

THE PRACTICE OF DEVELOPING ART EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Artistic education occupies a considerable place in the elementary education curriculum, even in the in school programs offered to our schools are presented the aims and objectives for these subjects. Examination of the program and the current state of the development of these materials in Albanian schools, for grades 1-5 of elementary education, is the goal of this study. It provides an analysis of school subjects and a report describing the practice of developing of subjects with artistic character (Musical Education, visual arts, technology, physical education) through the implementation of qualitative and quantitative research to receive more accurate data. The population of this study are teachers of grades one to five, from which the sample for the study was selected . Thirty teachers from rural and urban areas became part of the study, as well as sixty students, selected randomly in the municipalities of Durres, Tirana, Elbasan. To reach conclusions as accurate as possible elementary classroom observations were conducted , A questionnaire was drafted that was distributed to teachers of elementary school cycle of areas of schools in the study, and interviews were conducted with teachers and students about how these courses are developed in schools. The data obtained were analyzed to identify innovative teaching practices that incorporate the needs and challenges of the artistic education for elementary cycle students (grades1-5), as well as they were compared with data obtained from the development of artistic subjects in the world. During the review of the data a significant gap was identified in relation to the development of courses with artistic character and the place they occupy in the curriculum. The results from the study lead to the necessity of improving and expanding the subject programs of artistic character and also the actual teaching in this regard, so that the development of teaching in the elementary school cycle to become closer to learning competencies required today by the development of education.

Keywords: *art education, subject program, visual arts, music.*

Introduction

‘Art education’ or artistic education is an international term, which refers to learning the ‘art’. The term ‘arts’, is seen as a compilation of several different fields in different contexts, including the arts performance (music, dancing, drama and theatre), visual arts, media, industrial art and literary art. In Albania the term ‘arts’, is mostly used to refer to music, visual arts, dancing, drama and the media. In our primary schools, basic areas of learning the ‘art’, are summed up in only two forms: music and visual art. The term ‘artistic education’ in this study, is also recognized and in other countries as well.

Currently in Albania, it is given more priority to ‘main subjects’ (mathematics, Albanian language), while art education offers students a valuable opportunity to get experience, build knowledge and skills to express themselves, develop imagination, increases cooperation in problem solving skills, develops communication skills, helps in creating different concepts, and respect for themselves and others.

Albanian school experience is still under the influence of traditional teaching (Haxhihyseni, 2015), which aims (de facto) in training students in science subjects and instilling knowledge of mathematics and Albanian language. Very little space is left for artistic subjects, while the artistic education curriculum framework occupies a considerable place. Thus, the visual arts program (Curriculum Framework, IZHA, 2014) states that, *“The art is an important part of the curriculum, which includes aspects of culture, spiritual, artistic, intellectual and emotional, where culture and society interact. ... Substantive powers, conducting arts at all levels, contribute to the achievement of key competencies, in the view of lifelong learning.”*

This is well documented in the current curricular framework, which is used actually in schoolwork, but is unclear what is happening in the class level.

In addition, most of objectives of artistic education are focused on music and drawing, and very little in drama. Even the research about practices of art education in primary school is very rare, in this regard we can mention the publications of Satka (2012, 2013) and Institute of Pedagogical Studies (IZHA) about classes in music or visual arts, while dancing and drama are almost non-existent.

In this context, the aim of this study is the identification of class practices of artistic subjects, recognizing the reality of the delivery of these subjects, studying the field and identifying the problems and needs of primary education grades 1-5.

Literature Review

Artistic education in different countries

In many countries, the national curriculum included the artistic dimension and emphasise its role in forming students’ life competences in the 21st century, which is widely known in the

European and world level (European Commission, 2009: 3). It assessed creativity development, while cultural awareness and creativity are seen as key central transversal competences included in strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. In March 2009, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on artistic studies in the EU, which recommended that artistic education should be compulsory at all school levels, art teachers should use the latest information and communication technology and the need have a greater oversight and coordination of artistic education at European level (Ibid). In 1999, UNESCO has requested that arts teaching should take a special place in the education of every child and it was also published "Guide of artistic education" (Roadmap for Arts Education, 2006), which supported the strengthening of arts education. In 1995, the Council of Europe launched a project on culture, creativity and youth, which examined the provision of arts education in the schools of member countries. The European Commission also issued a Communication on a European agenda for culture in a globalized world in 2007 that encouraged artistic education and active participation in cultural activities in order to develop creativity and innovation.

The importance of dancing, drama and visual arts, in the artistic education of children are treated extensively in the literature.

Visual arts. Children today are grown up in a visual world, surrounded by images of television, videos, and other media advertising.

Arguments to support the inclusion of the visual arts in education include:

- (a) Self-expression and communication,
- (b) Monitoring and expansion of conceptual knowledge by involving perceptual and practical activities, and
- (c) Assessment, individual response to peer work. (Conference on Education, 2009).

Music. We are musical and rhythmic by nature. People are surrounded by music every day and enjoy it while they want and relax and dance. The most recent research has shown that music lessons, even just listening to music performance can increase spatial logic. (Ibid). Primary school students in music classes show an increase learning in math and reading. Studies have found that pupils, who use a musical instrument at two or more years of study, demonstrate visible record and high levels of basic skills compared to students who do not use any musical instrument. The scientific evidence is abundant, clear, and compelling; there are strong links between learning music and achievement of high academic levels of students. Regardless of age, exposure to music helps brain development. Training students in music, musical instrument, vocal or appreciation of music helps develop cognitive and communicative skills of the child.

Dancing. The jump is illustrated as an activity that uses both sides of the brain and senses to rely on memorization. Practice and learning of complex rhythms gives energy and stimulates the whole mind and body system. Many students who really want to progress in learning must find the opportunity to do so through dancing. It creates coordinated movement, strong,

disciplined body that can move with grace and individual style. Preparing to give a show-choreographed dancing memorizing; rehearsing but also, cooperating with dancers develops critical thinking skills and perseverance.

Drama. Drama is a kind of theatre recommended in European schools, including many elements such as role, pressure, time and space, which make students explore traditional theatre forms and including poetry, painting and music in it.

Drama summarizes a number of ways of learning and connects body, mind, emotions and creative impulse. Opportunities for aesthetic education are numerous, as participants use these ways to respond to stimuli and express their interpretation of the situation. These interpretations participate in collaboration with the participants who work and are subject to negotiations with these partners in order to influence the dramatic task. Using facilities and other resources such as music are very important within the fictional context. The work of teachers and students can employ their creativity and imagination to explore and follow their own versions of events. Education as about its improvisator artistic nature facilitates unfolding imagination in drama. It becomes tangible through the expression of the group and the presentation of their work. Artistry of this work is divided among the other participants in the group, not as members of the audience but as 'spectators' (Boal, 1995), in action.

Programs of artistic subjects in the current curriculum framework

As it is mentioned above, the basic low education curriculum framework in Albania includes two artistic subjects: Art and Music. These cases are treated as separate courses and are part of a compulsory education up to grade 9. Dancing and drama are cases that are not part of the official curriculum framework and are considered accessory school subjects only for special programs or for talented activities or extracurricular. Art and music programs have fewer hours than all other subjects' even foreign language and physical education at the basic secondary level of education. The number of hours spent on art and music is 35 hours per year.

Art programs objectives are; 'artistic skills'; 'knowledge and understanding'; 'critique and evaluation'; 'individual expression', but are not included 'cultural heritage'; 'cultural diversity' and 'creativity'. Current programs treat inter-subject links, but do not include the development of social skills and communication. Acquisition of cultural and artistic competence is seen as an overall objective of compulsory education.

Regarding artistic subjects programs, we can generalize that visual art teachers should have the knowledge, skills, mastery and attitudes on these lines of content: materials, processes and techniques; art principles and elements; theme; history and culture; analysis, interpretation and evaluation; the relationship between life and environment. Regarding the music, the teacher must have knowledge, ability, skills and attitudes on these lines of content: literacy, basics of music education, instrument, listening to music and musical expression and creation.

According to what is treated above, meeting the curriculum goal and achieving learning objectives, teachers must be competent in the above issues.

METHODOLOGY

The population and sampling

The population of this study is made up of teachers and students of primary schools, Durres, Tirana, Elbasan municipalities. The sampling process was based on the access created in carrying out the study.

The initial sample for each school was thought to be 5 teachers, the minimum number that allows more variation in stratified sampling.

In total there were 15 teachers who were part of a study on class practices of artistic subjects in grades 1-5 of primary school, five for each school. The selection of teachers was based on the different levels of experience, academic qualifications, their age and profile, aiming at gathering the right information and identifying possible problems.

Research Questions

- What are the current class practices in terms of art education in primary grades 1-5?
- What is the nature of teaching practice in each art form in grades 1-5?
- What are the views and perceptions of teachers who are responsible for class practices of artistic character?

Identification of data such as personal experiences of teachers, their education, adaptability of apprentices, teachers' confidence in their ability to develop these class practices, the perception of the curriculum, the perception of the support offered by career teachers. These were some of the key issues, taken in consideration while designing the questionnaire.

To address the research questions, it was used a descriptive exploratory study, using data obtained from surveys, interviews and supported by the observations made in class

The results of the study and discussion

The discussion is organized into sub-sections to reflect the key issues identified in the study. This is done within each research sub-question.

1. What are the current class practices in terms of art education in primary grades 1-5?

1.1 Who is responsible for teaching the arts in primary schools?

All respondents answered that responsible for delivering arts classroom is the teacher who teaches in that class the other subjects, such as language, mathematics, science etc.

The data obtained from the survey showed that the lack of teacher's personal experience in performing art and dancing presents a barrier to the inclusion of these elements in teaching. Regarding the fact that these do not exist separately in the curriculum of these classes teachers apply the in different extracurricular activities. It is understood that the lack of experience in other forms of art is also a barrier to effective teaching of the arts. It should be noted that delivering these subjects relies on the empirical knowledge of the teacher and it is not based on proper scientific and didactic bases.

Participants were asked to indicate the extent of their experience and personal involvement in any form of art, on a scale of 1-5, where 1 represented 'not at all' and 5 represented 'a lot'. More than half of the respondents in this study showed that the extent of experience and their involvement in various forms of art was not at all or limited in relation to music (50.0%), drama (68.1%) and dancing (69.7%) and almost half of them explained the same thing about the visual arts (48.5%). Above all respondents reported more involvement in the visual arts and music than in drama and dancing.

This is consistent with findings from the literature review (particularly teachers' programs of grades 1-5), greater attention in the preparation of future teachers is devoted to visual arts and music.

Approximately 70% of respondents had no previous dancing experience outside of school, and 82% could not remember to had taken part in dancing activities at school. The majority of teachers interviewed accepted that may have a negative impact due to the lack of experience in these areas.

1.2. Appropriateness of teacher education in artistic education courses

Participants were asked about the percentage of time that was devoted to each form of art. Most of the responses showed that less than 25% of respondents had taken on arts education prior to the start of the teaching profession. They were keen on specific forms of art and followed courses on these. While all respondents claimed that, they had received the knowledge and didactics of these subjects during their education. It should be emphasise that we are only talking about music and visual arts.

1.3 . Professional development of teachers in career

In general, the years in which are taken more service training courses by respondents were 2010-2012, a period in which began the implementation of the current curriculum, followed by 2005-2006, a period in which began training to the current syllabus. About the level of impact of training and professional development undertaken during their careers in teaching practices, 42% of the women surveyed perceived that there was no relationship, 12% perceived that there was a minimal relationship, 36% perceived that there was little relationship between them, 10% perceived that it was a considerable relationship, and 0% of the respondents perceived that there was a definite relationship between training and practice. 12% of respondents reported that they had received arts professional training, comparing with

the rest reporting that their requests for access to professional development training are denied.

1.4. Teacher self-confidence

When asked what has contributed to their level of confidence in teaching the arts, 48% of respondents identified the experience (personal or-even professional) as a contributing factor, 12% identified skills, 18% identified the others ideas, 22% identified the personal interest and satisfaction that they follow one of the forms of art and only 0% identified that their level of confidence in teaching is influenced by professional development courses. This is in accordance with material resources which show that experience in a form of art is one of two main factors that contribute to teachers' confidence.

When asked about their level of confidence in the teaching any form of art, the majority of responses for each art form had declined. Given that the majority of respondents were long career teachers, an alternative explanation was that respondents experience may have contributed to their confidence in teaching.

Visual art was an art form about which respondents reported good experiences and at the same time the highest level of confidence. The responses showed lower or very low confidence in the teaching of art forms, were significantly associated with music. This is interesting, considering that in general respondents indicated that their larger experience consisted in music than in dancing and drama.

In general, most respondents have identified visual art as the favourite to teach, followed by music with a large number of responses that took the second or fourth preference, dancing and drama were selected as the third preference.

Question 2. What is the nature of the practices for each art form in grades 1-5?

The state of artistic education in grades 1-5

In this study, respondents were asked to rank the current state of each art form in the following categories: 'extremely poor', 'poor', 'satisfactory', 'good', 'very good'. Most respondents thought about each art form as 'satisfactory'. In relation to dancing, music and drama, most of the respondents were of the view that their situation was 'poor', while the state of the visual art was thought as 'good'. The reasons given for this were: 'Art is given less priority by schools; art is not considered as education; the attention is focused on subjects like reading, writing and mathematics (15.2%); 'Lack of knowledge and confidence of teachers' (6%) The opinion is: 'The school does not include art education at satisfactory levels for pupils; it does not provide opportunities for teachers to do more' (7.5%). 'They expressed that their school includes arts education at satisfactory levels' (12.1%); and 'Children enjoy the participation' (3.0%).

It is obvious that visual art is the form of art in which the respondents have wider experience, in which was undertaken the bulk of education before career, about which the majority of respondents expressed high level of satisfaction during specialization. It is also the art form,

which respondents said they had higher confidence in teaching, and some of the participants perceived it as the art that should be taught to children at a higher standard than other art forms. Moreover, it was concluded that greater time for arts teaching was focused on teaching art than other arts.

While respondents indicated that they had no access to musical instruments for teaching purposes, and in most cases, they reported that there were no musical instruments in schools, or recorders.

70% of respondents had classes with 28 students or more, due to this the availability of musical instruments for each student was impossible. It should be noted the lack of resources for teachers.

The survey showed that the resources used by the surveyed teachers to develop teaching of arts were art syllabuses for grades 1-5.

A greater number of participants indicated that resources above were used for teaching planning in music and visual arts, compared with the experience of teaching dancing and drama, which as noted above was not given any priority in primary programs. The reason why the syllabus was widely used is that it is more easily accessible than other sources.

A large number of respondents, (80.3% music, visual arts 89.4%;) showed that the classroom teacher is primarily responsible for teaching art forms among students. Time planned for the arts in all schools and classrooms is the same, because it is provided in the relevant programs, while teachers try to introduce elements of arts in delivering extra hours, but it is generally not planned and deliberate (with objectives well thought).

When asked about the percentage of time dedicated to certain types of different activities (performances, organizing sounds, listening, composing, assessment) within each art form, in general, most of the answers of the interviewees were 10-25 %, however a considerable number of teachers expressed that it was not given time to such activities in the classroom. More than 25% of respondents felt that teaching the arts subjects were seen as isolated event compared with core subjects.

In relation to special classes' delivery (in extracurricular activities) in artistic education, most of respondents were answered 'sometimes'. In relation to music, drama and dancing, the majority of responses were 'rare', while in terms of visual art were 'often'.

Surveys carried out for a month in schools during the study showed that teaching arts in grades 1-5 is casual and for a few of them, it does not happen at all (observed in 3rd grade). This shows that teachers in grades 1-5, difficultly meet curriculum expectations in the arts (the current one), they do not work for the artistic aspects of education that are not involved in the curriculum, such as drama and dancing.

Question 3: What are teachers' opinions and perceptions regarding "overload syllabus?"

The issue of overload curriculum perception is encountered in free discussions with teachers, but also in opened questions of this survey, in which 22.7% of respondents listed the overload curriculum and the time limit as one of the main reasons for not delivering the elements of artistic character. The teachers also felt that the inclusion of the four forms of art in the curriculum would have a negative impact; it should be provided the time for each art form. This statement confirms the nature of the problem widely known in a large number of teachers who still concept their role as transmitters of knowledge, while artistic education does not help students to reach the required standards in core subjects.

A number of participants expressed that the hours of art are irregularly delivered in their schools, and priority for artistic education was usually lower than other subjects. In addition, interviews with them reported that art has a lower status in schools compared with subjects like language literature and mathematics, considering the national tests conducted on these subjects. In addition, the interviews with the teachers observed the lack of support that teachers receive in arts, which are not recognized as 'core' curriculum.

3.2. Lack of training support given to teachers during their career.

Lack of support for artistic education courses is another issue where the study was focused. When the participated teachers in the survey were asked if they are supported by an educational system, half or more of the respondents were of the opinion that they felt 'not very supported' in relation to all forms of art. 93% of respondents said that they lacked access to development professional opportunities and almost half of the respondents indicated that they never undertake training career to develop professional opportunities in music or visual arts and more than half answered the same for drama and dancing. It is interesting to note that the majority of respondents in the study were of the opinion that arts classes should be delivered by specific specialized teachers.

Conclusions

This research has provided a modest contribution and support in research about terms of art education in primary schools. Art education in primary schools is described as a disappointment to expectations, in the schools studied. Experience in teaching and conversations with different teachers, direct observations in classrooms; demonstrate the same, the delivery of artistic education courses is not at the required level.

This study identified that it is not provided appropriate support or training for teachers to reach the expectations of art education curriculum.

While all research conducted is essential and appropriate to understand the current state of art education, what is not lacking in these data is the transfer of the curriculum at the classroom level, identifying concretely what happens in classrooms in these hours of teaching. Responses from teachers showed lack of delivering of these subjects according to the standards.

Further research can be done in terms of art education practice in class and it should go beyond self-report of teachers and including not only teachers, but also pupils and members of school communities.

Recommendations

Given the findings of the study can be given these recommendations, which will serve not only for teachers of classes 1-5 of primary education, but also for curriculum designers, directors of schools and teaching faculties.

1. Increasing the percentage of artistic education classes in grades 1-5, including not only music and visual arts, but dancing and drama as important elements that influence the formation of individual, develop them and help them cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally.
2. Giving the same importance for Arts education hours, as for the core subjects like maths and language.
3. Teaching faculties should develop syllabuses for subjects like drama and dancing and providing more training for teachers of primary education in artistic subjects.
4. School principals should devote appropriate importance of these subjects, not only when they have to organise a range of activities in school. If students are not educated all times in arts, they cannot perform well once or twice a year.

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