadian artist makes perfectly drawn encyclopaedic images of creatures composed of various animal species, some of which compete with each other in nature because of their customs, territory or needs. See Fig. 2.

- 2) Produce art – creative part of the project called for the search for appropriate means of expressions, elements of art and its usage in 2D and 3D expression. The project tasks did not want to follow outdated art education goals such as training of realistic drawing techniques, or tasks based on following strict steps to always get the same result. The presence of problem solution, own idea input and the possibility of choice were the requirements which the creative tasks had to meet.

For example: The Bus stop made by Czech artist David Cerny is a sculptural still life of objects related to the place where the Bus stop stands: the city of Liberec and its German-Jewish-Czech history. See Fig. 3. Also we invited our participants to choose five items from one place at home (bathroom, jewellery box, kitchen drawer) and to assemble them into still lifes. See Fig. 4.

- 3) Interpret art – art education often consists of art creation accompanied by art history lessons, although the art education curriculum documents nowadays require kids to learn to interpret and explore art and elements of visual culture. The project included tasks in which the participants were asked to share a work of an artist according to their choice and according to specified criteria at the same time. This type of work required the participants to search and critically select from a huge number of pictures that the internet provides. The offer of the internet, Google pictures and so on does not distinguish between a good and a bad idea, between a quality art and a kitsch, between a renowned artist and a weekend hobby painter unless you know precisely what you are looking for. Thus the participants had to find more information about the pictures they were browsing, evaluate them and sort them out. When sharing their findings, the participants were challenged to justify and defend their choice.

For example: The artwork Cocoon from Czech artist Veronika Bromova invites the participant to complete the sentence: I (do not) like you, because.... Result examples: I don't like you because you're softer than I can be to myself. I like you because you're hairy and it'd be nice to hole up in you and sleep well. See Fig. 5.

4 Limitations and possibilities of project implementation

It is necessary to take into account the specific aspects of each of the following parts – knowing the target group, main goals, the structure of the project and the way of its distance online implementation. Each part of the project was designed with regard to the structure of the

participants (all ages) and the current situation – stores were closed (no possibility to get extra supplies), people stayed at home or in their gardens (no possibility to reach places). Students had a lot of homework; most of it consisted of reading and processing large amounts of texts. The internet access might have been provided only via mobile phones, so long columns of text were not appropriate for the device, nor were they suitable for overwhelmed students.

The nature of the project allowed the participants to get involved at times that suited them from an organizational point of view and at a time when they were in a creative mood. The possibility of time flexibility in fulfilling tasks became essential for students especially in the beginning of distance learning when their personal and study schedules had not yet been set. The chosen platform, as mentioned above, allowed instant sharing and feedback, which was desirable due to the lack of personal contact. Thanks to sharing, the participants supported and encouraged each other and those who weren't sure how to handle the task. The obtained feedback was not just an average lecturer-participant line, but also a peer one, which is sometimes difficult to achieve during full-time teaching or face-to-face meetings.

The project had a broad curriculum goal: to cover with activities and tasks all levels of the national art education curriculum: perception, creation and interpretation. Perception is developed by innovation in concepts, art language and/or material. Creation focuses on the development of the ability to organize the visual elements, to create original objects/artworks in a specific medium. Interpretation consists of concepts of communication, description, analysis, sharing and evaluation of created artwork.

5. Methodology in detail and didactic description

During ten weeks of the closure, lockdown and movement restriction in the spring of 2020, 45 posts with art-based tasks were published on Facebook public group with almost 600 participants. The group content consisted also of motivational videos of lecturers, tips for other similar ongoing projects in the Czech Republic and general feedback tasks for participants at the end of the project. The creative tasks involved art techniques which were appropriate for given conditions. These included drawing – completing a shape (of a cut, ripped, crumbled paper, shadow, object, random line, stain), linear drawing (labyrinth, interweaving of different objects), automatic drawing, relief drawing, modelling – material shaping, assemblage – portrait compilation, composition and reorganisation of object or its elements, object creation – still life, tower of Babel, photography (detail, structure, shape, composition, shape and size relationships).

In addition to introducing specific artists, we also touched on current established art education procedures, which we simplified for the needs of the project in its set-up. The project also used

popular and unusual tools, materials, practices – condensation drawing, sand-art, op-art, blackout poetry, one-line drawing, paper- art and tidying up art.

From the point of view of the educational content, the tasks developed the ability of imagination, one's own choice of material and procedure. The activities led to the departure from the usual patterns of thinking, to the search for creative and new strategies for solving the task, and to critical evaluation of the chosen procedures and their success. The participants learnt about and compared different media and practices. The activities supported independent task solution, experimentation and search for different or more solutions.

The aesthetic interpretation and perception tasks were based on Art Criticism Teaching model (Jureckova, 2014). The tasks developed interpretive skills by examining the emotional elements of selected artworks. Through the aesthetic experience, the participants became aware of the individual value ladder and, by mutual comparing and sharing, also the cultural-social ladder.

The assignment led to these activities: searching, thinking, formulating one's own opinion and its defence. The discussion between the participants developed communication skills and the ability to competently express themselves on defined problems.

The project motivated to monitor, compare, comment and evaluate others. It led to the creation of a positive self-image and to the responsibility for choosing an activity and fulfilling the task.

Participation in the project led to a direct contact with contemporary art, which was put into a relationship with one's own artistic creation. The information was converted into a visual image and vice versa. An integral part of every activity was presentation and evaluation. The project developed visual literacy and practicum based on theory. Each participant tried the role of a recipient, creator and performer (role playing).

6. Reflection and feedback

The original idea, forced by extraordinary circumstances and the need for distance learning, has created a platform for a wide audience. Almost immediately, students accepted the principal compulsory tasks of this platform among their study duties; moreover, they also included them in their daily lives, returning to the platform several times a day and spontaneously observing and commenting on the shared works of others. The project has lived its own life since the first few weeks.

The group grew bigger owing to students' recommendations and the offer of lecturers to the public teacher community via social media. The project was also followed by teachers from practice, some of whom immediately used some tasks with their students in their own distance teaching. This group welcomed the project as a quick offer of inspiration for teaching art education in a way they were not used to, not ready and not prepared at all.

During the project, several limits and problems occurred or were observed. In general, the social role of the project depended on the internet access and thus on a quick and easy way to share one's own art with others and to get feedback from a big range of participants.

From a pedagogical point of view, the lecturers had limited competencies. It was not possible to intervene, nor to consult participants work during its creation as this phase occurred in everyone's homes. Therefore, it happened that the shared result revealed misunderstanding of the assignment or the artwork deviated from the meaning of the task. The last two mentioned problems might have been also caused by the task entry settings, which were very brief. The incorrect task completion indicated the persistence of established stereotypes and learned solutions. The interpretive tasks sometimes showed limited familiarity with the history of art, cultural competencies and of course one's own taste. The participants sometimes struggled with the formulation of their opinions and argumentation (e.g. by repeating expected solutions and clichés).

The preparation and implementation of the project was quite time consuming. The project required intensive involvement, regularity, consistency and an almost constant presence of lecturers on social networks. This type of teaching was not limited by a predetermined time, as in ordinary lectures, but it took place constantly. Online communication compensated the impossibility of personal contact and it gave rise to a specific social community, which consisted of students, teachers, artists, enthusiasts, their friends and kids, etc., regardless of the level of their art skills.

The tasks were not focused on the result, but on active involvement, process, idea, joy of sharing and they were often completed beyond the original assignment. The reactions of the participants showed that the project was very beneficial for them not only in terms of professional training and assistance in performing work, but also in terms of personal growth and mental hygiene.

The result of the project was a universal format transferable to other educational fields.

7. Conclusion of the case study

After the closure of schools, the first shock and groping for how to handle distance teaching of art education, interesting projects began to appear relatively quickly. Most of them were created at universities or within gallery education departments, but also by artists. The unusual times gave an impetus to activities that were presented through new media and at the same time it made galleries and museums virtually accessible which brought art closer to the public... and it would be a pity not to use it for art education in the future. These unprecedented times have strengthened the willingness to share examples of a good practice and to support and inspire the artistic and pedagogical community.

Technologies, internet and online forms of education help to emphasise or promote the perceptive and interpretive creation in art education which is often overlooked in art classes. Thus the generally

needed competences, such as observation, searching, interpreting and looking for new relations, can be very well trained and meet current challenges such as digital and visual literacy, quality in art and life. This period has led to the need to reaffirm art education both in the curricular context and the social dimension.

The transition to distance learning showed the unavailability of adequate learning resources for teachers. Faculties of pedagogy are confronted by the task of updating the curriculums of their study programmes to meet the need to prepare pregraduate teachers for curriculum planning in such situations as distance teaching. The teachers need to be able to design strategies and methods that can be used in similar situations as in spring 2020. These strategies also need to look for ways how to educate children online without asking their parents to assist personally instead of teachers, and to offer education that takes full advantage of what the online environment and digital technologies have to offer.

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