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**The Real Life Experience of Visual Art
in Czech Extracurricular and
Cocurricular Education**

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The Real Life Experience of Visual Art in Czech Extracurricular and Cocurricular Education

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Abstract

The paper presents the theoretical background for the investigation and the results of the investigation carried out in the Czech extracurricular environment in 2013 in which the characteristics and approaches to mediation of art within field trips and outreach programs for schools were defined. The research used qualitative research method of a semi controlled interview with professionals from different extracurricular establishments. The goal of the thematic analysis of six extensive interviews was to get a holistic view on the current concept of visual art based extracurricular programs for schools and its pedagogical potential and to describe and define the methodological specifics of this phenomenon. The analysis method of open coding reveals a generalized view of the topic.

Keywords: Visual art, extracurricular, cocurricular education, experiential education, object based education.

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Introduction

The educational system is worldwide based on the idea of academic skills, which is no more sufficient. Global economy is fueled by innovation and creativity. The social discourse demands communication in images as well as in text (Duncan, 2012; Fulkova, 2012). It is therefore obvious that visual art education is an important part of the school educational system. Yet its importance is worldwide underestimated in the hierarchy of core subjects (Eisner, 2002; Kress, 2000).

A number of researches on the effects of arts education on children's learning and development prove positive outcomes on children. Education through and in visual arts produce positive learning outcomes, develops sense of personal and cultural identity, supports socio-personal development and has a significant influence on cognitive development (compare Catterall, 2009; Bamford, 2006; Eisner, 2002; Fiske, 1999). The education is no longer associated to schoolrooms, school teachers or separated school subjects (Sobanova, 2012). The requirement on interdisciplinarity and link art with real-world issues and real-life experience of art demands cooperation with community and other institutions.

Visual Art-Based Field Trip Activities and Outreach Programs

Extracurricular activities are defined as activities designed for young people of school age to participate in learning activities outside of normal curriculum life (Bamford&Wimmer, 2012). These activities provide a channel for reinforcing the lessons learned in the classroom (then called co-curricular), offering students the opportunity to apply academic skills in a real-world context, and are thus considered part of a well-rounded education (Massoni, 2011).

Visual art-based field trip activities (e.g. to a fine art gallery) and outreach programs - programs brought to the school (e.g. a workshop with an artist at school) give children a more direct, interactive experience of the arts (O'Brien&Rollefson, 1995). The involvement of art-based programs into education can be provided by museums, community cultural institutions, art centers, artists or universities.

First museum educational programs for schools and the origins of arts integration in other subjects take place in the U.S.A. (Wilson, 1997; Winslow, 1939). The art-based programs are used both in art education as well as are integrated in other subject as an approach to teaching and learning that issues the art as primary pathway to learning. The emphasis on educational value of arts and its connection with real world issues is anchored in the Discipline Based Art Education (DBAE) approach. DBAE has expanded in other countries, as well as it has become a platform for current widespread Comprehensive Art Education approach.

In the Czech Republic, the current art education curricular documents and the theory emphasize the cooperation across subjects and community involvement (Babyradova, 2007). There are four approaches to art education in our country, one of them – the art-centric approach – is based on U.S. DBAE principals (Slavik, 1997). Its actual development accents experiential attitude to instruction (Babyradova, 2007) and thus the real-life experience of art outside the school (or brought to school) is desirable and very live.

The Real Life Experience of Art through its Mediation

Object Based Education

The mediation of art is a way to find a path to the artwork which we need to perceive and to facilitate its understanding. The term of mediation of art includes not only the work of pedagogues and lecturers. It covers also publishing, art disclosure in medias, exhibitions, fairs and others activities. In every way there is always a piece of art present, even if only indirectly through e.g. its reproduction.

The real life experience of visual art can be carried out through the practical, experimental, mediating programs called animations. The real life experience of art is an essential precondition for functional principles of animation, which is in the spirit of object-oriented learning.

Object based education and object based learning or using objects for education is a partial method that underlies for example gallery and museum education. When it is not possible to work with a piece of art directly, then an alternative object is used to facilitate the work, the interpretation and the recognition of art. The object based education is based on – already by Comenius promoted- idea of what is seen, is easily memorable than what is mediated only verbally. The “objects” in extracurricular and cocurricular programs can be in most cases seen in a natural setting and context, this aspect is often missing when working with an art at school.

The Method of Animation as Experiential, Creative, Educational Method of the Mediation of Real Life Experience of Art

The animation is a broad term. Its interpretation is not clear and the situation is more difficult by the fact that its interpretation is different in different countries and different languages. The Latin word “anima“ means soul. The term of “the animator“ is more specific: the one who gives life. The animation as the educational method within the real life experience of art is called cultural animation. It incorporates the gallery/museum animation and the animation of cultural historical heritage.

“Gallery/museum animation is a process of contact with the work of art. This process leads the participants to the possibilities of a richer understanding and gaining new experiences through the experience. The animation therefore adds the beautiful and irreplaceable element of effective practice to the

cognition process. The thinking and the learning gets its tangible form” (Horacek, 1998, p.72).

Gallery/museum animation is a kind of accompanying programs of an exhibition institution called mixed method program. It is a combination of a theoretical explanation or lecture and of a practical part. While during the theoretical part the participant’s role is passive and his role is to receive the information, during the practical part the participant is forced or encouraged to learn through an experience based on creative activities. The practical part consolidates the theoretical knowledge while enriching personal experience and reflection. The essence of the method of animation is therefore experimental and creative activity working with an artwork. These activities are means to a natural learning processes.

The second type of cultural animation is the animation of cultural historical heritage. It is viewed as one of the ways of care, presentation and popularization of cultural historical heritage. It is mostly a tangible heritage of a country, region, city or a certain place. Animation of cultural historical heritage is more closely linked with the methods of its conservation, of cultural management or arts management. It is understood as a method working with the emotional side of its consumer. The animation is used as a part of interpretation programs as its motivation or experimental part. As well as in the gallery/museum animation, there is a conditional requirement for an object of the heritage.

The Investigation of Approaches to the Educational Programs Based on the Real-Life Experience of Art out of School Environment

The research method of an interview was chosen to obtain research data from extracurricular environment. The interview is a form of the questioning that allows us to obtain in-depth information and to get into the problem more precisely. Mainly because it requires to contact the respondent personally. It also enables the researcher to develop and influence the interview according his needs.

The investigation consists of the analysis of six interviews made with the experts from the Czech extracurricular establishment providing animation programs for schools. Personal interviews were carried out during a period of four months in 2013. Each of them was recorded and then converted into text.

The aim of the interviews was to a, obtain data that are not available in the literature; b, to get a current view about the Czech environment that somehow touches the animation of visual art outside the school.

The goal of the general interview guide approach was a, to obtain data for analysis of expert’s personal subjective views on the current situation, the status of animation of visual art in extracurricular environment; b, to describe its learning potential and the methodological specifics. To achieve our goal a simple structure of the interview was used, which was followed in the form of follow-up:

- 1, the current status of animation of visual art in extracurricular education,
- 2, the pedagogical potential of visual art in extracurricular education,
- 3, the methodological specifics of the mediation of visual art in extracurricular education.

Six extensive interviews within this stage of the research were made. Two of them with a fine-art gallery pedagogue, one with a lector of a historical monument, one with a leisure time animator, one with a professor assistant at the university and one with a founder of a non-profit organisation engaged in the placement of artworks in a public space. For a capacity reasons, we do present only the results of the analysis of the interviews. The presentation and citation of interviews is therefore missing.

Analysis of the Interviews

The collected data were processed using the qualitative data analysis of the grounded theory: the constant comparison and open coding. The aim of the open coding is to create a categorized list of codes. The codes are further processed using the analytical strategy. The main goal of the analysis of the interview is to try to get a view on the topic by people, whose work is to mediate visual art in extracurricular environment and whose programs are used by schools. All respondents work with the method of animation and with the present piece of art (in a form of an artwork, tangible or intangible cultural historical heritage).

The interviews were transcribed from the audio recording to the digital text. The data were next processed using the method of a paper and pencil (Svaricek, Sedova, 2007). The text was divided into units according the meaning. The codes were then assigned to the units. "The code, as shown by Lee and Fielding (2004), is a word or a short phrase that captures a certain group of meanings. This code distinguishes its contain from the others" (Svaricek, Sedova, 2007, p. 212).

The interviews were analysed to establish a system of categories to answer the research questions:

- 1, How is the method of animation of visual art understood in real life and in professional practice?
- 2, What is the value and what are the characteristics of animation of visual art in a real life outside the school?

Two main categories were created by the open coding to the first research question:

- 1, the dimensions of the animation;
- 2, the ways of grasping the visual art in a real life.

Following categories were determined for the main category of the dimensions of the animation:

- 1, the qualities of the animator;
- 2, the role of the participant;
- 3, the form, the nature and the goal of the method of animation.

The animation as an educational method includes certain dimensions that are divided in these categories. The dimensions represent

- 1, the demands that the animation requires from the animator;
- 2, the demands that the animation requires from the participants whose role is fundamental to the functioning of the method;
- 3, the specific means by which the educational goal of this method is achieved.

The contain of this main category is expressed by the following text.

The animator is a person who carries out the animation with the participants and, if possible, is an author of the program. It is primarily a teacher by profession who is flexible and able to react spontaneously. The position of the animator is equal to the participants in the group. The animator is actively engaged and participating in the activities of the program.

The participant of the animation is concerned and committed. He participates voluntarily in the program. The animation has no fixed form. There is a wide range of options to pass information, experience, and how to shape or influence the participant's education. The animation always emphasizes the processuality and creative activities.

The animation is based on experience as a route to the knowledge. It is based on the communication within the group, on the work on himself, on the cooperation with the animator. It is based on the encounter with the art, new horizons and new ideas. The goal of the animation is the education to art and the facilitation of the process of learning.

Following categories were determined for the main category of the ways of grasping the visual art in a real life:

1. multistratification;
2. boundedness;
3. accessibility.

The contain of this main category is expressed by the following text.

The category of the multistratification simply affects the breadth of perception of visual art in a real life. It is most often seen in the context of tangible cultural historical heritage but also in the context of a particular cultures. The understanding of cultural historical heritage as an essence of man, who is a part of his culture, is a particular dimension as well.

Cultural and historical heritage is a broad term. It is influenced by the perception of each of us, the place, the time and the culture. The category of the accessibility is descriptive, and expresses the paths of a person to cultural historical heritage.

- 1, The paths of an action have a form of an animation, experimental program, art event, performance or a workshop.
- 2, Then there are of course the classic routes such as tours, discussions, comments, lectures.
- 3, And finally the impersonal paths in form of media, printed word, etc.

One main category was created to answer the second research question:

- 1, The educational potential of visual art in a real life.

Following categories were determined for the main category of the animation dimensions:

- 1, the difficulty;
- 2, the contribution to school education;
- 3, the motivation to care;
- 4, the personal development;
- 5, the unconventional approach.

The qualities of the first, quite descriptive category summarizes the demands that may be a barrier to the transmission of the cultural heritage: such as the need for a competent animator, finance, technology, equipment supplies, materials, time, emotional stress, the importance of reflection.

The educational potential for school education includes specific objects, skills, where the visual art in a real life can serve as a source of education but also the specific qualities that make it interesting for education. It is the opportunity for a direct work with the “object” of art, for a personal experience. The rapture from the conventional environment of a classroom and a school building plays its importance as well. At last it is the authority of an unknown or different person of a lecturer, that can activate and motivate learning of the participants.

Visual art as a part of the heritage is a part of each of us, of our identity. Its knowledge influence our attitude to it. The potential of the mediation of visual art may be the first real conscious encounter with its content. This is the moment that may initiate the creation of a sense of belonging and a responsibility to culture, community or cultural historical heritage.

The category of the personal development expresses the effect of the encounter with visual art in a real life on the participant. It touches its whole personality, its emotional, cognitive and conative competences towards oneself and to the others. The unconventional approach consists of the action moving, performativity, participation, experience, innovative means of expression, the need of a voluntary approach, playfulness.

Conclusion

The Czech educational system requires connection and cooperation of school with its environment in its curricula documents. There is however a big gap between the theory and the practice, even though the progress is visible. It is obvious from the results of our research that efforts of extracurricular establishments and its lecturers to cooperate with schools show a certain fragmentation and diversity in the approach to this phenomenon.

The real life experience of art out of school classroom in the Czech environment is understood as an experiential, personal method. Instead of the position of a teacher, the lecturer holds a position of a partner or coordinator. The experience of art is strongly related to the cultural historical heritage and the culture in the extracurricular environment. The nature of the educational program is expressed by two basic principles: conativity and interactivity.

We believe that the concept of mediation of the real life experience of art as it is understood by extracurricular lecturers might become a possibility for the formal education as well (especially the art education). These programs could become - in accordance with the curricula - an integral part in the school education plans.

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