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The CEPS Journal is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal devoted to publishing research papers in different fields of education, including scientific.

Aims & Scope

The CEPS Journal is an international peer-reviewed journal with an international board. It publishes original empirical and theoretical studies from a wide variety of academic disciplines related to the field of Teacher Education and Educational Sciences; in particular, it will support comparative studies in the field. Regional context is stressed but the journal remains open to researchers and contributors across all European countries and worldwide. There are four issues per year. Issues are focused on specific areas but there is also space for non-focused articles and book reviews.

About the Publisher

The University of Ljubljana is one of the largest universities in the region (see www.uni-lj.si) and its Faculty of Education (see www.pef.uni-lj.si), established in 1947, has the leading role in teacher education and education sciences in Slovenia. It is well positioned in regional and European cooperation programmes in teaching and research. A publishing unit oversees the dissemination of research results and informs the interested public about new trends in the broad area of teacher education and education sciences; to date, numerous monographs and publications have been published, not just in Slovenian but also in English.

In 2001, the Centre for Educational Policy Studies (CEPS; see <http://ceps.pef.uni-lj.si>) was established within the Faculty of Education to build upon experience acquired in the broad reform of the

national educational system during the period of social transition in the 1990s, to upgrade expertise and to strengthen international cooperation. CEPS has established a number of fruitful contacts, both in the region – particularly with similar institutions in the countries of the Western Balkans – and with interested partners in EU member states and worldwide.



Revija Centra za študij edukacijskih strategij je mednarodno recenzirana revija z mednarodnim uredniškim odborom in s prostim dostopom. Namenjena je objavljanju člankov s področja izobraževanja učiteljev in edukacijskih ved.

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Revija je namenjena obravnavanju naslednjih področij: poučevanje, učenje, vzgoja in izobraževanje, socialna pedagogika, specialna in rehabilitacijska pedagogika, predšolska pedagogika, edukacijske politike, supervizija, poučevanje slovenskega jezika in književnosti, poučevanje matematike, računalništva, naravoslovja in tehnike, poučevanje družboslovja in humanistike, poučevanje na področju umetnosti, visokošolsko izobraževanje in izobraževanje odraslih. Poseben poudarek bo namenjen izobraževanju učiteljev in spodbujanju njihovega profesionalnega razvoja.

V reviji so objavljeni znanstveni prispevki, in sicer teoretični prispevki in prispevki, v katerih so predstavljeni rezultati kvantitativnih in kvalitativnih empiričnih raziskav. Še posebej poudarjen je pomen komparativnih raziskav.

Revija izide štirikrat letno. Številke so tematsko opredeljene, v njih pa je prostor tudi za netematske prispevke in predstavitve ter recenzije novih publikacij.

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— KONSTANCA ZALAR

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Toward Fulfilling the Gap Between Arts Policy and Practice

Modern society constantly confronts us with the question of how we can find our way through the wealth of information, what values and knowledge will enable us to survive and enjoy a better quality of life, and how we can achieve all of this. Strategies for the development of science, education and culture (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2019; UNESCO, 2006; UNESCO, 2024, etc.) offer strategic and operational proposals to get out of the maze of possibilities and emphasise the importance of critical, creative and in-depth selection and processing of information.

If this points the way out of the labyrinth of values in modern society, which are all too often lost in the byways of expediency and capital, and indicates the importance of humanity and humanistic values, then in this context we can also ask about the importance and role of art and culture in the social context and in the life of the individual. Many disciplines, from psychology to education, sociology, philosophy and neuroscience, offer answers that shed light on the complex dimensions of art. They are all united in the realisation that holistic, creative and reflexive thinking is an axiom of artistic activity. Working in the various fields of art, through an authentic and autonomous process that cannot be replaced by modern technology and artificial intelligence, anchors humanistic values in the life of the individual and the community.

The irreplaceable importance of artistic activity in the various artistic fields is reflected in the human development of critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem-solving, risk assessment, decision-making, constructive management of emotions, etc., all of which are also essential indicators of lifelong learning competences. In this context, the competence of cultural awareness and expression is one of the key competences of lifelong learning, with a focus on creative expression and the appreciation and experience of artistic languages. In its definition, it emphasises “the importance of creative expression of ideas, experiences and feelings in a variety of media, including music, performing arts, literature and visual arts” (European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2019).

Awareness of the importance of arts education is highlighted by international strategies for cultural and education policy development (McCarthy et al., 2004; UNESCO, 2006; UNESCO, 2010; UNESCO, 2024; Winner et al., 2013), of which the Seoul Agenda (UNESCO, 2010, p. 10) notes the need to “realise the full potential of high quality arts education to positively renew

educational systems, to achieve crucial social and cultural objectives, and ultimately to benefit children, youth and lifelong learners". Quality arts education, including visual arts, music, drama, dance, reading, cultural heritage, film, intermedia arts and other artistic areas (Bucik et al., 2011), benefits people's holistic development, encompassing emotional, social, psychomotor and cognitive domains (Ijdens et al., 2018). In addition, arts education has important implications for the teaching and learning environment, as well as for the community (Bamford, 2009). As outlined in the *Ljubljana Dance and the Child (daCi) Declaration* (Dance and the Child International, 2024), we also recognise that culture and the arts are integral to inclusive development, resilience and the overall well-being of individuals and societies. Culture lies at the heart of what makes us human. It provides the foundation for our values, choices and relationships – with one another and with nature – nurturing critical thinking, a sense of identity and the ability to respect and embrace otherness.

At the same time, we note that there is a gap in the implementation of arts policy in practice (Bamford, 2009; Bamford, 2017; Ijdens & Wagner, 2018), and that clearer and more refined models for the qualitative implementation of arts education are needed (Bamford, 2017). Several countries also point to the problem of the lack of training of teachers to teach artistic subjects (EACEA/Eurydice, 2009; Ijdens & Wagner, 2018) and the need for a more balanced inclusion of different artistic fields, as disciplines such as theatre, dance, film and digital media, among others, are often not part of the curriculum or feasible activities. Within this framework, we can approach arts education from many perspectives.

In the context of the above dimension and the problems of implementing arts policy in practice, this focus issue contains ten articles dealing with arts education in the community context, arts education in the teaching and learning context, and the impact of arts education on children's development.

The issue opens with Susan R. Koff's article *Dance Education as Social Studies Education*, in which she argues that current measures of educational success overlook the arts, despite their potential to support holistic human development. In the US, social studies fosters citizenship and democratic participation, yet it is often marginalised. The article explores how dance education can integrate social studies by enabling students to engage with diversity, identity and society. Based on an online survey of dance educators, the findings suggest that meaningful implementation requires broader education policy support beyond dance education itself.

The second article, by Janja Batič, Natalija Rojc Črnčec and Nina Šulin, with the title *The Visual Journal as a Way to Strengthen Students' Ability to*

Self-Reflect, deals with the issue of how art allows us to look within ourselves, to learn who we are and what interests us. It connects us to our thoughts, our feelings, our perceptions, and our external reality and experiences. Artistic expression enables students to think about themselves and their feelings, to take the perspective of another while evaluating their artworks, to set goals and to organise the course of their creative work.

The third article, entitled *The (Im)possibility of Primary Arts Teacher Education* by Jeff Meiners and Kerrin Rowlands, explores the persistent gap between policy aspirations and practical implementation in primary arts teacher education. Drawing on UNESCO frameworks and recent Australian curriculum reforms, it examines how one Australian university has responded to the lack of structured arts education in teacher preparation by offering an “Arts Specialism”. Using education policy sociology and critical discourse analysis, the study investigates the policy contexts, curriculum design and institutional negotiations involved. It highlights key challenges and opportunities related to content, pedagogy and stakeholder engagement, and offers recommendations for strengthening arts education in initial teacher education.

In the fourth article, *Improving the Social-Emotional Well-Being of a Child with Multiple Developmental Disabilities by Incorporating the Performative Drama Model into the Learning Process*, authors Alenka Vidrih and Tina Grošelj present how the Performative Drama Model was trialled to improve students’ assertiveness and performance in real life. A 12-year-old boy with learning disabilities and multiple developmental disabilities, who had difficulties expressing himself and participating in class, managed to improve his academic performance and general well-being through the activities of an “actor” who supported the development of his self-advocacy, classroom integration and communication skills.

The fifth article, *Becoming an Engaged Dance Scholar Through Arts-Based Community Engagement Projects* by Lynnette Young Overby, Diana Crum, Jill Grundstrom, Francine E. Ott and Melissa Van Wijk, explores how postgraduate dance education students can develop as engaged scholars through arts-based community projects. The study analysed seven projects from doctoral students at Teachers College, Columbia University, focusing on levels of community engagement and the presence of arts-based research qualities such as evocation and illumination. The results showed consistent application of co-creation, co-implementation and co-assessment, while co-dissemination occurred only in the earlier cohort. The students reported positive impacts on their dissertations and future engagement plans, highlighting the value of structured support in developing engaged scholarship through dance.

The article entitled *Teachers' and Artists' Collaborative Teaching and Learning*, by Sonja Rutar, Tina Štemberger and Bogdana Borota, highlights the specifics of collaboration between artists and the school environment. By involving artists in the pedagogical process, teachers can gain information about how children are able to participate experientially and expressively in artistic experiences, which relieves the burden of predetermined and over-structured curricular practices, provides teachers with insight into children's experiential and expressive capacities/competences, and provides artists with insight into the possibilities of integrating authentic artistic experiences into education.

The seventh article, with the title *Teachers' Views: Using Body Music in Teaching and Learning Primary School Subjects*, written by Muzaffer Özgü Bulut, Ayşe Akarsu and Ersoy Karabay, examines the KeKeÇa Body Music approach in Turkish primary school lessons. The aim of the study was to understand how this form of embodied and arts-integrated method, which integrates movement, rhythm and play into learning and uses the body as a musical instrument, influences teachers' professional development and teaching practices, while impacting on students' motivation and academic performance. The study emphasises the great potential of body music as a pedagogical tool to enrich teaching and learning experiences in primary schools.

The eighth article, entitled *Encouraging Social and Emotional Learning in Preschool Children Through Carrying Out Musical Activities in the Daily Routine*, authored by Olga Denac, Ines Mohorko Germ and Jerneja Žnidaršič, presents how daily routines with enriching musical activities in Slovenian preschool education can promote children's social and emotional learning, including emotional self-awareness, regulation, empathy, relationship building and responsible behaviour, while achieving specific musical learning outcomes. Research confirms that integrating music into the daily routine not only improves emotional intelligence and social interactions, but also the structure of the classroom, transitions and overall atmosphere.

The ninth article, *Educating Children for Creativity and Democracy Through a Music and Drama Community of Practice*, by Blaženka Bačlija Sušić and Vesna Brebrić, explores how music and drama, integrated in a community of practice and guided by process drama, can enhance children's creativity and democratic values. Classical compositions, movement games, singing and creative storytelling formed the basis for a participatory and inclusive learning space. The study provides compelling evidence that music and theatre can serve as powerful tools to foster democratic and creative potential in early childhood education.

The focus issue also contains three articles in the varia section.

The first varia article is written by Monika Klun, Danijela Frangež and Aleš Bučar Ručman and is entitled *Addressing Violence Against Parents and Peers and Violence in Schools Through the Perspective of Ecological Theory*. This paper examines violence against parents and peers and violence in schools using Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. The study managed to establish connections between these forms of violence, perpetrator characteristics and conclusions about the influences at different ecological layers. Outward manifestations of these issues include discipline problems, truancy, association with problematic peers, substance abuse or addiction and violent behaviour.

The second varia article, entitled *The Development of Science Process Skills and Content Knowledge with Inquiry Boxes in Early Childhood Education* by Nika Golob and Vanja Ungar, explores the systematic use of inquiry-based learning in preschool science education through thematic inquiry boxes. The study involved twenty children aged four to five, with the experimental group engaging in guided exploration of materials using photo-based instructional cards. The results show that the children improved both in science content knowledge and in process skills such as classifying, ordering and weighing. The findings support the use of inquiry boxes as an effective didactic tool for fostering autonomy and integrating science skills with content learning in early childhood education.

The third varia article, by Irena Lesar, entitled *The Educational Paradigms in Tagore's School Through the Lens of Continental Pedagogy* explores Tagore's concept of holistic education through the lens of continental pedagogy. Using a qualitative theoretical analysis, the author examines how Tagore's school in Santiniketan reflects his vision of comprehensive education. The study focuses on four key pedagogical factors – teacher, content, child and social environment – and shows that Tagore successfully integrated all of them, unlike the major European traditions analysed. His approach also anticipated many contemporary educational concepts, including experiential learning, student participation and embodied cognition.

The varia section also includes a book review by Konstanca Zalar of the monograph *Art in Education in Kindergartens and Schools: The SKUM Project*, written by Robi Kroflič, Sonja Rutar and Bogdana Borota (Eds.), which offers a new perspective and approach to the theoretical and practical justification of art as an essential element of contemporary education.

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Dance Education as Social Studies Education

SUSAN R. KOFF¹

≈ Measurement of formal education success excludes arts education and focuses instead on reading, mathematics and science. In a world filled with differences between people, geography, backgrounds, customs, religions and sense of self, the only subject that approaches this knowledge is social studies. This discipline is not tested in the Programme for International Student Assessment, but is tested tangentially in the United States. In general, consideration of separate subjects in formal schooling does not encourage focus on what creates the holistic human beings who occupy this complex world. Within the United States, social studies emphasises citizenship and participation in democracy. The purpose of this article is to clearly articulate how dance education, a comprehensive education that enables young people to work in and encounter the world around them, can include social studies. An online survey of dance education practitioners results in ideas that cannot be implemented through the efforts of dance education alone, but require education policy decisions to enable implementation.

Keywords: dance education, social studies education, holistic education, integration

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Plesna vzgoja kot del družboslovnega izobraževanja

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Merjenje uspešnosti formalnega izobraževanja izključuje umetnostno vzgojo ter se namesto tega osredinja na branje, matematiko in na naravoslovje. V svetu, ki ga zaznamujejo razlike med ljudmi, zemljepisnimi značilnostmi, izvori, običaji, verstvi in samopodobami, je edini predmet, ki se približuje temu znanju, predmet družboslovja. Ta sicer ni del mednarodne raziskave PISA (Program za mednarodno ocenjevanje učencev), ampak se v Združenih državah Amerike preverja le posredno. Splošno gledano, razdeljenost predmetov v formalnem izobraževanju ne spodbuja osredinjenosti na tiste vidike, ki prispevajo k oblikovanju celostnega človeškega bitja, ki deluje v tem kompleksnem svetu. V Združenih državah Amerike družboslovje poudarja državljanstvo in aktivno sodelovanje v demokraciji. Namen tega članka je jasno predstaviti, kako lahko plesna vzgoja, celostna oblika izobraževanja, ki mladim omogoča delovanje v svetu in spoprijemanje z njim, vključuje tudi družboslovje. Rezultat spletne ankete med izvajalci plesne vzgoje ponuja zamisli, ki pa jih ni mogoče uresničiti samo s prizadevanji znotraj plesne vzgoje, ampak so za njihovo uvajanje v prakso potrebne odločitve na področju izobraževalne politike.

Ključne besede: plesna vzgoja, družboslovno izobraževanje, celostno izobraževanje, integracija

Introduction

Anecdotal discussions question the value of interdisciplinary education because there is no formal governmental measurement of this type of education. However, this does not prevent recognising ways in which disciplines are already aligned to some extent. Arts education practitioners have focused on interdisciplinary connections to describe their value in the curriculum (Adjapong & Emdin, 2015; Allen, 2023). This article presents the context for this discussion and examines specifically the implementation of integrated dance education and social studies education in order to make it visible and encourage this type of interdisciplinary education.

Measurement of formal education success internationally excludes arts education and focuses instead on reading, mathematics and science, claiming that this narrow focus creates the “knowledge and skills to meet real life challenges” (OECD, n.d., para. 1). In a world filled with differences between people, geography, backgrounds, customs, religions and sense of self, the only subject that approaches this knowledge is social studies. This discipline is not tested in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), but is tested tangentially in the United States. In general, consideration of separate subjects in formal schooling does not encourage focus on what makes us the holistic human beings who occupy this complex world. As one academician stated, “high-stakes testing may lead to a default philosophy of education that holds in high regard a narrow bundle of knowledge and skills” (Guzenhauser, 2003, p. 51).

Within the United States, the “primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (NCSS, 1994, p. vii). The purpose of the present paper is to take this philosophical thinking about creating more inclusive education and see if it is possible, and to clearly articulate how dance education, as a comprehensive education that enables young people to work in and encounter the world around them, can also be social studies (Koff, 2021). The article will first examine the literature to determine if the process of dance focused as social studies is discussed and considered. This is followed by a survey of how dance is currently taught within the United States in order to answer the question: Is there commonality between social studies education and dance education within elementary and secondary education, and if so, how much do these disciplines have in common? In discussing how dance education can contribute to the holistic development of young people in schools if it is implemented in this manner, we determine that dance can be recognised as an essential aspect of the curriculum,

encouraging the holistic development of young people and enabling them to meet the challenges of the world around them. These outcomes suggest changes to dance education and policy within the formal education sector.

Definition of Terms

Social Studies

Social studies is defined as “the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence” (NCSS, 1994, p. vii). This encompasses a variety of specific subjects including geography, history, sociology and anthropology. The focus is integration across the curriculum to address concepts (as defined by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)) of culture; time continuity and change; people, places and environments; individual development and identity; individuals, groups and institutions; power, authority and governance; production, distribution and consumption; science, technology and society; global connections; and civic ideals and practices (NCSS, 1994, pp. 12–14). Although elements of these areas can occur within individual courses, a list of this kind leads to entire school focus in order to emphasise a comprehensive education.

Dance Education

As defined through the National Core Arts Standards (US), dance education (like other arts education fields) is focused on the processes of creating, performing, presenting, producing, responding and connecting through eleven core competencies, of which only one reaches beyond the actual arts discipline, that is, relating “artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding” (*National Core Arts Standards: A Conceptual Framework for Arts Learning*, 2016, p. 13). There are, however, multiple understandings and definitions of dance education. Moreover, dance education can be defined in much broader and complete terms as comprehensive education that enables young people to work in and encounter the world around them through developed expression (Koff, 2021).

Educational Measurement

Measurement of success in education is used throughout the world to gauge the progress of students through formal elementary and secondary education. Within the United States, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is administered in formal schooling and “includes a range of subjects at grades 4, 8, and 12 to provide a comprehensive look at the wide array of

academic areas that are a part of a student's education. Subjects include civics, economics, geography, mathematics, music and visual arts, reading, science, technology and engineering, literacy, U.S. history, and writing" (NAEP, 2021, p. 3). Although the list of subjects is broad, it is important to note that they are tested individually. The only arts covered in NAEP are music and visual arts.

Internationally, PISA, which is created by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), "tests the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in mathematics, reading and science," while also including "additional results on students' financial literacy, creative thinking and readiness for life-long learning" (OECD, n.d., para. 1). PISA was developed as a comparative study across countries. Although the US participates in PISA and is included in PISA data, the participant numbers are relatively small. The focus on comparative testing within the US is NAEP, "The Nation's Report Card."

Both forms of educational testing, PISA and NAEP (within the US), are used to make policy and funding decisions across the world, enabling countries to ensure that their compulsory education is achieving its desired goals. These goals may depend on the specifics of education ministries within the respective countries, which are subject to political shifts. Although education is considered broader than the desires of any individual country, the complex systems of education in any given country are constantly shifting. Due to the complexity of international testing systems, and despite stating that the ultimate goal is to reveal a comprehensive view of progress, the very manner of testing by subjects channels the whole process into views of silos of subjects. Logistically, no comprehensive, integrated education can be tested; governments can only make inferences based on the data collected. Conversely, isolated disciplines are emphasised in order to facilitate testing, resulting in a shift away from any interdisciplinary education.

Within this complex, concrete system of testing, the present article focuses on discerning whether such integration is possible, considered through an examination of the integration of dance and social studies in US schools. The literature was searched and a survey was analysed. The survey questions were derived from and focused on the primary social studies categories (defined by the NCSS, 1994, pp. 14–16) and were adapted and directed to dance educators.

Literature

A review was undertaken of the literature discussing dance/arts expression within the many concepts of social studies, as well as some tangential arts education literature. It was clear that certain standards from the NCSS were not

mentioned in the literature on dance/arts education and rarely appeared in the surveyed literature on arts within educational directions. The literature search for connections to social studies concepts led to narrowing some questions within the survey. The literature was also searched for background to the testing movement, the educational perspective on this movement and, indirectly, its effect on curriculum choices.

The Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal was searched to discern whether this topic had been covered in the previous five years. Two articles concerning music education had been published in the journal during that period (Žnidaršič, 2022; Juhart & Kafol, 2022), while one entire issue had focused on art education and was summarised in the introduction (Selan & Potočnik, 2020). In the five-year period examined, however, the Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal had not discussed dance education or dance education integration with social studies.

The Educational Perspective on Student Learning

PISA testing began in 2000. Prior to that, there was more interest in the integration of arts into the general curriculum (Fiske, 1999) and the arts were considered an important aspect of general educational reform. In the late 1990s, the Clinton administration in the US created the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, bringing together nationally known researchers to analyse the impact of the arts on schools and student learning. Many significant findings emerged from this report (Fiske, 1999). However, the presidential administration changed to a different political party in 2000, the same year that PISA was created, and US perspectives clearly shifted with these changes. PISA set an international standard; however, as mentioned earlier, the arts were not measured. Any arts thrust for integration was tempered by this narrow focus.

From the literature, it is clear that students' ability can only grow when teachers no longer feel obligated to cater to a narrow educational curriculum (Gunzenhauser, 2003), and that students prosper when teachers no longer feel limited by curricular constraints. A unique example is the neglect of special needs students, who suffer from lacking a student voice and require a collaborative effort from their peers and instructors (Conklin & Olah, 2013). This narrow view of education can be the result of an inability to focus on subjects that do not require standardised testing, such as the arts. Subjects that can be applied alongside art would enlarge the educational focus and minimise the marginalisation of group communities (Glass et al., 2013). When education is integrated with history, art and physical education, learning can be more engaging. Quality art(s) lessons can contribute to character motivation, increased

conflict-resolution skills and many other areas (Allen, 2023; Burstein, 2014). Students have been shown to benefit from improvisation and creative exercises, such as those used in dance (Biasutti & Habe, 2021). Improving curriculum development and overall education is an important duty of teachers, and the acceptance of art education (including dance) can aid in this process.

Dance and Culture

Dance students can make connections to the heritage of dance, leading to greater cultural literacy (Georgios, 2017). Dance can cover multiple standards in the NCSS, including areas beyond culture, ranging from “people, places, and environments, to individuals, groups, and institutions” (NCSS, 1994, pp. 12–13). The dance teaching style can include as much social studies content as actual dance content, so it is important for dance educators to consider their teaching style as an aspect of their teaching (Dyer, 2009). Dance education content cannot be devoid of the context of its origin, so teachers must be aware of cases when the past context included problematic practices such as colonialism and environmental exploitation (Kloetzel, 2024). Rather than being ignored in the classroom, these practices can become the background for additional depth in teaching, in order to comprehend the complexity and issues involved in such practices.

One issue that arises when discussing culture is colonialism. The relationship between colonialism and dance education involves readdressing certain dance training/teaching styles. Some of these styles, such as authoritarianism, can be addressed through the dance education classroom. Alternative techniques, such as improvisation, can enhance both communication and children’s holistic development (Biasutti, 2021). The ability to use movement is a product of creative expression that aligns with the core values of social studies, as a more sustainable transformation from a worldview to individual communities (Shilcutt et al., 2020). This is often missing in the education curriculum.

Culture can be interpreted in many ways, depending on the discipline. The NCSS says that “culture examines the socially transmitted beliefs, values, institutions, behaviours, traditions and way of life of a group of people” (NCSS, n.d., para. 1) and that arts and other attributes reflect that culture. Dance uses the word culture in a looser manner, as an “expressive medium” that incorporates elements of daily life (Burstein, 2014, p. 133). Cultures reflect a person’s relationship to time, which can move from the past to the future and eventually reach the present. Therefore, preserving generational knowledge in its original form is important (Georgios, 2017). Cultural interpretations are often influenced by societal nationalist perspectives, leaving certain questions unresolved when historical events are not acknowledged from a culturally accurate

viewpoint. When a culture's context is not preserved, history becomes a series of events that lack authentic evidence, filled instead by a false digital footprint.

Within dance, expressive culture connects cultural practices with social studies by demonstrating how artistic communities can be shaped by memories and emotional stories, and do not need all of their aspects to be focused on serving an aesthetic performance (Burstein, 2014). By highlighting values and practices that develop artistic codes and frameworks, subjects like dance offer new opportunities to “participate in cultural production, in which prevailing cultural norms are challenged” (Dewinter et al., 2021, p. 940). This intersection of culture and the arts can enhance personal connections with heritage and community. Cultural significance grows by utilising a collection of experiences, thus the more shared experiences there are between individuals in historical culture, the bigger the collective of students that benefit from their social studies education (Dyer, 2009).

Another important aspect of culture and arts concerning social studies is the consideration of civics within specific communities. The social studies curriculum has been critiqued for the need for more initiative in promoting civics, while dance has played a role in fostering marginalised groups by combining culture with dance history, allowing for more voices to be reached and understood (Hall, 2023). An example of dance communities that benefit from civics is the relationship between Black culture and Hip-Hop (Adjapong & Emdin, 2015). Hip-Hop is a culturally significant symbol within the dance scene that is sometimes split between categories such as breakdancing and house, as well as others. Hip-Hop educators using Hip-Hop as a pedagogy within social studies relay the clear message of dance as a civic identity, especially for students of colour who stand up for their history and culture, and see themselves through a social studies narrative (Hall, 2023). The popularity of Hip-Hop has grown through social media, but choreographers emphasise that true Hip-Hop is meant to be taught in a way that honours its origins, as the dance reflects an inclusive part of what being a community means.

Integration of Arts Education and Social Studies

As mentioned previously, education includes limited resources that at times can be unsatisfactory to students interested in expanding their understanding of social studies and art outside a Western perspective. Additional frameworks within history, such as critical race theory (CRT), have recently been added to approach questions that tackle diversity and how indigenous communities have been neglected within popular historical events. In this light, the principles that guide the NCSS are as follows: “NCSS looks forward

to continuing its efforts to provide authentic educational resources on teaching and learning about Indigenous Peoples and Nations, and to foster opportunities and partnerships to engage and inspire all educators to prepare students to be successful in our complex social, cultural, economic and political world” (Paska, n.d., para. 3). With this statement from the NCSS, there are no longer worries surrounding a student’s non-adaptable ability and the marginalisation of general art education classrooms (Gunzenhauser, 2003; Conklin & Olah, 2013). Some suggest that if social studies included more art activities, this would lead to learning through active engagement and the creation of healthier social scripts that influence students to have a more empathetic understanding towards others (Brouillette, 2009). Therefore, strategies such as the Universal Design for Learning and the Arts (UDL) support learning as “a dynamic interaction between an individual and the physical and social affordances and constraints of the learning environment” (Glass et al., 2013, p. 100). The primary advantage of the UDL system is its accessibility, which enhances art education by moving away from high-stakes testing (the testing systems discussed above). This approach makes art learning more comprehensible for everyone (Glass et al., 2013). When education involves creative curricula through foundational arts elements such as improvisation, pathways and levelling, commonalities start to form between various subjects: music and dance (Burstein, 2014).

Three key themes have emerged through the literature:

- The international educational testing movement drives international education policy.
- Integration of arts/dance education within the curriculum will more often be driven by arts education initiatives than initiatives outside the arts.
- Dance education within the curriculum has very different interpretations and modes of implementation, leading to an unclear sense of the importance of both pedagogy and the curriculum within the dance education classroom.
- Considerations for curriculum development will take these concepts into account.

Method

Participants

The participants in the present study are 91 graduates of dance education programmes within the United States, teaching students of a variety of ages in a variety of settings. They were recruited through an email sent to them from

the dance programme or department where they had studied. Participation was voluntarily. The research was intended to be international in scope, but the IRB (Institutional Review Board) limited the scope to the United States. In order to completely anonymise the instrument, nine tertiary institutions within the United States that stated dance education was a degree focus were identified to receive the survey. These institutions were asked to distribute the survey to all of their graduates in dance education. There is no way to trace the responses to individual respondents. The subject pool is random but small, thus limiting the ability to generalise the results.

Instrument

The instrument is a survey (Table 1) consisting of 12 questions. It was created in Qualtrics, an electronic data collection instrument that cannot be traced to the respondents or their institutions. The actual questions were greatly reduced by the IRB and resulted in qualitative and quantitative data that provides a mere snapshot of the dance education focus within the United States. The longer questions would have revealed more qualitative text data, but the IRB created a limitation of the actual content of the survey.

Research design

The research was approved by the New York University Institutional Review Board (IRB) following the ethical standards for survey research. The survey was distributed between March and April 2024. The research was not conducted with a sampling technique that would enable generalisations to be made. Since the survey was not distributed through a quantitative sampling design, the quantitative results will be discussed in a general manner. Through qualitative data analysis, trends are discussed as they emerge from the data. The trends are a result of textual data analysis through a qualitative process of recognising emerging themes. The themes were then coded in order to recognise patterns and trends (Cresswell, 2009). The results of the qualitative survey provides a starting point to open the discussion about dance and social studies in various settings.

Table 1
Qualtrics Survey Questions and Response Mode

Question number	Question	Response Mode
1.	What grade and/or ages do you teach?	Short answer
2.	In what setting do you teach?	Short answer
3.	Does your curriculum focus on culture?	Yes/no
4.	Does your curriculum incorporate attention to time, continuity and change?	Yes/no
5.	Does your curriculum incorporate attention to people, places and environments?	Yes/no
6.	Does your curriculum focus on individual development and identity?	Yes/no
7.	Does your curriculum focus on differentiating individual, groups and institutions?	Yes/no
8.	Is there any place in your curriculum that attention is paid to power, authority and governance?	Yes/no
9.	Does your curriculum have any focus on science, technology and society?	Yes/no
10.	Does your curriculum incorporate focus on global connections?	Yes/no
11.	Does your curriculum incorporate civic ideals and practices?	Yes/no
12.	If you answered yes to any question above, please take the time to mention the content you marked yes; describe how it is incorporated in your curriculum.	Open-ended text answer

Results

There were 91 respondents to the survey. Questions 3–11 asked for a binary (yes/no) response listing the primary social studies concepts as defined by the NCSS (1994). Since the survey was not created from a randomised sampling method, the numbers will be reported as percentages and then summarised, as shown in Table 2. Although not every social studies concept was covered by every teacher, none of the concepts were omitted by all of the respondents. Clearly the strongest concept focus was on two categories: “attention to people, places and environments” (NCSS, 1994, p. 12) and “individual development and identity” (p. 12). This was followed by “culture; time, continuity and change” (p. 12), “individuals, groups, and institutions” (p. 13) and “global connections” (p. 14). Less attention was paid to “power, authority and governance; science, technology and society” (p. 13) and “civic ideals and practices” (p. 14).

Due to the type of survey and respondents, it is not possible to discern how many concepts are covered by one teacher, but this type of result is irrelevant, as the teachers covered a huge range of teaching settings and contexts.

The last question allowed for an open-ended answer. Some of the respondents also added more information in questions one and two, which contributed to the text that was analysed. The responses were broad and extended beyond compulsory education within the elementary and secondary range. The students taught by the respondents ranged from two-year-olds to senior citizens. The teaching settings were equally far-ranging and included almost any location in which movement is possible. Some of the respondents even voluntarily included some student characteristics, including low socioeconomic standing and students with special needs. As a snapshot, the resulting picture can be regarded as an overview of how dance is permeated through US society.

Table 2

Binary Question Results (yes/no)

Question Number	Question	Response Yes	Response No
3.	Does your curriculum focus on culture?	63%	38%
4.	Does your curriculum incorporate attention to time, continuity and change?	75%	25%
5.	Does your curriculum incorporate attention to people, places and environments?	94%	6%
6.	Does your curriculum focus on individual development and identity?	97%	3%
7.	Does your curriculum focus on differentiating individual, groups and institutions?	69%	31%
8.	Is there any place in your curriculum that attention is paid to power, authority and governance?	44%	56%
9.	Does your curriculum have any focus on science, technology and society?	59%	41%
10.	Does your curriculum incorporate focus on global connections?	66%	34%
11.	Does your curriculum incorporate civic ideals and practices?	44%	56%

The more revealing results were in response to the one open-ended question: "If you answered yes to any question above, please take the time to mention the content you marked yes; describe how it is incorporated in your curriculum." Some of the responses were holistic and demonstrated that the

respondents could see the connections even if they were not literal. Other responses were very literal and listed the units or aspects in the curriculum in which the concepts were taught. One of the most holistic responses that was clear about all of the implicit connections stated:

Dance allows both teacher and student to reflect in a safe and playful space our connections to society and to ourselves. How we perform within the dance class teaches us about the role we play as individuals within the class, the school, our families and beyond. Our actions in the dance class reveal the ways in which we have assimilated systems of power and also the practices we can put forth if we wish to change those systems. The task of learning a skill as a collective asks of all participants to adhere to rules of coexistence that mirror our civic duties to society. Respect, listening with our selves, keeping an open mind to new ideas, lean into the uncomfortable feeling of ambiguity, are some of the values explored in a creative learning environment. I use music and cultural dance styles that helps participants see their own connection to other peoples and lands and develop a sense of empathy. Understanding ourselves as physical beings allows us to create connections to the natural world and its processes.

The many social studies concepts were presented directly through the questions, so they did not become categories through the content analysis. The data analysis through text revealed that the concepts were comprehended and discussed in a manner ranging from literal to implied. These were the strongest trends that emerged from the data. Literal included the teacher naming the concept somewhere in the teaching setting, whereas implied meant that the teacher never mentioned the concept or words related to the concept. The interpretation of the actual concept names then influenced how each teacher considered their inclusion in the classes they taught. Below is a discussion of the range of literal to implied within the concepts in which the theme occurred.

Attention to People, Places and Environments; and Focus on Individual Development and Environments (NCSS, 1994, pp. 12–13)

The two most frequently discussed categories – “attention to people, places and environments” and “focus on individual development and environments” (NCSS, 1994, pp. 12–13) – were often discussed or included in the curriculum in either literal ways (one teacher mentioned the geography of the origin of a dance) or implicitly in the way that the classes practised their comprehension of inclusion. Inclusion was sometimes listed as students with disabilities, students from diverse communities such as LGBTQ, or students from

differing socioeconomic backgrounds. These differences were also discussed in the concept of “differentiating individual, groups, and institutions”.

Culture

Culture and its implications were discussed most frequently in the open-ended question. The concept was interpreted literally and was covered by teaching multiple dance forms from different parts of the world. Culture was often covered by introducing various dance styles and the background to those styles. This was then conflated with the categories of “society, groups”, “time, continuity and change” and “global connections”. All of these were regarded as literal responses.

Power, Authority and Governance

Those who wrote about power, authority and governance did so in a non-literal sense. One respondent stated that while “there may not be mention of civic ideas and practices”, these can be included by the manner of teaching. Others mentioned that the way the class operates can “mirror” society. Some even mentioned that the class created rules of decorum. While dance students do not explicitly have lessons in government and civic society through these practices, the teachers expressed the hope that the students are able to transfer this learning to functioning within broader society. One respondent who teaches from a classical ballet curriculum stated that the inherent teaching style in classical ballet is authoritarian, and the dancer etiquette built into the curriculum gives the teacher an authoritative role. The teacher was implying that either they cannot change this authoritarian nature, or perhaps that the students learn only one example of government. However, there is no way of connecting what students learn in a dance classroom to what they perceive in government and society.

Additional Categories

Some of the respondents discussed what was included or not included in the written curriculum and how that limited what they were teaching. This extended the concept of literal interpretation of the concepts to literal interpretation of what should be taught. Included in this idea is the comment “we don’t have a curriculum”, implying that it would have to be explicit to be taught. Focusing again on the explicit curriculum, some teachers mentioned being pulled away from any of these concepts by demands to create student performances. Finally, science was interpreted literally only when discussing dancer health, during teaching that focused on the benefits of exercise or in units that focused on a climate change issue.

Discussion

The research was initiated to answer the question: Is there commonality between social studies education and dance education within elementary and secondary education, and if so, how much do these disciplines have in common? The literature review demonstrated that:

- The international educational testing movement drives international education policy.
- Integration of arts/dance education within the curriculum will more often be driven by arts education initiatives than initiatives outside the arts.
- Dance education within the curriculum has very different interpretations and modes of implementation, leading to an unclear sense of the importance of both pedagogy and the curriculum within the dance education classroom.

The first finding did not emerge and was not discussed in the survey. This can suggest areas for further research.

The second finding from the literature was difficult to discern, as the survey focused solely on the dance education perspective. The teacher perspectives in the discussion are from dance education only and do not include the perspectives of social studies teachers, so no conclusions can be derived from the social studies perspective. The literature is also predominantly from the dance/arts education perspective. The study and literature review reveal wide-ranging interpretations of the dance curriculum from the teacher perspective. Although not the initial focus of the present study, dance educators also have diverse views on the collaboration of the curriculum and pedagogy, and the importance of devoting attention to both within the classroom, which causes distinct variations in the implementation of dance education in multiple settings. The finding that can be inferred from the analysis is that dance educators often operate alone when integrating the curriculum and when broadening the curriculum that they are teaching. They have little guidance in this endeavour. When dance educators create a holistic perspective to the curriculum and consider all of the possible explicit and implicit content that is present, they can integrate social studies concepts within the dance education classroom. However, when educators define dance education from an explicit and pre-determined curriculum, they do not see and therefore do not emphasise the social studies (and other) concepts that may be present. One suggestion that can be made based on these limited findings is to completely overhaul the dance curriculum

so that it is not prescriptive (as in the National Core Arts Standards in the US) and to increase professional development for dance educators so that they recognise the importance of pedagogy in the classroom and how it interrelates with the curriculum.

The third finding from the literature emerged clearly from the survey and is present in many of the survey findings. The survey demonstrated that many of the elements defined by the NCSS (1994) are being taught or included within varying dance education settings within the United States. One element of the survey is a revelation that also came from some of the literature, that is, culture (one of the elements) is considered both from the perspective of the classroom and pedagogy, as well as from the content that is being taught. In the survey analysis, these are described as literal and non-literal interpretations. The literal and implied (non-literal) categories that emerged through the survey are the strongest outcome of the research. The meaning of culture is not clear to the dance educators surveyed, nor is it consistent with the meaning of culture within any other educational context. The definition of culture varied according to the sources of the definitions. The definition or understanding of the concept of culture then indicated how culture was implemented or defined within the classroom.

The initial data analysis revealed this lack of clarity as aspects of the implicit and explicit curriculum. However, further analysis of the results revealed that this lack of clarity could also be a misunderstanding of pedagogy, the curriculum and the manner in which pedagogy and the curriculum interrelate. This limited survey does not reveal a cause or source, but only the possibility that this misunderstanding exists.

The present article has summarised and focused on two specific subjects in formal education that may or may not be present, dance and social studies, and some of the factors that lead to how these disciplines are located within formal schooling. Clearly, formal school assessments are the largest driving factor affecting the location and valuation of these disciplines within the formal school setting. Non-formal and informal educational settings were not the focus here, although some respondents did also teach in these settings. The literature surveyed suggested that individual educators have initiated projects that do support the integration of dance and social studies. When these subjects are not integrated, it is more frequently structures of formal schooling that cause this limitation.

Conclusions

The study was greatly limited by the IRB, which kept the subject pool within the United States and reduced the questions to mostly yes/no questions, removing many longer response questions. This greatly limited the data available. In response to these restrictions on the subject pool, there was no follow-up survey to go into greater depth, as this would have necessitated subjects identifying themselves to receive the follow-up survey.

Further research could extend the study into the areas that were limited and discern the connection between international education policy and the actual implementation of that policy. Continuing the direction of the present research, further research could begin by opening the subject pool to an international population. In addition, a follow-up survey could be created with more in-depth questions for a group of subjects willing to identify themselves. Further research could also focus on methods by which the findings could influence curricular changes. More research is also needed on the implementation of the curriculum, as it seems that there has been a complete disconnect in this area.

These limitations do not, however, inhibit the discussion regarding global initiatives for arts education and the possibilities of these findings within this global perspective. Global initiatives are not focused on a select student population, nor are they focused on the gifted and talented. As stated in the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education, “We also recognize that culture and the arts are integral to the holistic and inclusive development, resilience, and overall well-being of individuals and societies” (UNESCO, 2024, p. 1). Although formal education is not the sole location where this can occur and be nurtured, it is one of the integral sites. Since formal education is also influenced by the testing movement, governments could conceptually consider choosing to limit policy decisions related to the Framework for Culture and Arts Education outside the formal education sector, despite having endorsed the Framework. There is no comparison measure (such as PISA) for informal and non-formal education.

What are the possibilities from this perspective? Most changes anticipated from the present research can be made within education policy. There is no move to test arts education internationally and, as previously mentioned, only music and visual art are tested through NAEP within the US. Additionally, testing does not encourage interdisciplinary ideas and teaching. The strongest support to move in this direction is the UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education, which was ratified by over 100 member states in February

2024. It calls on governments and policies enacted by governments to create environments that support culture and arts education throughout the lifespan. Importantly, the UNESCO Framework discusses and suggests these changes in an interdisciplinary manner. This is a broad gesture and can only be initiated at all local levels. However, the global focus is on sustainable development and peace, which brings the conversation again to the integration of the arts, culture and social studies. The content of the overall Framework is therefore timely and inclusive, and can provide the support and initiative to implement policy that can create the many ways in which education can occur, in many settings.

Ethical Statement

The research study was approved by the New York University Institutional Review Board (IRB), which ensures that ethical standards are followed in pedagogical research. The research was supported by an undergraduate researcher sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Research at New York University.

Disclosure Statement

The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

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The Visual Journal as a Way to Strengthen Students' Ability to Self-Reflect

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∞ Art allows us to look within ourselves, to learn who we are and what interests us. It connects us to our thoughts, our feelings, our perceptions, and our external reality and experiences. Artistic expression enables students to think about themselves and their feelings, take the perspective of another while evaluating their artworks, set goals and organise the course of their creative work. Therefore, it is not difficult to establish a connection between artistic expression and strengthening social emotional competencies. In a study conducted in the 2023/24 school year, a case study explored whether creating a visual journal in the form of an artist's book can help students recognise their thoughts, emotions and values. In the case study, we included one class of first-year secondary school students, who participated voluntarily, as well as their teacher. We first presented the CASEL model to the students in connection with the artworks of artists whose works deal with topics related to social and emotional competencies. The mentor presented the artist's book in the form of a visual journal as a special artistic form. The students' task was to think about themselves, their wellbeing, values and actions, and to make real-time reflections on their day with the help of their own visual journal. In their spare time, the students compiled a visual journal over a few weeks, occasionally consulting with the teacher. Data were collected through an analysis of the resulting visual journals, a questionnaire for students and an interview with the teacher.

Keywords: artistic expression, secondary school, self-reflection, strengthening social emotional competencies, visual journal

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Vizualni dnevnik kot način za krepitev sposobnosti samorefleksije pri dijakih

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Umetnost nam omogoča, da pogledamo vase, spoznamo, kdo smo in kaj nas zanima. Povezuje nas z našimi mislimi, občutki, zaznavami ter z našo zunanjo realnostjo in izkušnjami. Umetniško izražanje omogoča dijakom, da razmišljajo o sebi in svojih občutkih, zavzamejo perspektivo drugega pri vrednotenju svojih likovnih del, si postavijo cilje in organizirajo potek svojega ustvarjalnega dela. Zato ni težko prepoznati povezave med likovnim izražanjem in krepitvijo socialno-čustvenih kompetenc. V raziskavi, izvedeni v šolskem letu 2023/24, smo s pomočjo študije primera ugotavljali, ali lahko ustvarjanje vizualnega dnevnika v obliki knjige umetnika pomaga dijakom prepoznati njihove misli, čustva in vrednote. V študijo primera smo vključili en razred dijakov 1. letnika srednje šole, ki so sodelovali prostovoljno, in njihovo učiteljico. Dijakom smo najprej predstavili model CASEL v povezavi z likovnimi deli umetnikov, ki se ukvarjajo s temami, povezanimi s socialnimi in čustvenimi kompetencami. Mentorica je kot posebno umetniško obliko predstavila knjigo umetnika v obliki vizualnega dnevnika. Naloga dijakov je bila razmišljati o sebi, svojem počutju, vrednotah in o dejanjih ter s pomočjo lastnega vizualnega dnevnika razmišljati o svojem dnevu. V prostem času so dijaki nekaj tednov sestavljali vizualni dnevnik, občasno pa so se posvetovali z učiteljem. Podatki so bili zbrani z analizo nastalih vizualnih dnevnikov, vprašalnikom za učence in z intervjujem z mentorico.

Ključne besede: likovno izražanje, srednja šola, samorefleksija, krepitev socialno-čustvenih kompetenc, vizualni dnevnik

Introduction

Art serves as a bridge that connects us not only to ourselves, but to the world around us. In the educational process, art serves various roles, including being an important opportunity for interdisciplinary education that can reduce the fragmentation of the school curriculum and transform teaching methods, thereby optimising the learning process (Birsa, 2018) while also fostering the development of creative and critical thinking (Bojc & Potočnik, 2024). Additionally, inclusive arts education promotes a sense of belonging and provides opportunities for self-expression and creative exploration, particularly for students with disabilities (Mareza et al., 2024). By engaging with art, we are able to tap into a collective consciousness that transcends time and space, drawing inspiration from the shared experiences of humanity. Through art, we gain a deeper understanding of the diverse perspectives that shape our reality, fostering empathy, compassion and a sense of interconnectedness with our fellow beings. Hence, the intrinsic link between art and social-emotional learning is inherently organic. Social and emotional learning (SEL) refers to the process through which individuals acquire and apply the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, n.d.; Elias et al., 1997; Tacol et al., 2019). Drawing from the findings of Edgar and Morrison (2021), it is evident that artistic creation plays a pivotal role in fostering self-awareness among students. This process empowers them to nurture a heightened perception of autonomy and emotional adeptness. Moreover, within the artistic milieu, a culture of collaboration nurtures discussions that prioritise inclusivity and the celebration of diversity. Individuals engaged in artistic endeavours characteristically grasp the significance of delineating personal goals, engaging in self-reflection and embracing accountability, thus maintaining superior benchmarks for both their personal growth and artistic pursuits (Edgar & Morrison, 2021). As per research by Farrington et al. (2019), it is evident that arts education has shifted from being a component of a well-rounded curriculum to serving as a mechanism for improving school engagement, academic achievement and social-emotional growth. The inherent value of arts education emerges from the blending of these functions and is supported by the widely held cultural perspective that art functions as a medium for expressing both emotions and ideas. Haralovich (2023) emphasises the strong connection between the objectives of SEL and art education, underscoring the capacity of art classrooms to address SEL and art competencies in their curriculum concurrently. This dual focus enables the utilisation of aesthetic experiences to blend students' emotions

with their creative expressions, thus fostering holistic development in educational settings (Haralovich, 2023). Hetland et al. (2013) emphasise the significance of eight studio habits of mind (craftsmanship, persistence, envisioning, expression, observation, reflection, exploration and understanding the art world) as crucial cognitive processes in art creation, underscoring the importance of these habits in art education and their potential for positive outcomes through active engagement in the arts. While these habits include various important skills, they typically do not encompass socio-emotional skills like self-concept, emotion regulation and empathy (Kastner et al., 2021). Kastner et al. (2021) demonstrated in their research that effectively designed visual arts programmes have the capacity to produce positive transfer effects that reach beyond traditional arts education and into socio-emotional domains. In the study (Kastner et al., 2021), courses were built upon psychological theories and instructional psychology strategies intended to enhance socio-emotional skills. Moreover, these programmes integrated traditional art principles and studio habits of mind. By engaging students in tasks like observation, envisioning and creating expressive drawings, the courses provided a unique interdisciplinary approach that combined authentic visual arts engagement with psychological perspectives.

By connecting studio habits of mind with the development of socio-emotional skills, individuals can utilise the creation of an artist's book in the form of a visual journal as a means to enhance their personal and creative growth. A visual journal offers a unique platform for individuals to express their thoughts, emotions, experiences and observations in a vivid and personalised manner. The utilisation of visual journals in the pedagogical process is multifaceted and versatile. Visual journals play a crucial role in enhancing visual thinking (Guglietti, 2023) and visual literacy (Loerts & Belcher, 2019), promoting risk-taking in a safe environment to encourage artistic creativity (Willcox, 2017), both within the realm of teacher education (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008) and in visual arts-based research practices (Leavy, 2020).

Hofsess (2015) emphasises the significance of documenting fleeting moments, exploring diverse directions and embracing non-linear structures in visual journaling, culminating in a more authentic representation of lived experiences. This expressive medium incorporates various visual elements, such as drawings, sketches, paintings, collages and photographs, to convey metaphorical meanings through imagery, as highlighted by Bertling (2019). Moreover, the inclusion of written text in visual journals transforms them into multimodal texts or ensembles, encompassing textual elements, visual images and design elements as integral components of this expressive form (Serafini, 2014).

In art pedagogical practice, there is a common focus on teaching the

visual language through practical art activities, while the development of social-emotional skills is neglected. However, art education lessons provide an opportunity to enhance the development of these skills during the planning and execution of art activities at various levels of education (e.g., Potočnik & Rapuš Pavel, 2024).

Based on these findings, we can pose the question of whether creating a visual journal can help students recognise and express their thoughts, emotions and values while simultaneously contributing to the development of their social-emotional skills within art education.

The research questions were:

- What is the attitude of students towards the creation of a visual journal?
- What themes and content do students explore in their visual journals?

Method

Participants

The study was conducted during the 2023/24 academic year by a collaborative team comprising two secondary school visual arts teachers and a university researcher. The case study aimed to examine how creating an artist's book as a visual journal can facilitate secondary school students in identifying their thoughts, emotions and values. A convenience sample of 30 first-year secondary school students participated in the study, consisting of 23 female and 7 male students. Among these, 17 students (11 female, 6 male) submitted visual journals, while 24 students (16 female, 8 male) completed a questionnaire. The art educator, who has 26 years of teaching experience and holds a degree in art education, is also recognised in the art community.

Instruments for Data Collection

Data were collected using a two-pronged approach: a questionnaire and interviews. After completing the artist's book (visual journal), a questionnaire comprising 13 open-ended questions was administered to the students. These questions explored their attitudes towards creating the visual journal, their experiences during the design process, the impact of the journal on their well-being, and their willingness to continue creating journals in the future. The questionnaire also aimed to uncover specific aspects that the students wished to emphasise and interpret regarding each theme. Additionally, an interview was conducted with the art educator to gain insights into their perspective on the students' engagement with the visual journals.

Research Design

The case study was embedded within the visual arts curriculum and spanned from March to June 2024. The art teacher introduced the task during the initial class, where students were guided to create a visual journal informed by the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) model of social-emotional competencies. During art classes and in their own time, the students expressed their daily experiences and feelings related to specific themes through artistic materials and brief texts (Table 1).

The research employed a qualitative approach, emphasising the exploration of concepts, experiences and individual perspectives. The student responses were systematically coded and aggregated into categories (e.g., Mesec, 2023). The analysis of the visual journals focused on understanding the significance of the depicted motifs and the application of various artistic techniques and methods, along with the interplay between visual and verbal communication modes. A visual research strategy was adopted, recognising the direct and tangible means of comprehending the participants' experiences (e.g., Patton et al., 2011).

Table 1

Content addressed within the case study

Week	Topic	The discussed artists and their artworks in relation to social-emotional competencies	Content guidelines for students' artistic responses in a visual journal
1-2	Self-awareness	Frida Kahlo	Students are attentive to recognising and naming their own emotions: they explore how their emotions influence their behaviour; identify their own strengths – where they are successful, where they excel; and reflect on self-confidence and self-efficacy.
3-4	Self-management	Jean-Michel Basquiat	Students reflect in a visual journal on how they regulate their emotions during everyday events and experiences: what they do when overwhelmed by a wave of feelings; how they react; how they regulate their thoughts (e.g., thoughts before a test, before stressful situations); how they regulate their behaviours; how they cope with stress; what their self-discipline is like; how they motivate themselves to perform various tasks; how they set goals; and how they organise their work.
5-6	Social awareness	Marjetica Potrč	Students direct their attention in a visual journal towards experiencing the world around them with an emphasis on taking the perspective of others: how a particular event or situation was perceived by someone else; the perspective of a classmate, parent, teacher, friend or coach; what empathy means; whether they had the opportunity to develop empathy during this time, how and what triggered empathy; whether anything happened that enabled them to accept and positively evaluate diversity – interacting with someone who feels, thinks, etc., differently from them; and what respect for others means.

Week	Topic	The discussed artists and their artworks in relation to social-emotional competencies	Content guidelines for students' artistic responses in a visual journal
7-8	Relationship skills	Hayao Miyazaki	Students present their experiences in a visual journal through the development of their communication skills; how they establish and maintain positive and stable relationships with various individuals and groups; how they listen to others; how clearly they convey their thoughts to others; how they collaborate with others; how they manage conflicts, seek help and offer assistance to others when needed; how they resist negative pressure from others; how they establish relationships with others; and how skilled they are in teamwork.
9-10	Responsible decision-making	Marina Abramović	Students present their experiences in a visual journal through the aspect of responsible decision-making; the problems they faced and how they solved them; whether they made constructive and respectful decisions regarding their behaviour and social interactions based on personal, moral and ethical responsibility; and how they evaluated the consequences of various actions (e.g., can you realistically evaluate what was good and how you could have behaved more responsibly?), reflecting on personal, moral and ethical responsibility.

Results

The data obtained from the student survey questionnaire were coded, categorised and ultimately analysed to identify overarching themes (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2
Implementation of coding

Theme	Category	Code
Support in the development of social and emotional competencies	Recognition of one's feelings, behaviours and relationships	Feeling of anger and sadness; missing a loved one; poor recognition of one's emotions; experiencing stress or loneliness; responding in stressful situations; methods of calming down; connecting with the environment; social circle; belonging.
	The advantages of creating a visual journal	Drawing as a means of relaxation; assistance in solving personal problems; seeking new connections within the artwork; wellbeing after drawing; relaxation while drawing; joy in creating; dedicating time to oneself and one's emotions; assistance in releasing tension; a method of calming; better self-understanding; a space and time to get to know oneself better; visualisation of one's thoughts; learning about oneself; clearer perception of events and situations; greater awareness of one's actions; a means of expression; analysis of one's actions; therapeutic value.

Theme	Category	Code
The power of artistic expression	Expressing one's feelings through artistic media	Choosing colours based on feelings; expressing oneself through symbols; the expressive power of colour; selecting colours that emphasise distress and concern; depicting perspectives and emotions through forms; the expressive power of artistic materials and techniques.
	Recognition and enhancement of one's artistic creativity	Creative expression of feelings; various methods of artistic expression; self-confidence in artistic expression; surprise at one's own creativity; astonishment at the ability to draw one's emotions; the advantages of choice-based artistic expression.

Table 3*Representative student statements*

Theme	Representative student statements
Support in the development of social and emotional competencies	"I became aware that a certain feeling had been troubling me for a long time. I realised that I truly miss my older sister. So, I drew myself at a desk full of notebooks, surrounded by my loved ones whom I miss."
	"It is a journal that reflects my thoughts on life in the first year. It also illustrates my feelings of stress, love and how I cope with stress. My relationships with my parents and classmates are also depicted. Some emotions are conveyed through words, so there are also poems written."
	"I think I have overestimated my circle of friends. I was convinced that many people considered me a friend, just as I consider them friends. After reflecting and drawing, I realised that this is not entirely true. I let many people in closer, but they do not reciprocate. I believe that I am much more lonely than I seem."
The power of artistic expression	"I thought that the design process would stress me out much more, and when I first learned about the project, I had in mind that it wouldn't be so bad. I thought about what I would express in it, and I hoped to finally pour out my relationship with food, but in the end, I hardly included any of that at all. However, I feel that I am now much less 'closed' about it. It definitely helped me with the 'healing' of this issue, which I think surprised me the most."
	"I created a collage from black paper with the words 'time is running' written on it. With this, I wanted to emphasise that people truly do not understand time and that, regardless of history, time has not taught us anything."
	"On one side, there is a foil (internal, grey) from a chewing gum wrapper, with a little grass and flowers at the bottom. The grey foil represents the sky and our thoughts. It also represents how it seems to me that we all have to be the same, that we are flat on this side and think the things we are supposed to think. When you turn the page over, there is the exterior – the coloured wrapper of the chewing gum, with much more grass and flowers along the edge. This represents how the world is more colourful and beautiful – more flowers – when we express ourselves, share our opinions, and are who we are."
	"What I liked the most was that we could create entirely on our own, with anything, on anything. I also appreciated that we were given themes that allowed me to connect my feelings with the drawings I created. I was surprised overall by my drawing, my abilities and the products that resulted from it."
	"I liked everything very much and found it interesting. Before starting, I bought a black notebook and white chalk. I didn't think I would discover so many ways to draw and create on black paper."

At the conclusion of the study, an interview was conducted with the teacher. From the responses provided, we identified four key insights articulated by the teacher, which were derived from her observations of the students.


- Engagement levels: Initial observations indicated passive reception among students during the first week. However, by the second week, a marked increase in active participation was noted, with students beginning to draw meaningful connections between their artistic expressions and the competencies highlighted in the artworks of established artists.
- Emotional expression and peer interaction: Students exhibited progression from hesitation in discussing their personal works to a growing comfort and willingness to share. This shift facilitated the establishment of a trusting atmosphere where students felt safe expressing emotions without fear of judgement. The acceptance of individual artistic expression, regardless of technical ability, became a cornerstone of the classroom culture.
- Positive reception and motivation: Throughout the project, students maintained a positive attitude towards the visual journal assignment, viewing it as a personal outlet for exploring their feelings. Despite the challenges of increasing academic pressure, students regarded the journal as both a filter for their experiences and a safe space for emotional exploration.
- Artistic freedom: Students were provided with a broad range of artistic materials and techniques, allowing autonomy in their creative processes. The teacher encouraged the exploration of different artforms and methods, which contributed to a richer understanding of self-expression.

The potential for future implementation of the visual journal task was affirmed by the teacher, who appreciated its positive impact on self-awareness, emotional expression and respect for individuality among the students. One particularly memorable moment was when many of the students became emotionally moved during a discussion about Marina Abramović, highlighting the power of art to evoke deep feelings and foster community within the classroom. The teacher believes that the visual journal assignment serves as a powerful tool for enhancing students' emotional and creative development.

Seventeen students consented to have their visual journals utilised for analytical purposes. We selected specific examples and descriptions from these journals that pertain to the topic under investigation. The five chosen examples were analysed through the lens of artistic expression and their relationship to the addressed themes (Table 4).

Table 4
Examples of students' visual journals

Topic	Visual journal	Student's interpretation of the artwork
Self-awareness		<p>"Here, I felt that it was most important to fully express my emotions. Everything was mixed up, nothing was right, and in that moment, I was completely chaotic, as there was too much of everything."</p>
Self-management		<p>"In this theme, I actually did something similar to the first theme, as I focused more on myself and my actions. However, I drew more things that bring me joy and comfort when I look at them or think of them."</p>
Social awareness		<p>"I made an effort to draw more connections, more people, as well as certain events that the public should not learn about."</p>
Relationship skills		<p>"My relationships with women I like, puberty, classmates, time is the best medicine. It depicts classmates with attributes and our most common activities."</p>

Topic	Visual journal	Student's interpretation of the artwork
Responsible decision-making		<p>"I drew the head of a person who has turned to stone. I watched the spiders weaving their webs, without hesitation, without decisions, just instinct, yet they still make these instinctual decisions correctly. Meanwhile, we have three birds that must decide where they will go for the winter, where they will build their nests... all these decisions are made so simply. I also drew water, which knows where to carve its path to be the best for itself. I observe all this - this stony head, and the longer it takes for me to decide where I will weave my web, how I will build my nest, the more I turn to stone and the harder it becomes for me to make a decision."</p>

For the theme of self-awareness, we selected a piece that includes two drawings created with a ballpoint pen. Both drawings are coloured with coloured pencils. The first drawing depicts vertical shapes intertwined with lines, resembling a forest. At the centre of the composition, the word "chaos" is written in large red printed letters. The second drawing illustrates a single tree in autumn colours (with leaves in shades of yellow-green, orange, brown and yellow). At the bottom of the trunk, the word "alone" is added (in large printed letters in black on a red background). In her interpretation of the work, the student highlighted her current emotional state.

For the theme of self-management, we selected a pencil drawing that subtly represents a magnolia branch featuring three blooms in varying stages of openness. Accompanying the drawing is a note that functions as a reminder for the author on how to attain a sense of calm. In her interpretation, the student underscores the significance of consciously directing her attention towards her own wellbeing and the elements that contribute to her joy and comfort.

For the theme of social awareness, we selected two pages of a journal that function cohesively as an interconnected entity. Each page features a central drawing created with coloured markers and pastels, depicting two faces on a white background, which are compositionally linked by colourful lines against a black backdrop. Surrounding both drawings is a collage of photographs that portray well-known political figures and leaders, including Franjo Tuđman, Slobodan Milošević, Angela Merkel, Aleksandar Vučić, Borut Pahor and Barack Obama. In the lower left section of the composition, there is a photograph of the American writer and human rights activist Kurt Vonnegut, an advocate for social justice. Additional photographs of workers, tourists, children and money are included. These photographs are interconnected by a red thread, accompanied by inscriptions in red lettering (such as "why", "don't look

away”, “who”, “why is it like this”, “they asked for it”, etc.). In her interpretation, the author indicates the existence of connections between individuals and events that may not be recognised by the general public. While the selected photographs linked by the red thread convey a socio-critical message, both drawings, which can be interpreted as self-portraits, evoke feelings of sadness and concern.

For the theme of relationship skills, we selected four pages from a visual journal that feature very simple pencil drawings. These pages were chosen because they incorporate a poem entitled *We Are Both to Blame*, which is a love poem that suggests conflict within a relationship. The accompanying drawing depicts two figures, recognised as male and female, between which a network of lines resembles communication noise. Above the female figure, a speech bubble is included, marked with an “x”. The second drawing illustrates several undefined figures and their interrelationships. In his interpretation, the student emphasised his relationships with others, highlighting a more challenging romantic relationship, on the one hand, and a supportive friendship, on the other.

For the theme of responsible decision-making, the author utilised various drawing media, including a ballpoint pen, a pencil and coloured markers. In the right-hand section of the composition, a face with large eyes is depicted, featuring concentric circles within them. From the pupils, flowers extend on long stems. The gaze is directed upward towards a spider’s web, accompanied by three stylised blue clouds. The composition is further enhanced by the presence of birds grouped into three clusters: in the first, they appear to be conversing; in the second, they are flying; and in the third, they are nesting. The birds are illustrated in a cartoon style, and the negative space of the drawing is filled with black. In her comprehensive interpretation, the student highlighted the complexity of making decisions in her life in relation to other living beings whose life paths are guided by instinct.

Discussion

The findings reveal that the students participating in the study used the visual journals as a powerful medium for expressing their emotions and thoughts. Additionally, the visual journals provided the students with a space for self-reflection, allowing them to engage more deeply with their inner experiences and understand their emotional responses. By channelling their feelings through artistic expression, the students articulated a deeper understanding of their emotional landscapes. For instance, one student noted, “I became aware that a certain feeling had been troubling me for a long time”, highlighting

the visual journal's role as a tool for introspection. Through visual imagery and symbolic representations, students not only identified and processed their emotions, but also confronted underlying issues that may have remained obscured in their daily lives. Visual journals, along with other creative arts, have also proved effective in reducing stress, as indicated in other research (e.g., Martin et al., 2018; Mercer, 2010).

The emphasis on positive coping strategies, as shown by the students using drawings to express joy and comfort, suggests that the act of creating art fosters a sense of control and agency. This finding aligns with existing literature highlighting the importance of emotional regulation within educational settings (CASEL, n.d.). The students' reflections underscore the significance of artistic practices in calming their minds and providing space for grappling with personal challenges.

Additionally, the results indicate the critical role of effective communication and collaboration within artistic contexts. Engagement in the arts has been confirmed as being instrumental in developing communication skills (Corbisiero-Drakos et al., 2021). The students in the present study reported a transition from initial reluctance to increased openness in sharing personal experiences with peers. This shift reflects a growing sense of trust and a supportive classroom environment where individual voices are validated. By fostering such a culture, art education transcends mere skill acquisition, evolving into a practice that nurtures healthy relationships both within and beyond the classroom.

Moreover, artistic expression in visual journals facilitated the students' creative reflection on social and emotional competencies. This is supported by an exploratory study by Oller et al. (2021), which underscores the importance of linking students' learning experiences in and out of school. Their findings suggest that personalised learning environments enhance students' reflective capacities by fostering connections across various contexts. Consequently, through visual journaling, students not only articulate their emotions but also develop essential social competencies, thus enriching their overall educational experience.

Conclusions

The present study highlights the integral relationship between the practice of visual journaling and the cultivation of social-emotional competencies among secondary school students. The artistic process not only allows them to express and explore their emotional realities, but also serves as a conduit for enhancing their interpersonal skills.

Artistic freedom is a fundamental aspect of creative expression that empowers individuals to explore and convey their unique perspectives, emotions and experiences without the constraints of conventional norms or expectations. Within the context of visual journaling, artistic freedom serves as a catalyst for self-exploration and innovation, encouraging students to take risks and experiment with various styles and techniques.

Our study does, however, have some limitations. The sample size was small, as it included only one class of first-year secondary school students, meaning that the results cannot be generalised to a broader population. Additionally, the research was not designed as a longitudinal study; rather, it lasted only four months, which limits the ability to assess long-term effects. If the study had been conducted over the course of an entire academic year, it might have provided a clearer picture of the impacts of incorporating visual journals on the development of students' thoughts, emotions and social-emotional skills.

Nevertheless, the findings of the research indicate the educational potential of incorporating visual journals into educational practice. Specifically, the incorporation of visual journals into educational frameworks could offer several potential benefits:

- **Emotional Expression:** Visual journals may provide students with a valuable platform for expressing their thoughts and emotions, which could foster greater emotional awareness and regulation.
- **Self-Reflection:** Engaging in visual journaling might encourage students to reflect on their inner experiences, aiding them in identifying and articulating their feelings more clearly.
- **Stress Reduction:** The creative process associated with visual journaling has the potential to reduce stress effectively, which could contribute to better overall mental health.
- **Communication Skills:** As students grow more comfortable with sharing their visual journals, they may develop important communication skills that enhance their ability to interact with peers and educators.
- **Supportive Environment:** This practice could foster a sense of trust and community within the classroom, creating a space where students feel safe to share personal experiences.

Thus, the inclusion of visual journals has the potential to promote emotional development and create a more engaging and supportive learning environment conducive to student growth.

Based on the potential benefits outlined, further research on the incorporation of visual journals in educational practice should consider several

guidelines. Studies should involve a broader and more diverse sample of students across various age groups and cultural backgrounds in order to enhance the generalisability of findings related to emotional expression and self-reflection. Longitudinal research designs are necessary to explore the long-term impacts of visual journaling on emotional development, stress reduction and communication skills. Comparative studies that assess the outcomes of visual journaling against other expressive arts practices could clarify its unique contributions. Qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups, should also be employed to gain deeper insights into students' experiences with visual journals. Further research should also focus on teacher education in the area of social-emotional learning and the development of various successful strategies that can successfully integrate artistic activities with social-emotional learning in secondary schools, in addition to visual journals. While our study primarily examined the benefits of visual journals for students, future research could investigate the impact of teachers creating their own journals on their practice. Evidence suggests that such journaling provides valuable resources for self-understanding and resilience, enabling educators to more effectively navigate the challenges they face within the public school system (Kulinski, 2023).

Ethical statement

Ethical approval for the research was granted by the Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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The (Im)possibility of Primary Arts Teacher Education

JEFF MEINERS*¹ AND KERRIN ROWLANDS²

UNESCO strategies, including the 2006 Road Map for Arts Education, the 2010 Seoul Agenda for Arts Education and the 2024 Framework for Culture and Arts Education, highlight a persistent concern regarding the insufficient emphasis on arts education competencies among pre-service teachers and the challenge of allocating adequate curriculum time in education programmes. In Australia, recent government policies have included the arts as a school curriculum learning area with five subjects: Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music and Visual Arts. This curriculum aims to ensure that all young Australians experience a comprehensive arts education by providing a framework for teachers to implement sequential learning across the primary school years. Despite these efforts, Australian research tracking the implementation of the arts curriculum within schools and teacher education programmes remains limited, revealing a problematic gap. The present paper examines how an Australian university has attempted to address this gap by providing pre-service teachers with an “Arts Specialism” within a teacher education programme. Using education policy sociology theory, the study explores the contexts of influence, curriculum text production and policy implementation. Critical discourse analysis is used to identify negotiations between influential Australian stakeholders, including university programme leaders who have supported the concept of an arts curriculum specialism. The study addresses themes of arts education content and pedagogy, revealing challenges and opportunities in implementing this specialism and concluding with recommendations for future developments.

Keywords: arts education, arts specialism, curriculum, policy, primary generalist teacher

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(Ne)možnost izobraževanja učiteljev umetnostne vzgoje na razredni stopnji

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∞ Unescove strategije, vključno z *Načrtom za umetnostno vzgojo* iz leta 2006, s *Seulsko agendo – Cilji za razvoj umetnostne vzgoje* iz leta 2010 ter z Okvirom za kulturno-umetnostno vzgojo iz leta 2024, poudarjajo trajno zaskrbljenost glede nezadostnega poudarka na kompetencah s področja umetnostne vzgoje pri bodočih učiteljih in izziv zagotavljanja ustreznega obsega umetnostne vzgoje v učnih načrtih izobraževalnih programov. V Avstraliji so nedavne vladne politike vključile umetnost kot samostojno področje v šolskem učnem načrtu, ki obsega pet predmetov: ples, gledališče, medijske umetnosti, glasbo in likovno umetnost. Cilj tega kurikulumuma je zagotoviti, da bodo vsi mladi Avstralci deležni celostne umetnostne vzgoje, in sicer prek ogrodja, ki učiteljem omogoča postopno in povezano učenje umetnosti skozi celotno obdobje osnovne šole. Kljub tem prizadevanjem je na voljo malo raziskav, ki bi spremljale uresničevanje umetnostnega kurikulumuma v šolah in programih izobraževanja učiteljev, kar razkriva problematično vrzel. Prispevek obravnava, kako je ena izmed avstralskih univerz skušala to vrzel nasloviti z uvedbo t. i. »specializacije za umetnosti« (Arts Specialism) v okviru programa izobraževanja učiteljev. Z uporabo sociološke teorije edukacijskih politik raziskava preučuje vplivne kontekste, oblikovanje učnih načrtov in uresničevanje politik. Kritična diskurzivna analiza se uporablja za prepoznavanje pogajanj med ključnimi deležniki v Avstraliji, vključno z vodji univerzitetnih programov, ki podpirajo koncept specializacije za umetnostni kurikulum. Študija obravnava teme, povezane z vsebino in didaktiko umetnostne vzgoje, razkriva izzive in priložnosti pri uvajanju te specializacije ter zaključuje s priporočili za nadaljnji razvoj.

Ključne besede: umetnostna vzgoja, specializacija za umetnost, učni načrt, politika, razredni učitelj splošnega profila

Introduction: The context for primary arts teacher education

The present paper focuses on arts education and the competencies of pre-service primary teachers in the teaching and learning context of an Australian university teacher education programme. We acknowledge that other nations within the Asia-Pacific region have developed arts and cultural policies that include arts education provision, for example in Japan (Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan, 2024), Korea (Korea Arts & Culture Education Service [KACES], 2024), Malaysia (Prime Minister's Office of Malaysia, 2021) and Singapore (National Arts Council Singapore, 2023). Here we focus on Australia, highlighting close post-colonial policy ties with the UK, the USA, Canada and New Zealand. Working within and beyond the university context, the study is informed by our experience in arts education, curriculum development and teacher education as education policy. Framed by national policies, we examine a key global problem facing the arts in initial teacher education, i.e., limited arts education curriculum time, which results in pre-service teachers being unprepared to teach the arts. The paper addresses an overarching research question:

How has an Australian university addressed the gap in primary pre-service teachers' arts education competencies through the development of an arts specialism?*

*(*the words 'specialism' and 'specialisation' are used interchangeably according to their alternative uses in references to published documents).*

Utilising a qualitative methodology, the theoretical paper is structured to include ethical considerations, background literature providing an overview of relevant writings, findings, discussion and conclusion.

Method

The study is grounded in the education policy sociology theory articulated by Stephen J. Ball (2005). In particular, we draw upon Ball's analytic framework for policy (Brennan, 2011; Meiners, 2017), which includes "three contexts of policy-making" (Ball, 1993, p. 16): the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of policy practice (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Three contexts of policy-making (after Ball, 1993)



These contexts provide a practical conceptual framework to examine how an Australian university sought to address a gap in primary teacher arts education competencies by developing an arts curriculum specialisation titled “Arts Specialism”.

Development of the new Arts Specialism was undertaken with the commitment of university educators and leaders who supported the integration of arts education within teacher education curriculum. Stakeholder interests were also vital contextual influences, including the perspectives and support of various key players such as policymakers, organisations and community members.

The theoretical framework provides insights into the interplay of such influences and policy texts upon the development and production of the Arts Specialism text, and the implementation of this initiative (see Figure 2: *The Arts Specialism curriculum text*).

The context of influence: Primary arts teacher education literature

This section provides an overview of the literature concerning broader forces shaping primary arts teacher education and their impact on pre-service primary teacher competencies for arts teaching.

National and state education policies, alongside sociopolitical contexts, significantly influence arts education. These influences originate in neoliberalism, a global political ideology that shifted the focus in the 1970s from social

democratic interventions to a free-market economy emphasising individual choice, personal responsibility and private enterprise (Fitzclarence & Kenway, 1993, cited in Sellar, 2005). By the 1990s, the Australian government and others had restructured education policy towards national curricula that prioritised workplace skills, vocational education and training (Meiners, 2014). This transition also led to corporate management models in education aimed at raising teaching and learning standards (Hill & Kumar, 2008).

In the early 2000s, curriculum and economic rationalisation at the university of focus reduced primary teacher arts education to just one of 32 primary programme courses. Aligned with the new *Australian Curriculum: The Arts*, this course included five subjects: dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2015). The reduction in offerings at Australian universities is well documented, with arts education academics expressing concern over the feasibility of covering these vast disciplines in a single course (Barton et al., 2013).

Earlier concerns had prompted global policy initiatives supporting the integration of arts education into curricula as a recognised field of theory and practice. These initiatives reflected a broad acknowledgment of the arts in fostering cognitive and emotional development, creativity, critical thinking and cultural literacy (Gardner, 1993). Notable developments occurred with the UK's *Arts in Schools Project* (National Curriculum Council, 1990), the USA's *Core Arts Standards* (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards, 1994) and Australia's *Statements and Profiles for the Arts* (Australian Education Council, 1994), each affirming arts education within a balanced curriculum.

Subsequent research publications, including the USA's *Champions of Change* (Fiske, 1999) and *Gifts of the Muse* (McCarthy et al., 2001), framed collaboration between artists, educators, policymakers, researchers and arts managers as essential for advocacy in arts education. Research also includes Australia's *Evaluation of School-based Arts Education Programmes in Australian Schools* (Bryce, 2004) and the USA's *National Endowment for the Arts* project (Catterall, 2012), alongside the Dana Foundation's *Learning, Arts, and the Brain* report (Gazzaniga, 2008).

Entering the twenty-first century, the United Nations Education, Science and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) led strategies for arts education, including the *Lisbon Road Map* (UNESCO, 2006), the *Seoul Agenda* (UNESCO, 2010) and the *Abu Dhabi Framework* (UNESCO, 2024). These publications are supported by research from Harvard's *Project Zero* (Seidel et al., 2009) and others focusing on quality arts education (Bamford, 2018). Australia's *National Cultural Policy* highlights the importance of arts education, affirming that it

fosters creative skills and cultural participation, improves literacy and numeracy outcomes, and enhances social and emotional wellbeing, particularly among disadvantaged youth (Australian Government, 2023). Despite this acknowledgment, practical implementation often falls short due to systemic issues such as insufficient time allocation and lack of specialised teacher training (Robinson & Aronica, 2009).

Problems: ‘Time’ and ‘competencies’

Despite advocacy and evidence, challenges persist regarding the capabilities of arts teachers. A mismatch between policy intentions and enactment realities is exacerbated by limited time for the arts. Barton et al. (2013) note a disparity between the well-researched benefits of arts education and the time allocated for meaningful engagement in arts practice. Persistent concerns emphasise insufficient attention to arts education competencies among pre-service teachers (PSTs) and the challenge of integrating adequate time for arts education within teacher education programmes (Ijdens & Wagner, 2018).

An early Australian government inquiry sought to improve classroom teachers’ arts teaching skills (Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts Reference Committee, 1995) and further concerns were raised at an Australian arts education symposium (Mooney et al., 2006). Ijdens and Wagner (2018) highlight the global urgency, stating that experts in 36 countries had indicated a pressing need to improve competencies for those teaching arts in primary and secondary schools.

Teachers frequently struggle to integrate arts education effectively due to inadequate preparation and lack of resources, signalling broader challenges related to curriculum time pressures. Australia’s participation in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and subsequent policies, such as the *National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) (Independent Education Union of Australia, 2013), has resulted in increased time demands on schools, adversely affecting teachers’ self-efficacy in arts education (Garvis et al., 2011).

Research highlights insufficient curriculum time allocated for arts education within teacher education programmes (Chapman et al., 2018; Ijdens et al., 2018; Shaw, 2020). Thomson (2025) notes that the promised broad and balanced curriculum often fails to include adequate arts education, resulting in diminished opportunities compared to other curriculum areas. Studies indicate that PSTs typically receive minimal exposure to arts pedagogy, impacting their ability to effectively teach the arts (McCaughtry & Hodges Kulinna, 2008).

A European study indicated that primary teacher education programmes often marginalise arts education, resulting in PSTs receiving inadequate preparation for implementing arts curricula (Baidak et al., 2009). In England, the *Researching the Arts in Primary Schools* project highlighted similar concerns regarding inequitable access to arts education, calling for enhanced arts knowledge within initial teacher education (Thomson et al., 2025).

The Australian curriculum aims for all primary students to experience sequential arts learning (Meiners & Garrett, 2015); however, as indicated earlier, recent policies have diminished opportunities for arts specialisation. Ewing (2020) notes that inadequate teacher education in the arts has left many teachers feeling unprepared to teach the arts. The National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE) have called for arts education to be an area of specialisation within initial teacher education programmes, emphasising the need for increased time allocation (NAAE, 2022). The Australian government's proposal to support specialist in-school arts education programmes may address some challenges, but evidence suggests that successful implementation is more likely when generalist classroom teachers lead arts implementation rather than relying on visiting artists (Snook, 2012).

In summary, while the literature identifies the value of arts education, its enactment often suffers from inconsistent support and inadequate resources. The introduction of an arts specialisation at an Australian university aims to address this gap. The following section discusses the development of the 2019 text *The Arts Specialism*, which introduced a new curriculum offering comprising four courses.

The context of policy text production: Use of critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis

This section illuminates contextual considerations in order to uncover the power dynamics involved in the development and implementation of the Arts Specialism as a policy text. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) serves as a method for examining this text and associated documents from the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), as well as professional associations such as the Australian Council of Deans of Education (ACDE) and National Advocates for Arts Education (NAAE), which have informed policy text production.

The methodology sheds light on analysis of the processes that rationalised and finalised the Arts Specialism text, including decisions regarding its

content. The text can be regarded as determined content contributing to policy enactment, whereby university lecturers and pre-service teachers (PSTs) become active participants. The Arts Specialism text and related documents exemplify “both text and action” as components of a broader policy agenda (Gerard et al., 2013, p. 63). Following Foucault (1971, cited in Meiners, 2014, p. 225), the curriculum text merits scrutiny to clarify explicit and implicit meanings that may be interpreted in various ways. Taylor et al. (1997) assert that policy is both process and product. The creation of the new curriculum text involved generating numerous micro-texts through collaborative efforts. Analysis is framed by the research question: How has an Australian university addressed the gap in primary PSTs’ arts education competencies through the development of an arts specialism?

Using CDA, attention is given to discourses embedded in the text’s content and structure, as well as the broader sociopolitical factors influencing its construction (Mills, 2004). Discourse shapes understandings of actions among individuals engaged in communication. CDA is applied as a method to critically analyse power dynamics within written texts, requiring an examination of the discursive interactions between speakers, writers or readers. The analysis operates on three levels – description (text), interpretation (discourse practice) and explanation (context) – and is used to facilitate an understanding of interconnections that create the whole (Janks, 1997). The curriculum text construction process involves a series of value-laden choices regarding inclusion or exclusion, prioritisation and marginalisation, all influenced by arts education discourses. This exemplifies a “two-way interactive, top-down and bottom-up approach to policy development” (Taylor et al., 1997, pp. 24–25).

CDA reveals how language and discourse shape education policies and practices, highlighting the roles of influential actors. The production of the Arts Specialism text necessitates consideration of various associated documents, including formal institutional policy publications and stakeholder communications, as explained below.

Policy formulation: Establishing an argument

Government documents provide critical top-down policy drivers guiding and controlling neoliberal education reform. An academic team member leveraged these documents to formulate an argument for the suite of arts courses that comprise the Arts Specialism. The report *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* (Australian Government Department of Education [AGDE], 2014) stated that higher education providers must equip all primary PSTs with at least one subject specialisation, emphasising areas such as science, mathematics or

language. Although the arts were not explicitly mentioned, subsequent guidance suggested opportunities for specialisations in areas such as music and physical education, thus providing a rationale for the Arts Specialism.

Additional policy documents reinforced the necessity for specialist teachers in primary education due to increasing curriculum demands and the need for strong content knowledge (AGDE, 2014). The *Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group* (TEMAG) emphasised the importance of specialisations, thereby bolstering the case for an Arts Specialism.

In this authoritative context, NAAE leaders approached the ACDE, seeking a collaborative interpretation of TEMAG recommendations and requesting support for developing an arts specialisation. Communication between ACDE and AITSL executive leadership indicated that decisions were informed by a government minister's expectations regarding primary specialisations.

Curriculum design: Creating the Arts Specialism

In subsequent phases, a university team member collaborated with NAAE to draft standards for the arts primary specialisation, which are crucial for developing course content and pedagogical strategies. This document articulated the necessary outcomes for a primary specialisation, emphasising “expert content knowledge,” “pedagogical knowledge” and “highly effective classroom teaching” (NAAE, 2017). This labour for rationalising an arts specialisation won university programme leaders' support for the development of the four courses comprising the Arts Specialism. These followed the established arts education foundation course, compulsory for all primary PSTs, which introduced the five arts curriculum subjects. A complex challenge was presented: how to include five subjects in four courses. With considerable consultation, a suite of four courses was developed as indicated in the Arts Specialism curriculum text (Figure 2). Course texts were written by the lead staff member in consultation with the university team, each with varying expertise in the arts subjects. The curriculum thus aligned with government requirements and aimed to prepare generalist teachers with an arts specialisation. Support was garnered from various professional arts education organisations, as demonstrated in letters from the *Australian Dance Council*, *Australian Teachers of Media*, *Art Education Australia*, *Visual Arts Education South Australia*, the *South Australian Department of Education* and South Australia's youth arts organisation *Carclew*.

In order to encourage enrolment, the Arts Specialism was required to be articulated in a summary one-page text for PSTs (Figure 2).

CDA and the Arts Specialism curriculum text

Figure 2

The Arts Specialism curriculum text

Arts Specialism

“Arts experiences cultivate and nourish children and young people’s creative, intellectual and communication skills and capacities, enabling them to participate as contemporary Australian citizens.”
Carclew Guiding Principle

In the Australian Curriculum, The Arts learning area draws together related but distinct art forms. The Arts specialism will prepare you to develop special interests and build knowledge, skills and confidence to plan, teach and inspire children across the five arts subjects (Dance, Drama, Media Arts, Music, Visual Arts) in early childhood sites OR primary schools.

Building upon the foundation arts education course, you will take four courses over the program and an elective focusing on a specific arts subject. Across the courses you will develop an in-depth knowledge of diverse approaches to the arts including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts and traditional cultural knowledge. You will develop understanding of the arts’ contribution to culture, society and the economy as well as its place in education.

The specialism will provide you with experiences of ‘making and responding’ in each art form:

Arts specialism 1: you will study each of the five arts in contemporary audio-visual cultures including the use of digital technologies to develop a visual arts portfolio and media arts presentation.

Arts specialisms 2 & 3: focus first on dance and music, followed by drama and visual arts to help you gain mastery of these subjects for planning and teaching via projects and presentations.

Arts specialism 4: through creative processes you will develop your interests and skills in one or more of the arts by developing a performance, presentation or display with plans for high quality arts education with a specific age range.

(Final Specialism Brochure, April, 2019)

The following section summarises the use of CDA, providing an account of recurrent themes, discourses and negotiations surrounding the Arts Specialism curriculum text. Reading against the text counterbalances reading with the text (Janks, 1997), as follows.

Aiming to stimulate PSTs’ interest in opting for the Arts Specialism, the arts team agreed to include a quote as a header from *Carclew*, the leading local youth arts organisation, as above.

The quote includes the active verbs “cultivate”, “nourish” and “participate”, connected with the nouns “children”, “young people” and “citizens”. These are indicative of a discursive educative theme, which may resonate with PSTs’ interests and aspirations as beginning teachers.

The introductory paragraph then provides a brief explanation of the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* in order to directly communicate the intention

that students will be prepared to plan for teaching. A further active verb “inspire” is associated with “children” and may stimulate desire, enthusiasm and excitement about the prospect of arts teaching in schools.

The second paragraph then outlines the structure of the Arts Specialism. Key terms such as “in-depth knowledge”, “diverse approaches” and “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander arts” signal an inclusive approach in curriculum developments that support PSTs’ understanding of Australia’s indigenous heritage. Similarly, the final sentence of this paragraph locates learners’ understanding of the arts beyond education and the curriculum to wider contexts, with the terms “culture”, “society” and “the economy”.

The feature of modality is used as a tool for textual analysis pertaining to “claims to authority [...] of the writer/s [...]” (Thomas, 2008, p. 326). The use of “will” as a textual feature of modality in this text is common in the Australian curriculum and establishes a tone of authority that may evoke both confidence and apprehension among prospective PSTs. “Will” is futures focused, and reading with the text (Janks, 1997), the repeated use of “will” may indicate a convincing interpretation that suggests the learning intended by selecting this specialism (“will prepare you”; “you will develop”, “the specialism will provide you”, “you will study”, “you will develop”). This combination of textual features of repetition and modality may point to a strongly affirmative text. However, reading against the text, the repetitive use of “will” may indicate a declarative tone and authority. Other modal verbs such as “may/might”, “must” or “shall/should” are not used. A reading of the verb “will” may lead to an interpretation of assertive compliance with the Arts Specialism content. An alternative reading could cause concern for generalist teachers who do not feel they have the ability, confidence or resources to embark upon an Arts Specialism.

An important point regarding active experiential learning is given emphasis through its location in a single separate line: “The specialism will provide you with experiences of ‘making and responding’ in each art form.” Active experiential learning across art forms is emphasised here. These terms are used as active verbs in the *Australian Curriculum: The Arts* and indicate that this specialisation option will involve embodied arts practices, rather than passive learning experiences.

The remaining three sentences then provide a succinct overview of the agreed resolution for the four Arts Specialism courses, signalling first the “study” component, followed by nouns such as “mastery”, “interests” and “skills”, which indicate the empowerment of learners leading to their agency as planners and teachers of “high quality arts education” with a specific age range. Other key nouns flag a wide range of agreed assessment modes that would be

experienced during the Arts Specialism, including “portfolio”, “project”, “presentation”, “performance” and “display”. The presence of these terms provides scope and flexibility for interpretation by staff members who may be responsible for implementation of the four courses. In addition, the key terms “digital technologies” and “creative processes” are indicative of an agreed practice-based approach to the Arts Specialism.

The context of policy practice: Towards effective implementation

The developed courses needed to align with university protocols for documentation and approval. Effective implementation of the Arts Specialism requires continual planning for resource allocation, including staffing and costs. The key pedagogical principle emphasises experiential learning across the five arts subjects, ensuring that students engage deeply with the curriculum with courses outlined as follows:

Course 1: Becoming a Primary Teacher with an Arts Specialisation aims to cover all of the arts, so that all students will have interests included. A focus on knowledge and practices examines the nature and presence of each of the five arts in diverse contemporary audio-visual cultures, including the use of digital technologies for deepening content and pedagogical knowledge in visual arts and media arts.

Course 2: Dance and Music: Social Dreaming reflects collaborative experiences inherent in dance and music practices, deepening and extending students’ traditional and contemporary dance and music knowledge, along with a futures orientation for the implementation of indigenous dance and music for all young Australians.

Course 3: Drama and Visual Arts: Story Landscapes deepens traditional and contemporary drama and visual arts subject knowledge, with active and collaborative drama and visual arts methodologies and strategies for the school setting.

Course 4: Production, Presentation and Audience in Arts Education involves a collaborative project, focusing on content knowledge in the arts with production processes integrating various arts domains, culminating in a final performance, presentation or display, supported by documentation.

The courses can be delivered in six-week blocks for each arts subject. Depending on staffing, it is also possible to alternate them weekly or fortnightly, or to integrate them weekly or in blocks. The goal is to achieve mastery of the subjects for the school setting, with assessments including projects in dance,

drama, media arts, music and visual arts. Assessments across the courses were scaffolded to provide opportunities for multiple modes of reflective practice, including oral presentations, project planning, implementation during placements and final group presentations to peers and guests, culminating in individual evaluation essays.

The arts education team faced initial hurdles in managing the coordination, teaching and assessment of the four new courses while maintaining the demands of existing programmes. Careful negotiation between programme leaders and the teaching team was essential for effective costing and timetabling. The arts team developed four Arts Specialism courses, each lasting 12 weeks, aligned with their arts expertise and incorporating support from casual staff.

The onset of COVID-19 during the first year required a shift from Course 2 on-campus classes to an online format. This transition led to the development of robust external learning tasks, garnering positive feedback from PSTs. The arts team focused on innovative strategies to deliver quality online arts education, designing community-based arts projects for fourth-year students to facilitate engagement in arts teaching practices and to bridge the gap between on-campus and remote learning environments.

Courses 2 and 4 allowed students to engage in school-based projects focused on planning, implementing and practising teaching in primary classrooms. Feedback emphasised the depth of learning experiences provided through these projects. For example, one PST noted:

Creating and implementing the arts project in a school context [...] provided me with further teaching experience and insight into the complexity involved in planning and implementing an arts project. (PST1)

Ongoing assessment and refinement of the Arts Specialism based on feedback and outcomes were integral to the courses. For example, Course 4 established a biannual partnership with a children's arts festival, providing PSTs with real-world experiences as teaching artists alongside professionals, as one PST reflected:

Through my involvement in the festival, I saw the benefits of arts education for children first-hand [...] active participation in the arts fosters deep learning, personal growth and a valuable sense of belonging. (PST2)

Each course allocated 120 hours for PSTs, translating to a total of 600 hours of arts education across the four-course suite, marking a significant

innovation in incorporating arts education into existing teacher education curricula.

The next section summarises findings regarding the three contexts of influence, policy text production and policy practice, with implementation aimed at addressing gaps in primary PST arts education competencies through the development of the Arts Specialism.

Findings

The literature reviewed by Ijdens and Wagner (2018), influential to the Australian context, identifies a paucity of training in arts education. There is an absence of opportunities for developing competencies for highly effective teaching within primary arts teacher education (Ewing, 2020) and insufficient time within the broader curriculum offered by universities (Barton et al., 2013), asserted as follows:

A lot of institutions around our country do not dedicate time to arts education to pre-service teachers. At the tertiary level, very little is done towards preparing these teachers to teach the arts in the classroom. (Newton-Turner, 2023, cited in Lei, para. 2, 2023)

The Arts Specialism initiated at this university attempts to counter this situation, empowering generalist primary teachers through transformative school-based experiences.

CDA, used as a method for examining the text and associated documents, provides insight into the development and production of the Arts Specialism as a policy document. Significant themes within the Arts Specialism text are revealed, particularly concerning the content areas of dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts, as well as approaches to pedagogy. The Arts Specialism curriculum text outlines the programme's structure and objectives, emphasising the importance of fostering creativity and engagement among students. Analysis shows the interplay of text and context, providing a critical account of carefully managed negotiations surrounding the Arts Specialism.

The Arts Specialism was introduced from 2019. Its implementation coincided with disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which significantly impacted face-to-face delivery in Australia's teacher education programmes. PST voices illustrate positive responses to early stages of implementing Arts Specialism courses. One PST shared:

My journey as an arts educator [...] has been profoundly transformative, challenging my personal and professional perspectives. (PST3)

Despite the various challenges identified, the phased implementation of the Arts Specialism courses over four years alleviated some pressure on the arts education team. The immediate introduction of the first course required collaboration between Media Arts and Visual Arts staff, as these art forms primarily drew PSTs into the Arts Specialism. The impact of teamwork is illustrated in the reflection of one PST:

I have grown an understanding that art forms rarely stand-alone [...] often a rich tapestry of multiple arts disciplines. (PST4)

This course also included excursions to learn about art gallery education programmes, highlighting the value of industry partnerships in successful course implementation (ACARA, 2015). Considerable effort was devoted to collaborating with other educational and arts partners to make a rational and well-supported argument to support the realisation of the Arts Specialism text and enactment of the four courses. This resulted in PSTs developing competencies in required standards for expert arts content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and effective teaching.

Discussion

Implementation of an Arts Specialism in teacher education programmes presents numerous challenges and, as noted in the literature, “much responsibility falls on the shoulders of teacher education programs” (Barton et al., 2013, p. 78).

Struggling with equitable time allocations for each of the arts subjects continues as an ongoing contestation within and beyond the university context. Widespread consultation for a new school arts curriculum included significant contentious debate (Meiners, 2014). Ultimately, this curriculum settlement was agreed for the arts as a learning area with five subjects, including the new term “media arts” replacing “media”. This school curriculum settlement perhaps pacified strains for power within the university arts education team, who at the time rejoiced in the success of winning a new arts curriculum (O’Toole, 2013). Rather than assertions for positioning art forms, this paper shows the value of university arts team negotiations and deliberations, centred on language that would embed and communicate the essential practices necessary for the development of core expert content knowledge and pedagogical skills to develop competencies.

The successful organisation and integration of four courses for an Arts Specialism into the teacher education programme signifies a commitment to

expertise in arts education and progress toward equipping generalist teachers with the skills and knowledge they require for effective arts teaching (Alexander et al., 1992). The initiative aligns with government requirements and national arts education curriculum content, enabling PSTs to explore interdisciplinary connections and enhancing their effectiveness as arts educators:

It has highlighted my strengths for working with children and intensified the confidence I have for being an arts specialist teacher. (PST5)

The Arts Specialism has provided specialised training, fostering PSTs' pedagogical skills for implementing culturally responsive pedagogies. One PST reflected:

This experience has not only given me the confidence and skills to teach quality music and dance education but has also transformed my understanding of the arts' value in children's education. (PST6)

PST feedback illustrates the transformative impact of the arts (Bamford, 2018), noting the joy derived from inclusive arts-based methods, referring to course coordinators and teachers who model passion and enthusiasm in each arts subject, and providing some resonance with the debate on evolving teacher professionalism integral to neophyte teacher identity (Saqipi & Vogrinc, 2021). PSTs identify the deep content and pedagogical knowledge they are gaining for highly effective teaching, bridging the theory-practice gap in fostering supportive classroom environments for culturally responsive teaching (Melchior, 2011).

Sustaining professional teaching partnerships with current educators is crucial for quality teacher education programmes. For instance, one course coordinator collaborated with a dance educator and a music educator to develop coursework, tutorials and assessments, including weekly three-hour tutorials, online lectures and various learning tasks. With limited resources, the team sought innovative approaches to enhance expertise in emerging curriculum areas, prioritising the integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content. An *Aboriginal Content in Undergraduate Programs* (ACUP) grant facilitated a partnership with a prominent First Nations dance artist, aiding in the incorporation of First Nations dance into the curriculum, which is significant for social justice in Australia (Rowlands et al., 2022).

However, a persistent challenge remains: ensuring sufficient time for PSTs to deepen expertise while developing agency and confidence in planning. Opportunities for self-selected project sites, such as youth justice centres and primary schools, encourage PSTs to engage with communities aligned with their values, professional aspirations and learning as future teachers (Aliu &

Kaçaniku, 2023). Feedback highlighted the value of applying theoretical learning in practice and establishing ongoing collaborations with schools, teachers and arts organisations. Regional and remote communities, which often lack arts projects, have particularly benefited from PSTs conducting projects on-site, with thirty recent regional arts education projects receiving positive participant feedback.

Conclusion: Challenges and opportunities

The present paper concludes with the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating an arts specialism into primary teacher education, informed by education policy sociology theory and critical discourse analysis. An earlier Australian government report noted the insufficient preparation of generalist primary teachers for teaching arts, but made no recommendations (Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts Reference Committee, 1995). This has remained a concern in and beyond Australia.

The establishment of an arts specialisation represents a significant advancement in bridging the gap between policy and practice in the context of Australian primary teacher education. Approved by the AITSL, the Arts Specialism provides a pioneering model for universities seeking to improve arts education. Despite challenges such as limited curriculum time, curriculum development with stakeholder involvement offers promising opportunities for progressing generalist teacher competencies.

In conclusion, time constraints in teacher education programmes and broader demands on educators present significant challenges for the Arts Specialism. These pressures affect programme leaders and PST participants, who must balance the specialism with other curriculum requirements, while changes in industrial relations laws complicate support for casual staff, potentially impacting the enactment of quality primary arts teacher education.

Looking ahead, opportunities for expansion include implementation of arts specialisms across more institutions. Enhanced support from policymakers and educational leaders, along with arts industry collaboration, can further facilitate the development and implementation of the Arts Specialism. Additionally, two key mixed-methods research focus areas are identified: a university study tracing the professional journeys of Arts Specialism graduates, and nationwide longitudinal research tracking successful school-based arts curriculum implementation.

Ongoing dialogue between policy, practice and research leaders is essential for addressing challenges and opportunities, transforming the perceived

impossibility of primary arts teacher education into real possibilities for advancing arts education in the preparation of primary generalist teachers.

Ethical statement

The research was carried out following ethical standards for pedagogical research as articulated by the Australian Association for Research in Education (2024), with the rights to privacy, dignity and sensitivities of research populations respected. Consent from University of South Australia contributors was obtained to use evaluative and reflective comments, illustrating responses conveying the voices of university PSTs. All identifying information is removed from evaluative extracts with identities protected through codes. Document analysis did not require ethics approval, as no human participants were named or identified.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no financial or conflicts of interest to declare.

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Biographical note

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Improving the Social-Emotional Well-Being of a Child with Multiple Developmental Disabilities by Incorporating the Performative Drama Model into the Learning Process

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∞ Self-advocacy is an essential skill for effective and successful integration into the wider social environment and is important for psychological and physiological well-being. The Performative Drama Model *Ars Vitae* was trialled to improve students' assertiveness and performance in real life. A 12-year-old boy with learning disabilities and multiple developmental disabilities, who had difficulties expressing himself and participating in class, was trained over a three-month period. The model was integrated into his lessons, with a particular focus on developing self-advocacy skills to help him express himself better and assert himself in groups. The activities carried out by the "actor" supported the development of his self-advocacy, classroom integration and communication skills, and improved his academic performance and general well-being.

Keywords: arts therapy, autism, integrated learning, self-advocacy, *Ars Vitae* model

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Izboljšanje socialno-emocionalnega stanja otroka z več motnjami v razvoju, z vključitvijo performativnega dramskega modela v učni proces

ALENKA VIDRIH IN TINA GROŠELJ

☞ Samozagovorništvo je bistvena veščina za učinkovito in uspešno vključevanje v širše socialno okolje; pomembno je za psihološko in telesno blagostanje. Performativni dramski model *Ars Vitae* je bil preizkušen z namenom podpore razvoja asertivnosti in uspešnosti učenca v vsakdanjem življenju. Pri 12-letnem dečku z učnimi težavami in več motnjami v razvoju, ki je imel težave z izražanjem in s sodelovanjem v razredu, je obravnava po performativnem dramskem modelu potekala tri mesece. Dejavnosti po tem modelu so bile izvajane med poukom. Poudarek je bil na razvoju samozagovorniških veščin, da bi mu pomagali bolje izražati sebe in se uveljavljati v družbi. Posamezne aktivnosti, ki jih je deček izvajal kot »igralec« v performativnem procesu, so podpirale razvoj njegovih veščin samozagovorništva, vključenosti v razredu in komunikacijskih veščin ter izboljšale njegovo učno uspešnost in splošno počutje.

Ključne besede: pomoč z umetnostjo, avtizem, celostno poučevanje, samozagovorništvo, performativni dramski model *Ars Vitae*

Introduction

Autism Spectrum Disorders

Autism spectrum disorders manifest themselves in the areas of social communication, social interaction and behaviour, interests and activities. The deficits significantly impair the child's social and educational functioning, as they manifest themselves in difficulties with verbal and non-verbal communication, social and emotional reactions, and establishing, understanding and maintaining social relationships, as well as in repetitive stereotypical behaviour, movements, use of objects, interests, language, thinking and behaviour, and unusual reactions to sensory stimuli. Due to more or less pronounced problems in individual areas, children with autistic disorders have poorly developed abilities to adapt to the environment (conceptual, social and practical skills), which significantly hinders their integration into the environment and their development of independence. It is in these areas that they need the most help and support. Depending on the degree, autism spectrum disorders are divided into mild, moderate or severe deficits in social communication and social interaction, as well as mild, moderate and severe deficits in the areas of behaviour, interests and activities. Children with mild deficits in social communication and social interaction have problems in establishing social relationships (establishing contact, inappropriate reactions to the environment, reduced interest in interaction), in verbal and non-verbal communication and in adapting their behaviour to different situations in the environment. Children with mild deficits in the areas of behaviour, interests and activities have inflexible behaviour in at least one area, as well as difficulties in transitioning between different activities and in organising and caring for themselves (Vovk-Ornik, 2015).

Children with special needs and drama activities

In the context of drama education as one of the disciplines of arts therapy, several studies have been conducted that specifically focus on the acquisition of the skills needed to improve assertiveness. Garvas (2006) found that through the process of drama facilitation, individuals improved their ability to express their own emotions and self-image, and that by improving empathy, they respected and listened more to their interlocutor. Through the creative process of drama, the participants discovered undesirable patterns of behaviour and tried to interrupt them. In the opinion of the researchers, all of this was reflected in the improved social integration of the individual. Methods of

artistic support include drama that integrates speech and movement/dance in role play, improvisation, interpretation of literary texts, puppet design and animation, and the making and use of masks. The introduction of theatrical skills through theatre activities was adapted to the abilities of the participants (Garvas, 2006). Strelec (2014) investigated the importance of theatre pedagogy for the integration and participation of individuals in society and for the development of the skills necessary for coping with life. In her research, she also observed the relationship between dramatic improvisation and self-confidence in people with special needs and found that self-awareness, self-discovery and an active attitude towards oneself and the environment are important elements in empowering individuals (Strelec, 2014). In a case study of a boy with an autistic disorder, Vilčnik (2015) found that various theatre techniques, drama activities and other methods of helping with art contributed significantly to understanding the teen's emotions and way of communicating. She found that after the meetings, the participant behaved more maturely, accepted agreements and showed a higher level of independence (Vilčnik, 2015). Vidrih (2016) states that participants in drama activities in which the performative drama method *Ars Vitae* was used, in addition to becoming aware of their own patterns of thinking and acting, personal satisfaction, recognition and awareness of their own behaviour, also make progress in communication (Vidrih, 2016). Similarly, Planinc (2017) believes that the introduction of drama activities gives children the opportunity to explore, face problems and discover different solutions. The research process itself takes place in a stimulating, accepting environment where students learn critical thinking. He notes that after the introduction of theatre activities, he observes positive reactions from the children, more sustainable, practically acquired knowledge, faster memorisation, creative problem solving, improved orientation and coordination, more confident speaking, improved and conscious own communication and improved relationships between students (Planinc, 2017). Kroflič (1992) asserts that movement is the most elementary form of expression for children and that the psychomotor way of problem solving is therefore closest to them. They can empathise with the problem more easily and understand it better if they also solve it through movement. This is a holistic cognitive and psychomotor activity.

The performative drama method *Ars Vitae*

Two decades ago, the *Ars Vitae* (AV) model of performative drama was developed. The AV model uses a scaffolded structure, which is a teaching strategy relying on Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the concept of the zone

of proximal development. It consists of elements that support learner's development by providing the necessary support for progressing to the next level (Van Der Stuyf, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). However, teachers' beliefs and experiences must be considered, as they determine the practices and innovations teachers use in their instruction (Bingimlas & Hanrahan, 2010). As such, both the instructors' theoretical perspectives and personal experiences and beliefs can be added to the model's scaffolding, integrating the scaffold structure with collaborative elements of social constructivism (Haydey et al., 2010).

The AV model emerged directly from professional acting experiences. The author's own professional acting experience contributed to the mastery of specific acting techniques that are transferred to participants in an "aeovian" workshop (i.e., a workshop of or pertaining to the AV model). The AV model is a result of years of applying professional acting techniques to coping with challenges in a given situation. It is a dynamic, ever-changing model that relies on improvisation and is based on the parallels between theatre and life: life is a theatre, and we are all actors playing and shaping our roles in life. Hence it is considered a performative model. By performing our life roles, we form ourselves and so become the artists of our own lives. This is why the model's name is *ars vitae*, "the art of life". As Cicero said, "*Ars est enim philosophia vitae*", or "Thus art is the glow to know life" (Cicero & Holstein, 1873, Lib III., Cap. II., p. 125). Not only does the AV model help participants (AV actors) to better understand and portray characters on stage, it also helps people to better understand and live out their various roles in life, such as a parent, employee or student.

The AV model has a three-in-two structure: three hierarchically co-dependent levels split into two phases. The first two levels, which can be used independently, make up the preparatory phase, while the third level, which should be used in conjunction with the first two levels, constitutes the creative phase. The preparatory phase encourages the participants to be introspective, to become aware of attention and intention, of their own experiences and drives, particularly bodily rhythms, such as breathing. Expressive elements, such as voice and body expression, are used to facilitate this awareness. The creative phase encourages participants to become the artists of their own lives. This phase ends with an analysis of the acquired experiences and knowledge, thus bringing both phases to a conclusion.

The first level establishes the so-called "neutral" attitude. This is accomplished by using body instrumentation (a means of attuning to the self, strengthening a sense of perception and lowering the volume of thought processes) to adopt an awareness of the triunity between body, mind and breath. At the second level, the performer enlists inner support (i.e., a neutral attitude

and vocal-speech-language refinement) to attune to other participants in the AV process (AV actors). This gives the participant an opportunity to recognise his own patterns of voice, body and breathing, and to test new combinations of patterns in order to develop new modes of behaviour. At the third level, creativity and improvisation begin. Using the experiences and techniques of the first two levels, one can authentically portray any drama character. Once in an appropriately relaxed state, participants analyse the mass of impulses, motives and reactions accrued during their lives. They then use the results of this analysis, combined with imagination and fictitious circumstances, to delve into their characters' psyches – thoughts, feelings, motives and behaviours, whether seen or hidden – to create a compelling creative performance. The goal is not to perfectly recreate identical personas and circumstances, but to be connected to them through feelings, emotional memories and sensory reactions that can be analysed.

In short, the AV model involves the mutual interaction of body, mind and breath, and active research of self through the individual performative experience. This means that, in aeovian terms, thoughts are seen; for example, when an actor is performing, he must have an awareness of whether his gestures are out of tune with his expressions, that is, the gestures must “see” the facial expressions and vice versa. Similarly, participants in the AV process or AV actors are encouraged to scrutinise their attitudes, movements and speech in order to “hear” any dissonance. Authentic performance is based on such learning by insight, revealed through consonance between expressions and actions, and through a balance between structure and spontaneity (Vidrih, 2007).

Aeovian workshops emphasise the multisensory faculties of the individual (Guyton & Hall, 2011). This is done to awaken the sensory dimension of one's personality, particularly the performative experience, which helps the practitioner to develop psychophysical abilities and skills, thus strengthening his own physical, emotional and mental intelligence, and enhancing the triunity between body, thought and breath. An aeovian trainer leads the individual to the attunement of this triunity through the dramatic process. The three-in-two structure of the AV model allows the individual to gradually tune her inner world to the outer world. An advantage of working in a workshop setting is that the model's structure safeguards against any mutual disregard. With a focus on attuning to others, the AV method fosters a sense of community and safety that not only allows participants to better delve into their characters, but to deal with the issues and concerns of their own lives.

As an acting technique, the carefully guided process of the AV model consists of a static structure, but the practitioner builds upon that scaffolding,

eventually developing a concordant *personal arsenal* of the character, which is comprised of the character's beliefs, thoughts, opinions, expressions, attitudes, reactions and behaviours. This external expression must be attuned to the actor's own feelings; for an actor to convincingly portray a character, his whole personality must be subordinate to the personal arsenal of the character. The actor thus becomes a mirror of the character's inner world, bringing it to life with a depth of vitality, a breadth of mentality and a chord of originality. To enable this, participants explore, both broadly and deeply, the roots and modes of such a personal arsenal to ensure the triunity of body, thought and breath.

Once participants understand the processes and purposes of the AV model, they can practise and apply it. In its practice, the AV model functions like play: it attunes us to ourselves and to those around us, serving as a catalyst for liberating ourselves from constraints. In its application, the AV model functions like a classroom: the actor is a teacher who wants his students (the audience) to believe him and learn about his character. Moreover, just as one must be a student before becoming a teacher, so an actor must first be an observer of the character's experiences and emotions. He then takes this knowledge to the stage to educate others through his performance.

The dramatic process used in the AV model does not stop at the walls of the theatres; rather, it breaks out from the theatre into the rest of life, responding to the needs of the individual and of mankind (Vidrih, 2009a). At the end of the aeovian journey, the participant is endowed with the title of an aeovian actor (AV actor) and has a stronger understanding of herself and her role in this world. With this step, the participant declares that she is accepting a proactive role in her life by becoming the artist of her own life. She is advocating for herself.

In order to illustrate the AV model in action, let us consider a case where it was used. The task at hand was to perform a celebration ceremony according to a preestablished scenario. Most of the 12 adult participants were more familiar with choir singing, but none with acting. The various roles of the teacher were acted out by the author according to Bloom's Revised Taxonomy of educational objectives, with its six cognitive processes that differ in their complexity, with *remember* being the least complex and *create* the most complex (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 215):

Remember. In the role of a facilitator, the teacher reminded the participants to be an empty shell and to create a mental image of the portrayed character.

Understand. In the role of a therapist, the teacher helped the students be fully aware and present in order to understand the metaphors that

represent the basic concepts of stage play, so as to perform a well-synchronised ceremony.

Apply, Analyse and Evaluate. In the role of a challenge setter, the teacher helped the students be authentic to their roles and to themselves by remaining attuned to the triunity of body, mind and breath. He helped the participants to analyse rehearsals and evaluate which elements worked and which did not.

Create. Finally, in the role of a co-creator, the teacher helped the participants to create a new and original creation on their own: the ceremony.

The result of this preparation was a performance that echoed in the body, minds and hearts of the distinguished guests and others.

Theatre training and theatrical performance have been widely studied as a social and educational tool, even as a means of coping with the challenges of life (Cahill, 2014, p. 36; Nicholson, 2005, pp. 63–64; Rousseau et al., 2007, p. 451; Vettraino et al., 2017, p. 89; Horghagen & Josephsson, p. 169; Morsillo & Prilleltensky, 2007, p. 726; Vidrih, A., 2009b, p. 65). Due to the way it emphasises mindfulness and emotional calmness, the AV model, in particular, can provide an excellent means of managing stress and other heightened emotional states (Shearer et al., 2016). This raises the question of whether it could also prove to be a valid coping strategy for dealing with other cognitive and emotional challenges, such as depression, anxiety and grief. Moreover, given how it has been shown to effectively help practitioners build self-awareness and become the artists of their own lives, it could prove to be an effective intervention in building confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness and other important skills in underperforming individuals.

The AV model teaches and encourages transformative power via imagination. The mind continually constructs images and connects them to create new knowledge, making imagination the central engine that provides meaning to mental events (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). If this central engine of meaning is shut off, nothing written will provide meaning; it will become gibberish. Imagination is therefore at the heart of every creative process, including the AV Model. Thus, it can be argued that the AV model could prove to be an effective tool for teaching people to be more creative and productive, and for instilling in them confidence in their potential.

The AV model is designed to assist individuals in transforming their lives into a compelling, authentic performance. This is done through training awareness of self and others, understanding and connecting to self and others, and finding a balance between the self and real-life roles, as well as between

body, mind and heart. The applications and benefits of the AV model go far beyond the stage, however. The mindfulness and understanding practices that it uses to train performers can have profound effects on managing stress and on coping with challenging life circumstances, suggesting it could be a powerful therapeutic intervention (Vidrih et al., 2020). At its heart, the AV model is about imagination and creation, especially about creating authentic, in-tune performances in various roles. These can be performances of character roles, but they can also be performances of real-life roles: parent, child, student, etc. The AV model develops the art of living well, *ars vitae*. As such, it could prove to be an effective means for helping underperforming, underconfident individuals build the skills and confidence they need to succeed in life, and for showing them how to be the artists and creators of their own lives. It can teach them *ars vitae*.

Research problem and research questions

The present case study describes an example of the use of the AV model of performative drama in order to promote social-emotional development in the area of self-advocacy skills in a child with pronounced difficulties in these areas. Specifically, the aim of the research was to examine whether the AV model (at least the first two phases, since the child never attained to phase-three activities) could prove to be an effective method for building skills in these areas in such a child. Of particular interest was how the child would react to such activities, given that the activities require exposure and activity with the whole body and voice at the same time, something that is extremely difficult for the child as someone on the autism spectrum. The child's teacher was also used as a researcher in this process, looking for sources of strength, trying to listen to and hear the child and respond to his needs, assessing his current situation, and providing him with appropriate incentives to move forward.

The objectives of the research were twofold:

1. To explore the possibilities of planning and implementing drama activities according to the AV model in order to support the social-emotional development of the child; and
2. To identify changes in the daily functioning of the child in the areas of self-awareness, communication, leadership skills and rights awareness during and after the implementation of the activities.

The present study employs a qualitative case study approach using participatory observation. In planning the implementation of the activities, the

AV model of performative drama (Vidrih, 2016, p. 75) was used as a methodological framework. When followed according to its framework, this model trains expression and self-awareness for those who practise it. The research focused on the child's subjective experiences and external behaviours, which were observed according to checklists, while self-awareness was measured using a standard scale. The findings will help provide a better understanding of the socio-emotional state and development of the individual involved, and perhaps other similar individuals, but cannot be extended to the general population.

Method

Participants

The participant was a fifth-grade boy (12 years old at the beginning of the study) with multiple developmental disorders: mild speech and language disorders, and autistic spectrum disorders (minor deficits in social communication and social interaction), manifesting in minor difficulties with behaviours, interests and activities. The boy was involved in a personalised, nine-year primary school programme with a lower educational standard, and was enrolled in a combined fifth- and sixth-grade class. He was observed during workshops with his entire class, which included two additional male fifth-grade students, two female fifth-grade students and two male sixth-grade students.

The boy had a noticeable lack of communication skills, which hindered him in successfully demonstrating knowledge and in managing social interactions, everyday contacts and independent self-care. Although not physically impaired, the boy moved as if his body were in a slight spasm and found it hard to move. He could do all of the exercises in physical education if he made an effort, but he expressed no motivation to exercise. He was also extremely awkward in handling various objects and waited for the help of the teacher, never asking for help on his own. He spent a lot of time preparing and tidying up his belongings. It was difficult for him to organise his workspace on his own: he needed a lot of time to master the order in the space, to recognise where the objects belong, and to come to terms with the routine of preparing and tidying up the space. He also demonstrated difficulties finding himself in the space, usually following a group and sticking to the back or the side, often hiding behind the others.

Despite his difficulties expressing himself, the boy was included in the class and accepted by his classmates. He liked to participate in games, but only if he was invited by his classmates; he did not join on his own. During free time,

when given the possibility of choosing an activity or game, he remained seated in his place. He always followed the game rules and the suggestions of others, but he was never the initiator. Although he rarely initiated inappropriate behaviour, occasionally his classmates complained that he was teasing them and would hit them when the teacher was not looking. Although he did not deny such actions, the boy did not give the impression that he regretted them either. He did not initiate conversations with classmates, and when he did converse with them, he gave short answers. He was unobtrusive, non-confrontational and easily overlooked in the group. He had no company or friends in his home environment in the afternoon, and he did not have any desire to engage in play with anyone. He was usually quiet in the company of adults, unless someone asked him something.

The boy gave the impression that he was satisfied with his learning success. He generally did not have high goals and was satisfied with any mark teachers gave him. However, when he completed a task well, he was much happier than usual. At times, he acted as if he felt very sorry for himself and did very little without being explicitly commanded. At any request, he would sigh, moan and sometimes stamp on the ground with his foot as if angry. In verbal communication, he acted as if he had a limited vocabulary and difficulty recalling words, which is inconsistent with his formation of perfectly linguistically correct sentences. When answering questions, he gave short and quiet answers, but only if called upon. He mostly covered his mouth with his hand or touched his nose and acted as if he were unsure of the answers, although in most cases he answered correctly. Occasionally he quietly spoke the answer – often the correct one – when other classmates did not know it. He was more successful in the English class.

It was extremely difficult for the boy to express his opinions and feelings. For example, on Monday mornings, he was not able to report on what he had done during the weekend because he said he did not remember anything, as if he were afraid to say something that might be wrong. In describing his feelings and experiences, he was limited to a basic expression and description of emotions and usually wanted to satisfy the teacher with his answer. His typical answers were “Okay”, “Good”, “I’m happy” and “I like it”. When asked for an explanation, he was usually silent and could not explain his opinion (or decision or answer). He did not express his desires in class, except his desire to resist writing. Otherwise, when he did not like something, he simply waited quietly, refusing to work, and would not say what bothered him when asked about his needs.

When talking to an adult or when he thought that someone was watching him, the boy had a closed posture, with his shoulders clearly hunched

and rounded forward, his head slightly drooping and his gaze looking away. When standing, he would slowly move away from the conversation partner. He seemed stiff and behaved as though his hands were in his way. At home, he argued a lot with his mother about homework, which he did not want to do, so his mother often did it for him. His mother had only weak authority over him and found it difficult to achieve what she demanded of him. It was difficult for her to encourage him to do any form of movement, recreation or socialising with other children. In school, however, he listened to his teachers (with the exceptions already described, which were often related to writing).

Instruments

A semi-structured interview was conducted to evaluate changes in various behaviours and a checklist was developed. The child was scored according to the checklist before and after the AV training. To evaluate the child's self-awareness, the Scale of Positive Self-Evaluation (Musek, 2017) was used, focusing on the areas of physical appearance, achievements and successes, as well as general attitude towards oneself. The answers were completed by both the researcher and the child.

During the drama training process itself, the author kept a reflective diary for participatory observation. The child was observed during workshops that were conducted with his entire class in their classroom at least once a week from late February to early June 2019. For each workshop separately, observations were made describing the child's response during the workshops and evaluating the activities and their implementation; this was occasionally supplemented with video analysis. After three months of performing drama activities, the verbal and non-verbal expression skills checklist and the self-advocacy skills checklist were filled in again, and another interview with the professional colleague was conducted. The Scale of Positive Self-Evaluation test was then completed again by both the researcher and the child.

Research design

The drama activities (workshops) were carried out with the entire class for three months, from late February to early June. One meeting per week was scheduled at a set hour. However, the activities were sometimes carried out a day or so earlier if it was possible in the schedule, and later, at the request of the pupils, even up to several times a week. Sometimes, at the request of the pupils, individual activities were performed during the week. The activities were

performed in the home classroom of the participating pupils so that they could feel safer and more at home. Before each activity, the furniture was rearranged to provide sufficient space and any potential distractors were removed to ensure adequate attention and concentration.

Drama activities were used to help the child perceive his body, to control it within a familiar space, and to move with coordination. To ensure success, it was important that he felt included, accepted and safe within the group; that he expressed himself in his own way, not simply repeating after the group; and that he treated himself as an equal member of the group rather than submitting to the group. The activities were designed to help him accept his mistakes and failures as part of learning, to continue working despite these mistakes, and to persist in more demanding tasks. The activities also taught important expressive behaviours, such as entering into interactions, developing and using several different facial expressions, standing upright, raising the head, keeping the eyes forward, and keeping the hands away from the face and mouth when talking.

Each meeting was conducted according to the *Ars Vitae* (AV) performative model. At the first level, the focus was on the self: awareness of the body, thoughts and, above all, breathing. Breathing was the main tool used to build the awareness of the whole body, as it is concrete and controllable. Given that the pupils were usually surrounded by an abundance of different sensory stimuli during class, each activity started with a quiet introduction in which they focused on breathing and moved on from there. In order to establish a routine and ritual, this first activity began with the eyes closed.

At the second level, the emphasis shifted to the experience of the body in the space and becoming aware of the other people in the space. The goal at this level was to lead the pupils – especially the observed boy – to maintain awareness of their bodies and not to blindly submit to the group. Various activities were used at this level, including movement, verbal and nonverbal expression, connecting with the group, and more.

Each meeting finished by calming down, discussing the activities, and sharing feelings and experiences: what the participants liked, their experience of themselves, the feelings they perceived and recognised, changes, etc.

The AV model provided the overall structure of the workshops, but, as deemed appropriate by the researcher, complexity was added to the activities, new things were included and progress was made through the levels (or, conversely, progress was slowed down to take more time on a certain level or activity as needed). In order to ensure the success of the activities, the researcher gave instructions at a level that the pupils would be able to understand. Moreover, to deliver a more honest experience for the pupils and to demonstrate what

was being taught, the researcher focused first on perceiving her own feelings during a certain activity and being aware of her own experiences. She then opened her perceptions outwards, offering them to pupils and directing them or supporting them.

Observations were written down in the research diary as soon as possible after each workshop. After each activity, the researcher evaluated her performance, the course of the activities, the reactions of the pupils, their feedback (especially from the observed boy) and all of her observations. Based on this information, the next meetings and topics were planned, the intention being to build upon the previous meeting and go deeper in the next one. While only the next meeting was fully prepared, the following two or three were partially planned. This planning was essential in order to prepare things according to the boy's current needs, the needs of the whole group and their level of progress.

Results

Changes in verbal and nonverbal expression skills were measured with a checklist, which was completed by the researcher before the start of the workshops and at the end of the three months of their implementation. The boy showed progress in all four areas: verbal expression, eye contact, facial expressions and posture. The changes were small but evident: more desirable behaviours were present and the quantity of undesirable behaviours decreased. The boy was more aware of his body, experienced more feelings in it, was better able to control it, and showed improvements in his expression. Some unwanted behaviours emerged, such as voicing objection, but this is actually very encouraging, as it shows that the boy was aware of his desires and tried to enforce them by standing up for himself. In general, the boy followed the others in the group less and was no longer afraid to do something differently. It is also interesting to note that he became interested in the behaviour of others, observing them and thus gaining new experiences and patterns. He visibly opened up more to the outside world, which could be a result of being firmer and more secure on the inside, trusting himself more and feeling safer. The changes were most prominent during the times of the activities and the researcher's presence, and were less noticeable in an unstructured environment with more people, such as extended classes.

Self-awareness was measured using the Scale of Positive Self-Evaluation, which was completed at the beginning and end of the three months of workshop activities by the student. A large increase was observed in positive self-esteem in the field of achievements and successes based the boy's evaluation,

and a very large increase was observed based on the researcher's evaluation. Moreover, compared to the first test, there was less discrepancy between the student's responses and the researcher's responses in the second test. In the area of general attitude towards oneself, there was a large increase in positive self-esteem based on the boy's responses and a very large increase based on the researcher's responses. Again, there was greater agreement between the student and the researcher in the second test. In the field of physical appearance, there was relatively stable positive self-esteem based on the boy's responses and a very large increase in positive self-esteem based on the researcher's responses. Again, there was greater agreement between responses in the second test.

The interview with the teacher also indicated improvements in the boy's behaviour. She mentioned several times that she noticed more communication in the boy: entering interactions on his own, explaining things when encouraged and speaking more loudly (but still quietly compared to his classmates). The teacher noted that the boy still did not verbally define what he liked or that he wanted to participate in a certain activity; some of his old patterns were still present, but to a lesser degree, and he no longer hid within the group. She noted that it was easier to motivate him and include him in the conversation and that he made eye contact when addressed and maintained it during the conversation, although he still exhibited some withdrawal of eye contact. His face was more expressive after the training and he responded better to conversation partners. His expressiveness still did not always match the situation or action, but he showed progress in this area as well, perhaps owing to being more open to communication than before. Compared to the group, his expressions were less noticeable and required more attention from the teacher to be recognised.

Regarding interest, the teacher reported that after the three months of training, the boy still did not outwardly show joy when he liked an activity, although he did show disappointment when the activity was completed. She also reported that his overall appearance was more coordinated. Compared to his classmates, his facial expressions were still very modest, but some progress was evident. She noticed more frequent relaxation in his posture, less touching of his face with his hand, and fewer instances of closed posture and repetitive gestures. She observed less hiding than before (with his hands, in his posture), but noted that he would still turn his body away and that he was still more closed compared to other classmates. After the three months of training, he was observed to smile more and exhibit a posture of being more actively open to the outside world.

Regarding functioning, the teacher recognised noticeable progress, although the boy was still more restrained than his classmates. She noticed that

he was making an effort to be noticed and that he wanted attention. He needed less encouragement to answer questions, but still needed time to formulate and provide an answer. He gave less resistance to activities that he did not like and showed less lethargy and sighing. Importantly, he demonstrated persistence, not giving up on activities where he was a part of a group, even if he did not like them. One of the major differences in his functioning was that even though he would give up quickly, he was willing to try to do challenging activities.

Discussion

Individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) have problems in the areas of social communication, social interaction and behaviour, and interests and activities, while speech and language tend to be even more hindered. Usually, depending on the understanding of their needs, they are offered various trainings of social and other skills, which teach them to understand certain behaviours and experiences and help them to express them in a socially acceptable way, thus equipping them with tools that enable more successful integration into society (Potočník & Rapuš Pavel, 2024). However, people with such disorders think differently than others and react in accordance with their own experience, which is often not appropriate or acceptable according to the rest of society (Potočník et al., 2025). As such, they are constantly confronted with feedback that their behaviour is not acceptable, that they are not good enough, and that something is wrong with them (Bradeško & Potočník, 2022). However, by teaching them to experience emotions “properly”, to control them and learn the correct (“acceptable”) responses, people with ASD are sent a message that even what they feel – what is most theirs and comes from within – is not accepted, not right and not good. Therefore, it is important to equip these individuals with the skills to perceive their body, to recognise and accept their feelings, and to feel good in their bodies. This is why the AV model, which focuses on self- and other-awareness, could prove to be a powerful technique for improving functioning, behaviour, expression and self-awareness in these individuals.

A 12-year-old, fifth-grade boy with ASD was given training according to the AV model. Prior to the training with performative workshops, the boy's condition prevented him from communicating with people on a daily basis, from demonstrating knowledge and from taking care of himself in general. This is consistent with ASD. To help improve his self-awareness and overall behaviour and functioning, the boy was trained with activities of the AV model, through which he would first become aware of his body, develop awareness of his place in space in relation to other people, get to know the responses and

perceptions of his own body, train his expression, and improve his ability to respond to others in his space.

Drama workshops according to the AV model were prepared for the selected boy and the rest of his classmates. In just three months, he made considerable progress, as measured on a checklist of behaviours and a scale of self-awareness. The boy compared himself to his classmates (without autistic traits) less often and better understood that he has different problems and abilities than the others, recognising that he is more successful in certain things but has to work harder in other things and still may not achieve the same result as his classmates. As such, he is less disappointed at failure and now perceives himself as at least as smart and bright as the others, and has already begun spontaneously answering in class. Answering questions on his own and even raising his hand is a huge improvement for the boy. He also shows more trust in himself to be capable, competent and accepted in the eyes of teachers, as reflected in the fact that he accepts criticism and praise and responds to it by expressing his emotions. Moreover, he exhibits greater focus on solving problems, even demonstrating persistence in the face of challenge.

The boy also demonstrates marked improvements in expressiveness. Before the workshops, his usual response to criticism was an expressionless face; when praised, he showed some satisfaction and joy. After the workshops, his facial expressions were a little more varied, showing identifiable expressions of being sorry, angry and happy. He also demonstrated greater awareness and openness by the end of the workshops. When prompted with questions, he was able to express his motives, reasons for certain actions, experiences, etc. The boy evaluated certain statements on the self-evaluation scale with a higher score before the training than after the training, although this likely shows a more realistic self-assessment rather than a decrease in skill. In general, he still showed difficulty in communicating compared to other children in the class; however, his otherwise remarkable progress in just three months demonstrates that the AV model is an effective tool for supporting him in an appropriate, comfortable and safe way, and for helping him develop skills in communication, expression and awareness.

It would be ideal to run the workshops for a longer period to allow the boy to really consolidate these newly developed patterns. It would also help to include other professionals in the group in order to experience new people within the safe environment of the known group with different didactic approaches (Potočnik, 2020). This would enable the boy to check and consolidate his patterns of response in stressful situations through the AV model structure and drama activities. However, it could prove difficult to increase the time and

efforts of these activities, as it was already challenging to find time during class for the pupils to complete the drama activities and other learning obligations without losing interest (Bojc & Potočnik, 2024). Nonetheless, the results of the boy's progress show that this is an important activity to integrate into the classroom for such students. The learning environment will always provide challenges with time limits, and students with special needs need even more time to master and consolidate the learning material; however, if you know what works and how to implement it, it is possible – and important – to arrange the schedule to allow the implementation of both learning content and creative and supportive content, and to connect them to each other (Batič, 2021).

Future research should aim to replicate these findings with larger sample sizes. In order to understand the full extent of the benefits that can be obtained by training with the AV model, it would be valuable to examine the effectiveness of AV model activities on training these skills in individuals with different types of developmental difficulties and on training different sets of skills. It is also important to examine whether these activities can help typically developing children.

While the findings of the present study are limited, showing progress in only one boy with special needs, it has promising applications. If it can improve expression and awareness skills in someone who has difficulty in these domains, it can reasonably be expected to work with any population, regardless of age, gender or ability. The present research also shows that art can be a powerfully helpful tool for people with autism spectrum disorders. This is by no means the end of learning, but the beginning. The boy is now ready to start strengthening and developing these skills in the hope that he will one day be as independent as possible.

Conclusion

A teacher of students with special needs has an extremely strong influence on the course and result of how the students work through their own experiences, learning, material and acceptance of and communication with other students. The present study shows that art, specifically the AV model of performative drama, helps such students improve their expression of various feelings in a safe environment. In such an environment, all such feelings are accepted and considered correct and true. This helps promote awareness and creative freedom, which can then foster the openness required to be oneself. Creativity comes from experience, and if you really go out of yourself, expressing your emotions, feelings, experiences and inner world in the process, that

can be powerfully therapeutic. This is perhaps the most beautiful thing about art: it is an adaptable tool that can transform and change you, and it is always interesting, up to date and enjoyable. It is something that raises the quality of our lives, because it is life. In the present study, the student managed to calm down (first phase) and to get in touch or coordinate with others (second phase), but he could not show improvisation (he followed the rules, but he did not create or offer new combinations, new creative solutions). We can also highlight the limitations of the research: too little time (more tasks or activities would certainly contribute to a deeper experience) and only one student in the research (additional similar studies would shed more light on other specificities). In addition, there was a lack of consideration of the process that took place outside the school environment (how the student functioned at home, outside school activities, etc.).

Ethical statement

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Commission of the Faculty of Education of the University of Ljubljana.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Becoming an Engaged Dance Scholar Through Arts-Based Community Engagement Projects

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Postgraduate dance education students can develop a practice of arts-based, engaged scholarship by applying their disciplinary knowledge in collaboration with community partners to enact projects that benefit local, regional and/or global communities and their own scholarship. The present article analyses seven arts-based research projects required as part of the Studio Seminar course for doctoral dance education students at Teachers College, Columbia University. The specific goals of the research project were (a) to assess the level of community engagement present in seven Studio Seminar projects, (b) to determine whether or not the criteria of “evocation and illumination” were fulfilled in the Studio Seminar projects, and (c) to determine the knowledge gained by the participating students who conducted and reflected upon the Studio Seminar projects. Two cohorts of students participated in the study: Cohort 1 (three participants), who completed the course in 2021, and Cohort 3 (four participants), who completed the course in 2023. The data were collected and analysed based on the arts-based research evaluation criteria of evocation and illumination, and the community engagement criteria of co-creation, co-implementation, co-assessment and co-dissemination. The results of this exploratory study reveal that the community engagement criteria of co-creation, co-implementation and co-assessment were present in all of the projects, but co-dissemination was only possible for the students who completed their projects in the first cohort. In addition, the arts-based research criteria of evocation and illumination were present in all seven projects. Furthermore, the results of a Community Engagement Questionnaire revealed that the projects had a positive impact on the students’ dissertation goals and their plans for future community engagement

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projects. In conclusion, providing postgraduate dance education students with guidance in developing arts-based, community-engaged projects assists in their development as engaged scholars.

Keywords: arts-based research, community engagement, assessment, dance, higher education

Postati angažiran plesni strokovnjak prek umetniško zasnovanih projektov za vključevanje skupnosti

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Podiplomski študentje plesne pedagogike lahko razvijejo prakso angažiranega, na umetnosti temelječega raziskovanja, tako da svoje strokovno znanje uporabijo v sodelovanju s partnerji iz skupnosti pri izvedbi projektov, ki koristijo lokalnim, regionalnim in/ali globalnim skupnostim, ter hkrati prispevajo k njihovemu lastnemu raziskovalnemu delu. Ta članek analizira sedem projektov na umetnosti temelječega raziskovanja, ki so obvezni del predmeta Studio Seminar za doktorske študente plesne pedagogike na Teachers College Univerze Columbia. Cilji raziskave so bili: a) oceniti raven vključenosti skupnosti v sedmih projektih Studio Seminar; b) ugotoviti, ali so bila v projektih izpolnjena merila evokacije (sprožanje estetskega ali reflektivnega odziva) in osvetlitve (prikaz ali osvetlitev kompleksne teme skozi umetniško prakso); c) raziskati, kakšno znanje so pridobili študentje, ki so pri projektih sodelovali in jih reflektirali. V raziskavi sta sodelovali dve skupini študentov: skupina 1 (trije udeleženci), ki je predmet zaključila leta 2021, in skupina 3 (štirje udeleženci), ki je predmet zaključila leta 2023. Podatki so bili zbrani in analizirani na podlagi meril za ocenjevanje na umetnosti temelječega raziskovanja – evokacije in osvetlitve – ter meril za vključevanje skupnosti, kot sta soustvarjanje in souporaba. Rezultati kažejo, da so bila merila vključevanja skupnosti prisotna v vseh projektih; soustvarjanje je bilo prisotno pri vseh, medtem ko je bila souporaba značilna predvsem za projekte skupine 1. Poleg tega sta bili evokacija in osvetlitev izraženi v vseh sedmih projektih. Rezultati vprašalnika o vključevanju skupnosti so pokazali, da so projekti pozitivno vplivali na študente glede njihovih študijskih ciljev in prihodnjih načrtov za projekte v sodelovanju s skupnostjo. Sklepno lahko ugotovimo, da usmerjanje podiplomskih študentov plesa k razvoju projektov na umetnosti temelječega raziskovanja v povezavi s skupnostjo prispeva k njihovemu oblikovanju kot angažiranih raziskovalcev.

Ključne besede: na umetnosti temelječe raziskovanje, vključevanje skupnosti, ocenjevanje, ples, visokošolsko izobraževanje

Introduction

Community engagement and arts-based research (ABR) have great potential to ensure that university dance students and faculty are connected in a meaningful way to the local, regional and global communities. The present exploratory study is based on reflections and outcomes of projects conducted by students in the Doctor of Education (EdD) programme in Dance Education at Columbia University. This is the only doctoral programme in the United States of America focused on pedagogical and educational research in dance. The students in the programme gain knowledge about the importance of the embodied experience to shape learning. Furthermore, the students, many of whom have worked for many years in various community settings, practise becoming engaged dance scholars by creating and implementing arts-based, community-engaged research projects.

All students in the EdD programme in Dance Education at Teachers College, Columbia University are required to take the Studio Seminar, an important practicum in the doctoral journey. Not only does it require students to engage with a community, but it is also the only course in which all students develop and implement research projects using dance as a methodology. Faculty encourage students to use the course project as an opportunity to develop their research interests and methods. The students who are the co-authors of and contributors to this article all took the Studio Seminar course before determining their dissertation topic and research methods. What the students learn in the process of conducting their class project informs both the methods and the topics they focus on in their original, empirical research dissertation. This introduction will be organised as follows: (a) postgraduate education in community engagement, (b) arts-based research definitions and assessment, (c) community engagement definitions and assessment, and (d) the research goals of this project.

Postgraduate Education in Community Engagement

The seminal work of Ernest Boyer (1996) provided the first blueprint for the importance of community engagement as an integral form of scholarship in higher education. He encouraged faculty in higher education to consider work with communities to be important and scholarly work. Other scholars have also described the importance of community engagement experiences for postgraduate students (Lesley & Smit, 2020; Matthews et al., 2015; O'Meara et al., 2006). Postgraduate students benefit from learning to apply their work within the context of a given community. Moreover, "Research clearly indicates

that learning and teaching which is engaged within communities provides a range of opportunities of building graduate attributes in areas of citizenship, employability, resilience, problem-solving and self-motivation” (O’Connor et al., 2011, p. 114).

Postgraduate students in dance education benefit from training in community engagement, as many of them are preparing for leadership in higher education, where all scholarship, whether traditional, creative or community based, needs to be conducted in a manner that makes the rigorous nature of the project obvious. Promotion, tenure and merit decisions made by universities depend on peer review of documents, which are required to demonstrate high levels of scholarship (Ellison & Eatman, 2008; O’Meara et al., 2015).

Not all institutions, units, or disciplines are opening to engaged scholarship at the same rate, and the challenges faced by many individual engaged scholars to have their work recognized and valued remain very real. The growth and recognition of engaged scholarship must be context-specific led by faculty increasingly attuned to their multiple roles, building intra- and inter- institutional understanding attentive to evolving models in other contexts. (Changfoot et. al., 2020, p. 256)

The completion of a community engagement project as a course requirement contributes to the knowledge and skills of future dance faculty, who may use this knowledge to advocate for the inclusion of engaged scholarship as equal to other forms of scholarship.

Many community-based dance projects combine both arts-based inquiry and community engagement (Dailey & Hauschild-Mork, 2017; Duffy, 2019; Mabingo, 2018; Warburton et al., 2014). Purvis (2018) described several dance-based community engagement projects in a review of papers published in the *Journal of Dance Education* in the period 2001–2016. She discovered that the tenets of engaged scholarship were rarely included, and determined that the field of dance could benefit from more qualitative and quantitative studies that provide evidence of the benefits of dance-based community engagement for all parties.

Arts-Based Research Assessment

Arts-based research (ABR) is a qualitative research methodology that may include one art form or a collaboration of several art forms, including dance, music, drama, visual arts and literary arts (Leavy, 2015). The arts (dance, music, drama, visual arts, literary arts) are a creative expression of the artist. The art form can be abstract – where the artist is unconcerned about the personal

interpretation of the artwork, as in some visual artworks and many avant-garde dance works – but the arts can also be a powerful source of knowledge and emotional connection. This is especially true when they are intentionally used to enhance knowledge and provoke the empathy of the observer. Dance can promote a deep understanding and illumination of a topic. In essence, the heart and soul are touched and transformed (Moffett, 2025; Overby, 2022; Wilson & Moffett, 2017).

The criteria for the assessment of arts-based research have been described by Barone and Eisner (2012) to include incisiveness, concision, coherence, generativity, evocation and illumination. Leavy (2015) includes the evaluative criteria of aesthetics, methodology, usefulness and audience response. For the purposes of the present exploratory research project, we focused on the criteria of evocation and illumination, where the work promotes a deep cognitive and emotional understanding that can lead one to reveal the complexities of social issues (Overby, 2022). An example of evocation and illumination was revealed during a dance performance when audience members were cognitively informed and emotionally engaged in the topics presented and performed. After the performance, which was based on the life and legacy of Mary Ann Shadd Cary (Overby et al., 2025), 110 high school students and 112 adult audience members answered a survey regarding the performance. Using a Likert scale of 1–5 (1 lowest and 5 highest), the survey asked respondents to select the number that best represented their knowledge of the production. The majority of the respondents indicated that they had known very little about Mary Ann Shadd Cary prior to the performance (1.6), but had gained significant knowledge by the end of the performance (4.02). In addition, open-ended questions gave the audience members an opportunity to share specific knowledge and meaning gained during the production. For example, one respondent stated “Dance expresses art that words cannot express by embodying the personal challenges she faced” (Overby et al., 2025, p. 116). Emotional engagement is another indicator of illumination of a topic through art. Dance, music, visual art and other creative arts can evoke emotions based on memory and experiences. For example, *Migrant Mother* (Lang, 1936), a painting of a woman during the Depression, gives us a glimpse into her impoverished life: we feel her sadness as we view this painting. One of the most impactful aspects of ABR is the ability to illuminate topics and evoke emotions. Although there are more published results of ABR in visual arts and literary arts (Leavy, 2015), dance, which is less researched, is a powerful tool for illumination and evocation.

As a reflection of their Studio Seminar project, and for the purposes of the present article, the first author and instructor of the Studio Seminar course

requested that each of the co-authors and three other students from a previous Studio Seminar course participate in a study that assessed the community engagement and arts-based research components of the course.

Community Engagement Assessment

In addition to the ABR criteria, we also assessed the engaged scholarship that encompassed the projects, as the projects included community partners. Community engagement can be seen as a continuum from outreach (one partner making all of the decisions) to full engagement (both partners contribute equally, from creation to dissemination). Engaged scholarship (ES) represents the most collaborative aspect of community engagement.

Engaged scholarship (ES) can be defined as scholarly activities focused on the social, civic, economic, educational, artistic, scientific, environmental, and cultural well-being of people and places beyond the academy. It involves the creation and dissemination of new knowledge to address social issues through collaborative relationships and shared activity between those in the university and those outside the university. (Campus Compact, n.d.)

The engaged scholar's goal is to apply their disciplinary knowledge in collaboration with community partners to benefit local, regional and/or global communities, as well as their own scholarship. With community partners, they create, implement and disseminate mutually beneficial projects that address public issues (Overby, 2016). Several forms of assessment have been designed to determine the effectiveness of dance-based, community-engaged scholarship projects. These are included in the book *Public Scholarship in Dance* (Overby, 2016). The assessment criteria consider ways that the researcher and community partner co-create, co-implement, co-assess and co-disseminate the project. In dance, the projects may include teaching, research or choreography leading to positive gains by the community members, the faculty and the performers, as well as benefits for the field of dance.

Leavy (2017) promotes the idea that community engagement provides a theoretical foundation for holistic frameworks and practices when approaching research and storytelling, serving and authentically engaging with a community. Furthermore, she argues for the significance of developing partnerships with stakeholders outside the academic realm that contribute to the progression of research addressing specified issues within the community. Community engagement promotes collaboration while sharing the dynamics of power and a variety of modalities of knowledge that benefit everyone. This outlook on

research tends to be centred on real-life issues and focused on problem-solving, which presents an opportunity for shared responsibility when finding solutions that create change within the development of communities that will be heavily impacted (Leavy, 2017).

Community engagement requires that everyone works from the ground up, because problem-solving is not a bandage to cover up deeply rooted issues within the community. Getting to the root of ground up work through community engagement is about giving access to tools that can be tangible, educational and transformative, and can create societal change (da Cruz, 2018). This work is about creating a safe space to discuss issues, ask the necessary questions, and facilitate a timeframe to process solutions, while also implementing what has been discovered through practice. This holistic outlook, where people are seen and heard, can also be healing for all communities involved. Community engagement reminds us of the power of partnership within the community.

The specific goals of the present research project were (a) to assess the level of community engagement present in the seven Studio Seminar projects, (b) to determine whether or not the criteria of “evocation and illumination” were fulfilled in the Studio Seminar projects, and (c) to determine the knowledge gained by the participating students who conducted and reflected upon the Studio Seminar projects.

Method

The projects analysed in this paper were created as part of the Studio Seminar, a dance education doctoral course taught at Teachers College, Columbia University. Students in this course were expected to complete an embodied, research-related studio project with a group of participants (youth or adults) during the semester in which they are enrolled in the Studio Seminar. During the semester, the students gained knowledge of ABR, embodiment, community engagement and critical race theory. They were guided in developing their projects by discussing course assigned readings and completing a project proposal form, as well as by communicating their goals for the project with the course instructor. The students completed the project, gave an oral presentation and submitted a formal research paper.

ABR was utilised as a method for exploring and understanding a variety of community experiences. Seven projects from the Studio Seminar course were assessed for the components of ABR stated by Leavy (2017): evocation and illumination. Community engagement of the projects was assessed by determining the levels of co-creation, co-implementation, co-assessment and

co-dissemination of the projects with the community partners.

The students answered the Community Engagement Questionnaire, which revealed the level of co-creation, co-implementation, co-assessment and co-dissemination of their projects. Their submitted final research papers were deductively coded, while content analysis was conducted to contribute further information about community engagement and reveal evidence of evocation and illumination of their arts-based projects. This section of the paper is structured as follows: (a) participants, (b) instruments, (c) the research design of the project, (d) procedures, data collection and analysis methods, (e) summary, and (f) ethics statement.

Participants

The participants were seven current and former postgraduate students from Cohort 1 of the Studio Seminar course taught in 2021 and Cohort 3 of the Studio Seminar course taught in 2023. Four of the students are co-authors of the present paper and members of Cohort 3, while three students are members of Cohort 1. All seven students are pursuing (6) or have recently completed (1) the EdD in Dance Education at Columbia University. The participants range in age from 42 to 63 years, with a mean age of 50.3 years. They have an average teaching experience of 29.6 years, ranging from 19 to 42 years, in a variety of settings including community programmes, public schools and college/university settings.

Instruments

Instrument 1. Community Engagement Assessment Rubric

The Community Engagement Assessment Rubric (Overby, 2016), as displayed in Table 1, provided specific criteria and explanations of low-level community engagement (score of 1), mid-level community engagement (score of 2) and high-level community engagement (score of 3). This assessment was used to determine the level of community engagement present in the seven Studio Seminar projects, in terms of co-creation, co-implementation, co-assessment and co-dissemination, in conjunction with reviewing the answers to the first four questions of the Community Engagement Questionnaire (co-creation, co-implementation, co-assessment and co-dissemination). The first author suggests that future dance scholars who utilise this instrument will promote a clearer understanding of how one can develop projects that are scholarly and engaged.

Descriptions of Community Engagement Assessment Criteria

Co-creation of the project

A co-created project involves communication between the community and the project director to determine mutually beneficial goals. The goals of the project director may differ from those of the community partner. For example, the community partner may be interested in gaining skills in a particular dance form, while the project director may be interested in providing accessibility to a variety of dance forms. The goals for each partner should be clearly stated and acknowledged, and the assets of both partners must be clearly articulated from the beginning of the relationship. The project should emerge in the context of mutual interest, needs and abilities, and the partners are actively involved in all aspects of the collaboration, from identifying participants, to the design, implementation, dissemination and continuation of the project (see Table 1).

Co-implementation of the project

During the implementation of the project, ongoing communication is very important in order to ensure that the goals and objectives of each partner are being achieved. The partners have a clear understanding of the project's objectives, timetable and mode of communication, and have determined an equitable allocation of time and resources. Additionally, the partners may have a formal agreement about leadership and work roles. Issues of trust, information and responsibility should be balanced (see Table 1).

Co-assessment of the project

Assessment allows both partners to determine the status of goal acquisition. A formalised formative and summative assessment process exists and guides decisions about current and future project development. Formative assessment occurs during the project, while summative assessments are utilised to determine the final outcomes of the project (see Table 1).

Co-dissemination of the project

The project is not complete until plans for sharing the results have been determined. The partners formally and informally consider ways to improve the project and initiate changes that will strengthen the levels of reciprocity and mutual reward, and actively acknowledge and support the value of the partnership. Dissemination that shares the achieved goals of the university partner may include academic journal publications and conference presentations, while appropriate dissemination for the community partner may include lesson plans, podcasts or presentations for other community partners (see Table 1).

Table 1*Community Engagement Assessment Rubric – From Outreach to Engagement (CEA Rubric)*

	1 <i>Low-level community engagement</i>	2 <i>Mid-level community engagement</i>	3 <i>High-level community engagement</i>
IDENTIFYING SHARED INTERESTS, POTENTIAL PARTNERS AND POSSIBLE PROJECTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project is designed primarily by one partner, with little input from the other partner(s). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project emerges in the context of knowledge of all of the partners' interests, needs and abilities. Partner involvement may be intermittent, unequal, incomplete or unsatisfactory. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project emerges in the context of mutual interest, needs and abilities. The partners are actively involved in all aspects of the collaboration, from identifying participants, to the design, implementation, dissemination and continuation of the project.
ESTABLISHING A PLAN THAT FULFILS COMMUNITY AND UNIVERSITY INTERESTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One partner addresses the project's objectives, timetable and mode of communication, but there is little dialogue with the other partner about leadership and work roles, or about equitable allocation of time or other resources. Trust and shared responsibility are lacking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partners consider the project's objectives, timetable and mode of communication, but may not have a formal agreement about leadership and work roles, or about equitable allocation of time and other resources. Issues of trust, information flows and responsibility are unclear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partners have a clear understanding of the project's objectives, timetable and mode of communication. The partners have determined an equitable allocation of time and resources. The partners may have a formal agreement about leadership and work roles. Issues of trust, information and responsibility are balanced.
FOSTERING RECIPROCALITY AND MUTUAL RECOGNITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partners have little discussion about how the project's objectives, implementation process and outcomes fulfil the wishes of either partner. Efforts to ensure reciprocity, mutual recognition and reward are non-existent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partners intermittently discuss whether the project's objectives, implementation process and outcomes are meeting the needs of each partner. Efforts to ensure reciprocity, mutual recognition and reward are not clearly articulated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partners have ongoing in-depth discussions to consider whether the project's objectives, process and outcomes are meeting the needs of each partner. Efforts to ensure reciprocity, mutual recognition and reward are ongoing.
ASSESSMENT GUIDES DECISION MAKING ABOUT PROJECTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No assessment process is in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The formative and summative assessment process is informal and inconsistent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A formalised formative and summative assessment process exists and guides decisions about current and future project development.
LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT AND DISSEMINATION OF OUTCOMES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partners have no plan to deepen or expand the project, except on a one-time or short-term level. No dissemination plans exist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partners informally discuss the next steps for continued engagement, but one or both partners may not be fully committed to continuing the partnership. The dissemination process is informal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partners formally and informally consider ways to improve the project and initiate changes that will strengthen the levels of reciprocity and mutual reward, and actively acknowledge and support the value of the partnership. The partners formally disseminate project outcomes.

Note. Adapted with permission from Appendix A.12 Community Engagement Rubric – From Outreach to Engagement (Overby, 2016).

Instrument 2: Final Studio Seminar Paper

The final Studio Seminar papers provided information that revealed the levels of community engagement included in the various projects. They also included information about the occurrence of “evocation and illumination” in the Studio Seminar projects. The final Studio Seminar papers were organised to include the following components:

1. Introduction (heading one)

- What was your project about?
 - a. Include one or more of the approaches discussed in class (arts-based research, embodied cognition, community engagement, critical arts-based research, counter-storytelling).
- Why did you choose this approach?
- What was the purpose of your project? Or what question(s) are you answering?

2. Methodology (heading two)

- Who were your participants?
- Where did the project take place?
- What exactly did you do?

3. Findings/Results (include tables and/or graphs) (heading three)

- What are the results of your project?
- What did you create, make or discover?

4. Discussion (heading four)

- Why was this project important?
- How does it relate to past projects/research?
- What are your next steps?
- How will you disseminate your work (publication, presentation, sharing with participants)?

Instrument 3: Community Engagement Questionnaire

Six community engagement questions were distributed online to the seven participants. The answers to the six questions allowed us to determine the level of community engagement (co-creation, co-implementation, co-assessment and co-dissemination) structured into their Studio Seminar projects

(questions 1–4) and the impact of conducting these projects on their knowledge development and future plans (questions 5–6).

Community Engagement Questionnaire

1. Were you able to co-create your project with your community partner? Please explain.
2. Were you able to co-implement your project with your community partner? Please explain.
3. Were you able to co-assess your project with your community partner? Please explain
4. Were you able to co-disseminate your project with your community partner? Please explain.
5. What did you learn by conducting this project?
6. How will you conduct community engagement projects in the future?

Research Design

A deductive research design was applied to the present study, allowing the collection of data that were confirmatory in nature. Deductive coding was used to search for the specific community engagement criteria and the ABR content of evocation and illumination. “Deductive coding is recommended when your conceptual framework, categories, themes or concepts are most likely to appear in the data you collect” (Saldana, 2021, p. 40).

The specific goals of the research project were (a) to assess the level of community engagement present in seven Studio Seminar projects, (b) to determine whether or not the criteria of “evocation and illumination” were fulfilled in the Studio Seminar projects, and (c) to determine the knowledge gained by the participating students, who conducted and reflected upon the Studio Seminar projects. The participants, students from the Studio Seminar class, were a convenience sample. This was a non-randomised study, which impacts the generalisability of the data. The participants included seven current and former postgraduate students from the Cohort 1 course taught in 2021 and the Cohort 3 course taught in 2023.

Procedures and Data Collection Methods

The participants completed their Studio Seminar projects during a 15-week semester. They were each required to work with existing community partners in an arts-based (embodied expression) community engagement project. The students created, implemented and assessed the projects, and formally

presented the results as a final presentation and as a final research paper. Seven students who had completed the Studio Seminar course participated in this exploratory research project to determine the level of community engagement of their completed projects and the existence of the ABR criteria of illumination and evocation as they reflected on their practices. The seven projects described in the present paper were quite diverse, including the topics of a) informal dance learning, b) injury and rehabilitation of a dancer, c) dance and healing, d) artists with disabilities, e) youth participatory action research, f) dance and older adults, and g) goal making of future dance educators. In determining the level of community engagement, the criteria of the CEA Rubric (see Table 1) in terms of co-creation, co-implementation, co-assessment and co-dissemination were first applied to the open-ended answers of the Community Engagement Questionnaire (1–4), after which the final research paper submitted for the Studio Seminar class was read and then coded using deductive coding. Each project received a number that represented the level of community engagement: 1 = low-level community engagement, 2 = mid-level community engagement and 3 = high-level community engagement (see Appendix A for the answers to questions 1–4 of the Community Engagement Questionnaire). The ABR criteria of evocation and illumination were determined through deductive coding of the final Studio Seminar research paper. Finally, by assessing the answers to questions 5 and 6 of the Community Engagement Questionnaire, the impact of conducting these projects on the student's knowledge development and plans for the future was determined.

Summary of Data Collection Methods

- Quantitative assessments were conducted by assigning numerical values to the categories included in the CEA Rubric (co-creation, co-implementation, co-assessment and co-dissemination). The numbers were based on a deductive analysis of the answers to the questions in the Community Engagement Questionnaire (questions 1–4) and in the final Studio Seminar papers. 1 = low-level, 2 = mid-level and 3 = high-level.
- The assessment of the criteria of evocation and illumination for arts-based research was undertaken via a deductive coding and content analysis of the final Studio Seminar research papers.
- The impact of conducting these projects on the postgraduate student's knowledge development and plans for the future was determined by assessing the answers to questions 5–6 of the Community Engagement Questionnaire.

Results

The results will be presented by first sharing the level of co-creation, co-implementation, co-assessment and co-dissemination of the Studio Seminar projects, as revealed in the answers to questions 1–4 of the Community Engagement Questionnaire, and the information gleaned from the final Studio Seminar papers (Goal 1). Evidence of the ABR criteria of illumination and evocation will then be shared, as determined by the deductive coding and content analysis of the data retrieved from the final Studio Seminar papers (Goal 2). Finally, the answers to questions 5 and 6 of the Community Engagement Questionnaire provide insight into the knowledge gained and future applications of the student's experiences (Goal 3).

Goal 1 - to assess the level of community engagement present in the seven Studio Seminar projects

Community Engagement Co-creation

The degree of co-creation varied across the projects. For example, in Project 1, the researcher and her one participant were able to co-create the project focusing on injury rehabilitation, indicating a high level of engagement, whereas the researchers in Projects 4, 6 and 7 worked with large groups and conceived of their projects before bringing them to the participant communities. However, each of the research projects emerged in the context of knowledge of all of the partners' interests, needs and abilities (mid-level community engagement).

Project 3:

"Through the pre-assessment interviews, I was able to hear their stories and the ideas that they have about healing, and the frustrations they have had in trusting people enough to allow an authentic community to emerge."

Project 5:

"I focused on issues pertinent to the group's needs and concerns, taken from our conversations."

Project 7:

"[Students] worked with the principal investigator to identify the issue to be researched, collect, analyze data, and report results."

Community Engagement Co-Implementation

Creative processes were instrumental in all of the researchers' methods of co-implementation. The research participants influenced (sometimes changed) and carried out the project with their own creative acts, such as dance-making or performing. Since dance as an embodied form of expression was a requirement for each of the projects, each research project fully embraced dance as a methodology.

Project 2:

"The dancers were able to create the movement themselves at whatever location indoors or outdoors that they chose and video tape themselves, giving them full creative control over their movement videos."

Project 4:

"Students brought ideas to class."

"Student responses informed the direction of the class."

Community Engagement Co-Assessment

Co-assessment occurred in the majority of the projects. The participants were involved in helping set the direction of future meetings and activities.

Project 1:

"The researcher and co-researcher had regular 'check-ins' on the project. They would move one day and then a few days later have a discussion about it. They culminated the project with a viewing of the draft of the video package and a wrap up discussion that was then incorporated into the final short film project."

Project 2:

All participants reviewed both the narrative that was created based on their interviews as well as the edited movement videos. Their feedback and requests for changes were incorporated into the final dance video.

Project 4:

"For instance, we had dance parties. In these imitations of the home learning environment, the students shared their dances with one another. Then, we engaged in reflective discussion. We considered how learning dances at home compares and contrasts with our usual in-school dance educational experience."

Community Engagement Co-Dissemination

The dissemination process was largely limited due to permission constraints: the semester-long timeframe of the course limited the number of permissions that could reasonably be obtained. As a result, the projects involving large groups were not shared formally outside of the class contexts. However, the research participants may have shared the results informally through conversations in their community. In addition, the projects informed the students' thinking and will impact their subsequent work.

The students who completed their EdD degree were able to build on their Studio Seminar projects (5 and 6) in subsequent projects. The students in Cohort 3, who had finished the projects more recently than the Cohort 1 students, had not had time to build on their work and were therefore more limited in the dissemination of the projects.

Project 2:

"This part was not successful for me in the slightest. All participants and myself (and our fellow Studio Seminar classmates, I should note) wanted to share the final dance video at a number of conferences and with online communities, but we are not permitted to do so. So, there is no dissemination unfortunately."

Project 5:

"Yes. The _____ Alliance helped to spread the word about the workshop. They arranged a meeting space and ensured all participants were present."

Project 6:

"Based on the successful undertaking of my pilot and dissertation project, further discussions on community projects at _____ are underway and planned for the fall or winter of 2024/2025."

Table 2
Community Engagement Assessment

	Project Number and Name						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Dance and Injury Rehabilitation	Artists with Disabilities	Dance and Healing	Dance Learning at Home	Dancing at the Feet of Our Elders	Dialogue, Community Involvement	Youth Participatory Action Research
Cohort	3	3	3	3	1	1	1
Co-creation	3	1	2	2	2	2	3
Co-implementation	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Co-assessment	3	3	3	3	2	3	3
Co-dissemination	1	1	1	1	3	3	3

Note. The Community Engagement Rubric Analysis was based on evidence supplied in the Community Engagement Questionnaire and the final Studio Seminar research papers.

1 – low-level community engagement, 2 – mid-level community engagement, 3 – high-level community engagement

Cohort 3 = 2023 Studio Seminar students

Cohort 1 = 2021 Studio Seminar students

Goal 2 - to determine whether or not the criteria of “evocation and illumination” were fulfilled in the Studio Seminar projects

Since the students were required to include an embodied component in their projects, dance was an integral part of all aspects of the projects. The projects were evocative and illuminating, as demonstrated by the following quotes from their final Studio Seminar papers.

Project 2:

“An example of a reaction from the parent of one of the participants in the dance video we created (pseudonym used). ‘Emma and I concur 100%. She kept looking at me as we were watching to see if tears were flowing from my eyes, as they were from hers. (Yes, they were.) Tears are welling up again now as I’m sitting here just thinking about this. Everyone’s words here need to be seen and heard.’”

Project 7:

“As dance artists, social-emotional learners, group members and researchers, the participants experienced a deeply layered reflection-in-action

process of social-emotional learning through dancemaking.”

Project 3:

“Quite often throughout the sessions, the dancers would stop to ask questions because they wanted to reflect on the awareness that they were having about their bodies, dance/movement, and how this aligns with their mental health and healing.”

Project 1:

“She expressed that movement encouraged a deep understanding of her injury and rehabilitation journey and an appreciation of her body, what it is able to do, and how it is able to do it. The co-researcher also stated that the embodied experiences may help her to communicate about future pain or injuries with a different understanding of her mind, and the needs of both.”

Project 5:

“Participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to move and address their overall well-being.”

Goal 3 - to determine the knowledge gained by the participating students who conducted and reflected upon the Studio Seminar projects

The Community Engagement Questionnaire – question 5 (What did you learn by conducting this project?) and question 6 (How will you conduct community engagement projects in the future?) –allowed the students to elaborate on what they had learned and how they would use the experiences in the class in the future. The experiences of the students in the Studio Seminar class provide an insight into their growth and development as arts-based, community-engaged dance scholars, as well as determining the direction of their dissertations.

Project 3:

“My next steps toward the completion of my doctoral work and considering how to build from here is to continue the conversations with the women in the communities I desire to work with to gain a deeper understanding and continue to learn as we heal. I believe this will help shape my research and the work I want to do by fostering supportive and safe relationships through communities while developing methodological practices that disrupt and challenge negative core values and belief systems.”

Project 1:

"I recently had the opportunity to put my project into practice. During a presentation of my pilot study data surrounding dance-related injury rehabilitation experiences at a recent conference, I opened with a modified version of this experience. By allowing our bodies to move through minor discomforts in order to find comfort, we were able to ease into the studio space and into the conference session. This opened the dialogue about my research and the participants' own experiences, allowing for sharing and conversations that will hopefully reshape the future of dance-related injury rehabilitation practices. As I consider my next steps with community-engaged research and learning, I hope to collaborate with my university's Injury Evaluation and Care Clinic to implement more somatic and dance-focused practices into injury rehabilitation."

Project 4:

"Doctoral studies require a lot of reading, thinking and theorizing. The Studio Seminar project gave me an opportunity to ground my thinking in practice. Sharing my ideas with students challenged me to clarify my questions. Through the research project, I was able to ask my students what they thought about my research topic. The students showed me their experiences of dance learning and offered opinions about what is appropriate both in and out of school settings. The project illuminated the chasm that exists between dance learning in school and dance learning outside of school. I have not yet decided what methods I will use in my dissertation research, but I am sure that I want to hear from and dance with students."

Project 3:

"Collaborating with artists who have disabilities was not only valuable in terms of community engagement, but, more importantly, necessary and crucial to enabling their lived experiences to come through authentically and through their own expression. This was made possible by using an arts-based approach that was collaborative and engaged in doing research with rather than doing research about. This is especially important when doing research involving people or populations who have been marginalized and are not equitably represented in research. When sharing the culminating dance project and findings with fellow doctoral students it evoked visceral reactions about the experiences that were shared by artists with disabilities in dance, and it made me realize the importance of taking on a role of facilitator as part of being a researcher to let people's experiences and

perspectives come through, rather than being a filter through which one reports about others' experiences and perspectives. This became instructive for me in developing a collaborative and participatory methodology for my dissertation research."

Since the projects were conducted as part of a class project and not for publication, the specific details of the participants and the individual studies is not included in the present article. However, Table 3 below provides insight into the benefits gained by the participants.

Table 3

Benefits for the Studio Seminar course project participants

Project	Target Group	Issues Explored	Size of Group	Benefits for the Target Group
1. Dance and Injury Rehabilitation	Collegiate dancers who had experienced injuries.	The injury recovery experience of a collegiate dance major.	One female collegiate dance major as co-researcher.	The benefits of this project included the opportunity for the dancer to articulate her injury rehabilitation experience in her own words and from her own personal perspective, as well as the chance to move/dance through rehabilitative exercises and protocols. This dual approach supported the development of greater confidence in movement patterns that may have previously been affected or compromised by the sustained injury.
2. Artists with Disabilities	Performing artists (dancers primarily, but some are also actors and singers) with various disabilities (deafness, vision impairment, Down syndrome, physical disabilities such as paralysis, muscular dystrophy, and other disabilities).	The perspectives of artists with disabilities on meaningful experiences, barriers, and needed changes in the performing arts. Research goal: To understand the lived experiences and perspectives of artists who are deaf or have disabilities in the performing arts, and to deconstruct and analyse what made their experiences meaningful and integrated or distancing and not inclusive, in order to illuminate needed changes in the field.	Seven performing artists with disabilities.	The artists strongly expressed (to the researcher) that the resulting dance and spoken/signed word video articulated their points of view and recurring themes of exclusion and ableism in the dance/performing arts fields, and as such would be a strong tool for advocacy. They found it cathartic. Affirmation was gained from being heard/seen/witnessed.

Project	Target Group	Issues Explored	Size of Group	Benefits for the Target Group
3. Dance and Healing	Women of colour who have experienced trauma.	Integration of dance, mental health and inner healing tools within the choreographic process to aid in the healing of women of colour who have experienced trauma.	Two African American female dancers.	The dancers benefited from the healing tools and were able to begin thinking about how these experiences within a community of support could be implemented and cultivated in their daily practices.
4. Dance Learning at Home	The project participants and co-researchers were Grade 5 students at a bilingual, independent school in Brooklyn. The bilingual education attracts international families to the school. Many students have at least one parent from a country in Western Europe. In addition, some have parents from South America, Asia and Africa.	My research question was: How is the way that students learn dance in their home communities different or similar to the way that they learn dance at school? The following related questions supported the inquiry: If students engage in community dance practices at home, what practices do they learn? What changes in a dance practice when it is brought into school? Is there anything else that we want to note about our experiences in this research project?	Two classes of Grade 5 students. Each class had approximately 15 students who met weekly for one 45-minute dance class on Fridays.	The students said that they had fun. They had an opportunity to reflect on learning at home versus learning at school. In their own words, they got to learn “new material” and “about other cultures”.
5. Dancing at the Feet of Our Elders	Black public school teachers.	This project addressed the participants’ well-being, sense of self and inspiration for teaching.	Five participants.	Three benefits were identified by the participants as being most effective. The first was the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues. They commented that teaching can be such an isolating space and the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues on this project was welcomed. Next, the participants reflected on their career choice. Writing letters to their mentors allows them to experience reflexivity on a visceral level (Leavy, 2017). The participants expressed a desire to continue this work and make this workshop an ongoing process.
6. Dialogue and Community Involvement	Former students who had completed a BFA in Dance.	Research question: Can dialogic spaces help assess students’ <i>physical, emotional</i> and <i>cognitive</i> aspects of their wellbeing?	Two students: one male and one female.	The dialogic space as an inner reflection allowed the students to organise their often only “felt” responses to a larger continuum and articulate them.

Project	Target Group	Issues Explored	Size of Group	Benefits for the Target Group
7. Youth Participatory Action Research	Middle school students.	How does collaborative dancemaking help students develop social-emotional decision-making skills? The purpose of the study was to illuminate the intersections of decision-making and collaborative dancemaking, and to develop decision-making skills and embodied-researcher skills.	Eighteen middle school students	The results showed noticeably increased references to the youths <i>solving problems by striving for equality</i> . The most identified problems related to <i>collaboration</i> , especially in <i>synthesising ideas</i> . There were higher levels of self-awareness reported in the participants' identification of problems. The results showed problem-solving during collaborative choreography required almost equal self-awareness and social awareness. <i>Collaboration</i> was the most referenced problem and the most referenced way to solve problems.

Discussion

The specific goals of the present research project were (a) to assess the level of community engagement present in seven Studio Seminar projects, (b) to determine whether or not the criteria of “evocation and illumination” were fulfilled in the Studio Seminar projects, and (c) to determine the knowledge gained by the participating students who conducted and reflected upon the Studio Seminar projects.

The results of the project support previous research and writings that indicate the importance of community engagement experiences for postgraduate students (Matthews et al., 2015; O'Connor et al., 2011; O'Meara et al., 2006). As educators and scholars, the participating students will be prepared to conduct projects that are mutually beneficial for the community and for the scholar. Each of the projects required the students to be organised and flexible, as they worked with a variety of schedules and individuals. However, they were able to co-create, co-implement and co-assess their projects. Dissemination was more limited due to the 15-week timeline of the semester for Cohort 3. However, the students from Cohort 1 were able to disseminate their work more broadly.

Although the projects differed in goals and objectives, the inclusion of improvised and structured dance movement allowed each project to embrace dance as a method of arts-based learning. The comments from the participants clearly described the impact of the embodied arts-based methods on their knowledge. This aligns with the arts-based criteria of evocation and

illumination, as described by Barone and Eisner (2012). The results also align with previously published work by indicating the meaning derived from participating in dance-based methods (Moffett, 2025; Overby, 2022; Wilson & Moffett, 2017).

The community-engaged projects contributed to the growth of the students as engaged scholars. The responses to questions 5 and 6 from the Community Engagement Questionnaire, in which the students provided examples of their knowledge gained and plans for the future, make it clear that this experience will prepare them for future projects in academia and in the community. As future university/community researchers and practitioners, they will have the skills and knowledge to conduct projects that are rigorously designed and assessed in alignment with the requirements of higher education evaluations (Moffett, 2025; Overby, 2022; Wilson & Moffett, 2017). Although this was an exploratory project, the information gathered supports the contention that community engagement can be assessed, and that by applying the tenets of Community Engagement Assessment, the individuals gain knowledge that they can apply to current and future projects.

In summary, the postgraduate dance education students gained valuable experience by conducting the arts-based community engagement projects, and plan to continue conducting this work in the future. The projects have become an impetus for future projects and the culminating dissertation.

Conclusions

When artists combine their artistic creations with high-level community engagement to foster deep reflections on issues surrounding the world, their community and within themselves, everyone benefits.

We live in a world where the creative arts are viewed as a nice advocacy or recreational pursuit; rarely do we consider the power of the arts to create the change that is needed in the world. The results of the present exploratory study indicate that by providing postgraduate dance education students with experiences in arts-based research and community engagement, they receive a deep understanding of how to work collaboratively with community partners in a reciprocal and embodied manner.

Figure 1*Embodied Expressions*

Note. Photo credit: Francine E. Ott, photograph by Hayim Heron. Reproduced with permission.

“When I move with my community partner to find solutions to problems, I am an engaged dance scholar” (Authors) – as indicated in the photo above, the ability to engage with communities in a collaborative and embodied manner promotes beneficial effects for the community partner and for the facilitator.

The conclusion will be structured to include (a) limitations, (b) ways we can build on this exploratory study with future teaching, research and policy considerations, and (c) a roadmap for becoming an engaged dance scholar.

Limitations

The limitations of the present study are primarily connected to the fact that the data were based on the work conducted in one semester and one course of a postgraduate programme. This fact impacted the sample, which was small, non-randomised and limited to 15 weeks. Another limitation was the use of the community engagement rubric. Although this rubric has been used by hundreds of students and faculty as a guide for the development and evaluation of various community engagement projects, the present study was the first time it had been used as a research tool. Finally, because the projects were conducted within a university course, dissemination of the results was limited.

Future Teaching, Research and Policy Implications*Teaching*

The criteria for high-level community engaged teaching and learning should be shared with anyone who desires to do this type of work. The course

work should include adequate time for reflection and critical analysis of the experiences, which may be part of a course, a creative project or a research study. Resources exist that can help faculty who are adding a community engagement experience for their students. For example, in the book, *Public Scholarship in Dance* (Overby, 2016), there are guidelines for incorporating community engagement in teaching. In addition, specific examples may be found in the work of Duffy (2019), Mabingo (2018) and Giguere (2019). As Risner (2010) suggests, preparing dance students beyond performance should be an imperative for the future employability of dance majors.

Research

Future research in this area should include a larger number of participants. Interviews and focus groups can reveal more information, while quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods should be utilised. For instance, the community partners and dance facilitators could be interviewed to determine the impact of the community-engaged work in achieving specific goals, while surveys could indicate the changes that occur through participation. Longitudinal studies could be conducted to determine the impact of the experience after six months, a year and several years.

Policy

As future higher education faculty members, training in community engagement through an embodied arts-based research approach promotes the development of the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the multidisciplinary landscape of colleges and universities. Dance educators/researchers will need to advocate with departmental, college and university level committees regarding the rigor of this work. The use of specific criteria and evidence will demonstrate the ways in which the faculty member, students and the community gain in a mutually beneficial manner. This information can be shared with faculty senates and promotion and tenure committees at the departmental, college and university levels.

The first author of the present paper was successful in adding language to her university faculty handbook that now recognises community engagement as a form of scholarship that should be acknowledged and rewarded. She also designed an annual university-wide award in community engagement for faculty and postgraduate students who conduct high-level community engagement. Finally, an annual workshop series has been created to promote knowledge of community engagement for all faculty and postgraduate students.

As a final recommendation that has evolved from this project, we have created a roadmap for becoming an engaged scholar for dance education students and faculty members.

Roadmap for Becoming an Engaged Dance Scholar

Postgraduate dance education students need guidance in ways to conduct projects that are embodied, artistic and connected. As indicated in the CE Rubric, projects can be conceived in a low level/outreach model or developed with a focus on a particular problem, or as a high-level idea that benefits the community and the future faculty members' scholarship. The following suggestions are presented as a roadmap of considerations for the scholarly implementation of arts-based, community-engaged projects.

First, read and become knowledgeable about community engagement and arts-based research. This will provide you with ideas for future projects based on successfully completed projects. Next, in developing scholarly projects, include the tenets of high-level community engagement in co-creating, co-implementing, co-assessing and co-disseminating community engagement projects. As you are creating the project, consider the forms of assessment to be included, e.g., interviews or videos for qualitative data, surveys that will yield quantitative data, or include a mixture of methods to enable you to present a broad view of the many dimensions of your project. As you become more involved in this form of scholarship, connect with organisations that have a community engagement and/or arts-based research focus, e.g., The Engaged Scholarship Consortium or the Arts-Based Educational Research Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association. Finally, as you become faculty members, share your knowledge of engaged scholarship with faculty senates, and promotion and tenure committees at the departmental, college and university levels.

By completing this exploratory research project and developing this paper, with a great deal of assistance from internal and external editors and reviewers, the instructor of the Studio Seminar, and lead author of this paper, gained knowledge about the best strategies for assisting students in completing arts-based, community-engaged projects. The lessons learned, as outlined in the present article, can assist higher education dance educators in conducting high-level community engagement as they become impactful engaged scholars.

Ethics Statement

This study was approved by the University of Delaware, USA.

Disclosure Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Appendix A

Data from the questionnaire that formed the basis of the numerical value included in the Community Engagement Table

Low-level Community Engagement = 1 Mid-Level Community Engagement = 2 High-Level Community Engagement = 3

	Cohort	Co-creation	Co-implementation	Co-assessment	Co-dissemination
Project 1: Dance and Injury Rehabilitation	3	3	3	3	1
		“She was very interested in what my research subject was and how we, collectively could expand how pre-professional dancers navigate the dance related injury practice.”	“The researcher and co-researcher (participant) decided to create a short film to depict this process.”	“The researcher and co-researcher had regular ‘check-ins’ on the project. They would move one day and then a few days later have a discussion about it. They culminated the project with a viewing of the draft of the video package and a wrap up discussion that was then incorporated into the final short film project.”	“This work has not been widely disseminated yet (beyond one conference), but I do see myself sharing more of this content on social media, where pre-professional dancers are highly engaged on a regular basis.”
Project 2: Artists with Disabilities	3	1	3	3	1
		“Some also chose the option of creating a general movement response to the narrative as a whole, rather than to specific sections, giving the participants freedom to kinaesthetically respond as fully as they could.”	“The dancers were able to create the movement themselves at whatever location indoors or outdoors that they chose and video tape themselves, giving them full creative control over their movement videos.”	“All participants were able to review the edited movement video and give feedback, which was incorporated into the final dance video. I felt that my role as a researcher was to let their stories shine and let the commonalities and shared themes surface through data analysis of the interviews and for me to ‘stay out of the way’, so to speak.”	“This part was not successful for me in the slightest. All participants and myself (and our fellow Studio Seminar classmates, I should note) wanted to share the final dance video at a number of conferences and with online communities, but we are not permitted to do so. So, there is no dissemination unfortunately.”

	Cohort	Co-creation	Co-implementation	Co-assessment	Co-dissemination
Project 3: Dance and Healing	3	2 “Through the pre-assessment interviews, I was able to hear their stories and the ideas that they have about healing, and the frustrations they have had in trusting people enough to allow an authentic community to emerge.”	3 “The dancers benefited from the healing tools and were able to begin thinking about how these experiences within a community of support could be implemented and cultivated in other dance spaces and daily practices.”	3 “The dancers participated in four- two-hour choreographic sessions, a pre-assessment interview, and a final interview via Zoom, all were video recorded. The interviews were transcribed, and the video-recorded sessions were observed to generate themes within the research process, along with the dancers’ reflective conversations, voice notes, and text messages.”	1
Project 4: Dance Learning at Home	3	2 Created based on knowledge of the community	3 “Students brought ideas to class.” “Student responses informed the direction of the class.”	3 “During each class, I made time for student discussion. During discussions, I took notes on the board, for transparency, and then copied the notes to my files for documentation.” “Throughout the process, I checked in with students.”	1 Formally shared the project as an in-class presentation “The students, my co-researchers agreed that the best way to share our outcomes was through personal conversations with people, including their family members, friends and bus driver.”
Project 5: Dancing at the Feet of Our Elders	1	2 “I focused on issues pertinent to the group’s needs and concerns, taken from our conversations.”	3 “The teachers in this group were eager to explore strategies to help them recognize and honour those who had impacted their choice to teach.”	2 “I will give time for reflection during the workshop. Our reflection happened after the seminar. It would have been helpful for participants to hear others’ reflections in real-time.”	3 “Yes. The Black Teachers Alliance helped to spread the word about the workshop. They arranged a meeting space and ensured all participants were present.”

	Cohort	Co-creation	Co-implementation	Co-assessment	Co-dissemination
Project 6: Dialogue, Community Involvement	1	2	3	3	3
		“My project involved two former dance students reflecting in diverse embodied ways on their dance education and how it affected their well-being and future goal-making.”	Dancers embodied their understanding	“I assessed my project with the participants and audience members who watched the final performance. Its value and importance for future projects were expressed.”	“Based on the successful undertaking of my pilot and dissertation project, further discussions on community projects at Lake Studios, Berlin, are underway and planned for the fall or winter of 2024/2025.”
Project 7: Youth Participatory Action Research	1	3	3	3	3
		“[Students] worked with the principal investigator to identify the issue to be researched, collect, analyse data, and report results.”	“The curriculum includes collaborative brainstorming ... poetry...written reflections, generating new movement phrases.”	“Data collection methods are self-reports, questionnaires, five focus groups, and content analysis. Data were analysed and coded phenomenologically by participants and the principal investigator.”	“The end report is a lecture-demonstration dance performance for community audiences, narrated PowerPoint, and written paper.”

Biographical note

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Teachers' and Artists' Collaborative Teaching and Learning

SONJA RUTAR^{*1}, TINA ŠTEMBERGER² AND BOGDANA BOROTA²

∞ The new dimension of a stimulating, open and innovative learning environment in education is recognised in the integrative collaboration of all those involved in the educational process. Such an environment provides children with a variety of contextual experiences to enter the symbolic world of culture and art. Collaboration between artists and teachers has been identified as an essential approach to improving the quality of planned arts practice in kindergartens and schools. In order to improve collaborative teaching between teachers and artists in Slovenian pre-schools and primary schools, a design-based research methodology was used. The paper presents a snapshot of the pre-intervention situation and the impact of interventions that involved teachers in collaborative work with artists and children's participation in the educational process. The study involved 116 preschool teachers and 148 primary school teachers. The results showed the importance of involving artists in the educational process. By involving artists in the pedagogical process, teachers can gain information about how children can participate experientially and expressively in artistic experiences, which 1) relieves the burden of predetermined and overstructured curricular practices, 2) enables pupils to participate experientially and expressively in artistic experiences, 3) provides teachers with insight into children's experiential and expressive capacities/competences, and 4) provides artists with insight into the possibilities of integrating authentic artistic experiences into education.

Keywords: arts education, children's participation, emergent curriculum, learning environment, professional development

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Sodelovanje učiteljev in umetnikov pri poučevanju in učenju

SONJA RUTAR, TINA ŠTEMBERGER IN BOGDANA BOROTA

~ Nova dimenzija spodbudnega, odprtega in inovativnega učnega okolja v izobraževanju se kaže v povezovalnem sodelovanju vseh vključenih v izobraževalni proces. Takšno okolje otrokom nudi raznolike kontekstualne izkušnje vstopanja v simbolni svet kulture in umetnosti. Sodelovanje med umetniki in učitelji je opredeljeno kot bistveni pristop za izboljšanje kakovosti načrtovane umetniške prakse v vrtcih in šolah. Za izboljšanje sodelovanja med učitelji in umetniki v slovenskih vrtcih in osnovnih šolah je bila uporabljena raziskava načrtovanih novosti pri pouku. V prispevku je predstavljeno stanje pred skupnim poučevanjem vzgojiteljev/učiteljev in umetnikov ter po njem. V študijo je bilo vključenih 116 vzgojiteljev in 148 učiteljev. Rezultati kažejo na pozitivno vlogo vključevanja umetnikov v vzgojno-izobraževalni proces. Z vključevanjem umetnikov v vzgojno-izobraževalni proces lahko učitelji pridobijo informacije o tem, kako lahko otroci izkustveno in izrazno sodelujejo v umetniških izkušnjah, kar 1) zmanjša obremenjenost z vnaprej določenimi in preveč strukturiranimi kurikularnimi praksami; 2) omogoča učencem, da izkustveno in izrazno sodelujejo v umetniških izkušnjah; 3) učiteljem omogoča vpogled v izkustvene in izrazne sposobnosti/kompetence otrok; 4) umetnikom omogoča vpogled v možnosti vključevanja avtentičnih umetniških izkušenj v izobraževanje.

Ključne besede: umetniško izobraževanje, sodelovanje otrok, porajajoči kurikulum, učno okolje, strokovni razvoj

Introduction

Arts as a curricular domain and as content is present in the Slovenian education system from preschool to the end of secondary education (Taštanoska, 2019). In the pre-primary period, kindergartens are given the autonomy to determine the number of hours devoted to art or the extent of arts content in their programmes. However, this is subject to the stipulation of a balanced curriculum, which requires that all curricular areas be represented equally in the curriculum as implemented (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, 1999).

Compulsory school curricula (for students aged 6 to 15) and secondary school curricula allocate a certain number of hours to the arts. In the initial first three grades of compulsory basic education, music and art are taught by the class teacher. According to Article 38 of the Basic School Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, 2024), a subject teacher may work with the class teacher in teaching music and art. From grade four, a subject teacher may also teach music and art. In Slovenian kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools, teachers are autonomous in their choice of teaching methods and are therefore able to decide by themselves how the lessons are delivered (Krek & Metljak, 2011).

Starting from the premise that children in kindergartens and schools should be given an opportunity for high-quality artistic experiences – education in and through the arts – the project SKUM – Developing Communicative Abilities Through Cultural Arts Education (2017–2022) was implemented in public kindergartens and schools. The basic objectives of the SKUM project were:

- to determine how kindergartens and schools make it possible for children/adolescents to get in touch with high-quality artistic experiences;
- to develop didactic approaches in artistic and other educational fields as well as new forms of linking educational work with artistic activities, including those in less well-established areas of art, with the aim of raising the level of communicative abilities of children/adolescents (SKUM, n.d.).

The key principles for the implementation of the project activities were: 1) the collaboration of kindergartens and schools with artists, and 2) the participation of children and pupils in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the pedagogical process. We assumed that only the joint work and collaboration of educators and artists in the pedagogical process can give children access

to 1) direct artistic experience of experiencing, 2) knowledge development and 3) self-expression. These are the phases and activities that we see as key in arts education.

In order to develop collaborative teaching between teachers and artists in Slovenian preschools and primary schools, design-based research was used as the main methodology. This paper presents a snapshot of the situation at the beginning of the project and the impact of interventions that involved teachers in collaborative work with artists and children's participation in the educational process.

Rationale for teacher-artist collaboration and children's participation in education

Art in education is a planned activity, but it depends on the knowledge and competences of teachers (Bračun Sova & Kemperl, 2012) as well as on their attitudes (Denac et al., 2011). Planned activities reflect the very mission of education and the education system. The purposefulness of the curriculum is what ensures that all children are provided with the content and incentives that are defined by professional consensus in the curriculum's objectives or content. It is therefore the teacher's task to provide children with experiences and opportunities that some of them may never have in their everyday or home environment.

In cultural-arts education, the emerging curriculum, in particular, has the role of balancing, complementing and co-creating experiences in a pedagogical process to which the child contributes in terms of content and process, through his/her prior experiences, knowledge and initiatives. In this pedagogical process, the artist can enter with intuition, openness and responsiveness to the child's process of experiencing, learning and expression. As previous studies have shown (Podobnik & Borota, 2022), the artist's knowledge of the artistic field and the process of artistic creation is the starting point for planning strategies together with teachers and children.

Only an emergent curriculum can go beyond the rigidity of a pre-planned curriculum (Osberg & Biesta, 2008), while at the same time ensuring children's participation in education (Rutar & Štemberger, 2018). Despite the fact that cognition is a sociocultural interactional process in which knowledge is constructed in an interactional process of knowing (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), the planning, implementation and evaluation of the pedagogical process can be characterised by the teacher remaining constrained by his/her own experiences and perceptions, and by statically determined plans of how to carry out the pedagogical process. Instead, the process can evolve into collaborative

work and mutual exchange of content and practices with colleagues, students, parents, artists and other institutions, thus enabling the creation of a learning community of co-responsible and complementarily participating individuals who co-create the process and knowledge with the children, without preconceived dominant notions of end results and roles (Freire, 1997) in which the process and the outcome are known in advance.

In considering the issue of excessively goal-oriented pedagogical structuring and the actions of individual teachers who remain constrained by preconceived expectations and content, it becomes evident that children in Slovenian kindergartens and schools have limited opportunities to engage with authentic experiences (Rutar et al., 2022). Furthermore, there is a paucity of opportunities for children to engage in cultural and artistic experiences in museums, galleries, theatres and concert halls. The results of research on the learning environment for artistic activities (Podgornik et al., 2022, p. 91) show that the situation varies across educational institutions. Kindergartens and schools that do not have dedicated spaces for artistic activities make use of so-called 'multipurpose rooms', as well as spaces in the dining hall, lobby and corridors. The central space for cultural and arts education in kindergartens and primary schools is the playground or the classroom and, to a much lesser extent, the other indoor and outdoor spaces of the kindergartens and schools themselves.

The fundamental process premise of the SKUM project was the incorporation of artists into the pedagogical process. This addresses three pivotal concerns: 1) an excessively goal-oriented structuring of the educational process that prioritises the outcome (and reduces emphasis on the process), 2) the individual limitations of the content and process inherent to the work of individual teachers, and 3) the dearth of authentic artistic experiences for children. Indeed, educational planning is a crucial element in guaranteeing that all children have an opportunity to obtain significant experiences that are pertinent to their development. This establishes the educational role of kindergartens and schools – the role that schools play in society for all children – through the quality of the learning experience, with the purpose of ensuring equal opportunities for all children.

Over-structuring the teaching process can make it impossible to recognise children's prior experiences, to listen to and positively acknowledge their initiatives, and to involve children and other adults. As Duh (2015, p. 92) stated, children's opinions differ due to personal perspectives and associations. Taking account of children's perspectives in the emerging curriculum ensures the emergence of a curriculum that is meaningful for the child. It also enables a curriculum in which a greater quantity of diverse content and processes can be

developed than originally planned. The emerging curriculum allows children to encounter the content and ways of experiencing and knowing that are developed with children and adults in the educational process, that is, in learning communities and communities of shared meaning-making. It is the artist who can provide this through his/her intuitive interaction with children, adults and materials in various forms of collaboration.

Collaboration between artists and educators is therefore regarded as a crucial strategy for enhancing the quality of planned artistic activities in early childhood education settings. As Hoekstra (2018, p. 3) asserts, dual professional practice necessitates the negotiation of roles and positions at the individual level, with implications for pedagogy. However, the binary opposition of artist versus teacher does not fully account for the diversity of practices in which art-making and teaching are combined. Chemi (2022) has observed that “in collaborative practices between artists and schools, uncertainty affects teachers and educators as well as artists” (p. 38). Teachers are often uncertain about the content of the curriculum, the organisation of the timetable, their role in partnership with artists and how they should assess children’s learning. Although they value the arts as an experiential and pedagogical tool, they may still feel uncomfortable about integrating the arts into the whole curriculum. Based on data from interviews with artists in the Slovenian context (Podobnik & Borota, 2022), it was found that artists enter the school environment with a rich artistic oeuvre and can therefore focus more than the teacher on the themes, content, materials and techniques of artistic expression. The research showed that, depending on the pedagogical situation and the children’s reactions, artists leave the planning open for free expression and exploration of the artistic language. Artists have the ability to see the situation, to observe carefully, and to recognise and respond intuitively to children’s creative potential. This loosens up the structuring of processes and opens different paths to achieving the goals (p. 141).

We assume that the formation of a learning community of children and adults (teachers and artists) reflects the understanding that knowledge acquisition involves individual and social processes (knowledge and community formation) and, in line with Morrissey and Kenny (2023), contributes to the professional development of teachers. According to Watkins (2005), it is characteristic of these classes and groups that conversations about learning become part of the community and that responsibility for knowledge is shared: community members take responsibility not only for themselves and others, but also for what they should know and for ensuring that others know what they should know. Furthermore, learning is enriched, co-constructed and based on shared

understanding, shared meaning-making (one's own ideas are shared and meaning is verified with others) and shared problem solving. Thus, there is shared metacognition of the learning process. At the same time, individual/subjective and shared experiences, meanings and concepts are established in a dialogical and complementary way in a collaborative learning community.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to find out:

- how often and in which forms of collaboration teachers planned artistic practices before the start of the project;
- how often and in which collaborative forms cultural and artistic activities were planned before the start of the project;
- how often and in which collaborative forms teachers reflected on their work before the start of the project;
- how the intervention within the SKUM project contributed to the professional development of teachers in the planning and implementation of collaborative cultural and artistic practices.

Method

Design-based research

In order to develop collaborative teaching of teachers and artists in Slovenian preschools and primary schools, the study utilised design-based research as the main methodology. As confirmed by Anderson and Shattuck (2012), design-based research can, based on data on the efficiency of interventions, improve educational practices through various and numerous refinements of the broad variety and levels of such interventions. Underpinned by this methodology, the research was designed as a cyclical process.

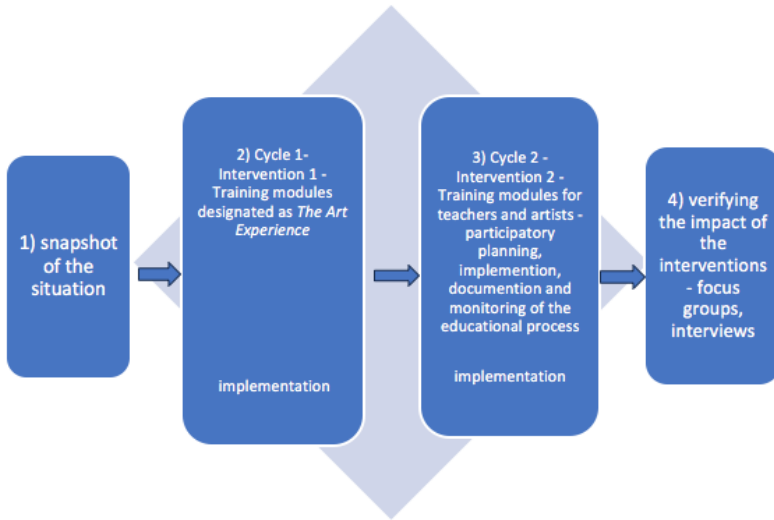
Participants

The research was carried out in the Slovenian public preschools and primary schools that took part in SKUM project. A total of 116 preschool teachers and 148 primary school teachers completed a questionnaire.

In the second stage of the study, after the second cycle of implementing and refining interventions, 4 preschool teachers and 16 primary school teachers took part in focus groups and 20 artists were interviewed individually.

Figure 1

Design-based research on teachers and artists collaborative teaching and learning



Cycle 1 – Intervention 1

A series of training modules entitled *The Art Experience* were developed. The modules were designed and implemented by a team of educators and artists. The training sessions, which were delivered by the artists, encompassed a range of disciplines, including the performing arts, film and multimedia, photography, dance, literature and music. The principal objective of the training was to enable the participants (preschool and primary school teachers) to: 1) engage with art as a means of accessing the world; 2) develop an appreciation of the ways in which art can foster curiosity and sensitivity to the real world and imaginary worlds; 3) gain insight into the creative processes of artists and their artistic creations; 4) engage in the exploration of artistic expression alongside artists and the practice of fundamental techniques of artistic creation; and 5) establish connections with artists with whom they would like to collaborate.

This was followed by the implementation of the new findings in educational work in preschools and primary schools. The main innovation was the collaborative teaching of artists and teachers and the integration of the arts with non-arts curricula. The innovative approach to teaching was tested over an extended period, usually as a multi-month project. The artist was involved in the pedagogical process continuously or sequentially as the need for his/

her intervention became apparent. In order to be able to carry out the planned pedagogical process and artistic practice competently in the intervening period, the artists underwent prior additional training on the chosen topic. These trainings became of interest to the whole kindergarten and school collectives, so that individual projects developed into school-wide projects. Artistic practice became a connecting element within the kindergarten and the school, as well as between the school and the sociocultural environment, enabling the schools to develop into cultural hotspots.

Cycle 2 - Intervention 2

As the SKUM project placed a strong emphasis on collaboration between artists, teachers and children, teachers and artists were invited to participate in the training modules. The aims of this training were: 1) to reflect on the principles of integrating the planning, implementation and documentation of the pedagogical process; 2) to test the planning of pedagogical processes according to the principles of the evolving curriculum in collaboration with all those involved in the pedagogical process; 3) to become familiar with the ways of monitoring and documenting the pedagogical process; and 4) to learn about the reasons for integrating documentation into the pedagogical process. To this end, a pedagogical planning tool was developed that focuses on planning the development process and the inclusion of all of the participants in all of the phases of the pedagogical process.

The implementation of this type of planning strengthened the monitoring of the teaching process and the children's progress. Thus the children's potential in artistic and non-artistic areas was better recognised.

Data collection and analysis

At the start of the project, a snapshot of the situation was taken using a questionnaire consisting of 13 closed questions, 16 sets of five-point rating scales on the frequency of the practices mentioned, and 3 open-ended questions. For the purposes of the present paper, we used data from three sets of five-point rating scales on (i) the frequency of collaborative forms of planning cultural and artistic practices, (ii) the frequency of planning collaborative activities for pupils, and (iii) the frequency of collaborative forms of professional reflection by teachers. The questionnaire was developed on the web application *ika*. At the beginning of the project, the preschool and primary school teachers participating in the SKUM project were invited to fill in the questionnaire. The data collection took place in November–December 2018.

The second phase of data collection, which sought to ascertain the potential impact of the project, was conducted at the conclusion of the project. Focus groups were employed for this purpose, as Štemberger (2021) suggests that such groups are an appropriate method for evaluating the implementation and results of a project, as they allow for the perception of progress as well as the identification of further needs. The second rationale for the implementation of focus groups was provided by the objective of the study, which was to investigate the potential benefits of collaborative teaching between teachers and artists. The focus groups were conducted in August 2021 to facilitate the sharing of experiences between the participants and the generation of insights into the synthesis of their individual and collective experiences of the collaborative teaching of teachers and artists. The artists were interviewed individually. Given the circumstances of the ongoing pandemic, the focus groups were held in the Zoom videoconferencing environment.

In line with the purpose of the study, the data obtained from the questionnaires were subjected to basic descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS software. The results are presented in tabular form. The data gathered from the focus groups and interviews were analysed in accordance with the principles of qualitative analysis, with a particular focus on the participants' perceptions of the contribution of the SKUM project.

Results and discussion

At the initial stage of the project, our objective was to ascertain the frequency and formats in which teachers plan cultural-arts practices, as well as to determine the individuals involved in the planning process and the frequency of their involvement.

Collaborative forms of planning cultural and artistic practices at the start of the project

Table 1

Basic descriptive statistics of different collaborative forms of planning cultural and artistic practices in preschools and primary schools

Collaborative planning practices	Preschool			Primary School		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
together with a teacher from a related field	114	3.2	1.2	144	3.5	1.0
together with other teachers	113	2.4	0.9	142	3.2	1.0
alone	114	3.2	1.2	145	3.4	1.2
together with pupils	113	3.7	0.8	143	3.3	0.9
together with other school professionals (counsellors, management)	111	2.4	0.9	143	2.8	1.0
together with representatives of cultural institutions (curators, animators, etc.)	112	1.9	0.8	142	2.2	1.0
together with artists/experts	112	2.1	0.8	142	2.0	0.8
together with parents	113	2.2	0.8	142	1.8	0.8

Note. Sample - *n*, arithmetic mean - *M*, standard deviation - *SD* (Ratings: never - 1; rarely - 2; sometimes - 3; often - 4; very often - 5)

The SKUM project's initial survey of collaborative forms of planning cultural and artistic practices in preschools and schools revealed that educators predominantly engage in planning activities with other educators or teachers, independently and with children/pupils. It is uncommon for educators to engage in planning activities with parents, representatives of cultural institutions or artists. This suggests that there has been no perceived need to extend planning and involve artists, parents and other cultural institutions directly in the planning process. While teachers demonstrate awareness of the value of collaboration with colleagues and pupils, there is a notable absence of collaboration with other individuals and institutions from the environment, who could contribute to the planning and implementation of arts activities in preschools and primary schools in terms of content, process and expertise.

Planning collaborative activities for pupils at the start of the project

From the perspective of the sociocultural understanding of constructing experience, we were interested in the extent to which children have the opportunity to collaborate and create with practitioners, learners and experts, as well as the nature of these opportunities.

Table 2

Basic descriptive statistics of planning collaborative forms of activities for pupils

Pupils collaborative work forms	Preschool			Primary School		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I plan art activities as a creative process in which the pupil creates with the support of professional staff	115	3.9	0.7	146	3.3	1.0
I plan art activities as a creative process in which the pupil creates	116	4.0	0.7	148	3.5	1.0
I plan art activities as a creative process in which the pupil creates together with an artist/expert	115	2.2	0.8	147	2.1	0.9

Note. Sample - *n*, arithmetic mean - *M*, standard deviation - *SD* (Scores: never - 1; rarely - 2; sometimes - 3; often - 4; very often - 5)

The findings indicate that teachers predominantly conceptualise art activities as a creative process, whereby pupils are encouraged to engage in the act of creation. This approach is observed to be more prevalent in preschool settings, with an average rating of $M = 4.0$, compared to $M = 3.9$ in primary schools. The same creative process is employed in preschool settings with the support of professional staff, with an average rating of $M = 3.9$, compared to $M = 3.3$ in primary schools. The findings indicate that although pupils are afforded the opportunity to engage in a diverse range of interactions, teachers adopt a supportive role, facilitating independent work while limiting opportunities for collaboration with an artist. In preschools, the mean score was $M = 2.2$, while in primary schools, it was $M = 2.1$. It can be concluded that artists had not yet been acknowledged as a source of diverse content, modes and artistic practices in preschools and schools, at least at the outset of the project.

Collaborative forms of professional reflection by teachers at the start of the project

The assumption that collaborative reflection, involving a multiplicity of perspectives rather than a single dominant viewpoint, represents a source of professional development led us to investigate the frequency and nature of interactions between preschool and primary school teachers engaged in reflection with others.

Table 3

Basic descriptive statistics for teachers' collaborative forms of professional reflection

Teachers' collaborative forms of professional reflection	Preschool			Primary School		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
alone, individually	102	4.0	1.0	136	3.8	0.9
in discussions with teachers from related fields	102	4.3	0.7	136	3.8	0.7
in discussions with other teachers in the school	101	3.2	0.9	136	3.4	0.8
in discussions with colleagues or other colleagues in training sessions	102	2.9	0.8	136	3.3	0.8
by reviewing documentation with pupils	102	3.1	1.0	136	2.9	0.9
looking at documentation with colleagues	102	2.7	0.9	136	2.5	0.8

Note. Sample - *n*, arithmetic mean - *M*, standard deviation - *SD* (Scores: never - 1; rarely - 2; sometimes - 3; often - 4; very often - 5)

At the initial stage of the project, it was observed that the teachers surveyed engaged in professional reflection with their peers from related fields (preschools $M = 4.3$, primary schools $M = 3.8$), as well as alone, individually (preschools $M = 3.8$, primary schools $M = 4.0$). However, it is apparent that they did not perceive documentation material or the review of documentation material as a crucial instrument for their own professional development, despite the fact that such practices are typical of educational settings and the documentation theories of Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi, 2005). These theories consider documentation material and its review, as well as collaborative discussions when reviewing documentation material with children and colleagues, to be a central element of professional development.

The contribution of SKUM to the professional development of teachers in the field of the collaborative planning and implementation of cultural and artistic practices after the interventions

In 2021, our objective was to identify and examine the impact of interventions in the SKUM project, which involved teachers engaging in collaborative work with artists and children's participation in the educational process. This entailed an investigation of the way children's initiatives contributed to the planning, implementation and evaluation of cultural and artistic activities, and the extent to which this influenced the professional development and transformation of the pedagogical process. Prior research findings from the project (Smrtnik Vitulić et al., 2022) indicate that an educational process that takes place in collaboration between teachers and artists creates the conditions for artistic experiences in which the participants experience and recognise the meaning of art and internalise its values (p. 71). The research findings also demonstrate that when arts activities are integrated into the educational process, the reception and experience of art as well as the learning and teaching process are transformed (p. 72).

In our research, the participating teachers indicated that both they and their pupils acquired knowledge and understanding of specific areas of art. *It was emphasised that artists from diverse fields should collaborate with teachers, given that teachers alone are unable to provide pupils with the same level of artistic experience that can be offered through such collaboration.* Thus, the teachers emphasised the importance of collaborative work as a fundamental aspect of the planning and implementation of the teaching process, given their recognition that they are unable to provide a meaningful artistic experience on their own, without the input of an artist.

The teachers expressed a desire for more frequent and intensive contact or collaboration with artists in the future. *It is their desire that artists be continuously involved in the educational process, rather than just for the limited duration of a project. It is emphasised that the planning of cultural and artistic education should be based on the pupils' wishes, backgrounds and individual differences.*

The teachers also stated that the project had enabled them to grow both personally and professionally. We note that they *identified opportunities in the arts to develop different ways of teaching and learning, including science, through artistic activities.* We also find that the teachers recognise the contribution of the project in terms of gaining concrete experience of working with artists and, in doing so, gaining insight into new approaches, *particularly in terms of*

teaching a wide range of subjects through the arts or, as they put it, “bringing artistic approaches into the teaching of all subjects” and cross-curricular integration. It can be concluded that the teachers experienced working with artists and art as universal content and form that goes beyond previous pedagogical approaches and practices.

Given that the teachers had very rarely collaborated or planned cultural-artistic practices with artists before, the insight into the nature of professional development is captured in the following statement, which suggests that only authentic experiences and direct opportunities for artists and teachers to engage in a direct pedagogical process can contribute to the insights that they feel they could not have gained in any other way.

Working with artists has given me rich, unforgettable experiences. No book, no workshop, can give you that. Working with an artist on the spot is a priceless experience.

The teachers emphasised that the project had changed the way they planned, not least because the artists were involved in the planning and teaching stages. They welcomed this change, but noted that it also brought other changes to the learning process:

[...] we liked this way of working very much, but we need to organise the lessons in a project-based way, integrating the learning content with each other. The pupils showed increased motivation, curiosity, new connections between pupils, increased interest in art, and joy of getting to know the artists.

The complementarity of the teacher’s and the artist’s action in education can thus create the conditions for social development and relationships between students, as well as the development of knowledge and other fundamental human dimensions, such as motivation, curiosity and enthusiasm for art, which is established by art as the communication of feelings, according to the definition of art offered by Tolstoy (1904).

In this context, documentation played a decisive role in professional development, with new meanings, in line with the pedagogy of listening developed by the Regio Emilia pedagogy (Rinaldi, 2005). Documentation became a platform for participation, learning, metacognition and interpretation for all those involved, as the teachers became accustomed to it during the project:

[...] several photos and videos were taken. The students also took part in the evaluation of the projects [...] They were encouraged to express their opinion [...] (it took place) [...] collecting videos, photos, establishing the

initial situation, collecting children's interests, collecting impressions, opinions, extensive evaluation (ongoing and final, everyone's reactions).

The teachers who participated in the study clearly distinguished and linked the roles of teacher and artist in the pedagogical process through the statement:

A first-hand visit to the school by the artist has always remained a fond memory for everyone. As teachers, we are 'enculturated' into the norms of the culture, so the experience of meeting a 'different person' among the pupils (especially in the first years of school) gave the pupils a broader idea of the good and interesting people in the school.

As well as providing an opportunity for collaboration between artists and teachers, the project also offered professional assistance in the pursuit of self-development as an artist and as a teacher. As Kind et al. (2007) assert, by shifting the conceptualisation of identity from a singular, fixed entity to a multiplicity of selves and expressions, educators can cultivate an 'artistic self' and advance their engagement with art in education to a more profound and personal exploration of their artistic identity. Similarly, artists can develop their pedagogical identity without compromising their artistic identity.

The participating educators also emphasised the importance of fostering a culture of trust, even when the artist's approach to their work differs from the educator's previous experiences and expectations. This indicates that educators acknowledged the necessity to move beyond preconceived notions and expectations, and to recognise the value of the artist's unique ability to engage with children in a manner that is distinct from traditional pedagogical approaches. This is of paramount importance, as the positive circle of recognition is developed through reciprocal recognition. This entails mutual respect and appreciation of each other's skills and abilities (Huttunen & Heikkinen, 2004, p. 3).

The direct presence of the artist in the group certainly had an impact on the level of performance. There was a lot of negotiation, cooperation and coordination between the teacher, the children and the artist. It was this that allowed the children to discover, experience and express themselves in art, even in the 'chaos' that sometimes ensued. At the same time, the trust of the educator in the artist was also important, as he or she might have acted differently, and the children would have missed out on an important experience and creativity in the process (preschool teacher).

The collaboration between the teachers and artists was presented in a synthesised manner from the perspective of the artists, who made the following observations:

[...] I have great respect and appreciation for the role of the early childhood teacher and the school teacher, and I think it is very powerful in our school system. However, as the teacher is also increasingly involved in the world of bureaucracy and data collection, he or she loses time where he or she could react in a relaxed way as an artistic creator. [...] But my work is mostly about expressing myself. As a human being, I have to work with my body, my voice, my emotions, so I understand the child from a different point of view [...] When I play with a child, I can anticipate through play which skills might be close to the child. Whether it's movement skills or art skills or word skills, sports skills or social skills [...] Through my experience, I can give him access to a creative practice where he can express his 'idea' and feel creative [...] Many times, in my workshops I have heard the words: "I don't know how to do that". I like to focus on these, because for me the biggest challenge is for the child to surprise himself and to see that he can do it, if he believes in himself. And this is the stepping stone for further situations, where the 'child' will often have to be able to encourage himself. I understand the barriers and the obstacles, and that together we can do it. I also see the teacher in all these roles, but it's a little different when the 'artist' is present [...] because it creates a different way of working with them (intermedia artist).

The teacher primarily follows the curriculum, not so much the individual development of the individual. At the same time, his or her practice is limited to educational methodology and processes. The artist is still committed to his creative practice and allows himself 'mistakes', tests in the sense of "if it doesn't work, it will work". The artists puts the untested in context and together with the teacher and the pupil they can discover a new approach, a new method (painter and curator).

The form of collaboration with artists thus brings a complementarity of teacher and artist into the pedagogical process, as observed in similar research, which has found that artists are inspired by what children do, while adults are inspired by each other. Over years of collaboration, teachers and artists learn to lean on each other, to take extra risks, to reflect on their decisions and to offer alternatives (Wolf, 2008, p. 100). The results of the present research suggest the following complementarity of roles and collaboration between teacher and artist: 1) the teacher who works in a goal-oriented way structures the path to the

goal, plans from the curriculum, and focuses on cognitive processes and outcomes; and 2) the artist who focuses on processes, especially experiential and creative processes, works with self-expression, intuitively opens multiple paths to the goal, communicates multilingually (with verbal and artistic languages), and seeks, discovers and realises the potential in the individual.

Teachers and artists report that the changes and effects of collaborative teaching between teachers and artists are manifested in children and young people at the level of cognition, experience and expression in and through art, at the cognitive and socio-emotional levels. This empirical evidence supports Herbert Read's (2015) thesis on education in and through art, which emphasises that art has great educational potential and that art and artistic experience are the basis for education, as the goals of teaching and learning are unconsciously integrated into the process of artistic expression and creation. At the same time, regarding the subjective position of the individual as a creator of meaning and sense in art, as Kroflič (2022a) argues, meaning is always formed in the individual's consciousness as a result of the interaction between the artist/teacher, the artwork/object of teaching and the learner.

Conclusions

The SKUM project – Developing Communication Skills Through Cultural Arts Education (2017–2022) was implemented in public kindergartens and schools (primary and secondary) in Slovenia with the aim of providing high-quality arts experiences for children in kindergartens and schools.

In order to develop collaborative teaching between teachers and artists in Slovenian preschools and primary schools, design-based research was used as the main methodology. Based on this methodology, the research was designed as a cyclical process. This paper presents a snapshot of the situation at the beginning of the project and the impact of interventions that involved teachers in collaborative work with artists and children's participation in the educational process.

The first intervention involved training modules designed and implemented by a team of educators and artists. Delivered by artists, the training sessions encompassed a range of disciplines, including the performing arts, film and multimedia, photography, dance, literature and music.

The second intervention had a strong emphasis on collaboration between artists, teachers and children. Teachers and artists were invited to participate in the training modules. The aims of this training were: 1) to reflect on the principles of integrating the planning, implementation and documentation

of the pedagogical process; 2) to test the planning of pedagogical processes according to the principles of the evolving curriculum in collaboration with all those involved in the pedagogical process; 3) to become familiar with the ways of monitoring and documenting the pedagogical process; and 4) to learn about the reasons for integrating documentation into the pedagogical process.

At the beginning of the project, the teachers typically planned the teaching process alone or with their closest colleagues, and very rarely with parents, pupils and artists. Similarly, the frequency of planning for children's collaborative learning was not high. Moreover, professional reflection with colleagues was rarely based on documentation. At the end of the project, we found that the new form of collaboration between teacher and artist and the participation of children in the educational process had made a significant contribution to changing the opportunities and ways in which pupils experience, learn about and express themselves, and acquire, deepen and consolidate knowledge in pre-schools and schools.

In the new context, the collaboration with artists changed and enriched: 1) the content of cultural-artistic practices; 2) the teaching methods, by increasing the frequency of project, cross-curricular and interdisciplinary work; 3) the responsiveness to students' initiatives, by listening, discovering student interests and involving student initiatives in decisions; and 4) the documentation, by involving all participants in the learning process in continuously evaluating and documenting the process, and by listening to everyone's reflections.

The involvement of the artist in the pedagogical process provides a sociocultural experience of shared meaning-making through learning processes involving experience, cognition and expression, which is also characteristic of all forms of experiential learning. Previous studies (Rotar Pance, 2022) have shown that learners have a better understanding and retention of content through artist-led activities.

Our research findings highlight the fact that collaborative work between teachers and artists ensures that: 1) the rigidity of predefined and structured curricular practices is reduced, 2) pupils are able to participate experientially and expressively in artistic experiences, 3) teachers gain insight into children's experiential and expressive capacities/competences, and 4) artists gain insight into the possibilities of integrating authentic artistic experiences into education.

Concurrently, the findings indicate that fostering collaboration with artists is an essential element in stimulating teachers' enthusiasm for designing arts-integrated curricula. However, the artists involved in the SKUM project (Podobnik & Borota, 2022) note that a complementary way of working requires mutual trust and respect, which can be built up through an ongoing, more

permanent partnership. At the same time, teachers' interest in arts-oriented pedagogy is also of paramount importance, as evidenced by the observations of Bačlija Sušić and Županić Benić (2018), who found that in the context of early childhood education, teachers who demonstrate a high level of sensitivity and personal engagement with one or more artistic disciplines tend to devote more time to creative activities when working with children.

Despite the fact that school and preschool teachers have already acquired the knowledge to teach art in education during their initial training – where they learn about the content and didactics of music, visual and performing arts – including an artist in the project brought a first-person artistic experience that goes beyond preconceived interpretations (Kroflič, 2022b), which can be an obstacle to direct experience, subjective cognition and expression.

The findings are derived from a specific context within Slovenian public kindergartens and schools, which may limit their applicability to other education systems or cultural contexts. Future research could therefore involve different education systems and cultural contexts, including different age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds and types of educational institutions, in order to assess the generalisability of the findings. Longitudinal research designs that track changes over time could also be implemented in order to assess the sustainability of collaborative teaching practices and student outcomes beyond the duration of the project.

The practical implications of the findings of the present research for the integration of the arts into education relate to the insight that actively engaging teachers in the developmental research process fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to implementing changes in pedagogical practices. Conversely, the incorporation of metacognition enables educators to engage in reflective practice regarding their pedagogical processes. The fostering of collaboration between teachers, artists and students creates a dynamic learning atmosphere that enriches the educational experience, fostering creativity and the experience of beauty.

Ethical statement

The research was conducted in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the University of Primorska, Slovenia, and as part of a project whose documentation, together with the research, was approved and accepted by an independent panel that reviewed the tender documents.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Teachers' Views: Using Body Music in Teaching and Learning Primary School Subjects

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∞ The paper presents research conducted among Turkish primary school classroom teachers regarding their personal and professional views about creating and using KeKeÇa body music games as educational tools. The core principles of the KeKeÇa body music approach – embodiment, play orientation and arts integration – are increasingly recognised as important topics in education today. The research is a phenomenological study with ten young women, primary school teachers who teach at village schools in the mountains. The teachers went through the KeKeÇa training programme, which aims to enable participants to make use of body music in teaching primary school curriculum content. They designed and used body music games for all classroom subjects, especially those that were more difficult to learn in the first place. In order to investigate the teachers' views, data were collected using an open-ended questionnaire and analysed using MAXQDA software. The results show that the teachers gained more control of the lessons, which became much more fun. They reported improvement in students' motivation and joy, adding that the learning showed greater long-term retention and became less time consuming. In conclusion, according to the participant teachers, the KeKeÇa body music approach, attitude and practice made remarkable contributions to their professional skills and had a beneficial effect in teaching and learning diverse subjects, and an enriching impact on their students' motivation, joy and learning quality.

Keywords: body music, primary education, embodied learning, KeKeÇa approach, play-based learning, teacher training, student motivation

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Mnenja učiteljev: uporaba glasbe telesa pri poučevanju in učenju predmetov v osnovni šoli

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☞ Članek predstavlja raziskavo, izvedeno med turškimi učiteljicami v osnovnih šolah, o njihovih osebnih in strokovnih mnenjih o ustvarjanju in uporabi iger z glasbo telesa KeKeÇa kot izobraževalnih orodij. Osnovna načela pristopa glasbe telesa KeKeÇa – utelešenje, usmerjenost v igro in integracija umetnosti – se danes vse bolj priznavajo kot pomembne teme v izobraževanju. Raziskava je fenomenološka študija, v kateri je sodelovalo deset mladih žensk, osnovnošolskih učiteljic, ki poučujejo v vaških šolah v gorah. Učiteljice so opravile program usposabljanja KeKeÇa, katerega cilj je udeležencem omogočiti uporabo glasbe telesa pri poučevanju osnovnošolskih učnih vsebin. Oblikovale in uporabile so igre z glasbo telesa za vse predmete v razredu, zlasti za tiste, ki tudi sicer predstavljajo večji izziv za učence. Da bi raziskali mnenja učiteljic, so bili podatki zbrani z odprtim vprašalnikom in analizirani s programsko opremo MAXQDA. Izsledki kažejo, da so učiteljice pridobile večji nadzor nad poukom, ki je postal veliko zabavnejši. Poročale so o izboljšanju motivacije in veselju učencev, dodale pa so, da je učenje pokazalo večjo dolgoročno zadrževanje znanja in postalo manj časovno zahtevno. Sklepno lahko zapišemo, da so po mnenju sodelujočih učiteljic pristop, odnos in praksa glasbe telesa KeKeÇa znatno prispevali k njihovim strokovnim veščinam ter imeli koristen učinek na poučevanje in učenje različnih predmetov ter bogatili motivacijo, veselje in kakovost učenja pri njihovih učencih.

Ključne besede: glasba telesa, osnovnošolsko izobraževanje, utelešeno učenje, pristop KeKeÇa, učenje skozi igro, usposabljanje učiteljev, motivacija pri učencih

Introduction

Embodied cognition, play and the arts have become topics of interest in education (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2022; Halverson, 2022; Shapiro & Stolz, 2019). The purpose of the present research is to contribute to practical, playful and embodied ways of teaching and learning in the classroom, and to discover the contributions and functionalities of using the KeKeÇa body music approach in teaching primary school subjects, as well as its effect on students' motivation and learning. Body music is an ancient art form that utilises sound-producing body movements, including vocals, speech and mouth sounds. KeKeÇa is a widely recognised body music approach that focuses on creating body sounds through ergonomic movement mechanisms while embracing a playful facilitation attitude.

Embodied cognition offers valuable educational insights, enhancing teaching practices and learning (Shapiro & Stolz, 2019, p. 16). "Greater awareness of embodiment can enable educators to facilitate rich, sensory learning encounters that are empowering and transformative" (Yoo & Loch, 2016, p. 528). A study carried out with 52 primary school children shows that embodied learning implemented as part of the classroom curriculum in a real classroom environment using motion-based games can have a positive impact on children's cognitive skills and academic performance (Kosmas et al., 2018, p. 70). A synthesis of scholarly empirical studies examining embodied teaching approaches in physical education suggests that embodied learning can support students in developing both critical thinking abilities and bodily awareness (Aartun et al., 2020). In addition, a study by Schmidt et al. (2019, p. 50) investigating the effects of tailored physical activities on primary school children's foreign language vocabulary and attentional performance found that children engaged in embodied learning enjoyed learning a new language more than those in a control group and demonstrated improved memory. These results replicate previous research findings.

The significance of learning through play in primary schools, the meaning of play for children and its benefits on their development is emphasised in the literature (Almonacid-Fierro et al., 2022; Breathnach et al., 2017; Hunter & Walsh, 2014; McGuinness et al., 2014; Mozelius & Öberg, 2017; Sandford et al., 2015). Accordingly, play should be included in primary education by encouraging teachers to create supportive environments that foster creative play rather than controlling it, as play is a vital and meaningful activity for children, integrating their cognitive and social development (Rantala & Määttä, 2011). However, education systems have shifted towards more structured learning

that overlooks the importance of play in fostering early literacy, numeracy, and essential social and emotional skills. Contrary to this trend, it is necessary to prioritise playful learning (Parker & Thomsen, 2019).

Body music is a term introduced by Keith Terry regarding the art form using sounding body movements such as snapping, stepping, clapping, touching (oneself or others) with hands, making mouth sounds and vocalising. The sequencing of these movements, as well as the visual and sensory integration and expression that occur while executing them, are also included in the practice. While *body percussion* and *body rhythm* are more common terms in the literature that refer to making rhythms with your body, *body music* is a broader term, especially when including vocals or speech.

Body music is primitive and easily imitable, and therefore applicable to everybody. It is a powerful tool for teaching and learning processes due to its playful and embodied nature as an art form that is also inclusive and economic. Although it has become a transdisciplinary art form used in a variety of educational areas, there are few written resources on its use in teaching school subjects other than music and dance. Among the literature is Keith Terry and Linda Akiyama's book *The Rhythm of Math* for primary school students (2015) and Anita Gritch's *Move and Groove* for teaching English (2016). Other books that suggest utilising body percussion in the fields of pre-primary and primary education are focused on competencies of music or physical education (Burrows, 2018; Glover et al. 2002; Henessy, 2016; Grieshaber et al., 2023).

*KeKeÇa*⁴ refers to a specific pedagogical environment and ensemble of body music. KeKeÇa body music is an original approach to producing and using body sounds for various purposes. This approach emphasises the acceptance and observation of body music as it emerges from the natural flow of movement that generates body rhythm and sound through lifts, drops, releases and rotations. Three movement mechanisms, which will be explained below, serve as the driving force behind the sounding body movement. Preschool and special education have been the primary areas of interest in the experience of KeKeÇa since the beginning of the 2000s, due to the efforts of its founder Tugay Başar⁵ to communicate in parenting a child with ASD and his occupation as a teacher at nurseries and kindergartens while being trained as an Orff-Schulwerk teacher trainer. Over the years, he developed the KeKeÇa approach by analysing efficient body sound production, valuing non-verbal communication, and incorporating play and acting into facilitation. Başar curated and created body percussion games with chil-

4 KeKeÇa is an abbreviation of the phrase "Kendin Kendini Çal" in Turkish, which can be translated as "play yourself (your own body), yourself (on your own)".

5 Ethnomusicologist, MA.

dren, using them for educational purposes. This work established the KeKeÇa technique, its facilitation approach and its play repertoire.

The present research, which encompasses in-class applications of the KeKeÇa body music approach by primary school teachers, is in line with articles about teachers' conceptions and experiences (Cavadas, 2023; Novijan, 2022), as well as articles about teachers and students at primary school (Fernandez et al., 2024; Novijan, 2022; Tomljenović, 2019). It could also be relevant to studies concerning teacher training/education (Chilla et al., 2024; Kink-Hampersberger et al., 2023; Nijakowska, 2022). The in-class applications refer to certain body music games that are created and facilitated by teachers to help learners gain and remember scientific knowledge through embodied forms.

In 2019, the KeKeÇa Body Percussion Ensemble⁶ was invited to teach at the "Our Teachers, Insurance of Education" project, supported by the Z Zurich Foundation and carried out by the Turkish Education Association in cooperation with the Turkish Ministry of Education. During its six years of implementation, the project encompassed "a program with the ambition of supporting 1,000 female teachers assigned to villages/small towns in the first year of their career by offering tailored personal and professional development plans" (Zurich Foundation). The project had reached 1,000 teachers by 2023.

KeKeÇa's tailored training programme consisted of four modules. The first three modules encompass competencies related to body percussion and rhythm. The fourth involves action research lasting eight weeks, carried out with volunteer teachers, where each participant generates instructional body music games for their current class subjects, applies them in class, gives/gets online feedback from KeKeÇa instructors (two of the authors), and reapplies the games until a mature version emerges. The present research was motivated by observing the success stories of past participants regarding in-class applications.

The first module was carried out through four online meetings of one hour each, focused on the competencies of KeKeÇa Mechanisms, KeKeÇa Vocabulary, and Beginner Games. *KeKeÇa Mechanisms* mainly address using the body as an instrument of movements that ergonomically create sound, focusing on the main three mechanisms that create sound: "Gravity", "Chinese Drum" and "Upside-Down U". We then studied *KeKeÇa Vocabulary*, in which each body part has a unique syllabic name: the syllable "şik (shæck) [S]" refers to

6 "KeKeÇa Body Percussion Ensemble; founded by Tugay Başar and Timuçin Gürer, have been working since 2002; doing performances, trainings and workshops, working for international and local projects for culture, arts and education through body percussion and body music. The group has performances, workshops with various diverse groups and ages, as well as inclusive, disabled, and disadvantaged groups." (KeKeÇa, 2025).

snapping fingers, “şak (shuck) [X]” refers to clapping hands, “tak (tuck) [T]” refers to touching the thighs, “dum (doom) [D]” to the chest and “bum (boom) [B]” to footsteps. Working on the *KeKeÇa Beginners' Repertoire of Body Music Games* in the training programme, we shared the “Body Percussion Massage” as part of the warm-up, “Mirror” and “Echo” as non-verbal communication games, followed by “Laptop”, a four-line body poem using the body sounds T, S and X, and another game called “ŞIKIŞIKI”, which uses S, X, T and B. The three other basic body percussion games of the first module are “Body Drum” [DSXS], “Keith Terry’s Rhythm Blocks” and “KeKeÇa Puzzle Pieces”. In addition, we practised a simple selection of the rhythm patterns of classical Turkish Music, called “usûls”. The second module was carried out in four face-to-face sessions of 90 minutes each. The aim was to let the participants experience the body music medium while observing how online-instructed games are played and facilitated within a group. In the third module of six online sessions, we focused on the competencies of realising and creating embodied movement sets and rhythm patterns in body music. The first four sessions consisted of theoretical descriptions and practice of rhythmic translations of speech, forms, visuals and daily life to body sounds. Sample games were played representing each topic. The last two meetings involved applications of the theoretical material from the prior sessions.

The fourth blended module comprised eight online meetings, each lasting 90 minutes, followed by a two-day, in-person camp. The first half of each of the first six meetings was devoted to reviewing the previous modules. The remaining sessions were dedicated to the creation and refinement of didactic games, facilitated through the sharing of in-class video recordings and the completion of KeKeÇa Body Music Game Design forms. Throughout the KeKeÇa training period, the participant teachers sent video recordings of the didactic body music games that they created and applied with their students.

Finally, the ten participant teachers created 16 didactic KeKeÇa body music games and applied them in the classroom. Following this period, we came together with the teachers and filmed video instructions for the games covering the following subjects: months; regional public directors; numbers of corners and sides of a square, triangle and circle; writing question suffixes in Turkish; adding odd and even numbers; finding the unknown in subtraction; seasons and their characteristics; a quarter and half hour; movements of the planet Earth in relation with the day and year; use of a full stop; use of a comma; introduction to body percussion; states of matter; antonyms; common characteristics of living creatures; and counting by 6’s. These instructional videos will be published in the future.

The present study investigates the teachers' experience when applying the KeKeÇa body music approach to teaching and learning primary school subjects. Specifically, the following research questions were formulated to gather the insights of female teachers who utilise body music in their primary school classrooms.

1. What do female teachers think about the contribution of using the KeKeÇa body music approach to their professional skills?
2. What do female teachers think about the functions of using the KeKeÇa body music approach?
3. What do female teachers think about the effects of using the KeKeÇa body music approach on student motivation?
4. What do female teachers think about the effects of using the KeKeÇa body music approach on student achievements?

Method

Participants

The participant group consisted of ten female teachers in the early stages of their careers, who were assigned to schools in villages or small towns. These participants had received training to facilitate their effective use of the KeKeÇa body music approach in teaching self-selected primary school subjects. Demographic information for the ten participants, coded P01 to P10, is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Professional Seniority (Years)	Region/Province
P01	F	32	4	Erzurum
P02	F	33	8	Eastern Anatolia
P03	F	29	5	Southeast Anatolia
P04	F	34	4	Sivas
P05	F	35	8	Ankara
P06	F	35	8	Ankara
P07	F	26	3	Sanliurfa
P08	F	29	8	Erzurum
P09	F	31	8	Marmara Region
P10	F	25	3	Mardin

Table 1 shows that all of the participants are female. Their ages ranged from 25 to 35, and their professional seniority is between 3 and 8 years. Four of the participants reside in Central Anatolia and Marmara Regions, while six reside in Eastern and South-Eastern regions.

Instrument

The data collection tool was an open-ended questionnaire containing eight questions. The first four questions were about the teachers' gender, age, years of experience and region of assignment. The other four questions concerned the teachers' professional experience and the perception of their students. The document was sent to the participants via Google Forms immediately after the end of the 2023–2024 Spring semester. The participants were asked to return the document within one month. The four questions concerning the teachers' professional experience and the perception of their students were:

1. What are the contributions of the KeKeÇa body music approach to your professional skills?
2. For which functions did you use KeKeÇa body music approach achievements in your professional practices?
3. What do you think are the effects of KeKeÇa body music activities on your students' motivation?
4. What is your assessment of the relationship between KeKeÇa body music activities and your students' achievements?

Data Analysis

Within the scope of the research, a content analysis method was used to analyse the interview data. An inductive approach was followed. MAXQDA 2020 software was used to analyse the data. Two researchers coded independently and reached 104 codes in total. The following equation was used to calculate consistency (Miles & Huberman, 1994):

$$\text{Consistency} = \frac{\text{Number of agreements}}{\text{Total coding}} \times 100$$

Consensus was reached in a total of 97 codes. When substituted in the equation, $(97/104) \times 100 = 93\%$ consensus was achieved. The coding consistency in the research is high. The seven codes that could not be reconciled were re-evaluated and reconciliation was achieved.

Research Design

The present qualitative phenomenological study investigates the perspectives of female teachers who utilise the KeKeÇa body music approach in primary school classrooms, investigating their experiences throughout the teaching process.

Phenomenology, as developed by Husserl, is a philosophical method focused on the direct experience of consciousness. Later, Husserl's work, as expanded by Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, influenced psychology and existentialism. Phenomenology emphasises describing lived experiences without preconceived frameworks. Researchers using phenomenology focus on understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of those involved (Groenewald, 2004).

In the present study, the phenomenon explored is the participating teachers' experiences of intentionally using the KeKeÇa body music approach to teach curriculum subjects in their classrooms. The object of the phenomenon refers to educational body music games grounded in the KeKeÇa approach, created by teachers and applied during lessons. The essence of the phenomenon emerges from the teachers' experiences of perceiving and implementing the educational potential of the self-developed games in their teaching practice. In this context, the act of experience relates to the meaning that the teachers assign to the phenomenon. Thus, the study seeks to understand their experiences and perceptions of the KeKeÇa body music approach, highlighting how they interpret and make sense of its educational applications within the classroom setting (Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015, p. 6).

Results

Teachers' views on the contribution of using the KeKeÇa body music approach in the class to their professional skills

Table 2

The contribution of using the KeKeÇa body music approach in teaching primary school subjects to the teachers' professional skills

Theme	Code	Frequency	Participants (P) ⁷
<i>Classroom Management</i>		11	
	Lessons are more fun	7	01, 02, 03, 04, 06, 08, 10
	Managing the learning and teaching process	1	07
	Development in music and rhythm	1	03
	Attracting attention	1	05
	Classroom layout	1	05
<i>Ensuring Quality and Continuity of Learning</i>		9	
	Long-term retention of student	2	02, 04
	Using time correctly	2	04, 06
	Adapting the acquisition to body music	1	09
	Reinforcing the outcomes learned	1	05
	All-round professional development	1	04
	Using different senses	1	10
	Continuity of the learning process	1	05
<i>Creativity and Activity Generation Skills</i>		4	
	Enabling nursery rhyme writing	1	03
	Being creative	1	05
	Designing education tailored to learners	1	04
	Investigate different methods	1	05
<i>Motivation</i>		3	
	Students' participation in the learning process	1	01
	Motivating students	1	04
	Teacher motivation	1	05
Total		27	

7 The term learning refers to that of students throughout the text.

Table 2 shows that four themes – “Classroom Management” ($f = 11$), “Ensuring the Quality and Continuity of Learning” ($f = 9$), “Creativity and Ability to Produce Activities” ($f = 4$) and “Motivation” ($f = 3$) – and 27 opinions related to these themes emerged.

Regarding the theme of classroom management, most of the participants ($f = 7$) emphasised that the lessons were more fun. A sample opinion is given below:

“It allowed me to make the lessons fun.” (Po1)

Sample opinions about other issues related to classroom management stated by the participants are as follows:

“It helped me to manage the learning and teaching process.” (Po7, Code: Managing the learning and teaching process)

The participants expressed nine opinions on the theme “Ensuring the Quality and Continuity of Learning”. Sample opinions are as follows:

“Enhances long-term retention and fun in teaching.” (Po2, Code: Long-term retention of student)

“It enabled me to spend fun and productive time with children in lessons and free time activities.” (Po6, Code: Using time correctly)

The participants expressed four opinions on the theme “Creativity and Activity Generation Skills”. Sample opinions are given below:

“I had never tried to write nursery rhymes; it helped me to write nursery rhymes.” (Po3, Code: Enabling nursery rhyme writing)

The participants expressed three opinions on the theme of “Motivation”. A sample opinion is as follows:

“For three years, it has been highly beneficial in capturing attention, reinforcing acquired skills and maintaining classroom order. Professionally, it has encouraged me, as a teacher, to explore different methods, be more creative, ensure continuity in my learning process and further enhance my motivation within the school environment.” (Po5, Code: Motivation)

Teachers' views on the functions of using the KeKeÇa body music approach in teaching

Table 3

The functions of using the KeKeÇa body music approach in teaching

Theme	Code	Frequency	Participants (P)
<i>Course Diversity</i>		10	
	Use in mathematics	3	04, 08, 10
	Use in life science	2	09, 10
	Use in abstract subjects	1	04
	Use in science	1	04
	Use in physical education	1	04
	Use for rhythmic practices	1	08
	Use in Turkish	1	09
<i>Quality of Learning</i>		10	
	Use in subjects that students have difficulty with	3	02, 07, 09
	Use in hard-to-learn subjects	2	03, 05
	Reinforcement of course outcomes	1	01
	Active participation of students in the learning process	1	05
	Developing creative thinking skills	1	05
	Attention gathering	1	05
	Reinforcement	1	07
<i>Sport and Movement</i>		1	
	Using it instead of morning exercise	1	06
Total		21	

Table 3 shows three themes – “Course Diversity” ($f = 10$), “Learning Quality” ($f = 10$) and “Sports and Movement” ($f = 1$) – and 21 opinions related to these themes that emerged based on the participant views.

Regarding the theme “Course Diversity”, the use in mathematics was emphasised by the most participants ($f = 3$). The opinion of P04 regarding both this code and its application in science, physical education and abstract subjects is given below as an example:

“I have utilised Body Percussion more in activities involving abstract concepts rather than in my professional practice. While designing activities based on the learning objectives of Mathematics, Turkish and Science lessons, I incorporated rhythm patterns with my students to create tongue twisters and songs, making the process both enjoyable and educational. In

addition to learning activities, I have effectively used Body Percussion at the beginning of the week and during Physical Education lessons through stretching and game activities to enhance my students' readiness and motivation while fostering their body awareness.” (Po4)

Two opinions were expressed regarding use of the KeKeÇa body music approach in life science. A sample opinion on its use in life science and Turkish lessons is as follows:

“I applied it to the subjects that children often confuse in Turkish and Life Science lessons.” (Po9)

There were ten opinions on the theme of “Quality of Learning”. Most students had difficulty ($f = 3$) and emphasis was put on the use of the KeKeÇa body music approach in subjects that are difficult to learn ($f = 2$). A sample opinion is given below:

“I used it in subjects where children had difficulty and I was successful.” (Po2)

Examples of other opinions about the quality of learning are as follows:
“Gathering distracted children’s attention, attracting their attention when they move on to a new subject. Teaching the subjects they have difficulty with easily by having fun. I used it to help them get to know their bodies, to develop their creative thinking skills and to ensure their active participation in the learning process.” (Po5, Code: Active participation in the learning process, Developing creative thinking skills, Gathering attention)

Po6 expressed an opinion on the theme of “Sports and Movement”:

“When I was explaining the lessons, I used it to develop rhythm perception in music lessons instead of a mini morning sport, aiming to clear children’s heads from sleep in the school in the morning.” (Po6)

Views on the effects of using the KeKeÇa body music approach in teaching on students' motivation

Table 4

The effects of using the KeKeÇa body music approach in teaching on students' motivation

Theme	Code	Frequency	Participants (P)
Motivation and Joy		13	
	Enjoyment	6	01, 03, 04, 05, 07, 08
	Increased motivation	2	04, 10
	Motivation	1	09
	Positive impact	1	06
	Cheerfulness	1	08
	Increase in demand	1	05
	Positive attitude	1	07
Attracting Attention and Interest		10	
	Increased interest	3	01, 03, 04
	Focusing attention	2	01, 03
	Increased excitement	2	07, 09
	Different activities	1	06
	Bringing new breath into lessons	1	09
	Attracting attention	1	10
Quality of Learning		4	
	Fast feedback	1	02
	Spontaneous learning	1	08
	Supporting long-term retention	1	04
	All-round development	1	04
Skill Development		3	
	Independent thinking skills	1	04
	Becoming aware of their bodies	1	09
	Increased self-confidence	1	07
Total		30	

Table 4 shows four themes – “Motivation and Joy” ($f = 13$), “Attracting Attention and Interest” ($f = 10$), “Quality of Learning” ($f = 4$) and “Skill Development” ($f = 3$) – and 30 opinions related to these themes.

Regarding the theme “Motivation and Joy”, the most frequent emphasis was on having fun ($f = 6$). A sample opinion is given below:

“Children are cheerful in every activity; they have fun and learning happens spontaneously. They take it as the flow of life, not forced.” (Po8)

There were two opinions about the increase in motivation. A sample opinion is as follows:

“It increases motivation because this way of learning attracts their attention.” (P10)

There were ten statements related to the theme “Attracting Attention and Interest”. Sample opinions are given below:

“Their interest in the lesson increases. I usually do the activities when they are very bored; they immediately pay attention, try to do them and have fun. We both learn and have fun.” (Po1, Code: Increased interest, Attention gathering)

“It helped my students to have a positive attitude towards the lesson, the class, the school, the teacher and their friends. Doing something they had never done, making their brains work both verbally and physically, and learning by having fun increased their excitement.” (Po7, Code: Increased excitement)

Four opinions were expressed about the theme “Quality of Learning”. Sample opinions are given below:

“KeKeÇa Body Music activities increased my students’ interest and motivation in the lessons. It supported their long-term retention in abstract and difficult-to-understand subjects by providing fun learning. In addition, taking an active role in the studies improved my students’ all-around development and independent thinking skills.” (Po4, Code: Supporting long-term retention, All-round development)

There were three opinions on the theme “Skill Development”. The sample opinion is as follows:

“They became aware of their bodies; the fact that it brought a new breath to the lessons motivated and excited them.” (Po9, Code: Becoming aware of their bodies)

Views on the effects of using the KeKeÇa body music approach in teaching on students' achievements

Table 5

The effects of using the KeKeÇa body music approach in teaching on students' achievements

Theme	Code	Frequency	Participants
Quality of Learning		13	
	Learning with body percussion	2	01, 03
	Absorbing subtle details beside the main outcomes	2	01, 03
	Understanding the acquisition	1	08
	Internalising the acquisition	1	08
	Breaking free from boring lecture memorisation	1	09
	Learning all outcomes in difficult subjects	1	05
	Better use of body language	1	07
	Increased body awareness	1	07
	Better learning	1	07
	Increased self-confidence	1	08
	Facilitating the learning process	1	05
Duration		9	
	Greater long-term retention	6	01, 02, 03, 04, 06, 10
	Achieving achievements in a shorter time	2	02, 05
	Faster learning	2	08, 09
Motivation		4	
	Development of teamwork	1	07
	Positive effects on other courses	1	08
	Gamifying the lesson	1	07
	Enjoyment	1	09
Total		26	

Table 5 shows that three themes – “Learning Quality” ($f = 13$), “Duration” ($f = 9$) and “Motivation” ($f = 4$) – and 26 opinions related to these themes that emerged based on the participants' views.

Sample opinions on the theme “Quality of Learning” are given below:

“They learn the outcomes unconsciously while engaging in body percussion. Besides the main outcomes, they also absorb the subtle details we implicitly embed in the process. I can deliver much more than I normally would and in a more enduring way.” (P01, Code: Learning with body

percussion, Absorbing subtle details beside the main outcomes)

“A child who enjoys themselves and feels a sense of presence learns quickly and internalises their achievements. This positively impacts their self-confidence, reinforcing their belief in their abilities. When a child gains a sense of accomplishment from effective learning, their confidence grows, often leading to improved performance in other subjects as well.” (Po8, Code: Understanding the outcome, Internalising the outcome, Increased self-confidence)

There were nine opinions about the theme “Duration”. Sample opinions are given below:

“It enhances long-term retention in learning.” (P10, Code: Greater long-term retention)

“In even the most challenging subjects, it enabled all the children in my large class to acquire fundamental knowledge and skills. It heightened their awareness and made them more eager to learn, thus easing the learning process. Although some learning objectives were designed to take three to four lessons, they were achieved within a single lesson.” (Po9, Code: Faster learning)

Discussion and Conclusions

Mazzella and Ambretti (2023) explore body percussion as a practice rooted in embodied cognition, highlighting its role in enhancing cognitive functions, motor skills and social inclusion. By engaging the body as a primary instrument for learning, body percussion facilitates cognitive processes and promotes emotional expression, making learning more interactive and inclusive. This approach underscores the role of the body in shaping cognition and fostering social interaction.

According to Kosmas et al. (2018, p. 61), “the sensorimotor activity, the relevance of gestures to the theme that is to be reproduced, and the emotional involvement of the participant in the whole process” are the primary principles of the implementation of embodied learning.

The participating teachers’ answers to the first question show *the contribution of “using body music in teaching” on teachers’ professional development* is that the practice helps *classroom management* ($f = 11$) as well as *ensuring quality and continuity of learning* ($f = 9$) and *creativity and activity generation skills* ($f = 4$), all of which foster the cognitive functions.

According to the teachers’ replies to the second question, the *functions of using body music in teaching* are *course diversity* ($f = 10$) and *quality of learning*

($f = 10$). The first finding shows that the adaptability rate of KeKeÇa body music activities to the primary school curriculum is quite high, which supports the idea that the rhythmic transcription processes (i.e., from language or visuals to body music) included in the training provided the participating teachers with the ability to prepare activities for a variety of subjects from the curriculum.

Regarding the teachers' third response, *an effect of using body music in teaching* is that it *raises motivation and joy* ($f = 13$), one of the most popular themes that supports the emotional involvement of the participants and influences cognitive functions, as well as the second theme *attracting attention and interest* ($f = 10$), which is a cognitive function itself.

The first two themes of the fourth question, *the effects of using body music in teaching on students' achievements*, which are *quality of learning* ($f = 13$) and *duration* ($f = 9$), are directly linked to cognitive functions, whereas the third theme, *motivation* ($f = 4$), is also closely related, as it influences these functions.

In addition, the codes "use in physical education", "using instead of morning exercise", "becoming aware of their bodies" and "increased body awareness" point to effects on motor skills, whereas "active participation of students in the learning process", "increased self-confidence", again "increased self-confidence" and "development of teamwork" are codes that feed social inclusion. Considering all of the codings made, the most popular two are *enjoyment* ($f = 6$), as *an effect of using body music in teaching on students' motivation*, and *greater long-term retention* ($f = 6$), as *an effect of using body music in teaching on students' achievements*.

Accordingly, the themes in order of popularity would be *motivation and joy* ($f = 13$), *quality of learning* ($f = 13$), *classroom management* ($f = 11$), *quality of learning* ($f = 10$), *course diversity* ($f = 10$), *attracting attention and interest* ($f = 10$), *ensuring quality and continuity of learning* ($f = 9$) and *duration* ($f = 9$), all of which are related to cognitive functions.

The integration of body music as an educational tool aligns closely with principles highlighted in various studies, such as embodied cognition, fostering cognitive functions and promoting inclusivity. Cavadas and Sá-Pinto (2023) explored real-life teaching practices, emphasising the importance of interactive and engaging approaches in teacher education. Their findings resonate with the benefits of body music, such as increasing motivation, fostering creativity and ensuring continuity in learning, as observed in the responses from teachers using KeKeÇa body music activities.

Kink-Hampersberger et al. (2023) discuss the tension between theoretical frameworks and practical applications in teacher training, noting that reflexivity can bridge this gap. The application of body music games in classrooms,

as reported, serves as an example of such reflexivity, where teachers adapted theoretical knowledge into practical, playful and engaging activities.

Chilla et al. (2024) highlighted the role of teacher preparedness and adaptability in education. Similarly, the adaptability of rhythmic transcription processes to primary school curricula demonstrates the flexibility and inclusivity of body music, enhancing course diversity and the quality of learning. This adaptability supports diverse classroom needs and fosters a holistic educational approach.

Fernandez et al. (2024) investigated the role of creative methodologies in science classes, illustrating how interactive, embodied approaches can ignite curiosity and improve learning outcomes. Similarly, the reported effects of body music, such as motivation, joy and teamwork, as well as its interactive learning environment (Özgu Bulut, 2012, p. 753), reflect the potential of such creative interventions to enhance student engagement and achievements.

Nijakowska (2022) discussed the impact of inclusive teaching practices on learners with specific needs, emphasising the importance of emotional involvement and active participation. Body music, as observed in this study, promotes self-confidence, body awareness and active engagement, aligning with these principles to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Novljan and Pavlin (2022) explored the impact of outdoor lessons on primary education, emphasising hands-on, experiential learning. Body music, with its emphasis on movement and sound, complements this approach by enabling students to explore learning through physical engagement and sensory experiences.

Tomljenović and Novaković (2019) examined the competence of student teachers in the visual arts, pointing out the value of creative pedagogies. The KeKeÇa body music approach similarly empowers teachers to design innovative, arts-based learning activities, enhancing their creativity and pedagogical skills.

By connecting body music practice to these studies, it is evident that this approach not only enriches teaching and learning experiences, but also aligns with broader trends in contemporary educational research. Future research could investigate its long-term impacts, especially as a structured component of teacher training programmes.

The product of this project will be an addition to certain literature that contains explanations of body music games (Bulut, 2020; Popović & Karl, 2021; Goodkin, 2008). In addition, workshops and training targeting teachers, aimed at letting them experience certain games and gain the necessary skills of facilitation, will be organised. A follow-up study on the functionality of this educational product can be undertaken in the coming years.

The present study has successfully contributed to the use of a movement and sound-based approach by primary school teachers who created and applied their games with their students in the class. In the videos they sent, we could observe children playing the games in the garden in a circle formation during breaks. Additional therapeutic benefits of the KeKeÇa body music approach are the self-touch (Cristobal, 2018; Moffitt, 2018; Seoane, 2016; Young, 2007) and the circle formation (Karampoula & Panhofer, 2018).

The present research has created a useful mindset in young teachers' approach to practical, fun and embodied ways of teaching and learning in the classroom. The aim was to explore teachers' experience of using the KeKeÇa body music approach in teaching primary school subjects. In the videos that were sent during the training, the enthusiastic and motivated attitude of the students playing the games in the classroom and school garden, both during lessons and breaks, is observable, supporting the results of the content analysis. Considering body music as a powerful and therapeutic educational tool that combines embodiment, play-based learning and art education, we suggest versions of KeKeÇa Body Music Training as a single-term course to be included in teacher training programmes at the Faculty of Education, tailored according to the needs of the specific branch.

In brief, the present study explores the integration of the KeKeÇa body music approach in primary education, highlighting its impact on teachers' professional development and students' cognitive, emotional and social outcomes. The participating teachers reported improved classroom management, creativity in activity design and enhanced teaching effectiveness, while the students demonstrated increased motivation, joy and attention, as well as improved learning quality, with additional benefits for motor skills and social inclusion. The findings align with principles of embodied cognition, emphasising the role of sensorimotor activity, emotional engagement and creative pedagogy in fostering inclusive and interactive learning environments.

However, certain limitations exist. The study's sample size was limited to a specific group of primary school teachers, restricting generalisability. Furthermore, the reliance on qualitative methods, while insightful, could benefit from complementary quantitative data to strengthen the findings. The observations were based on teacher-reported outcomes and videos, which might introduce subjective biases. Finally, the long-term impacts of the approach on both teachers and students remain unexplored.

Future research could address these limitations by conducting longitudinal studies with diverse teacher and student populations, employing mixed methods to validate findings. Investigating the effects of KeKeÇa Body

Music Training on specific subjects, such as mathematics or science, as well as its application for students with special educational needs, could further expand its scope. Practical implications suggest including Body Music Training in teacher education programmes, focusing on activity design and embodied learning. This would ensure that teachers are equipped to integrate such creative methodologies, fostering an inclusive, dynamic and interactive classroom environment.

Ethical statement

This research study was approved by the Ondokuz Mayıs University Social Sciences and Humanities Ethical Research Committee.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Encouraging Social and Emotional Learning in Preschool Children Through Carrying Out Musical Activities in the Daily Routine

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☞ In the context of kindergarten, the daily routine includes various activities aimed at the holistic development of children. Carrying out musical activities in the daily routine plays an important role in encouraging social and emotional learning. For the present research, which included preschool children, we developed a plan for implementing elements of the children's daily routine enriched with musical activities, monitored the effect of this routine on social and emotional skills, and verified the realisation of the planned musical goals. The results of the research confirmed the effect of implementing musical activities regarding (1) self-awareness and self-management – children more often recognised their own emotions, they became aware of their emotions and regulated them, they expressed a feeling of joy, respected the agreed rules, understood what is right or wrong and asked for help if they needed it; and (2) social skills for establishing relationships and social awareness – children more often encouraged other children in the group to participate in activities, they successfully participated in common activities, shared things with other children, and recognised and empathised with the emotions of other children. Most of the children were also successful in achieving the planned musical goals.

Keywords: social and emotional learning, kindergarten, daily routine, musical activities, preschool children

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Spodbujanje socialnega in čustvenega učenja predšolskih otrok z izvajanjem glasbenih dejavnosti v dnevni rutini

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☞ V vrtcu dnevna rutina vključuje različne dejavnosti, ki so namenjene celostnemu razvoju otrok. Izvajanje glasbenih dejavnosti kot del dnevne rutine ima pomembno vlogo pri spodbujanju socialnega in čustvenega učenja. V raziskavi, v katero smo vključili predšolske otroke, smo oblikovali načrt izvedbe elementov dnevne rutine, obogatene z glasbenimi dejavnostmi, spremljali učinek izvajanja dnevne rutine na razvoj socialnih in čustvenih veščin ter preverili uresničevanje načrtovanih glasbenih ciljev. Izsledki raziskave so potrdili učinek izvajanja glasbenih dejavnosti na področju 1) samozavedanja in samokontrole – otroci so pogosteje prepoznavali lastna čustva, jih ozaveščali in uravnavali, izražali veselje, spoštovali dogovorjena pravila, razumeli, kaj je prav in kaj narobe, ter prosili za pomoč, če so jo potrebovali, in na področju 2) socialnih veščin za vzpostavljanje odnosov in socialnega samozavedanja – otroci so pogosteje spodbujali k dejavnostim druge otroke v skupini, se uspešno vključevali v skupno delo, delili stvari z drugimi otroki ter prepoznavali čustva drugih otrok in se vanje vživljali. Večina otrok je bilo uspešna tudi pri doseganju načrtovanih glasbenih ciljev.

Ključne besede: socialno in čustveno učenje, vrtec, dnevna rutina, glasbene dejavnosti, predšolski otroci

Introduction

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a process through which children (and adults) acquire knowledge, develop skills, recognise and manage emotions, show empathy towards others, establish and maintain relationships within society, and make responsible decisions (Denham, 2006; Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Ritblatt et al., 2013). With the establishment of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Clark, 2019), the main aim of which is to promote and implement SEL as an integral part of teaching, the social and emotional part of children's personalities has gained prominence. Numerous authors (Thompson & Lagattuta, 2006; Weissberg et al., 2015; Weissberg, 2019) suggest that the development of social, emotional, behavioural and character skills is essential for success at school, in the workplace, in relationships, in society and in life in general. On the other hand, maladjustment in the social and emotional sphere hinders the way a child functions in various circumstances and periods of their life (Campbell et al., 2016). Kroflič and Smrtnik Vitulić (2015, p. 55) confirm that: "Children's social competence also includes effective emotional regulation. Emotionally well-regulated people are capable of managing their emotions in a flexible and socially acceptable way."

The use of creative media to enhance social and emotional competence is especially suitable for younger children, with this kind of learning being conducted experientially and through play. Artistic expression has a positive impact on children's communication skills (Duh, 2016) and creative expression often helps people find socially accepted ways of expressing and regulating emotions such as anger, disappointment, love, etc. (Malchiodi, 2018).

Social and emotional learning and music

Engaging in artistic activities, especially music, is associated with positive development in children on several levels (Habe, 2020). Research demonstrates the impact of young children's musical engagement on well-being, self-confidence and the development of social skills (Ilari, 2016, 2018; Saarikallio, 2019) and confirms the link between music education and the social and emotional competences of preschool children (Boucher et al., 2021; Kirby et al., 2022). There is extensive evidence of the key role of music in regulating emotions and moods (Saarikallio, 2011; Brown & Sax, 2013; Randall et al., 2014; Campayo-Muñoz & Cabedo-Mas, 2017; Williams & Berthelsen, 2019), and in encouraging positive affective states (North et al., 2004) and prosocial behaviour (Schellenberg et al., 2015; Hallam, 2015; Ilari et al., 2020; Zadnik & Smrekar, 2024). Boone and

Cunningham (2001) found that children between the ages of 4 and 5 are able to express, through movement, certain emotions that they perceive through music, such as happiness, sadness, anger and fear. Váradi (2022) believes that music education in a group setting helps develop acceptance of and interactions with others, and that the social experience surplus of joint activities also has a positive influence on empathy. Küpana (2015) and Pellitteri (2006) mention five ways in which music education and SEL complement each other, namely that music can be used for relaxation, for encouraging creativity and the imagination, as an emotional stimulus and aesthetic experience, as a form of self-expression, and as a form of group experience. SEL includes the following areas of social and emotional skills (CASEL, 2013), which can be developed through various musical activities:

- *Self-awareness*: emotional learning competence includes recognising emotions, accurate self-perception, self-efficacy, self-confidence and recognising strengths. An example in music: a child is disappointed for not having sung a song correctly; they are aware of this feeling and put it into words.
- *Self-management*: this component includes control of stress, stress management, self-motivation, self-discipline, setting goals and organisational skills. An example in music: a child experiences a sense of dread when they assume the role of a soloist in a choir; they use various breathing and relaxation techniques to ensure a successful performance.
- *Relationship skills*: this component includes communication, social engagement, relationship building, teamwork, listening, collaborating and offering help. An example in music: a child encourages their friends and peers to join a choir.
- *Social awareness*: social learning skills include the ability to recognise other points of view, empathy, respect for diversity, respect for others, and understanding social and ethical norms. An example in music: a child playing in an orchestra offers to help a friend who has problems with their playing technique.
- *Responsible decision making*: this component includes recognising a problem, analysing the situation, solving the problem, evaluation and reflection, as well as personal, moral and ethical responsibility. An example in music: a child prepares for a performance; in order to be successful, they decide to devote more time to rehearsing before the performance.

Daily routine and music

A daily routine is a series of activities that are repeated every day in the same order. A routine provides structure, stability and predictability, which is especially important for children, as it helps them feel secure and know what to expect. Hohmann and Weikart (2005) advocate a planned and consistent daily routine that should support active learning. Bregar Golobič (2004) believes that the individual experiences their daily routine as something spontaneous, authentic and natural. As Wildenger et al. (2008) explain, the daily routine is crucial for young children in establishing a sense of security, trust and independence. Lepičnik Vodopivec and Hmelak (2020) believe that elements of the daily routine – such as children's arrival at and departure from kindergarten, care for hygiene, food, transitions between activities, rest, tidying up and arranging the classroom – offer children a consistent schedule of events that they can rely on and comprehend.

Elements of the daily routine can be enriched with a variety of musical activities, such as singing, playing musical instruments, engaging in musical didactic games, creating music, listening to music and expression through movement. Hudoklin (2023) states that music is intrinsically inviting and serves as a motivational tool for many children due to its very 'nature': it can have a calming effect, remind children of a certain task, announce the beginning or end of morning circle time, signal a calm transition to another activity or a change of corner, calm children before rest time, or wake them up as they arrive in the morning, inviting them into the playroom.

The connection between musical activities and elements of the daily routine is that music not only makes routine activities more interesting, but also encourages development in various aspects of the child's personality (Hallam, 2015). Jacobi (2012) suggests the following musical activities with which we can profoundly affect the development of social and emotional competence: free improvisation, which allows children to express their own emotions without conditions; participation in a choir or orchestra, which encourages respect and taking into account the opinions of others, as well as the responsibility for reaching group goals; and listening to music and linking it to emotions, which encourages emotional awareness and facilitates the development of a vocabulary for expressing emotions.

Method

On the basis of the theoretical starting points with which we confirm the role of music in developing social and emotional skills in preschool children, and the importance of the daily routine in the upbringing and education of preschool children, we carried out research in which we:

- planned didactic units of the daily routine enriched with musical activities,
- monitored the effect of implementing a daily routine enriched with musical activities on the development of social and emotional skills, and
- checked the achievement of the planned musical goals.

Participants

The research included 24 children aged between 5 and 6 ($M = 5.70$) who attended a kindergarten group following the state programme for preschool education (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport, National Education Institute Slovenia, 1999). The sample consisted of 12 (50%) girls and 12 (50%) boys.

Research design

The research focused on elements of the daily routine, such as the children's arrival at kindergarten, preparing for mealtime, morning circle time, transitions between activities and preparing for rest time, all of which were enriched with musical didactic games and musical activities, or performing, listening to and creating music. For each element of the daily routine, we planned a didactic unit with social and emotional learning goals (developing communication skills, cooperating to achieve group goals, solving conflicts and encouraging positive relationships, recognising one's own emotions and the emotions of other children, developing skills for regulating and managing emotions, encouraging positive behaviour and positive emotions, self-consciousness and optimism) and concrete musical goals (the child listens attentively to musical content, reproduces and creates rhythmic and melodic motifs, follows the rules of musical-didactic games, sings a song independently, abides by intonation, creatively follows the song being sung, creatively expresses experiences and perceptions of music through movement, executes movements following the rhythm of the song, relaxes and calms down). The didactic units were conducted on 21 consecutive days.

Didactic units of elements of the daily routine enriched with musical activities:

- *The children's arrival at kindergarten*

Upon arrival and during departure, the teacher greets the children with the song 'Dobro jutro sonce' (Good Morning Sunshine). They then offer the child musical instruments from the table at the entrance to the playroom. The child chooses an instrument and plays it in a creative way. The musical-didactic games 'Glasbeni pozdrav' (Musical Greeting) and 'Glasbeni odmev' (Musical Echo) are performed in the group. In the latter, the children take turns choosing to be someone else's echo. Other children who have already arrived at the kindergarten are encouraged to join the activity and play together with the children entering the playroom. In response to the greeting 'Good Morning!' or 'Good Day!' the child sings or creates a melody.

- *Preparing for mealtime*

The teacher sings the folk song 'In mi smo lačni' (And We Are Hungry), announcing the new element of the daily routine. The children recognise the song and split into two groups, representing the choir and the orchestra. The choir sings the song and the orchestra accompanies them on Orff instruments. Two children designated as being on duty continue singing the song to the accompaniment of rhythm sticks and invite the other children to wash their hands and take care of hygiene. They sing and accompany the song until all of the children are at the table. During mealtime, the teacher plays soothing music as background encouragement to an unhurried eating pace.

- *Morning circle time*

The teacher plays the children a part of the soothing piece *Morning Mood* by Edvard Grieg (Peer Gynt, Op. 23), and without unnecessary haste and hurrying, encourages a calm transition to morning circle time. The teacher initiates a discussion about the sunny morning that the composer has illustrated musically. The teacher encourages the children to listen attentively and express their experiences and perceptions of the piece of music through dance. Listening to the music and dancing, the children prepare for the activities that will follow.

- *Transitions between activities, tidying up*

With a song, the teacher announces a new element of the daily routine, the transition between activities. When the children hear the lively song 'Pesem za pospravljanje' (Tidying Up Song) they begin tidying the playroom, singing

along as they do so. Once they have finished tidying up, they line up, listen to a given note and, marching along and clapping their hands, sing the song once more. In the end, the children are asked to count how many times they had to sing the song before the playroom was tidy and the result is noted on a bar chart. At the end of the week, the children and their teacher check the chart to see which day they tidied up the playroom fastest.

- *Rest time*

The child who is on duty creates a slow, quiet tune on a pentatonic metallophone. Upon hearing the instrument, the children understand that rest time is approaching and, in cooperation with the teacher, prepare the playroom. Since rest time in kindergarten is not supposed to be too rigidly regulated and enforced, the teacher may continue to play instruments (guitar, jingle bells, metallophone, etc.) during rest time. Those children who do not need to rest or who do not fall asleep during rest time have the option of playing calmly.

Instruments and procedures

The data was collected through video footage and observation sheets. The implementation of the planned elements of the daily routine enriched with musical activities was recorded three times at the beginning of the research and three times at the end. A camera on a stand was placed in the welcome area, where we monitored the arrival of children (7.00–8.00 am); in the washing area, where the children wash their hands and prepare for their meal (8.00–8.30 am); and in the playroom, where both planned and spontaneous activities take place, including eating, forming a circle during morning circle time, transitions between activities, tidying up, and preparing the area for rest time (8.30 am–1.30 pm).

On the basis of the video footage, we observed how frequently each child resorted to individual social and emotional skills at the beginning (the first three days of the research) and at the end (the last three days of the research) of the period of implementing the daily routine enriched with musical activities. The results were noted on an observation sheet, which contained 13 social and emotional skills. As a starting point in developing the observation sheet, we used some of the individual clusters of competencies for social and emotional skills as defined by the CASEL Guide (2013): self-awareness (the child expresses basic emotions and recognises his/her own emotions), self-management (the child asks for help needed, follows agreed rules, understands what is right or wrong), relationship skills (the child encourages other children in the group, successfully participates in group activities, assists a child who needs help), and

social awareness (the child shares items with other children, empathises with the emotions of others children). A four-level score was used for evaluation: never (1) – the behaviour, emotional state or action never occurs on the day of observation; rarely (2) – the behaviour, emotional state or action occurs once or twice during the course of the day of observation; often (3) – the behaviour, emotional state or action occurs three to four times during the course of the day of observation; always (4) – the behaviour, emotional state or action always occurs during the course of the day of observation. The frequency rating in the categories ‘rarely’ and ‘often’ was determined after making the recording and reviewing all of the frequencies of occurrence of social and emotional skills.

Together with a psychologist, a pedagogue and a music pedagogue, we prepared descriptions of some of the skills, which helped us monitor and evaluate these skills. The descriptions of simple emotions were based on expressions of behaviour associated with gestures, actions and facial expressions:

- expressing joy: laughs loudly, jumps, dances; facial expressions: upturned corners of the mouth, creases around the eyes and outer corners of the mouth;
- expressing sadness: lowers head, lies in the corner, cries, withdraws from the group; facial expressions: lowered corners of the mouth, lips may tremble, eyes closed;
- expressing anger: aggressive behaviour – throws things, hits, shouts; facial expressions: eyes with a bulging expression, eyebrows lowered and together, furrowed brow, pressed lips or narrowed eyes, mouth can be straight or tight or can be shaped like when shouting, nostrils flared, facial expressions can be tense or serious;
- expressing fear: stops and shakes, is quiet or behaves in an unusual way; facial expressions: eyebrows raised, straight or together, mouth and eyes open, tense, horizontal furrows on the brow, excessive caution;
- recognising own emotions: observation and, if necessary, individual discussions between the teacher and the child during or after execution of the individual element of the daily routine (questions about how the child feels and their mood);
- understanding right or wrong actions: observation and, if necessary, individual discussions between the teacher and the child about their comprehension of what is right and what is wrong.

The elements of the daily routine enriched with musical activities were carried out by the teacher who also had the role of researcher and co-author of the research. We arranged for a professional review of the footage, the

observation sheets and the chart recording the musical goals. The review of the frequency of occurrence of social and emotional skills was conducted by a psychologist, a music pedagogue and the teacher, whereas the assessment of the realisation of musical skills was conducted by a pedagogue, a music pedagogue and the teacher.

Data processing procedures

At the beginning and end of implementing the didactic units, we carried out an analysis of the frequency of occurrence of social and emotional skills with the help of the video footage and the observation sheets. An analysis monitoring the achievement of the musical goals, in which we determined whether the child had achieved the musical goals or not, was only conducted at the end of the research period. The data were analysed using the SPSS software package. We used frequency distribution, the arithmetic mean, standard deviation and the dependent samples t-test, based on which we determined whether there was a statistically significant difference in the frequency of occurrence of social and emotional skills between the initial and final stages of implementing the planned elements of the daily routine enriched with musical activities.

Results

Table 1

Frequency of occurrence of social and emotional skills in the initial and final stages of the research

SEL skills ¹	Social and emotional skills	Time of observation	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
self-awareness	expresses emotions of joy	beginning	3.13	0.74	-3.191	0.004
		end	3.50	0.66		
	expresses emotions of fear	beginning	2.79	0.88	3.685	0.001
		end	2.21	0.88		
	expresses emotions of anger	beginning	2.42	1.10	3.715	0.001
		end	1.92	1.02		
	expresses emotions of sadness	beginning	3.00	0.83	4.628	< 0.001
		end	2.25	1.11		
recognises own emotions	beginning	3.17	0.92	-3.077	0.005	
	end	3.46	0.78			

SEL skills ¹	Social and emotional skills	Time of observation	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
self-control	asks for help when required	beginning	2.75	1.19	-2.892	0.008
		end	3.08	1.14		
	respects agreed rules	beginning	2.92	0.93	-3.412	0.002
		end	3.38	0.87		
	understands what is right and what is wrong	beginning	2.96	0.86	-4.796	< 0.001
		end	3.46	0.78		
relationship skills	encourages other children in the group	beginning	2.25	1.11	-2.46	0.022
		end	2.46	1.14		
	successfully includes themselves in group activities	beginning	2.92	0.97	-3.412	0.002
		end	3.38	0.82		
	helps another child who needs assistance	beginning	2.29	1.22	-2.005	0.057
		end	2.70	1.18		
social awareness	shares things with other children	beginning	2.67	0.83	-4.114	< 0.001
		end	3.09	0.85		
	recognises and empathises with the emotions of other children	beginning	2.33	1.00	-4.412	< 0.001
		end	2.79	1.02		

Note. ¹Social and emotional skills (CASEL, 2013)

The data related to the frequency of occurrence of social and emotional skills, collected at the beginning and end of the research, point to a positive effect of engaging in musical activities on the development of SEL skills, as there is a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.05$) in all areas. After the period of carrying out elements of the daily routine enriched with musical activities, the children more frequently recognised their own emotions and expressed joyful emotions. If they required help, this was also expressed. They respected the agreed rules and understood what is right and what is wrong. They became more skilled in communication, encouraged other children in the group, and got involved in team activities. They more often recognised and empathised with the emotions of other children, offered help and shared items with others.

Table 2*Frequency (f) and percentage (f%) of the realisation of the planned musical goals*

Element of the daily routine	Children's musical goals	Yes		No	
		f	f%	f	f%
arrival	attentively listens to the song	18	75	6	25
	reproduces rhythmic motifs	20	83.3	4	16.7
	reproduces melodic motifs	18	75	6	25
	relaxed vocal creativity	19	79.2	5	20.8
	relaxed instrumental creativity	23	95.8	1	4.2
	respects the rules of musical didactic games	21	87.5	3	12.5
preparing for mealtime	sings a song on their own	17	70.8	7	29.2
	creatively accompanies the song	24	100	/	/
morning circle time	attentively listens to the music	19	79.2	5	20.8
	creatively expresses their experience and perception of the piece of music through movement	20	83.3	4	16.7
transition between activities - tidying up	sings the song in the given tone	16	66.7	8	33.3
	moves in harmony with the rhythm of the song	18	75	6	25
rest time	creates a peaceful instrumental composition	24	100	/	/
	attentively listens to the music	20	83.3	4	16.7
	relaxes and calms down while listening to music	24	100	/	/

At the end of the period of implementing the daily routine enriched with musical activities, the children had achieved most of the planned goals. All of the children participated in creatively accompanying a sung song, created peaceful instrumental compositions and relaxed when listening to music. Most of the children listened attentively to the pieces of music played, were creative in a relaxed way both instrumentally and vocally, and expressed themselves through movement in the rhythm of the music. They successfully reproduced rhythmic and melodic motifs and creatively expressed their experiences and perceptions of the music through movement. Slightly fewer children were able to follow a given tone for a song.

Discussion

The results of the study confirm the effect of the implementation of a daily routine enriched with musical activities on the social and emotional development of a child's personality. The participating children made progress in recognising and regulating their own emotions; negative emotions appeared

less frequently at the end of the research than at the beginning. As claimed by Blasco-Magraner et al. (2021), music in the upbringing and education of children between the ages of 3 and 12 can contribute to the development of emotional intelligence, especially in perceiving, expressing and regulating emotions. Children who participated in musical activities were better able to recognise and express emotions and regulate their emotional states, such as aggression or anger. Winsler et al. (2011) and Kùpana (2015) also confirm that music facilitates better understanding of emotions and better self-regulation, which in turn encourages intellectual, emotional and social development of the child's personality.

The children in our study also became more adept at establishing relationships with other children. Varner (2019, 2020) confirms that, by linking SEL and music, educators can influence emotional self-regulation, interaction with peers and decision-making. SEL skills can therefore be developed through actively involving children in activities such as musical creation, playing in an orchestra, participating in a choir, or listening to music for different moods. All of these activities promote cooperation, communication and positive interaction between peers. In the words of Kim (2017, p. 183): "Any musical piece is the product of someone's creative work and a means of communication with others. Musical activities involve creativity not only in the product but also in the processes of imagining, creating, performing, and responding that require critical thinking, collaboration, and communication."

In the present research, the musical activities of each element of the daily routine were carefully planned, executed and evaluated, as is confirmed by the realisation of the planned musical goals. At the end of the period of implementing the didactic units, most of the children were happy to actively participate in the musical-didactic games, singing, playing instruments, creating music, listening to music and expressing themselves through movement or in forming the daily routine. Addressi (2009) states that, through repetitive actions that are reinforced by their daily routine, children find their place in the world of relationships and perceive the general, linguistic and musical culture of the group to which they belong. The child learns to predict events, and through this also to control them. In our study, the musical aspects of the daily routine encouraged the pace and time organisation of the children's actions, while the implementation of musical activities as part of the daily routine made the transition from one activity to another easier. Barrett et al. (2022) suggest that, as part of implementing elements of their daily routine, educators should plan daily singing, playing instruments, musical games, listening to music, moving to music and creating music.

As argued by Batistič Zorec and Došler (2016), educators and teachers should flexibly plan elements of the daily routine, with an emphasis on creating opportunities for the child's cognitive, emotional and social development, as well as learning. Jackson et al. (2024) also consider ways of encouraging the cooperation of preschool educators in emotion-focused teaching. The only correct way to achieve the desired goals is through appropriate professional training and a positive attitude of the educator towards work and content through which we can develop the social and emotional competences of children.

Conclusion

Enriching elements of the daily routine with musical activities has an important role in encouraging SEL in early childhood. Although the results of the present research confirm the effect musical activities have on the social and emotional development of children, we need to bear in mind certain methodological limitations, such as the small size of the sample, the duration of the research and the fact that it did not include a control group or groups of children of various ages. These factors do, of course, limit the ability to generalise the results of the research. Additionally, it is essential to address the challenges associated with implementing musical activities in diverse preschool environments. These challenges include varying levels of resources, differences in educators' training, and cultural contexts that may influence the effectiveness of musical interventions. Discussion of these challenges can help refine practical recommendations and support adaptability across a wide range of settings.

Nevertheless, the findings encourage further research in the field of developing social and emotional competencies of preschool children within the framework of implementing elements of the daily routine. This includes studying the effects of specific musical activities (e.g., playing instruments, group singing, music creation), monitoring and evaluating their effects across different developmental stages, and examining the long-term impact of such interventions, which could provide insights into how sustained exposure to musical activities influences children's social and emotional development over time. Future studies should also explore the influence of incorporating musical activities into elements of the daily routine on children's cognitive and psychophysical development. A significant contribution would be the development of proposals for the long-term systematic inclusion of musical activities in daily routines and integrating research approaches from various disciplines, such as psychology, pedagogy and music therapy, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of musical activities on the holistic development of a child's personality.

Ethical statement

The research was conducted in compliance with the principles of research ethics. All of the participants were assured that the collected data would be used exclusively for research purposes. We prepared a memo for all of the children's parents, informing them about the purpose of the research. All of the parents gave their consent for the participation and recording of their children. The research was approved by the Ethics Committee at the University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts (Approval ref.: 038-12-147/2023/8 FFUM).

Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Educating Children for Creativity and Democracy Through a Music and Drama Community of Practice

BLAŽENKA BAČLIJA SUŠIĆ*¹ AND VESNA BREBRIĆ²

∞ The priority of promoting children's creativity and democracy in education, which includes values such as freedom of expression, competence, respect for diversity, empathy, collaboration, dialogue and the development of critical thinking and curiosity, is strongly supported by communities of practice that foster these values and promote heuristic and sociocultural approaches to music learning and artistic expression. The research explored how children aged 5–10 years ($N = 10$) used musical and artistic forms for creative expression in music drama activities within a community of practice (music drama studio), and how elements of democratic education were manifested in these activities. An ethnographic case study in early childhood education and care was used to explore children's culture, experiences and actions through interactional and participatory observation methods. The data were analysed through a written protocol of observation, transcriptions and video recordings. An inductive and deductive thematic analysis was used to better structure and interpret the data, organised into two main themes (categories): Forms of creative artistic expression and Democratic aspects of education. The conclusion emphasises that the integration of music, other arts and process drama within a community of practice, led by a skilled teacher, provides authentic learning opportunities that foster democratic artistic expression, creativity and holistic development, preparing children for active citizenship.

Keywords: children's creativity, community of practice, democratic education, music and artistic expression, process drama

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Vzgoja otrok za ustvarjalnost in demokracijo skozi prakso glasbeno-dramske skupnosti

BLAŽENKA BAČLIJA SUŠIĆ IN VESNA BREBRIĆ

~ Prednostna naloga spodbujanja ustvarjalnosti in demokracije pri otrocih v izobraževanju, ki vključuje vrednote, kot so: svoboda izražanja, kompetentnost, spoštovanje raznolikosti, empatija, sodelovanje, dialog ter razvoj kritičnega mišljenja in radovednosti, je močno podprta s prakso skupnosti, ki goji te vrednote in spodbuja hevristične in sociokulturne pristope k učenju glasbe in umetniškemu izražanju. Raziskava je preučevala, kako so otroci v starosti od 5 do 10 let ($N = 10$) uporabljali glasbene in umetniške oblike za ustvarjalno izražanje v glasbeno-dramskih dejavnostih v okviru prakse skupnosti (glasbeno-dramski studio) in kako so se elementi demokratičnega izobraževanja kazali v teh dejavnostih. Za raziskovanje kulture, izkušenj in dejanj otrok so bile uporabljene etnografske študije primerov v zgodnjem otroškem izobraževanju in varstvu, in sicer z interakcijskimi in s participativnimi metodami opazovanja. Podatki so bili analizirani s pomočjo pisnega protokola opazovanja, transkripcij in videoposnetkov. Za boljšo strukturo in interpretacijo podatkov je bila uporabljena induktivna in deduktivna tematska analiza, organizirana v dve glavni temi (kategoriji): oblike ustvarjalnega umetniškega izražanja in demokratični vidiki izobraževanja. Zaključek poudarja, da integracija glasbe, drugih vrst umetnosti in procesnega gledališča v praksi glasbeno-dramske skupnosti, ki jo vodi usposobljen učitelj, ponuja avtentične priložnosti za učenje, ki spodbujajo demokratično umetniško izražanje, ustvarjalnost in celostni razvoj ter otroke pripravljajo na aktivno državljanstvo.

Ključne besede: ustvarjalnost pri otrocih, praksa skupnosti, demokratično izobraževanje, glasba in umetniško izražanje, procesno gledališče

Introduction

The growing threats to democracy, freedom and human rights we face today (Deligiannis et al., 2021) require democracy issues to be at the heart of education. EU programmes support non-formal education for social and civic competences, promoting active and responsible participation of citizens in democratic decision making. They endorse UNESCO's mission to improve education systems for a changing world and emphasise that learning should focus on both methods and content, highlighting the importance of a transdisciplinary approach. Consequently, the ESD-Net for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD-Net, 2030) promotes knowledge sharing, collaboration and mutual learning (UNESCO, 2021).

Building on the Enlightenment philosophers' emphasis that the core purpose of effective education is the ongoing reconstruction of experience, social participation in a community of practice is crucial to democratic education. By placing the child at the centre of his educational philosophy, Dewey (2024) embraced educational approaches, pedagogical issues and the connections he made between education, democracy, experience and society. Emphasising democratic education as a way of associative living (O'Neill, 2006), this approach highlights the need to adapt educational practices to the changing needs of learners and society by actively engaging with one's environment rather than passively receiving information (Mintz, 2023). Accordingly, Dewey's humanistic ideals, rooted in his democratic principles and his commitment to freedom, equality and children's experiences, advocate an approach to learning that fosters imagination, flexible thinking, communication, listening and responsiveness to the needs of others (Mason, 2017; Sikandar, 2015).

Alongside Dewey, Rousseau recognised the importance of aligning education with democratic values (Ovens & Lynch, 2019), while John Locke similarly emphasised the creation of an education system that teaches individuals to be functional and contributing members of civil society (Jordan, 2023). Building on these perspectives, democratic education not only benefits the classroom, but also contributes to the broader development of a democratic society by raising awareness of its principles and benefits (Alshurman, 2015; Tuhuteru, 2023). As these skills are not naturally developed, this approach serves as an important tool for educating children about democratic principles and practices, encouraging self-discovery and engagement with the world, and preparing them for responsible and engaged citizenship (Kochoska, 2015; Subba, 2014).

In line with this, contemporary education programmes should provide children with opportunities to express themselves creatively through aesthetic

activities, including various forms of artistic expression, and to engage with democratic principles through participation in decision-making processes and responsibilities (Ministry of Education and Research of Sweden, 2018).

This approach builds self-confidence, strengthens cooperation and promotes constructive conflict management (Ministry of Education and Research of Sweden, 2018). While Hasen et al. (1999) highlight the basic characteristics of democratic education as freedom of speech and thought, efficiency and competence, acceptance of difference and empathy, and respect rather than domination, Moss (2011) identifies additional characteristics such as cooperation, solidarity, dialogue and listening, the promotion of curiosity, uncertainty and subjectivity, and the development of critical thinking that recognises multiple perspectives and paradigms (Moss, 2011).

From a sociocultural perspective, Lave and Wenger (1991) have identified communities of practice as fundamental to democratic education, viewing learning as progressive engagement within diverse communities. This is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the influential role of peers and communities in shaping the individual's learning journey (Wenger, 1998; 2006). In the context of artistic and aesthetic expression, musical activity within a community of practice is defined as a group operating within a particular sociocultural setting in which individuals collectively learn, share and teach musical knowledge (Brashier, 2016), with both experts and learners working together to foster a mutual exchange of musical impressions.

In this way, musical activity can create spaces in a democratic environment where everyone has the right to be heard, regardless of their background, and where plurality is accepted as the basis for individual and collective growth (Thorgersen, 2015).

The term *musical community of practice* (Barrett, 2005) describes an informal environment in which children lead and control musical activities. In these settings, children, as experts in their own musical play, demonstrate creativity and navigate rules and norms while considering the perspectives of others. Observing music and music-making as a narrative art/act not only demonstrates the incorporation of shared symbols and forms of expression as powerful tools for constructing meaning and representing culture (Barrett, 2016), but also acknowledges children's need for syncretic artistic expression, where they explore new ideas and ways of artistic expression based on their imagination and creativity (Bačlija Sušić & Brebrić, 2022). In this regard, research with children also highlights their development of auditory imagery as a highly creative process from an early age (Wong & Lim, 2017). This capacity for imaginative musical engagement is further supported by children's need for

non-verbal expression of musical experiences, as evidenced by the finding with children aged 7–9 years that “[...] the more they engaged in making music, the fewer words they needed” (Zalar, 2020, p. 134). Through these shared musical experiences, children actively participate in social interactions, develop a sense of belonging and learn the implicit norms of their communities. These communities help children learn and adopt group norms and engage in the adoption, resistance, transformation and reconstruction of the social and cultural practices they encounter in their everyday lives (Barrett, 2005; Gee & Green, 1998).

From the earliest moments, young children use sound to communicate their thoughts and wishes, with their early musical expression reflecting communicative musicality (Malloch & Trevarthen, 2010). This engagement promotes a two-way, meaningful and emotional dialogue with caregivers/teachers. Through music, children connect with and represent their world (Nyland et al., 2015), while enhancing their socioemotional skills and overall well-being by improving emotional expression, social interaction and self-regulation (Bačlija Sušić & Buerger Petrović, 2023).

Considering music as an aural art that stimulates the ears and engages the mind, often evoking pleasure and satisfaction, cultivating the ability to listen attentively and insightfully is arguably the most important and enduring musical skill for children (Campbell & Scott-Kassner, 2018). Research shows that listening to music begins in the womb, with babies remembering music heard before birth, and by nine months children are actively listening and showing preferences (Graven & Browne, 2008). Listening to music has a multisensory effect, influencing how information is processed and communicated and shaping children’s musical perception (Washburn, 2010).

Engaging with different types of information in different modes enhances musical thinking and understanding by stimulating mental processes that improve analytical skills, deepen musical insight and strengthen memory retention (Godinho, 2018). Integrating creative listening into music education can contribute to the development of fluency, flexibility, elaboration and originality in listening skills. This approach not only engages children more deeply in musical activities, but also enhances their ability to think creatively and critically about music, providing a contrast to traditional methods (Kratus, 2017). Essential conditions include adequate space, time and equipment, engaging musical pieces, and a responsive teacher who supports children’s personal interpretations and acknowledges the influence of music (Gluschkof, 2018).

The heuristic and sociocultural perspective of musical learning

Advocating a heuristic and sociocultural perspective on music learning, Partti and Westerlund (2012; 2013) suggest that informal learning environments and new digital/virtual technologies allow individuals to express artistic freedom and develop musical skills in line with their personal aspirations. This approach promotes what they call the “democratic revolution” of the twenty-first century, increasing opportunities for social participation in music, musical learning and artistic expression. This learning perspective emphasises active engagement through performing, manipulating and interacting with music, and offers significant heuristic value in music education (Abril, 2006; Partti & Westerlund, 2012). Despite these advances, however, children’s creative thinking in the context of music improvisation remains a relatively underexplored area (Larsson & Georgii-Hemming, 2019; Siljamäki & Kanellopoulos, 2020), with the specific nuances of improvisation pedagogy for young children only beginning to attract scholarly attention (Johansen et al., 2019). Accordingly, group music improvisation is defined as a process in which some or all of the content is created spontaneously during performance, with participants actively collaborating and shaping the music in real time (MacGlone, 2019). In this context, collaborative improvisation, group creativity, music education and communities of practice emphasise negotiation, reflection and shared decision making in collaborative music making, highlighting the role of the teacher as a facilitator in fostering deliberate reflection and meaningful collaboration (Partti & Westerlund, 2013). Furthermore, it highlights the importance of prioritising democracy in education, particularly in facilitating students’ growth towards democratic artistic expression (Partti, 2014).

The concept of a community of practice serves as a heuristic tool for exploring how participation can enrich learning, while also highlighting potential constraints and certain ways of making sense that are favoured over others (Goodfellow & Lea, 2005; Partti & Westerlund, 2013). Accordingly, in out-of-school settings, participants typically focus on the making of music itself rather than the learning of how to make music (Folkestad, 2006).

Process drama as a pathway to creative expression within the music drama community of practice

As a powerful educational tool, process drama facilitates the exploration of a problem, situation or issue (Brown, 2017), while emphasising the crucial and implicit need for children to explore, create and reflect (Vangsnes &

Økland, 2017). This approach provides opportunities for children to freely express their desire to explore, innovate and reflect. The audience is not involved, except for the participants themselves, who observe each other in the process. Thus, by going beyond traditional teaching methods and relying on creative improvisation rather than a predetermined script (Ødemotland, 2020), process drama becomes a highly engaging form of learning that focuses on collaborative inquiry and problem solving within an imaginary world (DICE, 2010). Guided by a facilitator or teacher, participants explore themes, ideas and emotions through a variety of working methods and drama conventions, making the educational experience dynamic and immersive.

It is therefore crucial to emphasise the role and attitude of the teacher in process drama, which involves showing a deep interest in children's contributions, such as their ideas, thoughts and attitudes, while challenging them to think more deeply, acting as a guide, questioner, participant and observer rather than determining the exact outcome (Wagner, 1999). The changing roles of teachers reflect a conscious understanding of their professional role in the teaching process, with process drama serving as a teaching strategy that accommodates directive, supportive and distal roles, encouraging various forms of democratic participation by children. Leading a process drama, whether as a teacher or facilitator, requires an open attitude towards the children, moving from being the one who knows to the one who wants to know, at times supporting and at times stepping back to let the children lead the exploration. In the supportive role, the teacher guides and reinforces the students' leadership in the learning activities with comments, gestures and smiles, while in the distal role, the teacher withdraws to the periphery as an "awaiting observer" and allows the students to lead (Vangsnæs & Økland, 2017; 2018).

Since there is no drama without tension, the facilitator's role is to create tension by starting with real questions that have no clear answers (Ødemotland, 2020). Facilitating process drama requires a teacher who is willing to be spontaneous, take risks (Dunn, 2016), improvise and anticipate the next steps ahead of the children (Ødegaard et al., 2022). Accordingly, it requires a teacher who is open-minded and playful, who has both pedagogical and artistic skills, and who can subtly encourage the dramatic tension that ignites action in a play (Bowell & Heap, 2001). In line with this, process drama and other educational drama activities should be "both an artistic and an educational journey" (Nee-lands, 2009, p. 14).

The research problem, aims and research questions

In line with the theoretical framework outlined, the research problem stems from the need to educate children for democracy and to nurture their creativity through music and other artistic fields in the context of a community of practice. Consequently, the aim of the research was to explore how children used musical and artistic forms for creative expression in music drama activities within the community of practice (the music drama studio), and how elements of democratic education were manifested in these activities. In line with the problem and the research aim, the following research questions were posed:

- RQ1: What musical and artistic forms of creative expression did the children use in the music drama activities?
- RQ2: What elements of the democratic aspect of education were represented in the activities carried out within the music drama activities?

Method

Participants

The activities took place in an informal setting at the *Magic Wand Music Drama Studio* in a small town in an earthquake-affected area of Croatia. A group of 10 children ($N = 10$), aged 5–10 years (preschool and early school age) participated in the research. The study involved process drama sessions that took place over a two-month period, consisting of five sessions, each lasting 90 minutes (450 minutes in total), allowing for an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon (Hallgren, 2018).

Instruments

While the observation protocol, based on the theoretical framework of democratic education (Hasen et al., 1999; Moss, 2011) in the form of a checklist, allows analysis according to predefined categories, the second protocol, related to process drama and music, offers a more open approach. It focuses on children's implicit needs to explore, create and reflect (Vangsnes & Økland, 2017) through process drama, which facilitates the exploration of problems, situations or issues (Brown, 2017; Vangsnes & Økland, 2017). Therefore, the observation protocol did not include predefined characteristics of musical and artistic forms of expression, but was more flexible and focused on the children's natural flow of expression and creative process.

Research design

Ethnographic case study research was used to gain a deeper understanding of the culture of a particular group bounded by space and time. Ethnographic research in early childhood education and care (ECEC) provides insights into childhood by exploring children's experiences and social interactions, supporting their development and well-being (Köngäs & Määttä, 2023). It shares key features with its parent approaches, such as addressing subjectivity and bias, while using data triangulation to ensure validity and reliability (Fusch et al., 2017).

The present research used interactional and participatory observation methods (Crossman, 2021) to explore sociocultural understandings and practices within a group (Siraj-Blatchford, 2020). Using inventive processes such as storytelling, drama and drawing, these creative methods emphasised knowledge production and enabled the participants to analyse and make sense of their experiences (Veale, 2005).

The transcribed data were analysed and coded using inductive and deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), guided by the research questions. This process included notes from written observation protocols using checklists based on key features of democratic education (Hasen et al., 1999; Moss, 2011), music and drama as key features of the activities carried out within the process drama, transcriptions of video recordings and analysis of the children's artefacts.

Data analysis and coding

Activities related to musical and artistic forms of expression (RQ₁) were analysed inductively based on the notes and video recordings. The elements of the democratic aspect of education (RQ₂) were analysed deductively using checklists based on key features of democratic education (Hasen et al., 1999; Moss, 2011). This type of semi-structured observation protocol provides an initial framework for observing specific behaviours and allows the observer to systematically record both expected and unexpected behaviours during the observation (Palaiologou, 2019).

Following the thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which offers theoretical freedom and a highly flexible approach, the following stages of data analysis were undertaken: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report. Although these categories are interrelated in

practice, they provide different perspectives for observation in accordance with the research questions.

After familiarisation with the data and identification of initial patterns and ideas, the coding process was undertaken (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Based on an analysis from the aspect of RQ1, the following codes were identified: rhythmic play (RP) and spontaneous musical improvisation (SI); choreography (C), expressive gesture (EG) and non-verbal communication (NVC); scenography (S), props design (PD), costume design and creation (CDC) and drawing (D); and character play (CHP) and narrative improvisation (NI) (Table 1). In the next step, themes and categories were developed from the initial codes to capture the key elements observed in the data: *Musical expression and improvisation*; *Dance, movement and expressive gesture*; *Visual artistic expression*; and *Narrative-driven improvisation*.

After reviewing the defined themes to assess their validity and to ensure that they accurately reflected the meanings evident across the dataset, the main theme/category was named and defined to represent the creative and expressive processes observed in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, based on the codes and categories identified (Table 1), which encompassed various forms of creative expression and improvisation through different artistic forms and modalities, the overarching theme of *Forms of creative artistic expression* was established.

Table 1

First category – Forms of creative artistic expression

Codes	Themes (categories)	Main theme (category)
rhythmic play (RP) spontaneous music improvisation (SI)	Musical expression and improvisation	
choreography (C) expressive gestures (EG) non-verbal communication (NVC)	Dance, movement and expressive gesture	
scenography (S) props design (PD) custom design and creation (CDC) drawing (D)	Visual artistic expression	Forms of creative artistic expression
character play (CHP) narrative improvisation (NI)	Narrative-driven improvisation	

A deductive analysis was conducted, driven by the theoretical interests of the researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006), in line with the theoretical framework (Hasen et al., 1999; Moss, 2011) and RQ2. The analysis focused on the overarching category of *Democratic features of education*. Within this category, several key themes were identified: *Freedom of expression and decision making; Collaboration, group problem solving and critical thinking skills; Communication and listening skills; and Respect for diversity, empathy and solidarity*.

From these themes, the following codes were developed to guide the analysis: role choice (RCH), expression of preferences (EP), original ideas (OI), taking initiative (TI) and cooperation (C); non-verbal and verbal dialogue (NVD) and listening (L); conflict resolution (CR) and admitting mistakes and forgiveness (AM); and friendship through reconciliation (FR) (Table 2).

Table 2

Second category – Democratic features of education

Codes	Themes (categories)	Main theme (category)
roles choice (RCH)		
expression of preferences (EP) original ideas (OI), taking initiative (TI), cooperation (C)	Freedom of expression and decision making	
non-verbal and verbal dialogue (NVD), listening (L)	Collaboration, group problem solving and critical thinking skills	Democratic features of education
conflict resolution (CR)		
admitting mistakes and forgiveness (AM)	Communication and listening skills	
friendship through reconciliation (FR)	Respect for diversity, empathy and solidarity	

Results

After a casual discussion about the story, scenario, roles and music, the chosen story in the process drama serves as a starting point, “raising the curtain” (O’Neill, 1995) on creativity and free play, and providing a framework for narrative play (Hakkarainen & Berdikyte, 2014). The children improvised and recreated the suggested story framework, starting with a simple narrative structure:

In a kingdom there lived a king, a queen and a princess, as well as little fairies, one of whom was particularly fond of the music played by the

royal orchestra during festivities. To enhance the musical experience for the guests, who were mostly focused on food and drink, she sprinkled them with magic dust, creating bracelets that encouraged them to dance. Thus the court became a place where all of the guests at the royal parties enjoyed the beautiful music.

After listening to the short story that formed the basis of the process drama, the children were encouraged to shape it according to their preferences. The teacher guided the narrative, asking questions, giving hints and staying ahead to maintain focus, encouraging the children's creative expression through active participation.

Following the identification of themes and codes based on inductive and deductive methods, the final stage of data analysis, "write-up of a report", provides a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and engaging account of the data across the defined themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition to considering how each theme fits into the overall narrative of the dataset and how it is relevant to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the inclusion of direct short examples and quotes from participants supports the understanding of specific points of interpretation and demonstrates the prevalence of themes (King, 2004). Based on the consistency of using a deductive or inductive methodological approach throughout the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the results of the data analysis are presented in Tables 1 and Table 2, highlighting two key themes/categories: *Forms of creative artistic expression* and *Democratic features of education*.

Forms of creative artistic expression

The main theme/category *Forms of Creative Artistic Expression* includes the following categories: *Musical expression and improvisation*; *Dance, movement and expressive gesture*; *Visual artistic expression*; and *Narrative-driven improvisation*.

Musical expression and improvisation

This theme includes the following codes: rhythmic play (RP) and spontaneous music improvisation (SI). Two girls who had chosen the roles of the *Princess* and the *Lady* proposed including the singing game "Spread, Peep, Colourful Butterflies". When they presented it to the other children at the first meeting, they spontaneously improvised a melody (SI/1) and enjoyed it so

much that the other children immediately agreed to include it in the play. At a later meeting, two girls suggested reciting “Winter”, which they also enriched with an improvised melody (SI/2) and movement (RP/1). Throughout the activity, the children also improvised on songs such as “Crazy House” (SI/3).

Dance, movement and expressive gesture

The children’s forms of creative artistic expression included various ideas for choreography (C), including dance, movement and expressive gestures (EG) as a means of non-verbal communication (NVC).

One girl, after expressing her desire to be a lady, immediately felt the need, despite the lack of musical accompaniment, to perform “*a dance that she would do after the fairies had sprinkled her with dust*” (C/1). Pointing out that “*the music played at court must be elegant*”, the children spontaneously added various forms of expressive gestures, stressing the importance of “*bowing to the king, queen and princess*” (EG/1), while the ladies who appeared on stage should “*walk with their heads held high and smile when they bow*” (NVC/1).

Visual artistic expression

Based on the children’s initiative during the visual artistic expression activities, the following codes were defined: scenography (S), props design (PD), custom design and creation (CDC) and drawing (D). Some of the children already had ideas about scenography when they chose their roles. For example, one girl suggested: “*Ladies come and sit at the table, drink juice, soda, eat cookies, popcorn with masks on their faces*” (S/1). When describing the scenography, the children emphasised that “*the table must be special, royal, different from the others... on the table, glasses, plates, cakes... royal details...*” (S/2).

Listening carefully, one girl suggested candlesticks, while another girl added that she wanted “*real biscuits and juices*”, which the other children accepted (S/3).

The children created their costumes independently from the options given. For example, one girl found a long black skirt, which she wore under her dress to give it the shape of a crinoline, and she also found an umbrella to walk with like a real lady (CDC/1). They also suggested and designed props such as crowns and hair ornaments (PD/1), which they illustrated while explaining their imaginary outfits (D/1).

Narrative-driven improvisation

This theme included the following codes: character play (CHP) and narrative improvisation (NI). In line with the girls' discussion at the beginning about choosing a fairy character (CHP/1), the four fairies spontaneously created a conflict resolution through story improvisation within the process drama. The four fairies found themselves on the empty dance floor where people used to dance.

Two of the fairies shouted: "*What have you done?!*" One of the fairies, who had not been present during the spell, replied: "*We didn't do anything; you two did when you decided to have fun without us.*" The other added: "*And we've always done everything together!*" One of the absent fairies replied: "*Oh, you're right... we were so caught up that we forgot about you*" (NI/3).

Democratic features of education

The democratic features of education are defined by the following themes/categories: *Freedom of expression and decision making; Collaboration, group problem solving and critical thinking skills; Communication and listening skills; and Respect for diversity, empathy and solidarity.*

Freedom of expression and decision making

In line with the given examples of spontaneous music improvisation (SI/1) and rhythmic play (RP/1) within the first main theme/category, after listing the characters (king, queen, princess, royal staff, elegant ladies and fairies), the children were given the freedom to choose their roles (codes roles choice (RCH) and expression of preferences (EP)).

They explained their preferences and motivations, reflecting key democratic values in education, such as autonomy, self-expression and respect for different perspectives and needs. The only boy in the group declared that he wanted to be the king, and one girl immediately said, "*I'm going to be a princess*" (RCH/1). This empowered other children to express themselves authentically by choosing roles with or without text and expressing their preferences, thereby promoting their autonomy and self-expression (EP/1). Similarly, the children expressed their preferences when choosing the music to be used in the activity (EP/3).

The example given within the category of Artistic Expression (CDC/1) of the girl who chose the role of a court lady and at the same time created her outfit with a crinoline and an umbrella also points to the democratic aspect within the category of Freedom of expression and decision making (EP/2 and

CHR/2). This was particularly evident in her complete absorption in her role, as she continued to dance enthusiastically after the other children had finished the activity.

Collaboration, group problem solving and critical thinking skills

The plot development and resolution in the activity further highlighted the democratic features of education by emphasising collaboration, decision making and problem solving, which are further reflected in the following codes: original ideas (OI), taking initiative (TI) and cooperation (C). These codes were particularly evident in the following activities: “At one point the room went dark, the music of Johannes Brahms’ *Hungarian Dance No. 5 in G minor: Allegro*, which had set the tone for the energetic parts of the drama, stopped and the dancing stopped.” This change in atmosphere allowed the children to take the initiative and collaborate with other roles (TI/ 3 and C/5) in order to come up with an original idea to solve the situation in the resulting plot twist, as presented above within the category *Forms of creative artistic expression* (SI/3).

Respect for diversity, empathy and solidarity

This category includes the following codes: conflict resolution (CR), admitting mistakes and forgiveness (AM) and friendship through reconciliation (FR).

The conflict between the four fairies, divided into pairs, was resolved within the resolution phase: “*Oh, you’re right... we got so caught up in the game that we forgot about you.*”

- Fairy 1: “*Where have you been?*”
- Fairy 2 and 3: “*We were playing with a butterfly. It took us all the way to the flower bed in the garden of the manor...*” (CR/1).
- Fairy 3: “*Do you forgive us?*”
- Fairy 2: “*Please forgive us... it won’t happen again!*”
- Fairies 1 and 4 looked at each other, nodded and said in unison: “*We will!!!*” (AM/1)

They stretched out their hands, blew and ran across the hall, sprinkling magic dust (FR/2).

The resolution emphasised the importance of mutual respect, understanding and reconciliation.

Discussion

The results presented in Tables 1 and 2 provide answers to the research questions (RQ1 and RQ2), highlighting both categories: *Forms of creative artistic expression* (musical expression and improvisation, dance, movement and expressive gestures, visual artistic expression and narrative-driven improvisation) and *Democratic features of education* (freedom of expression and decision making, collaboration, group problem solving, critical thinking, communication and listening skills, respect for diversity, empathy and solidarity). The answers emerged through the children's engagement in music drama activities. Some examples of the activities carried out fall into both categories.

Since process drama inherently taps into children's implicit desire to explore, create and reflect (Vangsnes & Økland, 2017), while allowing them to express themselves freely, the activities that took place within the music drama activities in the music drama studio as a form of community of practice also have an implicit heuristic value. Development was driven by the tension between ideal and real behaviour, with play and imagination playing a key role (Vygotsky, 1977; 2004). Collaborative creative play fostered the children's creativity and social-emotional skills (Garaigordobil et al., 2022), as well as the democratic aspects of education within the category *Democratic features of education*, such as freedom of expression and decision making, collaboration, group problem solving and critical thinking skills, communication and listening skills, and respect for diversity, empathy and solidarity (Hansen et al., 1999; Moss, 2011). Thus, for example, the process of reconciliation between the fairies within the plot twist within the categories *Respect for diversity, empathy and solidarity* and *Collaboration, group problem solving and critical thinking skills* symbolised how collective creative expression through music and dance can restore relationships and encourage community action emphasising the importance of dialogue, listening, cooperation and solidarity, acknowledging mistakes, maintaining friendships and achieving forgiveness. Finally, encouraging all of the guests to dance illustrates how embracing uncertainty, diversity, subjectivity and empathy fosters respect and different perspectives in children rather than dominance.

Through collaborative group music improvisation, where the participants actively shape the music in real time (MacGlone, 2019), within category of *Musical expression and improvisation*, group creativity, music education and communities of practice emphasise negotiation, reflection and shared decision making. This approach also emphasises the role of the teacher as a facilitator (Partti & Westerlund, 2013) and highlights the importance of prioritising

democracy in education and fostering students' growth towards democratic artistic expression (Partti, 2014).

These elements are also implemented through narrative improvisation and character play within the category *Narrative-driven improvisation*, in line with the concept of narrative play as central to children's play (Brèdikytė & Hakkarainen, 2011; Hakkarainen & Bredikyte, 2014), as well as in spontaneously occurring musical improvisation and rhythmic play within the category *Musical expression and improvisation*. The category *Visual artistic expression* included the children's creative ideas about set design, costume design and drawing, providing valuable insights into their thinking (Angell et al., 2015). Their comments also highlighted democratic decisions about music and decorations, demonstrating their active participation in both creative and democratic processes. This free expression of ideas and emotions through music increases children's self-confidence, imagination and creativity, which has a positive impact on their overall development (Bačlija Sušić, 2018).

The classical music chosen by the children themselves (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Serenade No. 13 in G major KV 525 Eine Kleine Nachtmusik/A Little Night Music*, and Johannes Brahms' *Hungarian Dance No. 5*) served as the foundation of the whole activity, illustrating the content and adding depth to the narrative; encouraging the children's involvement as well as their non-verbal and verbal communication, interaction and movement; creating tension in the drama; and demonstrating the children's understanding of the role of music in creating atmosphere. In this way, the music facilitated the children's ability to express thoughts and experiences inspired by both the narrative and the music while creatively and actively interpreting their roles. Accordingly, unlike conceptual approaches to music listening that emphasise the identification of the characteristics of musical sounds, this creative approach prioritises children's unique personal experiences and embraces their diverse and individual ways of listening (Kratuś, 2017).

The activities carried out also demonstrated how listening to music can be made more accessible to children through different approaches and strategies that encourage their experience of music, while at the same time contributing to their free, original way of expressing themselves through different modes of expression. In addition, by interacting with music in this way, this learning perspective provides significant heuristic value in music education, helping individuals to develop a personal connection with music, and promoting identity formation and artistic expression (Abril, 2006; Partti & Westerlund, 2012), thus fostering children's development towards democratic artistic expression (Partti, 2014).

Process drama with children in the music and drama community of practice relies on an open-minded and playful facilitator with both pedagogical and artistic skills. Using the “teacher in role” technique, the facilitator introduces new elements into the children’s scenarios, develops roles and supports the use of materials (Loizou et al., 2019), starting with open-ended, authentic questions that have no clear answers (Ødemotland, 2020) and skilfully creating dramatic tension through subtle hints that catalyse the action in the play (Bowell & Heap, 2001). The facilitator shows a deep interest in the ideas, thoughts and attitudes contributed by the children and challenges them to think more deeply (Wagner, 1999). Their role is similar to that of an early childhood educator, providing varying degrees of guidance during play, primarily through indirect involvement in process drama. This approach encourages children’s creative and critical thinking while promoting the values of democratic education.

A strong affirmation of these values, including freedom of creative expression, was provided by a girl dancing with an umbrella when, after a brief signal to the activity leader, the other children resumed dancing, respecting her enthusiasm. This event highlights the relationship between flow state and creative output in artistic performance (Harmat et al., 2021), while demonstrating the quality of the activities carried out in the music drama studio. Furthermore, it points to children’s need for non-verbal expression of musical experiences, reinforcing the idea that the more children engage with music, the fewer words they need (Zalar, 2020).

Accordingly, within the music drama community of practice, process drama represents a pathway to creative expression and improvisation that goes beyond traditional teaching methods (Ødemotland, 2020), with narrative and music serving as fundamental stimuli aimed at collaborative exploration and problem solving within an imaginary world (DICE, 2010).

Conclusion

By integrating music and other artistic disciplines within process drama in the informal setting of a music drama studio as a form of community of practice, process drama served as a platform to promote children’s freedom, voice and choice (Schneider et al., 2006). This holistic approach allows children to express themselves through different modalities and forms of creative artistic expression, gaining diverse knowledge and experiences, while promoting balanced development by nurturing their creative abilities and exploring democratic principles. Highlighting the importance of creativity, which can be studied through different classifications in different domains, while recognising

that each dimension of creativity involves tasks that individuals can approach and solve in innovative ways (Kaufman, 2012), it is crucial to addressing how the lack of emphasis on divergent thinking in education shapes these perspectives (Županić Benić, 2021).

In addition to the important role of teachers and activity leaders as facilitators of democratic participation within music and drama communities with children (El Shahed, 2017; Vangsnes & Økland, 2018), it is important to highlight the role of teachers who embrace spontaneity and risk-taking, demonstrating an ability to improvise and plan the next steps based on the children's needs (Dunn, 2016; Ødegaard, 2022). As facilitators, they need to engage deeply with the children's contributions and ideas, encourage creative and critical thinking, and uphold the values of democratic education. Furthermore, teaching strategies that set achievable goals while promoting curiosity, critical thinking, cooperation and respect for diversity can support children's holistic development and contribute to their inclusion in social activities within community services (Antulić Majcen & Drvodelić, 2022), such as music drama studios within cultural centres.

This child-centred approach not only fosters deeper engagement, creativity and critical thinking in music (Kratuś, 2017), but also emphasises children's need for syncretic and multimodal music and artistic expression, allowing them to explore new ideas and forms of expression driven by their imagination and creativity (Bačlija Sušić & Brebrić, 2022; Godinho, 2018), in line with their holistic and integrated way of learning. Art, play and aesthetics in children's education, explored in the context of communities of practice that support creative expression and learning (Pitt, 2018), encourage children's diverse forms of creative expression and the development of democratic values. Furthermore, this approach advocates for the "democratic revolution" of the twenty-first century, expanding opportunities for social participation in music and artistic expression (Partti & Westerlund, 2012), while providing authentic learning opportunities that not only foster creativity and balanced development, the development of a democratic society (Alshurman, 2015; Tuhuteru, 2023), but also prepare children for active citizenship, ultimately contributing to individual success, social progress and positive social change in modern society.

Limitations of the study

Although the study provides valuable insights into children's expression through process drama and music activities, the small sample size, the short

duration of the study and the specific demographic group limit the understanding of long-term effects and the generalisability of the findings. The unique geographical and cultural backgrounds of the participants and the specialised music drama studio setting may limit the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Methodologically, the ethnographic ECEC participatory observation approach may introduce subjectivity through the researcher's interpretation. This is a significant challenge in ECEC ethnography, as the researcher, as part of the adult culture, needs to remain reflexive throughout the process.

Implications

In terms of research implications, greater inclusion of ECEC ethnography in research practice can deepen the understanding of childhood and support children's development and well-being (Köngäs & Määttä, 2023). Extending research to larger samples over a longer period of time and using methods such as interviews or focus groups can further enhance the understanding of education for creativity and democracy through engagement in music and drama communities of practice, while also highlighting the need for their greater presence in both urban and rural areas.

Ethical statement

This study adhered to ethical standards for educational research. Written informed consent was obtained from parents and the participants were fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the research. Participation was voluntary and data were anonymised to ensure confidentiality and privacy. The research was approved by the Ethical Research Committee of the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Addressing Violence Against Parents and Peers and Violence in Schools Through the Perspective of Ecological Theory

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☞ This paper examines violence against parents and peers and violence in schools using Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory. We aim to establish connections between these forms of violence, perpetrator characteristics, and conclusions about the influences at different ecological layers. Through in-depth empirical research, we reviewed police, prosecutorial, and court files on child-parent violent crimes. Out of the total closed cases, 46 were included for further analysis, with nine cases addressing violence or misconduct in schools. Our findings highlight the link between violence against parents, early adolescent misbehaviour, and academic problems. Outward manifestations of these issues include discipline problems, truancy, association with problematic peers, substance abuse or addiction, and violent behaviour. Boys exhibit a progression from psychological to physical abuse against their parents and others. These results confirm other conclusions on the early onset and persistent nature of violent and delinquent behaviour. Notably, mental health issues and substance abuse play a significant role at the microsystem level. In conclusion, we recommend policy upgrades with a systematic approach to address youth violence, appropriate care of young people's mental health and the public delegitimation of various forms of violence.

Keywords: ecological theory, violence against parents, peer violence, school violence, violence prevention

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Obravnava nasilja nad starši in vrstniki ter nasilja v šolah z vidika ekološke teorije

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≈ Prispevek obravnava nasilje nad starši in vrstniki ter nasilje v šolah z uporabo Bronfenbrennerjeve teorije ekoloških sistemov. Ugotoviti želimo povezave med omenjenimi oblikami nasilja in značilnostmi storilcev ter oblikovati zaključke o vplivih na različnih ekoloških ravneh. V poglobljeni empirični raziskavi smo pregledali policijske, tožilske in sodne spise o nasilnih kaznivih dejanjih otrok nad starši. Od vseh zaključenih primerov je bilo v nadaljnjo analizo vključenih 46 primerov, pri čemer je devet primerov obravnavalo nasilje ali neprimerno vedenje v šolah. Naše ugotovitve poudarjajo povezavo med nasiljem nad starši, neprimernim vedenjem mladostnikov in težavami pri akademskem uspehu. Problemi se manifestirajo navzven v obliki težav z disciplino, izostajanjem od pouka, druženjem s problematičnimi vrstniki, zlorabo ali odvisnostjo od drog in z nasilnim vedenjem. Pri dečkih je opaziti stopnjevanje od psihičnega do fizičnega nasilja nad starši in drugimi osebam. Naši rezultati potrjujejo ugotovitve drugih študij o zgodnjem pojavu ter vztrajni naravi nasilnega in prestopniškega vedenja. Pomembno vlogo na ravni mikrosistema imajo zlasti težave z duševnim zdravjem in zlorabe drog. V sklepu priporočamo nadgradnjo politik s sistematičnim pristopom pri obravnavi nasilja med mladimi, z ustrežno skrbjo za duševno zdravje mladih in javno delegitimacijo različnih oblik nasilja.

Ključne besede: ekološka teorija, nasilje nad starši, vrstniško nasilje, šolsko nasilje, preprečevanje nasilja

Introduction

Events related to youth violence in Slovenia since autumn 2022 and the aftermath of the tragic school mass shooting in Belgrade in May 2023 have prompted a broader public discussion on youth violence. It has become evident that there is a lack of a systematic approach to addressing and preventing youth and school violence. Additionally, there is a paucity of empirical data available, with reliance primarily placed on common sense approaches rather than rigorous scientific evidence (Bučar Ručman & Šulc, 2020). In public discourse, it has become increasingly prevalent to attribute blame to two institutions: the school and the family. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the causes of violence are multifaceted and encompass various levels of society.

Rearing children, their development, socialisation, and full inclusion in society depend on many elements, which are often complexly intertwined. This perception of human development through various interactions and relationships with factors on different levels was introduced in Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1979, 1994) ecological systems theory, which integrated conclusions from the vast body of research from diverse disciplines. He argued that external factors influencing human development coexist through different layers of the social environment. In ecological theory, these layers, which are not strictly bordered and limited but blurred one into another, start with the *microsystem* (i.e., activities, roles and interrelations in an individual's immediate setting within a family, peers and teachers in schools, co-workers at workplace), the *mesosystem* (i.e., interrelations between at least two elements of microsystem; e.g., relations between family, schoolmates, teachers, and peers in the neighbourhood), the *exosystem* (i.e., linkages and processes between two or more settings, where at least one is not a child's immediate setting and in which a child does not have an active role and direct contact with, but it influences her/him indirectly, e.g., parents' place of work, mass media, neighbourhood, government's (local and state) decisions, informal social networks, etc.). The *macrosystem* refers to the cultural and ideological blueprint that determines formal and informal institutions and 'sets the pattern for the structures and activities occurring at the concrete level' (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515). It includes formal rules, laws, policies, beliefs, bodies of knowledge, customs and everyday practices, and lifestyles supported by the predominant values of a given culture and subculture. The last layer, the *chronosystem*, includes changes or consistency over time, not only at the level of the individual but also at the level of the environment (e.g., changes in family structure, socioeconomic status, employment, place of living).

Ecological theory and explanations of youth violence and bullying

Social sciences offer explanations of violent behaviour, though this has long been marked by theories that mostly stayed within their disciplines and focused on the lower level of factors and elements considered as causes of violence. Heise (1998, p. 262) argues that the theory-building approach was hindered by 'the narrowness of traditional academic disciplines' and the popularity of single-factor explanations among academics and activists. Ecological theory surpassed this theoretical narrowness, joined conclusions from various disciplines, and put multiple factors under the spotlight at different levels. It has been used as an umbrella covering previously separated conclusions and theories of delinquent and violent behaviour. WHO's World Report on Violence and Health (2002) adopted the ecological model as a theoretical foundation for understanding violence. It eloquently states that 'no single factor explains why some individuals behave violently towards others or why violence dominates in some communities compared to others. Violence is a result of the complex interplay of individual, relationship, social, cultural and environmental factors' (WHO, 2002, p. 12). The ecological framework was applied to research and provided explanations of intimate partner violence (Di Napoli et al., 2019; Heise, 1998; Muster, 2021; Nelson & Lund, 2017), child maltreatment (Belsky, 1980; Little & Kaufman Kantor, 2002), sexual assault (Casey & Lindhorst, 2009) and it also strongly influenced research on bullying, school, and youth violence (Astor & Benbenishty, 2019; Benbenishty & Astor, 2005; Espelage, 2014; European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN), 2021; Henry, 2000, 2009; Henry & Bracy, 2012; Hong et al., 2014; WHO, 2015).

The ecological model explains youth violence and bullying across multiple levels. Espelage (2014) demonstrates that bullying is influenced by interactions, processes, and issues at various ecological levels, including the family (attitudes towards violence, presence of family violence, lack of parental supervision, family impact on peer selection, significant family changes like divorce), peers (association with violent peers, the role of bystanders), communities and neighbourhoods (exposure to violence in unsafe areas), schools (supportive teachers, school administration's anti-bullying efforts), and broader cultural and institutional factors (inequality perpetuation, alienation, aggression based on race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, sexual orientation of students). Benbenishty and Astor proposed a heuristic model of school violence based on ecological theory (Benbenishty & Astor, 2005; Astor & Benbenishty, 2019). Unlike other approaches, their model places the school, rather than the

individual student, at the core. They argue that schools exist within a socioecological environment, and violence is shaped by the school's external and internal context. The internal context includes factors such as school social climate, organisational climate, and ideology.³ The external context encompasses students' characteristics and the broader social context of the community. The authors also acknowledge the influence of the global context, media, and technology, highlighting the impact of global influences and trends on youth violence.⁴

The link between victimisation and victimising others – or, as Meško (1997) concluded in his case study analysis of young offenders in Slovenia, 'victim victimises' – is evident in research examining the microsystem elements. Studies have confirmed that bullies often come from families in which parents are not actively engaged in their children's lives (Low & Espelage, 2013) or in which aggression and violence are used to achieve family goals. This can be connected to direct violence, conflicts between child and parent, and indirect violence resulting from exposure to domestic abuse. Conflicts in the parent-child relationship have been found to be correlated with and predictive of both bullying perpetration and victimisation (Lereya et al., 2013; Stelios & Panayiotis, 2013). Baldry (2003) concluded that exposure to direct forms of violence within the family, such as parents hitting or threatening each other, significantly increases the risk of children becoming bullies. Childhood maltreatment significantly heightens the likelihood of involvement in delinquency and is also a crucial predictor of the prevalence of adolescent violent delinquency (Smith & Thornberry, 1995). Furthermore, the presence of violence and delinquency within the family can contribute to engaging in more severe and extreme forms of violence (see Putkonen et al., 2002, 2007). Apart from violence against others, childhood abuse (physical, emotional, sexual) also increases the risk of self-injury (Harford et al., 2014; Meeker et al., 2021) and increases the risk of victimisation in bullying due to the absence of protective factors, such as a warm parent-child relationship and effective coping mechanisms (Baldry, 2003; Espelage et al., 2012; Nguyen et al., 2019).

3 The lead/corresponding author of this paper had the unique opportunity to witness the divergent ideologies prevalent in schools within the Slovene public educational system. His active involvement in the 'Only (with) others are we' project (orig. *Le z drugimi smo*) (2016–2021) involved conducting extensive training for over 3000 teachers, counsellors, and principals across kindergarten, primary, secondary, and high schools. The responses to the same training sessions exhibited notable variations, ranging from affirmative applause and a principal's remark acknowledging the workshop as enlightening to another principal's concluding comment expressing concern about alleged one-sidedness, highlighting the importance of recognising that immigrants can also be implicated in criminal acts such as rape.

4 The most evident example of this is the impact of social media, particularly TikTok, on cyberbullying. TikTok's widespread popularity among young people creates situations in which violent incidents are recorded and shared, reaching a broad audience and resulting in further victimisation. Traditional media even pick up these videos, amplifying the victimisation through news coverage.

Longitudinal studies provide valuable insights into the long-term impacts of various factors on delinquency. The Cambridge Study of Delinquent Development (Farrington, 1989, 1990; Farrington et al., 2006) followed 411 boys in London from ages 8 to 50. The study concluded that the most significant early predictors (at ages 8–11) of later criminal offending include socio-economic deprivation, poor parenting, family deviance, school problems, hyperactivity-impulsivity-attention deficit disorder, and antisocial behaviour in children. The development of a criminal career later in life was significantly influenced by factors experienced at a young age. Among the observed group of men, those who were convicted at the earliest ages had more convictions and the longest criminal careers throughout their lifespans (Farrington et al., 2006).

With most cross-sectional studies, we cannot make general inferences on a link between bullying and violence later in life. However, some broader studies proved this connection. From the research on the three community samples in Stockholm, Olweus (2011) confirmed the connection between bullying and committing general crimes over eight years. This link was even stronger in the case of violent crimes. A systematic review and meta-analysis conducted by Ttofi et al. (2012) also showed that bullying offending and victimisation are significantly associated with violent behaviour later in life. Messerschmidt's (2017) life history analysis of adolescent boys clearly shows the connection between in-school bullying victimisation and compensation for the unsuccessful acclimatisation with the socially constructed ideas of masculinity with committing sexual violence in the home environment.

Violence against teachers and parents

Peers are not the only victims of adolescents' aggression and violence. At least two other groups of victims have attracted the attention of researchers: parents and teachers. Until recently, these phenomena were predominantly addressed separately; however, recently, we have seen attempts to address them together (Del Moral et al., 2019; Ibabe et al., 2013a; Jaureguizar et al., 2013).

Multiple studies reveal that student violence against teachers exists globally, with variations in prevalence and types. Longobardi et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of 24 studies, finding a prevalence range of 20% to 75%, with an overall prevalence of 53% for teacher-reported violence victimisation within the previous two years. McMahon et al. (2014) reported that harassment was the most common form of violence (73%) in a US sample, including obscene remarks, gestures, and threats. Canadian data (Wilson et al., 2010) showed 80% of teachers experienced violence, primarily personal insults and threats. South Korean research (Moon & McCluskey, 2016) indicated lower rates of teacher

victimisation but similar types of violence.

Lešnik Mugnaioni et al. (2009) revealed the prevalence of different types of violence against teachers in Slovenia. Verbal abuse is experienced by 56% of teachers, followed by psychological violence (44%) and economic violence (28%). Physical violence is reported by 5% of teachers. A 2018 survey as part of the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) in Slovenia shows that 18.5% of primary school teachers and 14% of high school teachers experience verbal abuse from students several times a year. Physical violence is reported by 3.3% of primary school teachers and 1.2% of high school teachers. Disrespect and property damage occur for 16.2% of primary school teachers and 5.8% of high school teachers (Japelj Pavešić, 2020).

Violence against parents by adolescent children encompasses emotional, physical, financial, and sexual abuse (Cottrell, 2004). Factors contributing to abusive behaviour can be found within family dynamics, including cohesion, support, conflicts, and parenting style (Ibabe & Bentler, 2016; Ibabe et al., 2013b). A nurturing and supportive upbringing is considered a protective factor, while emotional rejection poses a risk for violence (Ibabe et al., 2013b). Permissive parenting, excessive control, and inconsistent parenting can also contribute to parent abuse (Cottrell, 2004; Cottrell & Monk, 2004). Witnessing violence or experiencing direct victimisation, such as physical violence, can influence violent behaviour (Cottrell & Monk, 2004; Margolin & Baucom, 2014). Research indicates that violence against parents is linked to children's mental health problems (Band-Winterstein et al., 2016; Kageyama et al., 2018), as well as illicit drug and/or alcohol addiction (Benbow et al., 2018; Johnson et al., 2018), which can lead to financial demands and subsequent conflicts and violence.

In recent years, researchers have started to address the problem of violence against teachers and parents jointly. This became known as 'violence against authority' (Ibabe et al., 2013a) and shows common elements in violence against both groups of victims. Parents and teachers should be recognised as 'a source of physical and psychological well-being, safety, and authority for adolescents' (Ibabe et al., 2013a, p. 1). A study on physical victimisation and verbal abuse of parents and teachers in Spain (Ibabe et al., 2013a; Jaureguizar et al., 2013) showed that school environment (classroom climate) influenced this type of violence, though the impact was even stronger for the family environment. In both cases, the mediating element between difficulties in the family and in schools and violence against parents and teachers was antisocial and criminal behaviour. In contrast, positive family and school environments acted as protective elements against antisocial and criminal behaviour (family again had a stronger impact).

Our research is guided by the following research questions: Is there a connection between violence against parents, violence in schools, and violence against peers? What are the characteristics of perpetrators of violence against parents, school violence, and/or violence against peers? Can we draw common conclusions about the influences of various elements at different layers of ecological theory on violence against parents, violence in schools, and against peers? The methods used to address these research questions are described in the following section of this paper.

Method

Participants

Our analysis included 46 case files, encompassing all instances of violent crimes committed by children against their parents. This was not a selected sample of such cases, but rather all finished cases with parent-child violent crimes that were kept in the archives of District State Prosecutor's Offices during the selected time period. We examined all available documents for evidence of violence or misconduct in schools or during schooling. Among the 46 cases, nine (19.6%) of them met the selection criteria and were included in further detailed analysis.

Instrument

We obtained permission from the Supreme State Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2021) to 'access, transcribe, copy or extract text' from the files of the State Prosecutor's Office. Between November 2021 and July 2022, the first author visited all District State Prosecutor's Offices in Slovenia and collected documents from the cases initiated between 2011 and 2013. The collected documents included police files with pertinent documents from pre-trial proceedings, including criminal charges, reports, and supporting materials such as minutes of the criminal report, official notes on collected information, suspect statements, crime scene investigation reports, medical expert reports, restraining orders, toxicological test reports, social work centre notifications, and criminal record extracts. The prosecution files consisted of investigation requests, witness and defendant interviews, prosecution waivers, indictments, and custody order documents. The court files contained minutes from pre-trial and sentencing hearings and transcripts of audio-recorded witness statements, expert reports, and final verdicts.

Research design

Data for the analyses were obtained from the State Prosecutor's Office records. In the nine cases that met the above-mentioned selection criteria, we examined the basic demographic characteristics of perpetrators (gender, age at the time of the beginning of violence, educational level) and then applied the coding system with the use of *a priori* codes (i.e., codes based on the theoretical review and defined prior to examination of data) (Gibson & Brown, 2009, pp. 130–137). All documents in the files were analysed for the following codes: family characteristics, long-term family relations, relations with peers, problems in school, the onset of violent behaviour, characteristics of violent behaviour, pre-conviction and police records, drug abuse, mental health problems, victims of violence, important life-changing events in the family. After the coding phase, an in-depth analysis of the coded data was undertaken, aimed at identifying patterns, potential exceptions, and deviations from existing conclusions. By employing a qualitative content analysis, we constructed coherent thematic groups, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the data.

Results

Characteristics of violent offenders and the beginning of violent behaviour

Detailed analysis of nine files revealed specific characteristics at different ecological levels. All offenders were male and lived with their parents. Many of them displayed aggressive and abusive behaviour during their teenage years, preceding their involvement in violent crimes against their parents. For most of them, problems occurred already at elementary school (four had discipline problems, and one had academic problems); the youngest showed behavioural difficulties at the age of 10 (Case 3). In three cases, problems appeared at the beginning of high school, when boys started to hang out in bars and abuse alcohol and, in one case, illicit drugs. The academic success of all perpetrators was low. Among them was one with unfinished elementary school, four with finished elementary school, three with vocational school and training, and one finished high school (entered university but never finished it). From the documents in the files, we can see that their behavioural problems at an early age included truancy, aggressive and violent behaviour, and alcohol and illicit drug abuse.

From the case files, we can see the progression and escalation of violence among the offenders. It started at a young age with psychological violence, which included insults, threats, death threats, blackmail, financial exploitation and abuse, and then escalated to physical violence in the form of hitting, choking,

pushing, and pulling of victims, and damaging and destroying property. In addition, some perpetrators used tools or weapons and threatened victims with them (e.g., knives, a homemade gun). Further, in some cases, offenders threatened with destroying and burning down the home and committing suicide.

Development and progression of violence are exemplified in Case 2, where it is stated: 'This family experienced problems with their son for the past 10 years. He struggled with learning difficulties since elementary school, was hyperactive, always seeking attention, and was disruptive. In high school, he began skipping classes, his academic performance declined drastically, and he drank and associated with inappropriate individuals. He became violent and argumentative, resorting to physical abuse against his parents when confronted.'

A similar account is found in Case 4, where a mother reported: 'Issues with my sons [one of whom became an offender] emerged when they finished elementary school. In high school, they started staying out late, frequently skipped school, and began drinking alcohol, leading to fights.' The offender hangs out with a group of approximately ten friends, who all use marijuana and have similar lifestyles.

Case 7 involves an offender who displayed aggression towards parents, grandparents, and siblings. Documents indicate that problems began in the offender's second year of high school when parents suspected illicit drug use (marijuana). His sister described the situation: 'We used to get along until he dropped out of the second year of high school and changed his group of friends. He first hit me when I was in my fourth year of high school.' This pattern of violent behaviour was also confirmed by a social worker, who described its development over seven years (from ages 17 to 24).

In Case 8, the sister of a physically violent offender stated that her brother 'started hanging out with a bad crowd and drinking alcohol when he was 15 years old.' The police also reached a similar conclusion, gathering information on the suspect and noting his history of alcohol abuse since his teenage years. When intoxicated, he instigates fights with his siblings and humiliates his parents.

Other noticeable characteristics of violent perpetrators are their psychological well-being, mental health, and addiction issues. Except for Case 1, for which precise data is lacking, all offenders exhibited a mental health condition and/or illicit drug/alcohol addiction. Out of the nine offenders, evidence in their files indicates that six have been placed in psychiatric hospitals. Some were diagnosed with specific mental health conditions, such as symptoms of schizophrenia (Case 9) or personality disorders (Cases 3, 4, 6). Additionally, some individuals struggled with illicit drug and/or alcohol addiction or exhibited extreme alcohol abuse (Cases 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). In Case 7, reports only referred

to illicit drug use (marijuana), while in other Cases (2, 4), alcohol use was combined with substance abuse. Reports for Cases 5, 6, and 8 solely mentioned alcohol abuse or addiction.

Specific files contain information regarding the factors contributing to the deteriorated psychological condition of the individuals. For instance, in Case 2, it is mentioned that the offender's problems escalated after the death of his mother. However, it should be noted that this cannot be considered the sole reason for his violent behaviour. As evident from the file, this individual exhibited violent tendencies even before his mother's passing, and she was also a victim of his attacks. The evolution of personal problems and the inclination towards violence is apparent in the documents of Case 3. The boy was institutionalised in a residential treatment institution in the fourth grade of elementary school (age 9–10) due to his bad temper and disruptive behaviour at school. He remained in this facility until the age of 17. After his return home, his family constantly engaged in conflicts, prompting the Social Work Centre to place him in another treatment institution. Although he returned home after a few months, he physically fought and threatened others with a knife. Consequently, he was placed in a psychiatric hospital. After three months, his parents took him out, and he was diagnosed with a mixed personality disorder. His violent tendencies persisted and worsened with alcohol abuse. His diagnosis was later confirmed by a court expert (psychiatrist), who concluded that his disorder stemmed from a combination of innate and acquired personal characteristics. While this condition alone does not significantly affect the individual, combined with alcohol abuse, it leads to a lack of self-control and impaired judgment and capabilities.

Similar conclusions can be drawn from Case 9. During high school, the offender began spending time in a bar after classes, and upon returning home intoxicated, he displayed verbal aggression. Over time, his inclination towards violence developed, and he exhibited violent behaviour even when sober. He also became physically aggressive. Eventually, he was diagnosed with an acute mental disorder with signs of schizophrenia and was hospitalised five times.

The lack of money for illicit drugs and alcohol was identified as a trigger for fights, leading to violence against parents and subsequent criminal charges in some cases (Cases 2, 4). However, this reason was not the sole factor contributing to such behaviour. The documents in case files demonstrate a pattern of long-lasting and evolving violence against parents, extending beyond isolated incidents prompted by financial issues. Pre-conviction records and a history of police scrutiny are available for eight offenders, encompassing crimes such as fraud, threats, and family violence. One of the offenders (Case 4) had previously been convicted of 13 crimes, including six thefts, two frauds, a grand theft,

endangering safety, two acts of family violence, and vehicle theft. In one case, there is no available data on previous criminal offences.

Victims of violence and types of violence

Because our research focused on violent crimes against parents, parents were expected to be the primary victims. However, a comprehensive examination of the files revealed that violence was also directed towards other individuals, including siblings, grandparents, relatives, and even police officers who responded to emergency calls. In one instance, the violence extended to an 11-year-younger sibling, leading the parents to be unable to leave the sibling alone with the offender (Case 3). These situations also had a detrimental impact on the academic achievements of the affected siblings (Cases 3, 7). While not explicitly stated, it can be inferred from the files that violence was also perpetrated against peers. This inference is supported by statements such as 'the perpetrator has a history of fighting since high school' (Case 4) and information on prior convictions. Additionally, in one case, a former university professor of the perpetrator became a victim, receiving threatening emails containing death threats.

Family relations

The data in the files provides limited insight into long-term family relationships and conditions. However, based on statements from social workers, witnesses, and police reports, we can categorise families into three groups. The first group includes families where parents have lost authority over their children, although they still attempt to provide support (Cases 1, 2, 3, 7, 9). This is evident through the involvement of children in various forms of professional assistance, such as psychologists and psychiatrists. These parents also continue to help their children even after experiencing physical violence at home. For example, in Case 2, the father accompanies his son to job interviews and assists him in writing job applications despite withholding financial support. In Case 3, the parents decided to remove their son from a psychiatric hospital where he had been placed for several months following a violent outburst. They also choose not to pursue criminal charges against their son and maintain regular contact, providing him with financial support. A similar domestic situation is observed in Case 9. In Case 7, the parents seek help from the Centre for Social Work and other institutions due to concerns about their son's drug abuse, dropping out of school, and aggressive behaviour. After moving in with them, this boy also exhibited violent behaviour towards his grandparents.

The second category comprises families in which the children did not receive parental support and were exposed to unfavourable conditions. However,

in our sample, this situation was only evident in one case. Case 5 involves a family in which the father, who was an alcoholic, passed away, and the son was placed in a foster home by the Centre for Social Work. The mother relocated and remarried. Violence ensued when the offender later joined them. Witness statements indicate that alcohol abuse is prevalent in this family, serving as the primary factor contributing to conflicts and violence.

Data from Case 4 indicates an overly permissive parenting approach within the family. Issues with the son emerged during elementary school and persisted for several years. The parents provided him with money, which he used for drugs. Despite the son's use of violence during high school, the mother never involved the police or sought assistance from other institutions, believing he would improve. The son remained unemployed, relying solely on social support, and despite the violence, the parents continued to cover his rent and food expenses.

Within the files, we also observed changes in the family that align with the ecological theory's chronosystem. These long-term changes included the death of a mother (Case 2) and the death of a father, followed by placement in a foster home (Case 5) and the death of a brother (Case 9). Although these events marked turning points and intensified the violent behaviour, they were not the sole cause. Violent and disruptive behaviour existed prior to these events, except for Case 5.

Discussion

The results of our empirical research have revealed a link between violence against parents, delinquency in early youth, and school-related problems. These problems manifest as disciplinary issues, truancy, association with troublesome peers, substance abuse, and violent behaviour. Boys tend to develop persistent behaviour patterns, progressing from psychological to physical violence and severe abuse toward parents and others.

Our findings support previous studies and conclusions regarding the early onset and long-lasting nature of delinquent and violent behaviour. In all analysed cases, problems emerged as early as elementary or high school and persisted for years, with some cases spanning almost two decades. The development of a violent career was clearly influenced by factors experienced at a young age. Another notable characteristic of the offenders is their involvement in a broader range of criminal activities. With the exception of one individual, they were all convicted or processed for other offences and misdemeanours. This also confirms the conclusions of other studies that antisocial behaviour in

youth serves as a significant predictor of future criminal behaviour.

Although our study was not limited to the specific gender of offenders, we must not neglect the microsystemic (individual) characteristic that appeared in all cases: all offenders were men. This is not a coincidence. Our findings confirm the conclusions on the connection between (physical) violence and masculinity, which is already apparent at a young age.

Unlike other studies, our data do not indicate a direct association between behavioural problems in boys and family dynamics, family violence, or inappropriate parenting. From the analysis of extensive documentation, it was impossible to identify instances of maltreatment, neglect, or abuse. On the contrary, some cases exhibited descriptions of parental engagement and support for their children. Parents often made efforts to address problems through institutional means, albeit with limited success. Additionally, in families with more children, the other children, aside from the perpetrators, were not violent and were even exposed to victimisation by their violent siblings. Only in one case were we able to identify exposure to unfavourable conditions, such as growing up in a home with an alcoholic father and subsequent placement in a foster home after the perpetrator's father passed away.

Our findings are aligned with theoretical conclusions that highlight the connection between violence and mental health issues, such as offender's mental health disorders and substance abuse, as prominent factors at the microsystem level. Additionally, factors from the mesosystem level, such as association with delinquent peers and in-group substance abuse, significantly influenced the behaviour of offenders. This appeared mainly during the transition from elementary to high school when boys started hanging out in bars and abusing alcohol. The combination of mental health problems and substance abuse yielded the most concerning outcomes.

Conclusions

Conclusions drawn from our research provide the following recommendations for practical implementation. Firstly, considering that all boys exhibited signs of problematic behaviour at an early age, which subsequently led to long-lasting delinquency, there is a clear need for a systematic approach to address youth violence in elementary schools. This necessitates intervention in the exosystem by developing and implementing a violence prevention policy based on evidence-based approaches, encompassing effective primary and secondary prevention programmes. It is crucial to educate school staff and provide them with systematic and ongoing training to identify early indicators of violence.

As emphasised by Astor and Benbenishty (2019, p. 23), 'Schools make a difference'. External influences on youth violence can be mitigated and moderated by implementing effective violence prevention policies within school contexts. Similarly, Berčnik and Tašner (2018) conclude that appropriate school policies can contribute to reducing violence. Addressing youth violence requires a comprehensive, top-down, systematic approach, and schools should not be left to tackle this challenge alone.

Secondly, the results of our study show the importance of appropriate care for young people's mental health. The health system must provide appropriate support and help available in due time to everybody and not only those who can afford it. This support must also be provided for violent offenders, families, and victims. Additionally, recent studies on the mental health of young people during the coronavirus pandemic in Slovenia have revealed concerning findings. Among 9th-grade elementary school students, the prevalence of depression was 17.4%, and suicidal thoughts were reported by 12.4% (Jeriček Klanšček, 2021). Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge that peer violence is addressed in two important national documents: the Resolution on the National Mental Health Programme 2018–2028 (2018) and the Resolution on the National Programme for the Prevention and Suppression of Crime 2019–2023 (2019).

Finally, while our research did not specifically delve into the broader social influences on youth violence, it is important not to overlook the legitimisation of various forms of violence, intolerance, xenophobia, misogyny, and chauvinism in public discourse. As the ecological theory has demonstrated, these influences at the macrosystem permeate and impact society as a whole. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise and condemn them as harmful, unproductive, undesirable, and unwarranted. Further, our findings showed a clear connection between violence and gender; therefore, we can repeat the call of Podreka (2017, p. 30) that 'research on violence cannot avoid the question of gender and construction of men and masculinity'. This issue clearly needs to be addressed at the macrosystem level and address cultural norms connected to violence, as well as the socially expected roles and behaviour of men in our society.

Our research primarily relied on official case documents, which provided numerous verified details but also imposed limitations on our study. For future research, we recommend incorporating information from social care centres, schools, and other relevant institutions. The focus should be not only on parent-child violence but also on bullying incidents and analysis of relationships with parents, peers, and the community. Such an approach would significantly contribute to the existing knowledge of young people's violence.

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The Development of Science Process Skills and Content Knowledge with Inquiry Boxes in Early Childhood Education

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☞ This paper aims to investigate the systematic use of an inquiry-based learning approach in science by using inquiry boxes for preschool children. We prepared four thematic inquiry boxes for the areas of magnetism and buoyancy, separation of substances, weighing objects, and the investigation of substances. The research sample consisted of twenty children aged four to five years. Ten children from the experimental group explored the material using the photo-type instructions on the instructional cards over a period of four weeks. Comparative test results for the control group children show that the experimental group children progressed both in content knowledge and in better-developed science process skills. We find that children develop autonomy in science process skills such as classifying, ordering, and weighing through prepared and guided inquiry with the help of the inquiry boxes. In doing so, children show increasing autonomy within each set of tasks that develop the chosen science process skill. In this manner, science practices with inquiry boxes allow children to build on science content knowledge. They can apply the skills they have learned through inquiry boxes to new knowledge instead of teaching science processes as isolated skills. This approach of individually guided inquiry by children using thematic inquiry boxes is therefore recommended as a proven didactic tool for developing science process skills and content knowledge.

Keywords: development of science process skills, inquiry boxes, content knowledge, early childhood education

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Razvijanje spretnosti naravoslovnih postopkov in vsebinskega znanja z raziskovalnimi škatlami v predšolskem izobraževanju

NIKA GOLOB IN VANJA UNGAR

~ Namen članka je raziskati sistematično uporabo raziskovalnega učenja v naravoslovlju z uporabo raziskovalnih škatel za predšolske otroke. Pripravili smo štiri tematske raziskovalne škatle s področij magnetizma in vzgona, ločevanja snovi, tehtanja predmetov in preučevanja snovi. Raziskovalni vzorec je predstavljal dvajset otrok, starih od 4 do 5 let. Deset otrok iz eksperimentalne skupine je v štirih tednih raziskovalo material iz raziskovalnih škatel s pomočjo slikovno-fotografskih navodil na delovnih karticah. Rezultati primerjalnih testov za otroke iz kontrolne skupine kažejo, da so otroci iz eksperimentalne skupine napredovali v vsebinskem znanju in tudi v bolj razvitih spretnostih naravoslovnih postopkov. Ugotavljamo, da otroci s pomočjo pripravljenega in vodenega raziskovanja z raziskovalnimi škatlami razvijajo samostojnost pri spretnostih naravoslovnih postopkov, kot so: razvrščanje, urejanje in tehtanje. Pri tem otroci kažejo vedno večjo samostojnost v vsakem sklopu nalog. Naravoslovna dejavnost z raziskovalnimi škatlami otrokom omogoča nadgradnjo znanja naravoslovnih vsebin. Spretnosti, ki so se jih naučili s pomočjo raziskovalnih škatel, lahko uporabijo kot novo znanje, na novem primeru, namesto da bi naravoslovne postopke urili kot izolirane spretnosti. Pristop individualno vodenega raziskovanja otrok z uporabo tematskih raziskovalnih škatel je tako priporočljivo in preizkušeno didaktično orodje za razvijanje spretnosti naravoslovnih postopkov in vsebinskega znanja.

Ključne besede: razvoj spretnosti naravoslovnih postopkov, raziskovalne škatle, vsebinsko znanje, predšolsko izobraževanje

Introduction

Inquiry-based education is student-centred learning and teaching in which students learn by adopting inquiry methods. It also acts as an educational strategy that enables students to acquire knowledge with methods similar to those used by professional scientists or in a way akin to that adopted by scientists in practice. For example, science-oriented, inquiry-based learning involves supporting students as they gain science knowledge through science experiments rather than from teachers (Hong et al., 2020). It is crucial that children in early childhood education (ECE) learn in such a way that they can transfer their knowledge to different problems, settings, and times (Klahr & Chen, 2011).

After considering a meta-analysis of research in the field of early science, Jirout and Zimmerman (2015) establish that in their play, even very young children conduct 'experiments' to discover causal links. Similarly, children aged six successfully recognise experimental designs as valid and meaningful or not. Children aged five can identify patterns in evidence, interpret the usefulness of evidence, and understand how evidence relates to a hypothesis. While young children show well-developed science process skills in extremely simple science tasks, older primary school children and adults may have difficulty with more complex tasks, even though they involve the same types of skills. These results suggest that young children do not learn individual skills of science inquiry (discovery using the scientific method) but, over time, develop skill sets that enable them to answer science questions, find ways to gather information in response to these questions, and observe and infer evidence to learn about the unknown. In contrast, data on children's curiosity show that it fades with age, although it is present in young children and remains present at least through the early primary school years (Jirout & Zimmerman, 2015).

Similarly, Siry and Max's (2013) research reveals that from an early age, children have the capacity to 'conduct investigations, explain their observations and plan new investigations' (p. 899). Likewise, Kiel (2011) confirmed that children develop basic scientific methodological skills such as integrating information and drawing conclusions; Gopnik (2012) found that they are capable of forming abstract and causal structures from a very young age. The authors argue that such skills, which are important for inquiry and discovery, can be developed if children are given the opportunity to systematically explore and make sense of the surrounding world. Byrne (2016) added that it is possible to develop inquiry-based learning requirements in early childhood education, including wondering, experimenting, gathering evidence, and using evidence to draw conclusions.

Fragkiadaki et al. (2023) determined that motivation for learning science concepts can begin in infancy in educational settings. While it is impossible to determine young children's conceptual understanding from their speech, it is possible to observe their actions and see how they engage in play and solve problems. These authors pointed out that while studying children, we must also study the conditions teachers create in their educational programmes, which is a dialectical relationship. Their research leads them to suggest that they 'come together for deep conceptual development of the child in science, so we continue to create these conditions for scientifically engaging them in their world systematically over time' (p.18).

It is also important to foster children's autonomy during active inquiry, as Devjak et al. (2021) noted. Among the factors that help promote children's autonomy, they list the educator taking the children's perspective, supporting children's self-initiative, and enabling them to make decisions and solve problems (Devjak et al., 2021). The positive impact of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) activities (Akçay Malcok & Ceylan, 2021; Dilek, 2020), project-based science education for preschool children on problem-solving ability is referred to in many contemporary research studies (Can et al., 2017). In addition, the knowledge and interest of preschool and kindergarten children in science is an indicator of their later success in school STEM (Clements & Sarama, 2016).

Science process skills

Science process skills (SPS) are physical and mental skills in collecting information and organising it in several ways. SPS are used to process new information in concrete learning. They can also build new concepts and new understandings of science (Charlesworth & Lind, 2012). SPS are the skills that scientists use in their research (McComas, 2014). There are two categories of SPS: basic and integrated. Basic SPS include observing, classifying, ordering, measuring, inferring, predicting, and communicating. Integrated SPS involve identifying and controlling variables, formulating and testing hypotheses, interpreting data, defining operationally, experimenting, and constructing models (McComas, 2014; Saçkes, 2013). Charlesworth and Lind (2012) defined SPS as competencies used during the production of science knowledge while regulating the ensuing knowledge and also analysing and solving any problems occurring in the process of producing science knowledge.

In the Slovenian Kindergarten Curriculum (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, 1999), specifically in the text for the

'Nature' activity area, there are guidelines for activities to help children develop SPS, worded as follows: observing with all the senses, comparing, ordering, and classifying substances, objects, living beings and phenomena in nature and the environment. It is recommended that while classifying, the educator should encourage the child to use their own criteria and to comment on and explain the choices made. Several activities are also suggested to develop experimentation (through a science experiment or test).

Early childhood and science educators agree that children need to be able to do science. According to Larimore (2020), there is disagreement over what it means for young children to do science in a meaningful way. Early childhood educators typically refer to doing science in terms of 'process skills' (Jirout & Zimmerman, 2015). While process skills are components of science practices, they should not be our ultimate goal when considering how children do science. SPS, such as observation and prediction, have been theorised as skills that can be developed independently of content knowledge.

In contrast, science practices integrate the knowledge and skills needed to 'do' science. Much research in education for children from kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) shows that learning skills in isolation does not help children apply them meaningfully in other contexts (National Research Council, 2007). Practices are linked to knowledge, and not all process-related skills are equal in scope. A prediction can be based on prior knowledge or experience, yet it need not – it can simply be a guess, as Larimore (2020) explains. This means that science practices allow children to use their previous knowledge to engage with natural phenomena to gain new knowledge about the world rather than developing isolated skills (Larimore, 2020).

As an SPS, experimenting is more complex than prediction. Experimenting has a different meaning than the process skill of 'observation', Larimore (2020) claims. A biochemist holds an entirely different understanding of an experiment than is appropriate for early childhood education (ECE). Suppose in ECE we aim to teach a child to design a science experiment taking the dependent and independent variables into account. In that case, we must be aware that this is not the only traditional form. In some sciences, other methods of experimentation have been developed to answer research questions or test hypotheses. Planning and investigating are a practice in which pre-schoolers can easily participate. Young children can observe phenomena under a variety of conditions (Larimore, 2020) that are simple and repeatable.

SPS development in context is also discussed in Dilek (2020). Providing context is the only way to ensure a child acquires new knowledge through a concrete experience. With such a meaningfully designed science experience,

children develop process skills that are important in their daily lives. Young children's natural curiosity is crucial for learning science skills, and they not only learn skills but also build on a set of skills over time (Jirout & Zimmerman, 2015; Kuru & Akman, 2017). Moreover, these skills in the early years are also the best predictors of children's science achievement in their subsequent grades since their development gradually progresses with age (Saçkes, 2013). There is also a positive relationship between children's creative thinking and SPS scores (Yildiz & Guler Yildiz, 2021). Therefore, researchers suggest that inquiry-based activities should be implemented in ECE.

Science inquiry not only includes SPS but also refers to the combination of these skills with scientific knowledge, scientific reasoning, problem-solving, and critical thinking in social settings (Vartiainen & Kumpulainen, 2020). The literature in this area gives an insight into young children's diverse and significant abilities in science. Therefore, the Slovenian early childhood education curriculum needs to be updated in the field of science because its practical implementation does not reflect modern findings and the understanding of the early development and learning of toddlers/children, as was noted by Umek (2021). She further stressed that the curriculum should pursue long-term objectives like the development of an autonomous, responsible, critical, and creative individual (Umek, 2021). If implemented appropriately, science inquiry can develop these dimensions of a person's activities.

Improvement is also essential in pedagogical content knowledge, given that it is a contributing factor for many teachers who tend to avoid inquiry experiences in their classrooms (Gropen et al., 2017). Accordingly, an important role in the learning process of future educators is played by their involvement in the preparation and use of materials for children's inquiry (Eckhoff, 2017). The importance of the continuous professional development of educators, along with reflection, self-evaluation, and evaluation of their teaching practice, was also highlighted by Umek and Drvodelić (2021). A positive impact on changing one's own teaching practice is reported by Blannin et al. (2020), who concluded from their research that collective and self-reflective inquiry enabled teacher-researchers to understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves. The importance of future teachers' reflective thinking within various courses of their study is discussed by Devjak and Krumes (2017), who emphasise that even university teachers should embrace reflective thinking by becoming critically reflective practitioners.

The theoretical background and existing research suggest that SPS and content knowledge play a crucial role among older pre-schoolers (aged 3–6) when engaged in inquiry learning facilitated by educators.

Inquiry Boxes and Content Knowledge

Skribe-Dimec (2010) introduced the concept of inquiry boxes (IBs) in Slovenia as a didactic tool for primary science education. IBs are designed to foster science literacy by engaging children in autonomous science inquiry through carefully prepared thematic collections of materials and guided inquiry instructions. In her book *Raziskovalne škatle: učni pripomoček za pouk naravoslovja* [Inquiry Boxes: A Teaching Tool/Aid for Science Lessons] (Skribe-Dimec, 2010), the author presents some ideas for a thematic collection of objects and instructional cards with written instructions for guided inquiry. The instruction is usually a simple task to develop SPS with a prepared collection of materials. Following instructions, the child investigates a collection of materials by classifying, comparing, ordering, and measuring objects, performing simple tests with objects, making predictions, and making reports. The inquiry is thus divided into a series of smaller tasks that the child is able to complete using the instructions on the instructional cards, which are a partial answer to the broader research question hidden in the IB thematic field. The positive role of dividing the problem into a set of smaller ones in the domain of science in early childhood is discussed by Fridberg et al. (2020).

Numerous research projects conducted by pre-primary and primary education students in their final theses (e.g., Brbre, 2012; Flego, 2015; Kopič, 2021; Kvas, 2019; Lamovšek, 2015; Perko, 2008; Smiljan, 2021; Šenica, 2022) at Slovenian universities have explored IBs. Most of these studies focus on practical validation through individual observation of children working with one IB (thematically varied based on the study). The researchers mainly assess children's autonomy in understanding instructions and their success in task-solving, thereby evaluating the effectiveness of the prepared IBs. Motivated and successful autonomy is often observed, particularly in tasks involving simpler SPS.

However, none of the mentioned studies monitored the progress of content knowledge or provided an overview of SPS development when children engage with various thematically different IBs over an extended period. As a result, the present study aims to create four thematically different IBs for fostering autonomous inquiry in pre-schoolers and examine the impact of these boxes on content knowledge and SPS development.

As presented below, we designed and created four inquiry boxes in the thematic fields of magnetism and buoyancy; separation of substances; weighing; and investigation of substances.

The instructional cards, as named by Osredkar and Skribe-Dimec (2009, 2010), were adapted in our IBs for preschool children who cannot yet read, with photo-type instructions that include photographs of the objects collected in

the box. A similar approach using photography was also employed by Jeffries (2011). As part of photo-type instructions, the photographs were supplemented with symbols to help the child understand the instructions on the instructional card. According to Kambouri and Pieridou (2016), symbols can help explain abstract science concepts. Figure 1 is an example of one of the IB instructional cards, combining a photograph and symbols. We identified a prioritised SPS for each photo-type instructional card task. (For more on the design of an IB for preschool children, see Golob (2020)).

Figure 1

Example of a photo-type instructional card from the Separation of Substances IB, using photography and symbols for ordering by size and sequence



The **Nuts and Bolts** IB (adapted from Lamovšek, 2015) includes the thematic area of magnetism and buoyancy, in which children learn about nuts and bolts from different materials (metal, plastic, wood), check magnetic properties and buoyancy, make predictions based on experimentation, order by size, etc. The content of the IB is presented in Figure 2a.

When preparing the material, we considered the findings of Kalogianakis et al. (2018) and Paul (2018), who established that pre-schoolers have difficulty understanding that not all metals are attracted by magnets. We, therefore, chose only those metal nuts and bolts that are attracted by magnets and hence planned only a basic experience of magnetism for the children.

By preparing the materials in the IB, we planned for a child to generalise, based on the experiment (Hsin & Wu, 2011), that metal nuts and bolts sink, whereas plastic and wooden ones float. Explanations using the density of a material, which involves mass and volume, are still too complex for many 11-year-olds (Smithenry & Kim, 2010). See the Appendix for the list of tasks as shown by the eight photo-type instructional cards.

Figure 2

a: Contents of the Nuts and Bolts IB; **b:** Example of a photo-type instructional card from the Separation of Substance IB by sieving; **c:** Contents of the Weighing IB (a Styrofoam ball, a ping pong ball, a super ball, various marbles, instructional cards, and a balance scale)



Young children usually have a limited understanding of the properties of materials; colour and hardness generally are understood (Preston & Love, 2021). By preparing the materials in the **Separation of Substance** IB, we aim to extend children's basic descriptions of the properties of materials to include the size of their particles. According to Abdo (2022), very few studies have focused on chemistry and how more chemical content could be transferred to a preschool environment. One example is separation methods like filtering or sieving (Abdo, 2022). An example of a sieving task is shown in Figure 2b. See the Appendix for the list of tasks as shown by the eight photo-type instructional cards.

The **Weighing** IB aims to teach children how to use a balance scale. Figure 2c shows the contents of the IB. Children compare the size and weight of different balls. The concept of weight is easier for children to understand than the concept of mass, which is still too abstract for them (Bar et al., 2016). The concept of weight is best introduced to children through their own experience if two objects of different weights are placed in the child's hand, and the child compares which one pushes a hand more downwards. A balance determines mass by balancing an unknown mass against a known mass. When designing the **Weighing** IB, we deliberately chose balls of different sizes and materials, with some smaller balls being heavier than the larger ones. This was to encourage children to realise that weight and size are not necessarily linked. Similar activities are also described in Bajd et al. (2013). See the Appendix for the list of tasks as shown by the nine photo-type instructional cards.

The fourth IB, **What Do You Know About A Substance?**, tests and consolidates the content knowledge acquired and the SPS of the first three IBs. Figure 3a shows its contents. In this IB, children separate a substance using a

limited range of processes. They must apply their content knowledge in different situations and practise SPS in more complex tasks (see Figure 3b), as in the instructions in the first three IBs.

Similarly, the sizing task requires ordering equally sized packages of substance according to the size of particles, as shown in Figure 3c. The weight-ordering task is also more challenging, as the child weighs packages of substance identical to those in Figure 3c. See the Appendix for the list of tasks as shown by the five photo-type instructional cards.

Figure 3

a: Content of the What Do You Know About A Substance? IB; b: The What Do You Know About A Substance? IB photo-type instructional card for separating a mixture of semolina, metal nuts, and plastic buttons without handling the items; c: The What Do You Know About A Substance? IB photo-type instructional card for ordering equally sized packages of substances by particle size



With regard to the research aims, the following research questions (RQs) were addressed:

- RQ1: Does inquiry learning through IBs influence the progress of 4- to 5-year-olds' content knowledge?
- RQ2: Does the child develop SPS when inquiring by using several different IBs in sequence?

Methods

Participants

The study sample is a non-randomised sample from a specific population of twenty children aged 4–5 years attending the same kindergarten with a publicly approved ECE programme in Slovenia, which includes children from both urban and rural settings. Ten children, randomly selected from the sample, were included in the experimental group working with the IBs. The other ten children were placed in the control group. In both groups, half were boys, and half were girls.

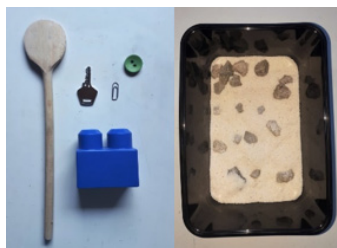
Having both a control group and an experimental group in a study is crucial for establishing causality and improving the validity of research findings. It allows researchers to assess the progression without any new intervention, which helps identify if the observed changes result from the tested IBs. The educator ensures the absence of magnets, intentional buoyancy experiments, and balance scales in kindergarten. The use of sieves in the sandpit is limited to free play activities only and is part of the regular daily routine. As both the control and experimental groups are drawn from the same kindergarten setting and have been selected through random sampling for this study, we consider the two groups to be comparable.

Instruments

The data for the study were collected using a qualitative data collection technique, specifically individual testing and observation, and recording using an observation protocol. To *test* the content knowledge, semi-structured pre- and post-interviews were designed to individually test children's knowledge of the magnetism, buoyancy, weighing and separation of substances. The interview consisted of four sets, each related to its own domain, and we prepared the same collection of materials for each set, as shown in Figure 4. The collection consists of five objects: a metal key, a metal paper clip, a wooden spoon, a small plastic brick, and a plastic button. Without testing anything, the children predicted what they thought the magnet would attract and, in the second set, which objects would float or sink in the water. For buoyancy, we also asked them for a reason: why do they think the object will float or sink? Their answers were duly recorded. If the children correctly predicted all five objects, they received five points. The magnet sticks to the metal key and the metal paper clip. A wooden spoon and a plastic cube do not sink in water.

Figure 4

A collection of materials for testing knowledge of buoyancy and magnetic properties (left) and a mixture for testing knowledge regarding possible ways to separate mixtures (right)



For the third set of tests, children were offered a mix of semolina and small pebbles and asked how they could most quickly separate the mixture (Figure 4, right) into two groups. The question was how (i.e., with what) would you make a separate pile of pebbles and semolina in the fastest way from a mix of the two materials? We wrote down the children's answers.

For the fourth set, we showed the children a child's balance scale (Figure 3a, marked with a star) and asked if they knew what it was and for what it was used. We asked the children whether they knew it was a weighing scale and how they would determine which of the two objects in the collection was heavier.

If they showed or described that the scale tipped downwards for a heavier object, we recorded that the child knew how to use a balance scale, but we did not tell them if they had solved the problems correctly.

The research employs a guided inquiry learning educational strategy. By using open-ended materials in the IBs, we stimulate children's curiosity, wonder, and interests, which serve as a vital starting point for the inquiry process. The children in the experimental group were introduced to basic IB work during the introductory phase by presenting prepared materials, photo-type instructional cards, and the topic of inquiry. The Preschool Inquiry Cycle, adapted from Trundle and Smith (2017) and tailored to the child's stage of development (Ramanathan, 2022), comprises the following phases: a) Play (engage, notice, question, wonder); b) Explore (predict, observe, record data); c) Discuss (construct, reflect, provide explanations, draw conclusions, develop new questions).

During the play phase, children work individually with the IB, allowing them to play with the materials freely, become familiar with the content, and express curiosity and engagement. The teacher then guides them to use photo-type instructional cards, which present open-ended questions and guided inquiry prompts, promoting the development of scientific process skills (SPS) and content knowledge.

The exploration phase involves making predictions, conducting unexpected observations, manipulating objects, taking measurements, classifying based on different characteristics, conducting experiments, and using various other SPS.

Although not planned and monitored as a social interaction in this study, the discussion phase is included in the subsequent inquiry cycle with another IB as a cognitive process. In the following IB, some of the previously introduced SPS are further developed, and specific science knowledge is confirmed with new examples. This allows the child to draw conclusions, provide explanations, or develop new questions suitable for their stage of development. For detailed information about the content of IBs, please refer to the section 'Inquiry Boxes and Content Knowledge'.

The children's individual work with the prepared IBs in the experimental group was closely monitored by their educator through observation and recording using an observation protocol. A table was used for entering the *observations*. For *each task* in the IB, the educator recorded a child's degree of success and autonomy. *Successful (value 1)* means that the child solved the task correctly, and *unsuccessful (value 0)* means they were unable to solve the task correctly. *Autonomous (value 3)* means that the child solved the task on their own, without needing help. If the child has expressed a need for help in understanding an instruction or task by gesture or word, it has been offered. If non-verbal help was sufficient for the child to continue the activity, it was recorded as a value of 2 on the autonomy scale. An example of *non-verbal help (value 2)* is a finger pointing in the direction of order, pointing to a tool that could help the child or pointing to a symbol. *Verbal help (value 1)* was represented by the educator asking a question, explaining the symbols on the instructional card, guiding the child through thinking, or giving complete instructions for a task. Moreover, in helping children, the educator did not tell the children the solution to the task but merely non-verbally or verbally explained the instructions given for each task on the photo-type instructional card. Sometimes, the educator just reads the text written on the back of a card.

The development of a test instrument for assessing children's knowledge is based on the subject-specific research already explained in previous chapters (Abdo, 2022; Bar et al., 2016; Friedberg et al., 2020; Hsin & Wu, 2011; Jeffries, 2011; Kambouri & Pieridou, 2016; Lamovšek, 2015; Paul, 2018; Preston & Love, 2021; Smithenry & Kim, 2010). The validity of the prepared materials (the IBs and testing materials) was ensured by expert reviews (checking the performance of prepared materials to determine if they correspond to the expected results of the experimentation) and by pilot testing.

Objectivity was ensured by providing detailed instructions to the educator of these children, the one who carried out observations of the children working with the IBs. Evaluation of the children's answers during the test (Test 1 and Test 2, as shown in Figure 9) was performed by the authors of the study without subjective judgment. Data anonymity was guaranteed for research purposes while processing the data.

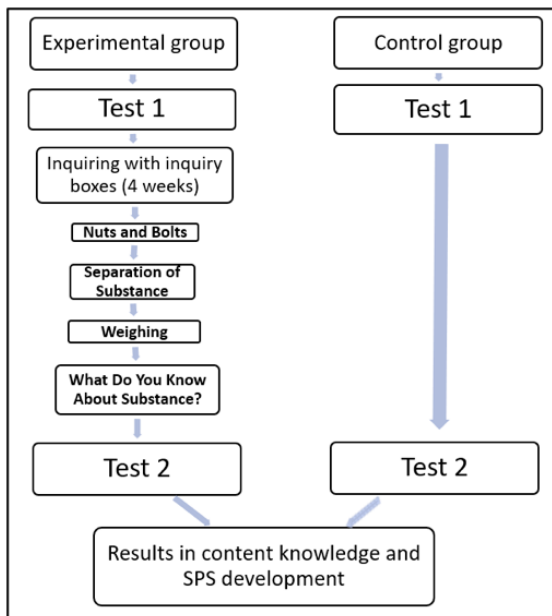
Before collecting the data, consent forms were also distributed to all participating parents of the children to be observed. The requisite permissions were obtained regarding the observation of participant children for this research.

Research Design

Twenty children from the same kindergarten were randomly divided into two gender-matched groups. Each child experienced individual testing (Test 1 in Figure 5) using semi-structured content knowledge interviews. The results were continuously recorded. The testing was conducted in a separate, quiet room, with each session lasting 10 minutes.

Figure 5

Research Process



Over the next four weeks, the children in the experimental group engaged in inquiry activities with the materials provided in the IBs. They completed the assigned tasks indicated on the instructional cards in a separate room within the kindergarten at various times of the day. All ten children in the experimental group individually tried out the Nuts and Bolts IB, followed by the Separation of Substance IB. On average, each child spent 25 minutes working on each IB. Over four weeks, all ten children interacted with all four IBs in the same order as presented here in the study (see Figure 5). The educator, who received proper training in using the IBs and instruments, conducted observations of the children while they worked with the IB and recorded the observations using the observation protocol.

After their sessions with the IBs, the children were again tested (Test 2 in Figure 5) using the same semi-structured interview. We tested all the children, both in the experimental and the control groups. The results were processed descriptively and presented in tables and figures according to research questions.

Results

Progress with content knowledge

The results of the experimental group testing are shown in Table 1. The experimental group made inquiries using all four IBs after the first test. Table 2 presents the results for the control group.

Table 1

Knowledge of the experimental group children in Test 1 and Test 2 ($f_{max} = 5$)

Child / Correct answers	Magnetism			Buoyancy			Weighing		Separation of a substance	
	Test 1	Test 2		Test 1	Test 2		Test 1	Test 2	Test 1	Test 2
	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	Reason for buoyancy	<i>f</i>	Reason for buoyancy	Familiarity with a balance scale		Separation method for a mixture of semolina and pebbles	
A	4	5	0	Mass	3	Material	No	Yes	Handpick	Sieve
B	1	5	1	Mass	5	Material	No	Yes	Handpick	Sieve
C	2	5	2	Mass	5	Material	No	Yes	Handpick	Sieve
D	2	5	0	Mass	4	Material	No	Yes	Sieve	Sieve
E	5	5	2	Mass	5	Material	No	Yes	Handpick	Handpick
F	4	5	3	Material	5	Material	No	Yes	Sieve	Sieve
G	3	5	2	Mass	5	Material	No	Yes	Handpick	Sieve
H	4	5	1	Mass	4	Material	Yes	Yes	Sieve	Sieve
I	5	5	0	Mass	4	Material	No	Yes	Handpick	Sieve
J	1	3	0	Mass	2	Mass	No	Yes	Handpick	Handpick

Table 2

Knowledge of the control group children in Test 1 and Test 2 ($f_{max} = 5$)

Child / Correct answers	Magnetism			Buoyancy			Weighing		Separation of a substance	
	Test 1	Test 2		Test 1	Test 2		Test 1	Test 2	Test 1	Test 2
	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	Reason for buoyancy	<i>f</i>	Reason for buoyancy	Familiarity with a balance scale		Separation method for a mixture of semolina and pebbles	
K	1	2	0	Mass	0	Mass	No	No	Handpick	Handpick
L	1	1	0	Mass	0	Mass	No	No	Handpick	Handpick
M	2	2	0	Mass	1	Mass	No	No	Handpick	Handpick
N	4	5	2	Mass	2	Mass	Yes	Yes	Sieve	Sieve
O	3	3	3	Mass	3	Mass	No	No	Sieve	Sieve
P	1	1	2	Mass	2	Mass	No	No	Handpick	Handpick
R	0	0	1	Mass	1	Mass	No	No	Handpick	Handpick
S	1	1	1	Mass	0	Mass	No	No	Handpick	Handpick
T	2	1	0	Mass	1	Mass	No	No	Handpick	Handpick
U	5	5	3	Mass		Mass	Yes	Yes	Sieve	Sieve

From *Table 1*, in the area of knowledge about *magnetism*, we see that two children in the experimental group correctly classified all five objects in Test 1 according to whether they were attracted by magnets or not. In Test 2, nine children correctly classified all five objects. Nine children out of 10 (90%) scored better than in Test 1. Children in the control group (*Table 2*) scored similarly to children in the experimental group (*Table 1*) in Test 1.

Comparing the results of the experimental group (*Table 1*) with the control group (*Table 2*) in the area of *buoyancy*, both groups showed similar patterns in Test 1. In both groups, no child answered correctly for all five objects. Like the experimental group, all children in the control group attributed buoyancy to the object's mass (heavier objects sink, lighter objects float on water) (*Table 2*).

In Test 2, five children in the experimental group correctly classified all five objects, and only one child classified less than half correctly. Nine children attributed differences in buoyancy to the material, while there was no change in the control group (buoyancy is mass-dependent). None of the children in the control group correctly classified all objects in Test 2.

Only three children knew what a balance scale was and what it was used for (*Table 1* and *Table 2* combined) in Test 1 in the *weighing* set. They were also able to say how they intended to determine which of the two objects was

heavier. Other children did not know what the object in front of them was or why it might be used. In Test 2, all children in the experimental group knew what a balance scale was and what it was used for (*Table 1*). They were also able to identify the heavier of the two objects. The knowledge of the control group in Test 2 remained unchanged (*Table 2*).

In the area of the *separation of substance*, a significant *improvement* (8 out of 10 children) was also observed in the experimental group children's *knowledge of using a strainer or sieve* for sieving compared to hand-picking (*Table 1*). Hand-picking for separation purposes was an answer for the majority of both the experimental and control groups in Test 1. As seen in Test 2, the majority of the experimental group suggests sieving as a method of separation, which they had not considered before. The results of the control group are the same as in Test 1.

Science Process Skills Development

Observations among the children of the experimental group while they were using the four IBs were collected. *Table 3* shows the results of children's degree of success and autonomy. It can be observed that the children were successful in solving the first three IBs, with an average success rate of 9 or higher on a scale of 1 to 10. The greatest success involved the *Weighing* IB, the third in a row offered to them.

It can be observed that the average level of autonomy was also high, at 2.5 or 2.6 on a scale up to 3. The last IB, *What Do You Know About A Substance?*, offered as a test of knowledge and skills arising from the first three IBs using new examples, turned out to be too challenging for most children. The average success rate for this IB was significantly lower, at only 5.3. Children were less autonomous on average, scoring only 1.9, as shown in *Table 3*.

Table 3

Overall results for the children's success and autonomy for the four IBs, the best completed and the most challenging task for each IB.

IB/autonomy and success	Nuts and Bolts	Separation of Substance	Weighing	What Do You Know About A Substance?	
Average autonomy (1-3)	2.5	2.6	2.6	1.9	
Average success (0-10)	9	9.2	9.4	5.3	
The best-completed task	Experimentation and classification of nuts by buoyancy	Selection of a wheat-buttons mixture separation and classification process	Weighing, bigger ball is heavier, and both marbles	Comparison of weight without weighing and verification by weighing two balls of approximately the same size	Classification of wheat semolina, metal nuts and plastic buttons (magnet and sieve process reasoning, no hands)
Average autonomy (1-3)	3	3	3	3	2.6
Success (0-10)	10	10	10	10	9
The most challenging task	Ordering the bolts by size from largest to smallest	Ordering buttons by size (instruction showed the middle of the sequence)	Ordering the objects by weight using the balance scale	Separation of wooden sticks and metal nuts by inferring the use of the buoyancy and straining test	
Average autonomy (1-3)	1.6	2.3	2	2.4	
Success (0-10)	6	7	5	3	

The results in Table 3 show that the most challenging task for the children in the *Nuts and Bolts IB* was ordering the bolts by size from largest to smallest, in which they recorded the lowest levels of both success and autonomy. The size-ordering task (*Separation of Substance IB*) also proved challenging to complete. Ordering the objects by weight using the balance scale in the *Weighing IB* was also challenging. Table 3 shows that the children were very successful (10) and autonomous (3) when weighing pairs of objects. Difficulties only arose while putting multiple objects in order, which presented a mental challenge successfully solved by half (5) of the children.

When monitoring the development of a specific SPS, we focused on monitoring children's autonomy in the SPS of classifying, ordering, and measuring/weighing. We identified autonomy as the variable that fluctuated more than

success, conditioned by the educator's support. Thus, autonomy shows progress in the child's development of a particular SPS. The related graphs are shown in Figures 6 to 8. We did not include results for the fourth *What Do You Know About A Substance?* IB in the comparison because the complexity of the tasks in new examples led to lower scores for both autonomy and success (Table 3).

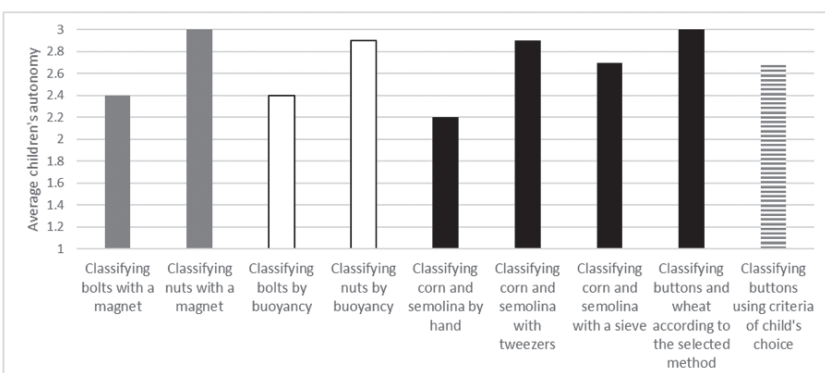
Figure 6 shows the children's average autonomy in a particular task on the instructional card that required various materials to be classified. If we observe the results for sets of tasks related to classification using a magnet (grey), based on buoyancy (white), and by the method of separation by hand-picking, with tweezers, sieving or by the method of choice (black), we see that the average autonomy within a set increases with the order in which the tasks are performed. Autonomy is lower when children first carry out a particular SPS with the chosen material. On average, it is always higher when they use the SPS within the same set of tasks.

The classification of buttons according to the child's criterion (striped) shows a high level of average autonomy, which we found surprising as it was the first time the children faced the task of choosing their classification criterion.

Surprisingly, when developing the SPS of ordering, we observe a trend of increasing child autonomy depending on the order of the first six tasks offered (grey) on the photo-type instructions for inquiry within the three IBs, as shown in Figure 7. The value 2.3 which is an outlier and is related to the instruction card with more symbols where only the middle sequence is shown.

Figure 6

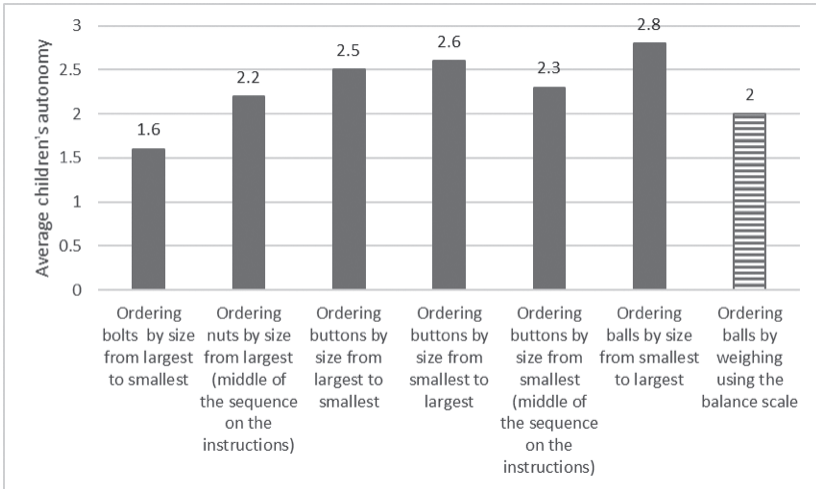
Development of the SPS of classifying shown as an average children's autonomy score on the sequential classifying tasks in the Nuts and Bolts (grey and white) and Separation of Substance (black and striped) IBs



Legend of autonomy score: 3 - autonomous child, 2 - non-verbal help from educator is needed, 1 - verbal help from educator is needed.

Figure 7

Development of the SPS of ordering shown as an average assessment of children's autonomy in the sequential ordering tasks in the Nuts and Bolts, Separation of Substances, and Weighing IB.



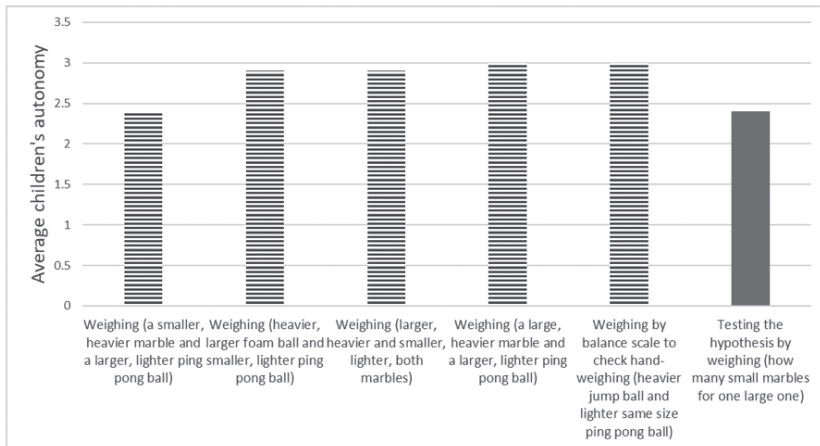
Legend of autonomy score: 3 – autonomous child, 2 – non-verbal help from educator is needed, 1 – verbal help from educator is needed.

The task of ordering the balls by weight, using a balance scale for weighing (the striped bar in Figure 7), was not completed by five children (half) who needed verbal help. Nevertheless, half (5) of the children completed the task successfully and with a high degree of autonomy.

Figure 8 shows the average autonomy of the children when inquiring into the weight measurement of the six tasks with the Weighing IB. Once again, the lowest autonomy (2.4) is observed for the first task, in which children first encounter autonomous handling of the balance scale. Despite the unexpected outcome, and with some non-verbal help from the educator, they all successfully identified the smaller ball as heavier since it ended up lower than the equilibrium position of the scale.

Figure 8

Development of the SPS of measuring shown as an average assessment of children's autonomy in the sequential weighing tasks in the Weighing IB.



Legend of autonomy score: 3 – autonomous child, 2 – non-verbal help from educator is needed, 1 – verbal help from educator is needed.

All children were also successful and autonomous while weighing two balls of the same size (a super ball and a ping pong ball) with the balance scale. In the last task (grey in Figure 8), they tried out weight measurement with a non-standard unit, and autonomy dropped to 2.4 as three children (out of 10) needed verbal help.

Discussion

Progress with content knowledge

The results of this study demonstrate a notable enhancement in content knowledge development for the experimental group that engaged with the IBs. Specifically, in the realm of magnetism, we can infer that children in the experimental group are more likely to progress towards the objective of generalising that metal objects are attracted by magnets, while wooden and plastic objects are not. Additionally, it is evident that the children in the control group in the study did not encounter any new experiences with magnets outside the kindergarten environment.

Based on the findings, we can confidently assert that the use of the Inquiry Boxes (*Nuts and Bolts* and *What Do You Know About A Substance?*) contributed to the improvement of content knowledge about magnetism and

buoyancy among the children in the experimental group. Furthermore, the children exhibited significant progress in accurately classifying objects according to their buoyancy, referencing the material as the determining factor rather than the object's mass or weight.

These results align with prior research by Hsin and Wu (2011) and Smithenry and Kim (2010), who found that pre-schoolers could generalise an object's buoyancy based on its material composition. The acquired knowledge through interaction with the IBs, such as the understanding that metal nuts and bolts sink while plastic and wooden ones float, had a positive impact on their subsequent application of the concept of density in further schooling. Previous research studies (Clements & Sarama, 2016; Saçkes, 2013) have highlighted the significance of early childhood education and skills as predictors of children's science achievement in later grades.

Similarly, the experimental group's exploration of weighing using the carefully prepared IB materials demonstrated a clear understanding of the concept of weight through practical examples, corroborating findings by Bar et al. (2016) in a study on introducing the concept of weight. Handling the strainers and sieves while exploring the prepared substances and mixtures with different particle sizes and engaging in tasks from the *Separation of Substance* and *What Do You Know About A Substance?* IB contributed to an improved understanding of separation techniques in this area, a finding also supported by Abdo (2022).

The deliberate preparation and selection of customised mixtures and sieves, as Bajd et al. (2013) also suggested, further enhanced the daily experience of sieving. The implementation of the prepared IBs facilitated purposeful reflection on the comparison of various separation techniques.

Overall, the experimental group of four- to five-year-old children exhibited significant progress in their content knowledge across challenging science areas, including magnetism, buoyancy, weighing, and separating of substances. This progress can be attributed to their exploration of materials and tools through the photo-type instructions provided in the IBs, which allowed them to learn and practice scientific process skills (SPS). The introduction of thematic IBs in children's play has the potential to foster knowledge progression in other areas of early science education.

Science Process Skills Development

On average, children consistently demonstrated a higher level of autonomy when using SPS within the same set of tasks, including sorting, classifying, and measuring/weighing. Similar observations were made by Jirout

and Zimmerman (2015) and Larimore (2020), emphasising the significance of content knowledge in SPS development. Our research also highlighted the importance of context in thematic sets, which aligns with the findings of the SPS development in classifying.

The diverse collection of materials, such as buttons, allowed children to choose various criteria for classifying, like colour, size, and the number of holes. Devjak et al. (2021) identified this autonomy in selecting criteria as essential.

Understanding instructions featuring more symbols proved more challenging for 4- to 5-year-olds, even though none of the instructions provided the entire solution, only a partial part. When comparing the average autonomy value (2.2) for a similar ordering problem with nuts and buttons (Figure 7), where the middle of the sequence was shown on the instruction card, we observed a slight increase in average autonomy value (2.3) for the second task using a different material. This suggests adequate development of ordering SPS and the ability to transfer knowledge to new situations and contexts, which is essential in (ECE) as noted by Dilek (2020).

Ordering by weight without considering the volume (size) of objects was particularly challenging for some children, even at higher grade levels (Bar et al., 2016). However, the results indicated that the materials in the IBs were suitable for developing ordering SPS in various contexts.

Children used the stated principle of weight measurement more meaningfully and autonomously after successfully completing the first task of weighing pairs of balls (Figure 8). This finding aligns with those of Bar et al. (2016) in their comparative analysis.

Identifying the equality of masses with a non-standard unit shown by the balance scale posed a new challenge for the children, resulting in decreased autonomy. Similar to classifying, the development of weight measurement SPS showed progress in autonomy when the process was familiar and comparable. Children learned to measure the weight of objects independently, irrespective of their size and material.

Through inquiry with the *Weighing* IB into the weight properties of concrete materials, children acquired a technique applicable in everyday life to identify and compare the weights of diverse objects, consistent with Preston and Love's (2021) findings with preschool children. However, when faced with a new task involving weight equality, some children (5) required explanations. Detailed observations indicated that these children also needed assistance with the first task and might have developed greater autonomy through repeated exploration of the same IB, which is in line with predictions from undergraduate research on IBs in early childhood education (Kopič, 2021; Lamovšek, 2015; Smiljan, 2021).

In conclusion, the results suggest that children develop autonomy in SPS of classifying, ordering, and measuring when they engage in inquiry using several different IBs in sequence.

Conclusions

When considering the study as a whole, science inquiry with the IBs was shown to yield effective results regarding the SPS development and content knowledge of four- to five-year-old children. By engaging in tasks that utilise the Inquiry Boxes (IBs), a child not only acquires knowledge about the specific materials or collections within an IB but also gains transferable skills and develops scientific process skills (SPS) relevant to the discovery of content knowledge and early childhood education (ECE). These skills and knowledge prove to be crucial for the child's future development during their school years when the knowledge and skills acquired are further honed and demonstrated in scientific achievements, as highlighted by Larimore (2020). For pre-schoolers, inquiry through IBs arouses curiosity and a desire to explore new things. Guided tasks on photo-type instructional cards allow for a sufficient degree of autonomy and achievement. The presented form of individually guided inquiry for children using thematic IBs is recommended as a proven teaching aid for developing children's SPS and knowledge for the separation of substances, weighing and magnetism. The results of the study were obtained from a small sample and cannot be generalised to the whole population, which may be seen as a limitation and as offering the potential for further research within ECE.

We also note that it is often too simplistic to categorise specific SPS as basic and simple SPS, as classified by McComas (2014) and Saçkes (2013). Indeed, we found that the choice of materials already influences the task's difficulty, as well as the success and autonomy in solving the task. This was seen in the ordering by size for collections of materials made up of individual particles rather than in one piece.

Inclusion of the *What Do You Know About A Substance?* IB as a testing material for both groups of children presented a challenge since it covered the content knowledge and SPS developed in the other three IBs used in the research. Despite the experimental group's lower success and autonomy scores due to more challenging tasks, we anticipate a difference in the success and autonomy of the experimental group compared to the control group. This additional test would help fill a gap in our research, providing further confirmation of the significance of children's learning through inquiry-based methods, particularly regarding the transfer of knowledge and skills to new examples and

problem-solving situations (Klahr & Chen, 2011).

Therefore, educators should introduce inquiry-based activities in which children use developmentally appropriate materials to undertake observations, classifications, ordering, measurements, predictions, experimentations and other SPS to facilitate SPS development in different contexts and content knowledge.

To increase educators' awareness, one of the main elements of ECE applications, additional IBs for different content knowledge, could be developed and their effectiveness investigated. For some of these, it would be worth looking for IB designs in existing undergraduate final theses (e.g., Brbre, 2012; Flego, 2015; Kopic, 2021; Kvas, 2019; Lamovšek, 2015; Perko, 2008; Smiljan, 2021; Šenica, 2022; Ungar, 2020) as these also show great potential for developing children's autonomy. For children, the IB are an opportunity to experience, perhaps for the first time, fully autonomous science inquiry, which simultaneously offers a unique and stimulating learning environment.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Appendix: The Inquiry Box Tasks

INQUIRY BOX	TASKS AS SHOWN BY THE PHOTO-TYPE INSTRUCTIONAL CARD
Nuts and Bolts	Ordering the bolts by size from largest to smallest Ordering the nuts by size from largest (instruction shows the middle of the sequence) Fitting nuts to bolts Experimentation and classification of bolts by magnet Experimentation and classification of nuts by magnet Experimentation and classification of bolts by buoyancy Experimentation and classification of nuts by buoyancy Predicting: Are all plastic bolts and nuts magnetic?
Separation of Substances	Classifying corn and semolina by hand Classifying corn and semolina with tweezers Classifying corn and semolina with a sieve Selection of a wheat-buttons mixture separation and classification process Ordering buttons by size from largest to smallest Ordering buttons by size from smallest to largest Ordering buttons by size (instruction shows the middle of the sequence) Classifying buttons using criteria of child's choice and communicating
Weighing	Ordering balls by size from smallest to largest Weighing (a smaller, heavier marble and a larger, lighter ping pong ball) Weighing (heavier, larger foam ball and smaller, lighter ping pong ball) Weighing (larger is heavier, both marbles) Weighing (a large, heavier marble and a larger, lighter ping pong ball) Comparison of weight without weighing and verification by weighing two balls of approximately the same size Ordering balls by weighing using the balance scale Predicting: How many smaller marbles does one bigger one weigh? Testing the hypothesis by weighing (How many smaller marbles does one bigger one weigh?)
What Do You Know About A Substance?	Classification of wheat semolina, metal nuts, and plastic buttons (magnet and sieve process reasoning, no hands) Separation of wooden sticks and metal nuts by inferring the use of the buoyancy and straining test Ordering equally-sized packages of substances by particle size Ordering equally-sized packages of substances by weighing Classifying equally-sized packages of substances using criteria of child's choice and communicating

Biographical note

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The Educational Paradigms in Tagore's School Through the Lens of Continental Pedagogy

IRENA LESAR¹

∞ In today's world, the question of the impact of schooling on various aspects of the personality of children and adolescents is relevant and not just a question of the most effective teaching and learning process. For Tagore, the ultimate goal of education is *the all-round development of the individual to adapt harmoniously to reality*. The purpose of this article is therefore to detail Tagore's concept of comprehensive education and how it is reflected in the functioning of his school in Santiniketan. In addition, a qualitative theoretical analysis is undertaken to determine which of the four identified factors of education in the continental tradition (teacher, content of teaching, child and social environment) is the key medium of education in his school. The systematic analysis of the characteristics of Tagore's educational process and its requirements and objectives shows that he succeeded in integrating all four pedagogical factors known in the European continental tradition, which cannot be said of any of the European pedagogical theories presented (Herbartianism, humanistic or cultural pedagogy, reform pedagogy and socially critical pedagogy). Moreover, Tagore succeeded in bringing many theoretical concepts that are still relevant today (e.g., experiential learning, student participation, embodied cognition, the concept of a hundred languages) into the operation of the Santiniketan School in a very innovative way.

Keywords: Tagore, Santiniketan School, continental tradition, pedagogical paradigms, teacher, child, content of teaching, social environment, internalisation, communication

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Pedagoške paradigme v Tagorejevi šoli skozi objektiv kontinentalne pedagogike

IRENA LESAR

≈ V današnjem svetu je čedalje aktualnejše vprašanje vpliva šolanja na različne vidike osebnosti otrok in mladostnikov in ne le vprašanje čim učinkovitejšega poučevanja in učenja. Za Tagoreja je končni cilj vzgoje in izobraževanja *vsestranski razvoj posameznika, da se harmonično prilagaja realnosti*. Namen tega članka je podrobno predstaviti Tagorejev celovit koncept vzgoje in izobraževanja ter kako se ta kaže v delovanju njegove šole v Santiniketanu. S kvalitativno teoretsko analizo ugotavlja, kateri izmed štirih identificiranih dejavnikov vzgoje v kontinentalni tradiciji (učitelj, vsebina poučevanja, otrok in socialno okolje) je ključni medij vzgoje in izobraževanja v njegovi šoli. Sistematična analiza značilnosti Tagorejevega vzgojno-izobraževalnega procesa ter njegovih zahtev in ciljev kaže, da mu je uspelo integrirati vse štiri vzgojne dejavnike, ki jih pozna evropska kontinentalna tradicija, česar pa ne moremo reči za nobeno izmed predstavljenih evropskih pedagoških teorij (herbartizem, duhoslovna oz. kulturna pedagogika, reformska pedagogika in družbenokritična pedagogika). Poleg tega je Tagore uspel številne teoretične koncepte, ki so še danes relevantni (npr. izkustveno učenje, participacija učencev, utelešeno znanje, koncept stoterih jezikov), na zelo inovativen način vnesti v delovanje šole Santiniketan.

Ključne besede: Tagore, šola Santiniketan, kontinentalna tradicija, pedagoške paradigme, učitelj, otrok, vsebina poučevanja, socialno okolje, ponotranjenje, komunikacija

Introduction

From the point of view of educational goals, it can be stated that in certain societies school education is mainly focused on the acquisition of knowledge, while in other societies the formation of the students' personality is also an important goal. In the discussion of education, in addition to the question of educational goals, the question of the factors that contribute decisively to the achievement of goals is often raised. For Tagore (1917), "the highest education is that which not only gives us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence" (p. 142). The present article aims to compare his concept of education in Santiniketan with the European continental tradition (Biesta, 2011), where the question of shaping the whole personality is also relevant. Different scientific communities have researched education in different traditions of disciplined inquiry (Bridges, 2006; Lesar & Skubic Ermenc, 2017) and the differences are also reflected in the terminology. For example, the term pedagogy is used in some countries to designate specific scientific (as well as academic) disciplines (e.g., in Germany, Slovenia, Norway, Netherlands, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria), while in some Anglophone countries it has a much narrower meaning to refer more or less to the practice of teaching (Hamilton, 1999; Simon, 1999), for which we use the term didactic in the continental tradition. In addition, the naming of the educational process is not entirely comparable. In most countries that have relied on the continental tradition, two terms are known (e.g., *izobraževanje* and *vzgoja* in Slovenia, *Bildung* and *Erziehung* in Germany, *utdanning* and *oppdragelse* in Norway), emphasising a socio-culturally specific understanding of teaching-learning processes and personality-forming processes. In this article, we will use the term education in a broader sense that covers not only teaching-learning processes but also the formation of the whole individual. The fundamental pedagogical question within the continental tradition is which of the four known factors of education (teacher, content of teaching, child and social environment) is a key medium so "that a particular educational effect occurs, which manifests itself as a change in consciousness and behaviour" (Medveš, 2018a, p. 5).

When India was still an English colony, Tagore already noted that education for sympathy in schools was not only systematically ignored, but also strongly suppressed (Tagore, 1917, p. 142). He therefore concentrated his efforts on building a school that would give more answers to the question of how to achieve "fulfilment through sympathy" (Tagore, 1961) than to the question of an effective learning and teaching process. The case study of the Tagore School will provide a complex description and identification of key features of the educational process in the Santiniketan School through an analysis of relevant

(and linguistically accessible) documents and descriptions of the functioning of the school. Based on Medveš's theory of educational paradigms, a comparative theoretical analysis will also be undertaken to demonstrate the relevance of Tagore's concept of education to the present day from the perspective of someone closer to the continental tradition.

Basic features of Tagore's educational concept

The task set – to compare the key educational paradigms known in continental pedagogy with the educational ideas and approaches as observed within the operation of the Santiniketan School – is anything but easy, since Tagore justified the operation of the school in various sources, not all of which are available in languages I know. I will therefore have to rely on the scholars of his educational concept who have published in English (Das Gupta, 2015; Debnath & Pal, 2015; Jalan, 1976; O'Connell, 2003; Salamatullah, 1961).

As I have already explained in one of my previous articles (Lesar, 2015), Tagore's conception of education in the life of the individual and in society is specific, described by some authors as romantic and idealistic in orientation (Ghosh, 2012; Pritchard, 2014). In his texts, we find many educational goals, such as education for international understanding and universal brotherhoods, and education to support rural reconstruction, among others. However, the ultimate goal of education – which is not derived from the outside world, but from Tagore's own experiences, practices and experiments – should be *the all-round development of the individual to adapt harmoniously to reality* (Jalan, 1976; Tagore, 1917): “The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence” (Tagore, 1917, p. 142). Harmony with the whole of existence can be achieved only when all of the abilities of the individual – physical, intellectual, emotional, social, moral and spiritual – are developed to the highest perfection. Tagore's concern for the development of the whole child is reflected in his specific solutions and the way the Santiniketan School worked.

Tagore attached great importance to *physical development*, as is shown by the fact that yoga, games (e.g., pass the parcel, lemon and spoon, sack race, pick and throw) and sports were prescribed in Santiniketan as an integral part of the education system (Jalan, 1976; Salamatullah, 1961): “Children must dance, they must be restless, when they think, the body becomes restless and ripples with a variety of movement that helps to keep their muscles in harmony with the mind” (Tagore, 1961, p. 102). The movement recognised in his call for the “peripatetic” or mobile school is important because it not only facilitates

learning through direct observation, but also keeps our awakened mental faculties constantly alert and receptive through contact with ever-changing scenes and objects (Jalan, 1976, p. 16). In his demand for physical development and the possibilities of integrating this development into life, one can also see a proximity to the concept of embodied cognition at the Santiniketan School.

The *cultivation of the intellect* (e.g., the development of the imagination, creative freethinking, constant curiosity and alertness of the mind) to compensate for emotional immaturity and instability was also very important for Tagore. However, he believed that this could not be achieved by reading books, so the rejection of book-centred education and the focus on practical and relevant teaching is evident in the Santiniketan School. In this context, Tagore mentioned: “[...] legend is that eating of the fruit of knowledge is not consonant with dwelling in paradise” (Tagore, 1917, p. 141). He was aware that “since childhood, instead of putting all the burden on the memory, the power of thinking, and the power of imagination should also be given opportunities for free exercise” (Jalan, 1976, p. 42). As pointed out by Salamatullah (1961), in the curriculum of the Santiniketan School:

Handicrafts were accorded an important place besides nature study, art, music, etc. But here the craft was not intended to be a source of income for the school but a medium for self-expression, so that children may produce beautiful articles out of raw material of various kinds and thus satisfy their creative impulses and realise their aesthetic capacities. [...] Educational institutions should provide for practical industrial training and cooperative work, and they should be engaged in such projects as go to improve the economic, physical, moral and intellectual life of the people. (p. 137)

Tagore introduced a new idea of *emotional education* (orig. *bodher sadhana*), which is different from the education of the senses and the education of the intellect. Emotional education consists in the realisation of man's connection with the universe through the spirit, through the soul and through a deeper intuition of feeling (Jalan, 1976, p. 12). The arts are essential for the cultivation of feeling and experience, as well as for the expression of man's bond of union with the universe and his infinite side (Lesar, 2015, p. 122; Salamatullah, 1961, p. 137). In this context, it is understandable that, for Tagore, sociability and human fellow feeling were considered as an indispensable aspect of a truly educated person (Jalan, 1976, p. 44).

For the fundamental purpose of education is not merely to enrich ourselves through the fullness of knowledge, but also to establish the bond

of love and friendship between man and man. So long as we do not come down to the level of the common man and feel a bond of kinship with the poor and the lowly and the lost [...] our education will be sadly incomplete. This idea of fellow feeling was not limited to one's own countrymen but spread the message of internationalism. (Tagore, 1351 B. S. 71, in Jalan, 1976, p. 45)

In the Santiniketan School, these characteristics can be recognised at different levels or during different activities. The older students were encouraged to connect with the local community, with villagers, either helping to look after the younger ones, organising various games, or teaching the older ones (which may be related to the practices later developed by Freire). In addition, the Santiniketan School often hosted artists and scholars from different parts of the world, as Tagore had many contacts with internationally known figures of that time.

I invited thinkers and scholars from foreign lands to let our boys know how easy it is to realise our common fellowship, when we deal with those who are great, and that it is the puny who with their petty vanities set up barriers between man and man. (Tagore, 1929, pp. 73–74, in O'Connell, 2003)

Last but not least, there was also a lot of emphasis on learning about other cultures and their cultural creations, as well as the diversity of religions, after becoming thoroughly familiar with the creations within one's own (Indian) culture.

Tagore noted that for holistic development of the human personality, *moral and spiritual* education were more important than bookish knowledge. There must be adequate provision for the development of selfless activities, cooperation and love of empathy and sharing among students in educational institutions. He stressed the importance of discipline in a moral life, and true discipline means protecting raw, natural impulses from unhealthy excitement and from growing in undesirable directions (Jalan, 1976, p.44).

What the intellect is in the world of Nature our will is in the moral world. The more it is freed and widened, the more our moral relationship becomes true, varied and large. Its outer freedom is the freedom from the guidance of pleasure and pain, its inner freedom is from the narrowness of self-desire. We know that when intellect is freed from the bondage of interest it discovers the world universal reason, with which we must be in harmony fully to satisfy our needs; in the same manner

when will is freed from its limitations, when it becomes good, that is to say, when its scope is extended to all men and all time, it discerns a world transcending the moral world of humanity. It finds a world where all our disciplines of moral life find their ultimate truth, and our mind is roused to the idea that there is an infinite medium of truth through which goodness finds its meaning. (Tagore, 1917, pp. 105–106)

In addition to the aforementioned key features of his educational concept, the role of nature and freedom should also be noted. Tagore based his arguments on the assumption that *nature is the best teacher of the student*, so-called green pedagogy (Ghosh, 2012), and that nature itself has the purpose of giving the child the fullness of his or her growth (O'Connell, 2003; Pridmore, 2009).

He advised that we should encourage and educate our children to love and respect nature, instead of alienating them from it, so that they could realise that nature is an integral part of ourselves, and not merely a storehouse of resources to be transformed into cash at will, and that our continuity as a species depends entirely on maintaining the ecological balance in nature and survival of our planet. (Quayum, 2016, p. 14)

Furthermore, human beings can achieve their fullness of growth only through freedom (Jalan, 1976; O'Connell, 2003; Quayum, 2016; Salamatullah, 1961). Tagore postulated *three kinds of freedom*: freedom of the mind, freedom of the heart and freedom of the will (Jalan, 1976, pp. 15–16).

Freedom in the mere sense of independence has no content, and therefore no meaning. Perfect freedom lies in the perfect harmony of relationship which we realize in this world – not through our response to it in *knowing* but in *being*. Objects of knowledge maintain an infinite distance from us who are the knowers. For knowledge is not union. Therefore, the farther world of freedom awaits us where we reach truth, not through feeling it by our senses, or knowing it by reason, but through the union of perfect sympathy. (Tagore, 1961, p. 52)

These are the basic features of Tagore's idea of education. Below, educational paradigms and educational factors will be briefly presented as the basis for further analysis.

The educational paradigm in the continental tradition through the lens of Medveš

The Slovenian pedagogue Zdenko Medveš, a prominent professor of the history of pedagogy and an educational theorist, has developed an innovative classification of pedagogical paradigms (Protner, 2020). Medveš (2015, p. 15) recognised the teacher as the specific medium of education in Herbartianism; humanistic (German: *Geisteswissenschaften*) or cultural pedagogy presents *content* as an educational medium; reform pedagogy is based on the thesis that the medium of education is *the child* him/herself; while socially critical pedagogy recognises the medium of education in *the social environment* (Medveš, 2015, p. 15). Although some observers doubt that the teacher is the key factor of education for Herbartianism and that the content of lessons is the most characteristic factor of humanistic pedagogy (Protner, 2020, p. 94), these four factors of education still remain relevant.

Although each of these pedagogical theories specifically addresses the role of the teacher, his or her role in the educational process is understood differently in Herbartianism, which emphasises the direct personal influence of the teacher and presupposes an internalisation of his or her personal attitude and character (Medveš, 2015, p. 15). Humanistic or cultural pedagogy requires from the teacher not only a high moral image, but also a personal attitude in accepting all of the treasures of the spirit. This means not only understanding the historical state of mind (German: *Historische Betrachtung*), but also participating in its shaping and in the efforts to solve the “world of mystery” (Medveš, 2011, p. 153). In reform pedagogy, the teacher can challenge the activity of the student through personal commitment (as can be understood in the concepts of Steiner and Montessori), through social activism and commitment to justice (emphasised by Freire), and by promoting communication with reality and values (highlighted by Biesta and Luhmann). Socially critical pedagogy, on the other hand, gives the teacher the task of analysing the social conditions of the school environment and then working and acting accordingly, with the aim of providing a good school education and overcoming living conditions (poverty, linguistic diversity, etc.) that strongly influence the child’s development (Medveš, 2011, p. 153).

Education as internalisation vs. education as communication

In the above overview of the development of educational theories within continental pedagogy, we can see that the process of internalisation was relevant for Herbartianism (internalisation of the teacher’s personal attitude and character) as well as for humanistic pedagogues (internalisation of the spiritual

and cultural tradition) and socially critical pedagogues (internalisation of the symbolic structure). In contrast, reform pedagogues consider education as communication with values, in which the child him/herself creates a value orientation (Medveš, 2018b, p. 49).

The question arises as to whether imitating the personal attitude of the teacher, the internalised spiritual and cultural tradition, or the recognisable symbolic structures of society is the most effective way to influence the education of the individual. If we want to achieve the moral autonomy of the individual, their emancipation, their ability to lead and resist (as the goals of education have been defined in most educational concepts of the last century), internalisation will not be the most effective. As the German sociologist and author of the systems and interaction theory, Luhmann, puts it: “The concepts of imitation and education do not fit together” (in Medveš, 2018a, p. 9). Therefore, communication is the way in which we can most effectively influence the child’s ability to think critically and independently and make responsible decisions, which are the basic skills necessary to achieve the goal of education, i.e., moral autonomy and emancipation of the individual.

Medveš concludes that even through the communication system we cannot fully control the formation of the system of consciousness, but can only challenge and stimulate the child’s potential for critical thinking and creativity. On this assumption, he concludes that consciousness is established as an autopoietic system and that *the child is therefore a key medium of education* (Medveš, 2018a, p. 9).

This means that in the process of communication each individual reacts to the other according to his/her own laws and with his/her own filters. We must therefore offer the child different alternatives for decision-making and open views on individual alternatives in communication, without the intention of imposing any of them. We perceive the teacher only as a facilitator, who, by choosing the alternatives, nevertheless sets the framework for what can happen. Ultimately, however, it is up to the individual to decide whether to conform to the norms of reality or to resist them. (Medveš, 2018a, p. 9)

The idea that communication is at the core of the entire social and private life of a human being, and that communication is the only way an individual can change the outside world, since human consciousness cannot directly influence the outer world, is a starting point that is difficult to dispute. The question nevertheless arises: what communication? In systems and interaction theory, on which Medveš based his explanation of communication as a fundamental

type of educational action in reform pedagogy,

Communication is only an interactive interpersonal relationship, which – if we express ourselves more elementarily – is only possible in a symmetrical relationship of mutual recognition of equal subjects. In relationships where the roles in communication are asymmetrically distributed, which is common for relationships in institutions and especially in schools, it is difficult to establish communication as a dominant or global relationship. (Medveš, 2018a, pp. 9–10)

Although the relationship between teachers and pupils is characterised by asymmetry (in terms of the amount of knowledge and experience, and in terms of social status), Medveš's (2018a, p. 11), analysis shows that there are opportunities for communication at school: in class (so-called communication didactics contribute to increasing personal motivation to learn and to participate by promoting self-regulating learning), as well as in “maintaining the world of school life” (thematic discussions relevant to pupils, classroom activities, decision-making by voting) and in conflict resolution (peer mediation, group changes, retraining, educational contracts).

Tagore's concept of education viewed through the factors of education

In the continuation, we will examine which of the four known educational factors of the continental tradition can be identified in Tagore's educational concept and are most clearly visible in the Santiniketan School.

Teacher

When Tagore was confronted with the question of his son's enrolment in school, he recalled not only all of the bad experiences of his own school days, but the traditional way of education in India also came to mind. This traditional relationship between teachers and students, which has endured for centuries, was the basis for the establishment of the school at Santiniketan in 1901, initially under the name Brahmacharya ashrama.

The students live in their master's home like the children of the house, without having to pay for their board and lodging or tuition. The teacher prosecutes his own study, living a life of simplicity, and helping the students in their lessons as a part of his life and not of his profession. This ideal of education through sharing a life of high aspiration with one's master took possession of my mind. (Tagore, 1917, p. 157)

Tagore said that education could be imparted only by the teacher and never by a method.

Man can learn only from a man. Just as a water tank can be filled only with water and fire be kindled only with fire, life can be inspired only with life [...] The mere pill of a method instead shall bring us no salvation. (Tagore, 1351 B. S. 128, in Jalan, 1976, pp. 12–13)

In school, teachers should act as substitutes for the mother, offering children the freedom of love through understanding, compassion and free community. Tagore never used coercion or punishment against misbehaving boys in his school. He interpreted the freedom of the heart as an unrestricted human relationship. After all, the freedom of the will or the free activity of the soul consists in creating a world of its own. The way to realise this ideal is to invite the student to participate in the growth and development of the school. Accordingly, Tagore gave the students a free hand to develop their interest in any area they wished (Jalan, 1976, p. 15).

Content of teaching

The educational process at the primary school level, which includes children aged 6 to 12, is generally conducted in Bengali. The curriculum includes compulsory subjects (Bengali, English, Sanskrit, Mathematics, Social Studies and General Science) and electives, which are divided into (a) Humanities (Bengali, Sanskrit, Hindi, Oriya, History, Civics and Economics, Ethics and Psychology, Vocal Music, Instrumental Music, Dancing, Drawing, Painting and Modelling, Home Science) and (b) Science (Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics, Geography). Gardening is also a compulsory activity for students.

Physical training and games are compulsory for all students. In the case of students in classes IX, X, XI, the maintenance of at least 75 per cent of attendance in physical training and games classes is a requirement for admission to the Higher School Certificate Examination. (Jalan, 1976, p. 97)

In addition to the implementation of the formal curriculum, the school attached great importance to extracurricular activities aimed at developing the personality of the students, enhancing their ability to organise, cooperate and coordinate activities, and developing healthy competition through a variety of social, literary, artistic, musical and various other activities. The Student Council (orig. *Asrama Sammilani*) played a key role in planning and implementing these diverse activities, and the teachers acted only as advisors (Debnath & Pal, 2015, p. 207).

It should, however, be noted that Tagore did not distinguish between compulsory and elective subjects with clearly defined curricula and extracurricular activities; instead, he had the curriculum of life in mind (Jalan, 1976, p. 99). The emphasis was always on learning for life, not on living with the intention of learning. Tagore called for a flexible or dynamic and above all realistic curriculum. This came to the fore in the experiment Siksha-Satra (school for village children), which he conducted together with Leonard K. Elmhirst. In this experiment, they assumed that children in the countryside are used to taking on their share of responsibility or various jobs (e.g., cattle raising, gardening), thus making an important contribution to the survival of the family. For the teachers, this fact is the basis for experiential learning in the broadest sense. In such a system, textbooks, classes and laboratories played no role:

Geology becomes the study of the fertility of the plot; *chemistry* the use of lime and manures of all kinds, of spray and disinfectants; *physics* the use of tools, of pumps, the study of water-lifts and oil-engines; *entomology* the control of plant pests [...] and diseases [...]; *ornithology* the study of birds in their relation, first to the garden plot and then to the world in general. (Elmhirst, 1961, p. 73)

Child

Based on his own unhappy memory of school, Tagore concentrated on children and emphasised their creativity, the need for atmosphere and natural surroundings (Jalan, 1976, p. 61; O'Connell, 2003).

We all know children are lovers of the dust; their whole body and mind thirst for sunlight and air as flowers do. They are never in a mood to refuse the constant invitation to establish direct communication coming to their senses from the universe. (Tagore, 1917, p. 143)

Tagore tried to build an institution where children would have more freedom to explore and learn by themselves in the open learning environment of nature (Jalan, 1976, p. 41; O'Connell, 2003; Pridmore, 2009). Therefore, he considered...

...nature as a part of education for my boys to let them fully realize that they are in a scheme of existence where trees are a substantial fact, not merely as generating chlorophyll and taking carbon from the air, but as living. (Tagore, 1917, p. 145)

At the Santiniketan School, the children were often allowed to participate and make their own decisions, such as choosing subjects to attend in class,

and taking part in the planning and implementation of various projects (which are also key features of the Summerhill School founded by Neill in England in 1921), and helping and cooperating with the surrounding villagers. The children were especially encouraged to create through different artistic languages, as Tagore put it, and his record was translated by Das Gupta:

A large part of man can never find its expression in the mere language of words. It must, therefore, seek for its expression other languages – lines and colours, sounds and movements. Through our mastery of these we not only make our whole nature articulate but also understand man in all his attempts to reveal his innermost being in every age and clime [...]. It is the duty of every human being to master, at least to some extent, not only the language of the intellect, but also the language of the personality which is the language of Art. (Tagore 1335 B. S. 139, in Das Gupta, 2015)

Social Environment

Tagore was convinced of the extraordinary influence of both the physical and the social environment on the developing child. When founding the school, Tagore drew on his own deep experience of connection with nature, which is why the children of the Santiniketan School initially spent most of their time in the natural environment. In designing the school, Tagore was guided by the idea that we can find meaning and fulfilment in our relationship to everything, and was also greatly influenced by the rich cultural experience in his own family.

I tried my best, to develop in the children of my school the freshness of their feeling for Nature, a sensitiveness of soul in their relationship with their human surroundings with the help of literature, festive ceremonials and also the religious teaching which enjoins us to come to the nearer presence of the world through the soul, thus to gain it more than can be measured. (Tagore, 1961, p. 58)

Tagore tried not only to relate the economy and education, but believed in the influence of society on children and thus on education. He argued that all of the problems of social reform are interconnected, and that no educational experiment can succeed unless the vicious circle that connects society and education is broken once and for all, being replaced by a virtuous relationship (Das Gupta, 2015, p. 10; Jalan, 1976, p. 56).

An analysis of the functioning of the Santiniketan School shows that all of the known factors of education were represented in a very specific way, undoubtedly due to the cultural and historical origins of the school and the specific view

of humanity, which is not based on the dualism of body and soul, but on the idea of the connection of the individual with the whole universe. Living with *teachers* in the school, where there are no limits to when teachers are on duty and when they are not, suggests that Tagore expected teachers to devote themselves almost exclusively to pedagogical work. He demanded that teaching should be predominantly non-traditional, i.e., mostly not in the classroom and not with the help of textbooks. Therefore, there are obvious elements of communication didactics in the teaching of teachers at the Santiniketan School. It should be noted, however, that many teachers at Tagore's school are involved in socio-cultural events in the immediate or wider environment. Through their artistic work or activities in these events, they draw attention to obvious injustices or contribute to overcoming them, thus undoubtedly serving as role models for the students. Moreover, if we consider the other requirements for the implementation of communication didactics, we can conclude that the teachers also encourage students to communicate with reality and values. The *content* of the lessons at school is rather loosely defined and can usually be adapted to the students' interests. Nevertheless, it is obvious that a lot of time in school life is spent on various cultural topics, especially through live contact with artistic languages and artists and through the experimental (scientific) study of reality, which they draw on when implementing their projects. Tagore's school is characterised by the so-called open curriculum, as it is obvious that there is a need to learn from participation in life practice, which has a particularly strong educational effect (Kroflič, 2019) and which further promotes the implementation of communication didactics. Interestingly, Tagore attributed quite an important role to *the environment* in the development of the child's personality, as the child's environment should be as natural as possible, especially in the early stages, and children should be protected from modern technology and the urban environment. Nature makes it possible to sharpen the senses, while the observation of natural phenomena maintains curiosity and promotes communication with the phenomenon – all of the basic phenomenological postulates that can also be recognised in the concept of embodied cognition. However, Tagore designed all of this with the intention that the school should serve the children and promote their overall development, with the activity of *the children* being the central and most recognisable feature. The students are therefore at the centre of the action and play an extremely important role in the process of their overall development. In a rather select environment (in the countryside, with the constant presence of teachers, in a "boarding school" type of setting) the students are free to decide whether they want to attend classes and participate in extracurricular activities, and they also receive many incentives to get involved with and help the villagers. We can say that education as communication and

autopoietic are very obvious in the Santiniketan School: apart from the communication didactics already mentioned, it is obvious that the “co-creation of the world of school life” is strongly emphasised, so that the students can really take part. From the point of view of recognisable values (Medveš, 2015, p. 15), we see that personal freedom and freedom of choice are most present, but spirituality, humanity and emancipatory engagement are also clearly recognisable. Perhaps the least obvious is the ethics of duty.

What can we conclude from the present analysis?

Researching Tagore’s educational concept, which was developed more than a hundred years ago in a specific cultural-historical and socio-political environment, and the comparison with the knowledge of continental pedagogy developed over more than two hundred years is really surprising. Previous analyses of the educational concept in the Santiniketan School (Lesar, 2015, 2016) have led to the conclusion that many of the solutions implemented by Tagore in his school can be found in other contemporary and modern authors:

- the emphasis on experiential learning that has been known in pedagogy since Rousseau, most obviously by Dewey at the beginning of the twentieth century;
- opportunities for students to participate in the whole of school life in Santiniketan or self-government in Sriniketan, most obviously introduced by Neill in his school in Summerhill, founded in England in 1921;
- the importance of movement and physical development can be associated with the idea of embodied cognition, today propagated mainly by the new cognitive sciences;
- the organisation of the school to support the process of rural regeneration and adult education can be related to practices later developed by Freire;
- the emphasis on learning and facilitating expression in different languages (not only in “the language of words”, but also in the language of lines and colours, in the language of sounds and movement) can be related to the later ideas of Malaguzzi, the concept of a hundred languages.

The present analysis further confirms how modern Tagore’s concept of education is. He rooted the design of his school in the child, seeing children as one of the most important educational factors and providing them with a strong teacher with whom education as communication takes place. Teachers at his school should not only be committed to their pedagogical mission, but

should also be socially engaged in the quest for a more just society and encourage students to actively participate in life and communicate with reality and values. Interestingly, Tagore also attached significant importance to the social environment in education. This factor of education is important in his educational concept because it invites the child to communicate and not only to internalise influences from the social environment (the predominant way of understanding influences of the social environment on the child in the continental tradition). We can state that none of the factors known in the continental tradition were overlooked, since all four factors of education (child, teacher, content and social environment) play an important role in Tagore's concept of education. Moreover, we can conclude from the analysis that Tagore's concept of education places great emphasis on communication with the values of the nearby and wider social and cultural environment, and does not only endorse the internalisation of the primary culture.

The question arises as to whether Tagore was familiar with the European continental tradition. According to the information available, he knew some of the pedagogues of the continental tradition (Pestalozzi, Frobel), and in 1920 he had contact with some of the pedagogues active at that time (Montessori, Geheeb) (Quayum, 2016, p. 12). It is therefore not surprising that the school Tagore founded in Santiniketan in 1901 was one of the first schools of the new school movement that swept the world in the twentieth century (Bhattacharya, 2014, p. 71, in Quayum, 2016, p. 12). With regard to whether Tagore's concept of education can be classified as reform or progressive pedagogy, Salamatullah reminds us as early as 1961 that...

...There are people who hold the view that the Tagore's educational experiment is just an echo of that educational movement of Europe and America which seeks to exalt the child to the central place in educative process and which is known as the Progressive Education. Undoubtedly, there are certain similarities between the Tagore's educational experiment and the Progressive Education. [...] Rugged individualism of the West which, in fact, is an outcome of a social order based on selfishness, greed, competition and conflict is not acceptable to Tagore. To him the fountain-head of true individuality is self-knowledge. This is the stage at which the individual cares more for giving and less for taking and where he loathes to rush forward by pushing others back, but advances in company with others levelling the path collectively to reach the desired goal. Here the individual's gift turns into a veritable blessing for all. This distinguishes the Tagore's educational philosophy from the so called Progressive Education of western countries. (Salamatullah, 1961, pp. 138–139)

On the basis of this analysis, however, we can see that Tagore succeeded in implementing ideas that were partly unknown in Europe at that time, and that he even went beyond the findings of individual pedagogical theories from Europe. Primarily because of his own bad experiences with school – “It was not any new theory of education, but my memory of my school days” (Tagore, 1917, p. 138) – and with an extraordinary sensitivity to the needs of children, as well as a very deep respect for earlier teaching practice in India, he was able to bring many theoretical concepts that are still relevant today (e.g., experiential learning, student participation, embodied cognition, the concept of a hundred languages) into the operation of the Santiniketan School in a very specific way. Moreover, in a very innovative way, he succeeded in integrating all four educational factors known in the continental tradition, which we do not find in any of the European educational theories presented (Herbartianism, humanistic or cultural pedagogy, reform pedagogy, socially critical pedagogy).

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Biographical note

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Robi Kroflič, Sonja Rutar and Bogdana Borota (Eds.),
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Reviewed by KONSTANCA ZALAR¹

Numerous educational theorists and practitioners (Biesta, 2013, 2017; Dewey, 1934, 2012, 2021; Eisner, 2002; Gardner, 1990; Malaguzzi, 1996; Devjak et al., 2012) have long argued and demonstrated that the development of artistic domains in education is not just an “add-on”, but represents a fundamental mode of expression and thinking, as well as a holistic development of the child. They advocate approaches that recognise art as a medium for exploring and understanding the world and one’s role in it, while encouraging independent thinking, (self-)reflection and active engagement beyond knowledge acquisition and socialisation. The awareness of the importance of art in education, especially as a means of expression and communication, led to the development of the SKUM project (Developing Communication Skills through Cultural and Artistic Education), the results of which are comprehensively presented in the monograph *Art in Education in Kindergartens and Schools: The SKUM Project*. The project, which ran from 2017 to 2022, was one of the most important research initiatives in the field of education and focused on developing links between educational institutions, artists and cultural organisations. The main goal of the project was to improve students’ communication skills, which was achieved through the collaboration of 32 consortium partners and 224 educators from different educational institutions. Through this network, almost 3,000 kindergarten children, more



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than 4,700 primary school children and over 2,000 secondary school students were involved. In addition, 25 artists from seven different art disciplines, 20 cultural institutions and 24 experts from public partner organisations took part.

The intensive collaboration, in which artists were integrated into daily teaching practice, offered a new perspective on education and encouraged the development of innovative pedagogical approaches that contributed significantly to the creativity of the participating children and young people. In addition to the aspects already mentioned, the project placed particular emphasis on the development of individual identity and empathy (Kroflič, 2019), which was promoted through the aesthetic experience of engaging with various forms of artistic expression, such as music, theatre, visual arts and literature. Collaboration with theatres, museums, galleries and other cultural institutions offered children and young people the opportunity to learn in authentic artistic contexts and thus broaden their understanding of the complexity of emotions and experiences. In this way, aesthetic experience became a crucial component of experiential learning and understanding of the world on an intellectual, emotional and social level.

The final phase of the project coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated prolonged school closures, which presented a new challenge: overcoming educational barriers in remote learning locations while coping with students' emotional distress and declining motivation (Štirn Janota et al., 2022). However, the results show that through the creative use of digital technologies, the participating artists were able to maintain their artistic engagement, reduce social isolation and reaffirm the value of education.

In the introduction to the monograph *Art in Education in Kindergartens and Schools: SKUM Project*, editors Kroflič, Rutar and Borota outline the core ideas of the project and describe the methods used for planning and evaluating art education. They emphasise the refinement of the five-step model, which is based on reflection and communicative pedagogy. This model requires educators to act as reflective practitioners, engaging in critical dialogue with children, young people and other professionals, while systematically documenting the pedagogical process. The diverse documentation, including evaluations and reflections, enables continuous monitoring of educational activities, with a focus on responding to the initiatives of the participating children and young people. In the SKUM project, this approach formed the basis for a participatory planning and monitoring framework that ensured the active involvement of all of the stakeholders and contributed to a deeper understanding of the educational process and the development of innovative pedagogical practices.

The monograph *Art in Education in Kindergartens and Schools: The SKUM Project* is divided into nine chapters, each containing scientific and theoretical contributions by the participants in the SKUM project. In the first chapter, Kroflič examines education through art and first-person artistic experience as key components of contemporary education within phenomenology and reform pedagogy. He defines the process as a dynamic dialogue between an individual and a work of art, which promotes cognitive, emotional and motivational engagement. This holistic involvement enhances perception, self-reflection and personal growth. Kroflič also emphasises the importance of actively engaging with art as a viewer, listener or reader. Such experiences cannot be conveyed through explanations, but arise through direct artistic interaction, which deepens understanding and interpretation. Finally, he presents examples from the SKUM project, highlighting participatory gallery visits, artistic explorations of educational content and storytelling through photo narratives. These approaches allowed the participating students to creatively express personal experiences, especially during pandemic-related isolation.

The second chapter, written by Rutar, Kalin, Kožuh and Borota, addresses the importance of fostering encouraging, open and innovative learning environments in the context of arts and cultural education. The authors provide an in-depth analysis of the different types of learning environments and their impact on the educational process. They emphasise that in order to effectively integrate these environments into schools, it is crucial to innovate the pedagogical core, which includes the development of learning objectives, methods and resources, as well as interaction between students and educators. In addition, they emphasise the need to establish “formative organisations” supported by strategic leadership and continuous assessment of learning outcomes, and to promote openness to partnerships that foster collaboration with families, communities, higher education institutions and other schools. An important component of an innovative learning environment is the arts, with their transformative power to stimulate imagination, intuition and creativity. Within the SKUM project, the authors identify four key principles that position the arts as a fundamental element of education: active participation of students, teachers and artists in shaping the learning process; connectivity and openness of the learning environment to the wider community; facilitation of artistic and intuitive experiences for a deeper understanding of learning content; and diversity and authenticity of artistic experiences. The interweaving of these principles forms the basis for a learning environment in which art promotes personal development and integrates the cognitive, emotional and imaginative dimensions of learning.

The next chapter provides insights into the significance of artistic experiences in the educational process. Smrtnik Vitulić, Sicherl Kafol, Korošec, Podobnik, Prosen and Geršak use a content analysis of evaluations of the project activities to show that these experiences transcended the boundaries of specific educational environments and raise awareness of the importance of artistic activities in a broader social context. As a result of the project implementation, participants in the SKUM project emphasised the acquisition of new artistic experiences and the development of communicative skills, as well as the acquisition of new knowledge and reflective skills that foster interpersonal relationships, emotional development, personal growth and creativity. The analysis also reveals that future educators in both formal and informal education need more structured training to effectively incorporate artistic activities into the teaching and learning process. This is crucial, as artistic experiences can change not only the acceptance and perception of art, but also the learning and teaching process itself. Such a pedagogical approach enriches learning processes while contributing to the holistic development of the individual and society.

The fourth chapter, written by Podgornik, Kalin and Jeznik, deals with the role of educational institutions as cultural centres within the local community. The authors analyse the extent and nature of cooperation between kindergartens, schools, artists and cultural institutions, finding that although some educational institutions had already collaborated with other organisations prior to the project, the range of activities expanded considerably during the implementation of the project. These activities included various art exhibitions, photo exhibitions in galleries and libraries, film screenings, celebrations during public holidays, choir performances, cultural bazaar events, the Day of the Arts and much more, which were reported on in various media such as local newspapers, social media, radio, websites and television. Throughout the project, it became clear how important and challenging it is for educational institutions, local communities and individuals to work together and promote the culture of dialogue. Educational institutions and local communities became key partners, supporting each other through collaboration and co-creating learning and development opportunities for individuals and the whole community.

Another discussion deals with the promotion of narrative competence in education through various artistic languages. Štirn Janota et al. emphasise that storytelling is a fundamental starting point and a skill through which we think and articulate ourselves, enabling empathetic immersion in the perspectives of others and critical engagement with social reality. As part of the SKUM project, an analysis of the ongoing and final evaluations and the educators' reflections showed that the participating children and young people developed an

improved ability to observe interpersonal relationships and social and natural phenomena. Through storytelling, the students gained a broader understanding of the topics covered and were able to express themselves more easily. The analysis also reveals changes in the participating educators and artists, as the chosen documentation method allowed a deeper insight into the learning processes. This led to a more subtle perception of the students and deeper reflection on their own role in the pedagogical process, while promoting reflection on the meaning of the topics covered and the teaching methods used.

Chapter seven offers an examination of the role of the artist and artistic experience in the educational process by exploring and analysing the understanding of artistic principles through the processes of creation, co-creation, re-creation and mediation. Author Bednarik Sudec not only emphasises the interaction between pedagogical and creative work, but also highlights the integration of different artistic perspectives and approaches within the SKUM project. The children involved in the process engaged in practices of observation, creative expression and public participation in different spatial contexts, an approach deeply rooted in the long-standing traditions of art and museum education within various gallery discourses. The pedagogical approach implemented was oriented towards the paradigm of teaching through artistic practices, which equates aesthetic education with intellectual development and is based on the notion that human existence is defined by a holistic interplay of interests and abilities (Read, 2002). The pedagogical process described in this chapter was therefore designed to promote the comprehensive personal development of the individual, with artistic experiences playing a fundamental role in the development of cognitive, emotional and social competences.

Chapter eight is based on the UNESCO (2006) and European Commission (2016) guidelines, which author Rotar Pance has thoroughly analysed to show their impact on the development of cultural and arts education in Slovenia. This is reflected in the annual organisation of the Cultural Bazaar and numerous other forms of cooperation between various actors and institutions in the field of cultural education. As part of the SKUM project, educational institutions, artists and cultural organisations took part in five events in which students actively participated as performers, listeners and creators in six artistic fields. A unique challenge and opportunity arose during the pandemic, when schools acted as local cultural centres and encouraged students to use information and communication technologies creatively. During the pedagogical process, a new teaching model emerged that emphasises the integration of artistic creativity and close collaboration between teachers and artists. This model promotes participatory learning, whereby students acquire knowledge through

their own creativity and active involvement in artistic activities. Particular emphasis is placed on developing communication skills in the language of music, enabling students to develop aesthetic sensitivity and a deeper understanding of artistic processes through improvisation, ensemble performance and reflection on their own artistic expression.

The final chapter looks at the role of professionals and artists in fostering creative storytelling and expression. Baloh and Birsa emphasise that the personal participation of all of those involved means that art becomes a key factor in the holistic development of children and not just a means of expression. In order to promote storytelling skills in preschool and school children, the authors emphasise the importance of listening to stories and storytelling itself, highlighting various supportive strategies. They find that activities are only effective if three key dimensions are addressed: expressiveness, playfulness and communication. As part of the SKUM project, they investigate how educators foster children's storytelling and visual art skills, and how artists are involved in this process. The results show that the continuous interweaving of content from various curriculum areas encouraged the sensitivity of children, who even created their own book with an ongoing story. The participating artist entered the project through movement activities and emphasised the importance of the active role of educators, even when other staff are involved. The project work confirms that an approach combining observation, reflection, creation and supportive strategies contributes significantly to the empowerment of pedagogical staff, and consequently to the development of children's storytelling and visual expression skills.

The monograph *Art in Education in Kindergartens and Schools: The SKUM Project* offers a valuable insight into the role of art in education, while at the same time serving as a practical guide for educators who want to enrich their teaching with innovative artistic approaches. The analyses of the activities carried out as part of the SKUM project highlight existing shortcomings in the education system and suggest improvements to pedagogical processes based on examples of good practice. The results show that art can be an indispensable part of the education system, promoting the development of children and young people into well-rounded, critically thinking and creative individuals.

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Robi Kroflič, Sonja Rutar and Bogdana Borota (Eds.), *Art in Education in Kindergartens and Schools: The SKUM Project* (Slovenian title: *Umetnost v vzgoji v vrtcih in šolah: projekt SKUM*), University of Primorska Press, 2022; 212 pp.: ISBN: 978-961-293-172-8

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