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SOME GUIDELINES ON THE PRECONDITIONS AND PREPARATION OF TEACHERS OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION

Key words: *Aesthetic Education, Education through Art, Art and Culture, motivation, preconditions and competencies*

Aesthetic Education aims to improve the aesthetic perception of a person both in the area of art and in the non-artistic human environment, as well as to improve the skills of an individual and his/her ability to be creative in the field of art – an important starting point for a person's aesthetic perception. There are two dangerous tendencies which we can see – the reduction of Aesthetic Education to artistic education only and emphasis on the subject's theoretical aspects at the expense of practical ones. Although in current educational practice (since 2009), "Aesthetic Education" as a subject is not taught anymore, its continuation can be seen in the following subjects: *Education through Art* in the 8th and 9th grade of primary schools and *Art and Culture* at secondary grammar schools (formerly 'Aesthetic Education'). The essence of the subject remains, however. Therefore, we will use the concise term *Aesthetic Education* for these aesthetic-educational subjects in the following text.

The history of education has seen periods when different art disciplines have been taught separately and periods when they have been taught together as one subject. It is not our goal here to review the whole history of the teaching of aesthetics but instead to concentrate on the situation in the former Czechoslovakia in the second half of the 20th century and continue from there. In 1951, the teaching of Musical Education at primary and secondary grammar schools began. At the end of the 1960s, new efforts at teaching aesthetics were made and the teaching of Aesthetic Education at 'Gymnasiums' began.

During the 1980s, important people in the fields of art and science, e.g. Jozef Kresanek, pointed out the weak points of aesthetic and art education and the need to foster artistic taste as well as general cultural consciousness, an important point of integration for all artistic disciplines. Professor Kresanek pointed out that Aesthetic Education cannot turn into cultural history; historical knowledge should serve only as a foundation for better *understanding of works of art*. Unfortunately, however, Aesthetic Education at secondary schools, as well as at universities, still struggles with this problem.

After 1989, interest in aesthetic-educational concepts revived thanks to western influences. This led to integrating tendencies in art education and the declared ideal of human-

istic education. In 2009, however, school reform in Slovakia caused the reduction of music and fine arts education in the last grades of primary schools, particularly in the 8th and 9th grade, where the abovementioned subjects were merged into *Education through Art* (with only half a class per week, i.e. two classes per month divided between teachers of musician and art), which in fact effectively meant liquidation of the subject. Many reactions at all levels emerged. At secondary grammar schools, Aesthetic Education was named *Art and Culture*, and has become an optional subject for the school-leaving exam. However, from the point of view of art education, its content has remained predominantly theoretical and fact-based.

The national educational programme for art subjects defines *Education through Art* (ISCED 1,2) as a fine-arts, music and drama educational course, with added topics such as communication, culture, project teaching, pictures, sculpture, film production, web design, etc. These are, of course, themes which are far too big to cover in half a lesson per week. The teaching plan framework for the subject *Art and Culture* (ISCED 3) at secondary grammar schools, which comprises the concept of experiencing works of art (1st grade), interpreting works of art (2nd grade), understanding arts in their historical context (3rd grade) and mastering aesthetic concepts and opinions in terms of historical and cultural parallels (4th grade), seems at first to be a practical and creative one. In reality however, it is both old-fashioned and over-theoretical. Many educational experts warn that with such a newly constituted subject, it is not necessary to deal with the theory of art so much; instead it is more important to teach students to be practical and to create using the distinctive tools of a particular kind of art.

However, it is important to appreciate that this concept tries to react to changes in contemporary life in connection with globalisation and the dominant role of the Internet and mass-media. Difficult new tasks are being set for teachers of aesthetics, the question of primary and secondary school teachers' preparation remaining a sensitive one, especially from the point of view of selection of applicants for this type of education. According to the current conception, they have to be 'omniscient' types – really complex personalities in fact. However, when we take a closer look at their previous education, we can see that with the exception of some compulsory literature at secondary schools (and from the point of view of "trends" at primary too!), fine arts, music and dance art are not included in the compulsory curriculum. Unfortunately, this is reflected in the unsuitability of many students for this type of university study. An Aesthetic Education teacher-to-be who does not aesthetically improve himself/herself, is more a threat to our education system than a benefit to it.

Literary, music, fine arts and drama education have a broader scope than Aesthetic Education; however, they have to reflect aesthetical dimensions. The same applies to the concept of integrative education – or so-called multiaesthetic education. According to Soskova¹, the aim of aesthetic education is an *aesthetically well equipped personality*, which is understood as a "*personality internally integrated, able to perceive aesthetically, aesthetically create and judge the world (including the world of art), able to describe and affirm the aesthetic state which s/he is witnessing*", etc. To develop the ability to aesthetically perceive without the ability to aesthetically create would be disproportional, however. Therefore, the Aesthetics study programme at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Presov is constituted in such a way that within the allotted

¹ J. Sošková, *Možnosti uplatnenia interdisciplinárneho prístupu v teórii estetickéj výchovy*, [in:] *Estetika v horizontoch interdisciplinárnosti*, Prešov 1999, p. 84.

number of classes allowed by the credit system, it offers students a broad range of possibilities for acquiring theoretical knowledge of all kinds of art.

During the predominantly theoretical Aesthetics course in both its pedagogic and non-pedagogic form, students acquire the required level of knowledge in the fields of aesthetics, philosophy, theory, history and applied aesthetics of individual forms of art (music, fine arts, theatre, partly film and literature). This study differs, though, from the study of a particular art theory at art or art-pedagogic faculties or at faculties of education. The knowledge offered there as well as the specialisation of the majority of its courses are very similar; in the case of teacher training institutions, however, the volume of taught material is reduced given the need of students to achieve a general, non-specialized didactic-methodical knowledge base. We do not want to hide the fact that in comparison with musicology or fine arts history students, or musical education or fine arts education students, students of aesthetics during their studies do not have disciplines such as musical forms, musical instruments, complex analysis of musical works (only minimally with the disciplines of theory of music and harmony only); this applies to fine arts and theatre too. In study disciplines such as the interpretation of selected forms of art, we do, however, create projects and drama productions for them, so that their live contact with art balances – to a certain extent at least – their acquisition of theoretical knowledge. Certain predispositions are necessary from their side though.

The question of selection of students for the Aesthetics course is directly related to this. In 2008-2010, we conducted research at the *Institute of Aesthetics, Art Sciences and Cultural Studies* at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Presov in Presov. During three academic years, we approached students of both non-pedagogic Aesthetics and pedagogic Aesthetics, double major students, 151 respondents in total (118 of them future teachers). We approached 130 1st grade and 21 3rd grade bachelor students. Since there are sometimes only 10-15 non-pedagogic students in the first grade, and their career choices after graduation are in fact wide open, we did not separate the results of pedagogic and non-pedagogic students.

We do understand that the research would be more valid and more relevant if it was conducted at all three institutions where Aesthetics and Aesthetic Education students are prepared for practice – i.e. Presov, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra as well as at the University of Comenius in Bratislava. Several factors are influential: the study programme structure, which ostensibly does not vary too much but may be strongly determined by personnel structure and the profile of the lecturers, regional parameters – the structure of students from the point of view of smaller towns and villages in relation to bigger centres, the accessibility of a particular university (distance), types of achieved secondary education in students' structure in particular region, unemployment, the academic level of the teachers (from the point of view of the need to improve their qualifications), etc. All the factors stated above should be taken into account in longitudinal and more extensive research. For the needs of our research, however, it was not possible to take them into account.

1. The thematic fields of problems – research outcomes

We addressed the question of **predispositions and conditions** (art education) acquired by the student in their life and education before university. We were led to do

this by the fact that the level of Aesthetic Education at secondary schools (excluding grammar schools and art schools – conservatories, art film private schools, etc.), particularly at secondary vocational schools, is worse than poor; Aesthetic Education is not taught there in fact. We included teacher training schools in the first group of schools, even though they are not schools preparing future “artists”. In terms of the breakdown of theoretical and practical subjects, and the students’ preparedness for the reception of art, as well as its creation and interpretation, these schools have outstanding tradition and results.

1. *What type of secondary school did you attend?*

- 31% secondary grammar school
- 24% conservatory, School of Applied Arts, private secondary art schools, teacher training school
- 45% secondary vocational school (economics, hotel industry, engineering, secondary joint schools (transformed apprentice schools), apprentice schools with school leaving examination/graduation exam.

Commentary: The ratio of students who, in our judgement, have the potential to do aesthetical-educational work to those who don’t, is approximately 55 to 45%, the latter group being those whose study of art education and aesthetics was curtailed during secondary school). Considering the fact that they are studying to be teachers or cultural employees, these numbers are not satisfactory, even if individual personalities (who develop their skills and interests outside of school), have to be, of course, evaluated individually.

With the second question, the criterion was completion of at least 3 years of systematic art education at primary art school in the field of music, fine arts, dance and literary-drama; folklore ensembles, literary clubs, etc. One or two years spent at primary art school in childhood was not regarded as ‘systematic and effectively completed art education’.

2. *Did you attend primary art school or secondary art school, or some interest group (folklore, cultural etc)? If so, what branch and for how many years?*

- 53% of students took part or attended primary art school, choir, folklore ensembles, literary and drama groups, etc. for at least three years
- 47% stated they had not received any additional art education during childhood.

Commentary: The second group, unfortunately making up almost half of the students, does not have sufficient necessary knowledge of the theory and practice of individual arts and has insufficient aesthetic experience of perceiving arts as well as no practical skills. Taking into account the fact they will become Aesthetic Education teachers, we regard this as alarming.

2. The thematic field of problems – research outcomes

Here, we have focused on the students’ **motivation** for choosing Aesthetics as a course of study, their expectations as well as plans of what field of art they would potentially, during university study, want to improve their skills in. In response to the third question, it was possible to circle one or more options: fine arts (one’s own work, happenings, etc.), dramatic art (one’s own works, student theatre), musical art (music ensem-

bles, singing, playing an instrument). A 'de facto' positive answer was included in the first group, i.e. students chose/circled their interest in one or two kinds of art, which, in our view, represented a clearly expressed interest. We placed emphatically positive answers in the second group (all three kinds of art, sometimes with film, design, computer graphics etc. added), which suggests they are either complex performing arts individuals or personalities eager to develop themselves in many kinds of arts.

3. *Would you like to improve your art skills during your study?*

- 71% yes, I want to improve my skills in one or two kinds of art
- 9% yes, in many kinds of art
- 20% no.

Commentary: We were surprised by the answers of the last group in the first grade, students who have most probably not realised yet the impact improvement in their own art skills, art and aesthetic perception of life may have on their future work in the aesthetic-educational field. They have not realised yet that demonstrating their appreciation of art (if they have any!), can be done in teaching work only through the example of one's own passionate personality. However, there is a possibility that this group of students does not have any plan to continue in this specialisation professionally.

The question about motivation for choosing the study revealed interesting results. Interest in art and culture, love for art (for music and theatre most commonly), continuation of an interest first cultivated at secondary school (e.g. similarity of courses/subjects), etc., was the criterion for the first group of interviewees. The other group was chosen from the point of view of their expressed desire for knowledge and for improving their theoretical skills. The remaining two groups represented the opposite pole of positive motivation.

4. *What was your motivation to choose double major Aesthetic Education course or the non-pedagogic Aesthetics course of study?*

- 40% love for art, desire to engage in art
- 32% desire to acquire knowledge, theoretical information about various kinds of arts
- 18% Aesthetic Education only as a second, necessary approbation course
- 10% other (coincidence, recommendation from friends, education, qualification progress).

Commentary: From the point of view of motivation, in total 72% of students (the first two groups) can be considered sufficiently motivated. However, the previous outcomes, (1st thematic field) reflecting their preparedness for this kind of university study, are far from positive.

3. Interpretation of outcomes and final reflections

These research outcomes are not satisfactory either from the point of view of the preparedness and potential of students starting to study Aesthetics for the teaching of Aesthetic Education, or from the point of view of their idea of what are they going to study. Questions about the aims of aesthetic-educational efforts in society and the tools by which these aims can be fulfilled and achieved are clearly not being addressed. The

motivation and predispositions needed are reflected by feedback from teaching practice. Aesthetic Education teachers in the new, “post-reform” situation, are starting to replace music and fine arts teachers in the 8th and 9th grade given that as graduates of Aesthetics, they are qualified to teach the *Education through art* subject at primary school. We encounter contradictory opinions, however: sometimes, during their ongoing teaching practice (in their Master degree studies), we get responses from the host schools suggesting they are prepared very well. However, we also get responses indicating that they are unable to teach those art-educational subjects because of their incompetence in particular skills (playing an instrument, singing, motoric skills, fine art techniques etc.).

There seem to be few possible ways of solving this situation. Given the current trend of reducing contact hours at university, it is not possible to increase the teaching of other disciplines and that way provide students with the artistic habits and skills they are lacking. Only enormous effort will suffice – through as much contact with art as possible, at the level of apperception and reception (concert life, museums, theatres, educational trips, theatre ensembles, and participation in various multi-performing arts and multimedia students’ projects), encouraging the students’ own creativity in deepening aesthetic experience in their own lives. And, at the moment when they enter the teaching profession, we have to rely on their invention and creativity in using the countless possibilities which various media offer.

This problem is related to the concept of *teacher’s competence*, one which entered our educational environment as a result of our affiliation to European school policy. Following various catalogues of the key competencies in pedagogic literature, it is possible, in the words of Mednanska², to state that “*in the systems of key competencies, art education, development of creativity and space for a pupil’s artistic self-realisation are all absent missing*”, i.e. a definition of *aesthetic-art competence* is missing. Unfortunately, today’s educational strategists still do not realise the added value of Art Education and Aesthetic Education. We assume that the problems stated above, including particular research *in medias res* at one university, are not local, but rather global and therefore; present in all post-communist countries buffeted by unnecessarily frequent reforms reflecting each country’s political changes. Thus, international exchange of experience is crucial in the contemporary global world.

Cultivated aesthetic competencies are the basis for harmonisation of the spiritual and creative abilities of a person and are a measure of the success of humanistic education. It is our conviction that Aesthetic Education teacher should be known for their very own symbiosis of artistic and pedagogic skills. Therefore, this research has been very enlightening in many ways for us, university teachers of Theory and History of Art and Interpretation of Selected Kind of Art courses. In Aesthetic Education, we always try to ensure that the individual has the opportunity to experience works of art and the aesthetic side of reality spontaneously and emotionally. This is especially true for the Aesthetic Education of university students who will one day teach the subject.

² I. Medňanská, *Systematika hudobnej pedagogiky*, Prešov 2010, p. 103.

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Summary

SOME GUIDELINES ON THE PRECONDITIONS AND PREPARATION OF TEACHERS OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION

Changes in the 21st century place new demands on teachers of Aesthetic Education. The question of preparation of primary and secondary school teachers' is a sensitive one, especially from the point of view of selection and predisposition of applicants for this type of university education. This article summarises the findings of a three-year research into the preconditions, motivation and preparation of future teachers of Aesthetic Education.

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