

**Educational Programmes for
Preschool and Elementary School
Children, the Opportunities to Realize
Them for the Effectiveness of Education**

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Editorial

There are various researchers and professionals who try to develop educational programmes in order to make the educational process in preschools and elementary schools more effective. Some of the educational programmes are written by the institution or ministry of education of particular country. However, beside the state educational program, a school can use an educational program written by another source. Such programmes use different learning processes as compared to traditional education. Several educational programmes are focused on different educational subjects as well as stemming from different educational philosophies.

The tenth number of the *Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education* is devoted to the topic *Educational Programmes for Preschool and Elementary School Children, the Opportunities to Realize them for the Effectiveness of Education*. Seven authors have tried to tackle the subject matter from diverse perspectives.

In the first article *Eva Zezulková* and *Martin Kaleja* present the problems of reader literacy within the context of communication competence. They deal with the preparedness of primary school pupils to use reading as a tool of knowledge.

The study written by *Eva Vanousová* deals with the possibilities of speech therapy stimulation in children with postponed school attendance. The author presents a study aimed at the quantification and comparison of the level of phonological abilities in the studied group of 20 children before and after the training.

The aim of the paper written by *Beata Akimjaková* is to handle the issue of the educational programs of Religious Education for preschool children in Slovakia, at both a theoretical and methodological level. The author suggests the objectives and content of Religious Education and she briefly addresses the methods and methodological suggestions for practice in nursery schools.

The next article is focused on visual art in nursery school. The authors *Ivana Rochovská* and *Dagmar Krupová* intended their article mainly as an illustration of a proposed educational programme for preschool children entitled *Artists in Nursery School*. They emphasise the importance of the implementation of visual art in pre-primary education.

Božena Švábová aimed in her paper to outline creative drama as an educational method. The author focuses on a dramatization and role-play, which enable a child to obtain knowledge and skills through personal, emotional and practical experience.

Jozef Liba discusses possible ways in his article of the systematic implementation of intervention programmes designed for the development of health-related knowledge and skills. The programmes are focused on Roma pupils and the author poses the question: Can a programme of pro-health intervention significantly improve the level of knowledge of Roma pupils about health and a healthy life-style?

Finally, two reviews are published in the journal. The newly published book *Artists in Nursery School* is reviewed by *Beáta Akimjaková* who also reviewed the text for the publisher and she shares her impression just before it goes to print and is shipped to stores.

Marta Oravcová analyses the book on Jesus' beatitudes written by *František Trstenský* in her review, its author being one of the best and most famous biblical scholars in Slovakia.

As you can see, the authors of separate articles have tried to show the issue of educational programmes for children from multiple perspectives. Of course, the topic cannot be exhausted within one number of the journal and the authors refer to various sources of biography related to the topic. However, they certainly suggest inspiring ways as to how the problems dealing with educational programmes for children can be solved.

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Articles

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The Preparedness of Pupils in Primary School Education to Use Reading as a Tool of Knowledge

Abstract: The article presents problems with reader literacy within the context of communication competence. It focuses in detail on the processes of reading comprehension and reading intentions in the selected group of school-aged pupils of various kinds of primary school education. Scientific, pedagogical, special educational and psychological knowledge are supplemented by an interpretation of results of current research findings. Comparative analysis procedure was used to assess an educational progress in pupils of 3rd classes in the selected areas of literacy. The strengths and weaknesses of the educational reality related to the curricular postulates were described. Based on the results of the research the authors submitted proposals and measures for the special educational theory and practice at a general, legislative and curriculum level.

Keywords: pivotal jurisdiction, literacy, communications jurisdiction, reader's literacy, pupil in primary level, pupil with light mental disability, pupil with average intelligence, socially disadvantaged pupil, processes of understanding, reader's intentions.

Introduction

The current ongoing transformations in the Czech education system affect all stages of education and in certain aspects represent a radical reconstruction of ingrained and previously generally positively assessed concepts and their objectives. Confronted with the problems of the current socio-political, postmodern societies marked by secularization, the Czech school system has been crying out for the necessary changes for several years. There is no generalized consensus among the pedagogical, public and political representation. We can encounter disagreement in opinions even among experts of the same specialization. We do not want our article to deal analytically or otherwise with the argumentative diction of already legislatively defined processes which have adjusted the conditions of entry, progress or outcome of the education trajectories of heterogeneously designed groups, or with a matter of individual or individualized education. We intentionally aim at primary school education and the key priorities of the expected changes in the educational reality. These are anticipated by the current national strategic document entitled Strategy of Educational Policy in the Czech Republic by 2020, which puts emphasis on the following three areas in education:

1. Improving the quality of teaching, pedagogical skills of teachers and effective management of the education system. The achievement of expected changes must be preceded by innovation of framework educational programs, modifications to undergraduate teacher training and further education for teachers about transformational change, completing the career system and standard of the teaching profession, the rational equipping of schools with the necessary learning resources and others.

2. Personality development of the educated pupils, equipping them with positive human and civic attitudes. This process assumes the availability and throughput of all levels of education for all social groups, support of participation in early intervention and early stages of pre-school education, especially for children and pupils with the need for support

measures and for their parents, preventing the failure of pupils in learning through competence development for teachers and cooperation between schools and functional consultancy services, creating space for an inclusive, stimulating and motivating environment for learning throughout life and others.

3. Preparing for a job is, beside other things, subject to increasing the availability and quality of pre-school education, improving the quality of primary school education, promoting vocational schools, adequate development of a network of schools and educational facilities for the long-term employability of graduates in society, on the labor market and others.

These areas of school practice are currently subject to the processes of defining and designing the final, and for the educational terrain specific, binding form. They concurrently affect the phenomenon of inclusive education and its quality, determine social equality and social justice, and thereby shift the interpretation of the issues of equal opportunities in education (see Kaleja, M. 2015 Kaleja, M., Zezulková, E. et al. 2015 Zezulková, E. 2015).

Equality of educational opportunities as a research topic

Combined education, equal education and social justice in education are terms which the pedagogical public quite often associates with the concept of inclusive education. In combined education we meet a heterogeneous class, where the heterogeneity can be approached variably, from different perspectives (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, special educational needs, degree of support and others). The term *equal education* is supposed to refer to the equality in opportunity of the pupils in question, with an emphasis on explicit consideration of disadvantaged input conditions in which pupils begin their educational careers. Equality in opportunity in this case cannot be measured by mathematical principles, nor can it be associated with positive discrimination. Equality in opportunity requires the consideration of the individual characteristics of pupils in comparison

with other pupils of non-target groups with a clearly defined objective, and that is personality development of the educated pupils and equipping them with positive human and civic attitudes. By the recently frequently used term “inclusive education” we put all the pupils into one group, thus creating a combined education of heterogeneous groups of pupils. We do not want to put emphasis on the differences between them, though we take into account their handicap or their special educational needs in order to determine the degree of support in their educational path and set optimal supportive internal and external mechanisms along the lines of social justice. Inclusive trends in education include a wide variety of strategies, activities and processes which are trying to implement justice at the level of quality, pragmatic and optimally designed education of pupils with special educational needs. However, general education pupils are not neglected. In contrast, all inclusive educational practices implemented in the class must serve all, being beneficial to all. Segregation, marginalization or any procedures having the character of exclusion, are eliminated (cf. Hájková V., Strnadová, I. 2010, Pipeková, J., Vítková, M. et al. 2014, Adamus, P. 2015, Bartoňová, B., Vítková, M., Vrubel, M. 2014. Lechta, V. 2010, Krupová, I. 2010 and others). The interior (subjectively perceived) and qualified external (objectively measurable) preparedness of teachers and the school environment for the education of pupils of differently heterogeneously composed groups is undoubtedly becoming a prerequisite for the prevention of exclusion mechanisms in the school environment (see more Kaleja, M. 2015).

The amendment to the Education Act (82/2015 Coll.) and the expected implementing of other regulations are bringing several expected changes for the support of inclusive education. Special educational needs (hereinafter referred to as SEN), representing certain specifics in the educational path of the persons concerned defined by the relevant legislative documents¹, are defined more closely here. The bond to the fulfillment

¹ Act no. 561/2004 Coll., on pre-school, primary, secondary, vocational and other education, as amended, the Constitution of the Czech Republic (Act no. 1/1993 Coll.) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms (Act No.2/1993).

of educational opportunities and claims, for equal rights to education through the application/implementation of support measures taking into account state of health, cultural environment and individual wellbeing, are emphasized above all. The amendment to the Education Act continues to use the term special educational needs, but leaves the earlier exhaustive categorization of children, pupils and students with SEN by *disability, health disadvantage, social disadvantage*. The special educational needs of the individuals concerned will be saturated with supporting measures, which means the necessary adjustments in education and educational services being in accordance with the state of health, cultural, environmental or other living conditions of the child, pupil or student. A vertical view with five levels of support defined has now been added to the horizontal classification of special educational needs. The degree of support is categorically associated with organizational, pedagogical and financial aspects of integrative, or more precisely, inclusive processes. Combining the use of various degrees of support may be indicated by counseling centers, depending on the extent of special needs of the individual. Perception of children and pupils with SEN is thus getting closer to the fulfillment of *the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*², which defines *disability as a concept which is developing and which results from the interaction between persons with impairments and barriers in attitudes and in the environment hindering them in their full and effective participation in society with others on an equal basis*.

A similar perspective can be applied to the disadvantages associated with different cultural, social, physical, or otherwise adversely determining environments, whose impact concerns the living conditions and which subsequently have a significant impact on the educational path of individuals.

These (sometimes closely, sometimes more widely defined) questions are dealt with in our long-term research. In the years 2014–2015

² Notification of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the conclusion of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, no. 10/2010 Coll.i.c. The contents of the Convention, see: <http://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/10774/umluva_CJ_rev.pdf>.

(15 months), we implemented a national research project called *Sociological Monitoring of Educational Inputs and Outcomes of Children and Pupils, Including Children and Pupils with Special Educational Needs in the Czech Republic*. It had features of sociological monitoring of educational indicators in the education of children and pupils, including children and pupils with special educational needs in all regions of the Czech Republic, except for the capital city of Prague. More specifically, it was a comparative analysis, taking into account the educational progress of pupils of three target groups (pupils with mild mental disabilities, pupils with intelligence in the border zone, socially disadvantaged pupils) in their own educational trajectory, where the educational progress was observed in the area of reading literacy. The research also focused on identifying additional educational indicators, e.g. attitudinal constructs of the teaching staff of target group pupils, interpersonal relations in the school environment, the overall school climate – in order to define the criteria for evaluating the quality of inclusive schools.

The individual results of all of the research lines were subject to the proper strict critical procedures of methodological diction processes of selected research orientation and their publication was in the following publications:

- KALEJA, M., ZEZULKOVÁ, E. a kol. *Etnografie školy jako edukační realita současnosti*. Opava: Centrum empirických výzkumů FVP SU, 2015. ISBN 978-80-7510-167-9.
- KALEJA, M. *(Ne)připravený pedagog a žák z prostředí sociální exkluze*. Opava: Centrum empirických výzkumů FVP SU, 2015. ISBN 978-80-7510-191-4.
- ZEZULKOVÁ, E. *Vybrané faktory komunikační kompetence žáků v primárním vzdělávání*. Opava: Centrum empirických výzkumů FVP SU, 2015. ISBN 978-80-7510-189-1.
- KALEJA, M., ZEZULKOVÁ, E. *Sociologická analýza zaměřená na porovnání dosažených výsledků žáků se speciálními vzdělávacími potřebami v různých typech škol. Závěrečná zpráva klíčové aktivity 1*. Opava: Centrum empirických výzkumů FVP SU, 2015. ISBN 978-80-7510-159-4.

Communication skills as a predictor of competence for (lifelong) learning

The level of socialization in the broadest sense is influenced by a number of factors, of which the educational skills and controlling competencies necessary for career opportunities belong to the essential attributes of involvement in what is happening in society. Education must be seen as a single interconnected unit, enabling diverse and numerous transitions between education and employment. Key competencies form the basis for the acquisition of skills in different ways and at any time in the course of life. The focus on lifelong learning is the basic conceptual change in the approach to education (Lifelong Learning Strategy of the Czech Republic, 2007). The primary task of the school is to prepare pupils for job opportunities and the natural involvement in the lifelong learning process during compulsory education. The correlation between the level of key competencies, the economy and the labor market plays an important role (cf. OECD 2000 Veteška, J., Tureckiová, M. 2008 and others). The strategy of the educational policy of the Czech Republic until 2020 therefore justifiably puts emphasis on increasing the availability and quality of pre-school education, quality improvement of primary school education, promoting vocational schools, the development of a network of schools and educational facilities for the long-term employability of graduates in society and on the labor market.

Key competencies include the abilities, skills, attitudes, values and other personality characteristics which allow one person to act adequately and effectively in various work and life situations. Changing the style of teaching in schools should also contribute to supporting their development, as competencies are based on activities, not only knowledge. It is necessary to pay increased attention to this issue and to adapt the education system to conditions in the real world of work. It is necessary to start with an informed choice of occupation in children.

As a matter of fact, it is necessary for all individuals to be ready and willing to learn. In this context, we meet with the assertion that skills and knowledge acquired at school are not as valuable as the ability and

willingness to learn. National curriculum documents (framework educational programs) respect the new educational strategies emphasizing core competencies, their interconnection with the educational content and application of acquired knowledge and skills in real life. Based on the concept of lifelong learning, they formulate the expected level of education stipulated for all graduates of the various stages of education and at the same time support the educational autonomy of schools and teachers' professional responsibilities for the results of education. The development of key competencies is thus becoming accessible to the general population in lifelong learning (cf. Belz, H., Siegrist, M., 2001, Hansen Čechova, B. 2009, Veteška J., Tureckiová, M. 2008, Zezulková, E. 2014 and others).

The Czech Republic has been participating in international comparative research of school education for almost twenty years and the presented results of the research are often the only source of relevant information on various aspects of the functioning of the education system in the Czech environment³. With regard to domestic and international research results that show the ever deepening differences in pupil achievement at upper primary school and at secondary school level, justifiably, we must ask what level of expected outcomes of key competencies declared by the national curriculum documents pupils of different types of schools achieve in primary school education (cf. Matějů, P., Straková, J. et al., 2006 Straková, J. 2009, Janík T. 2013 and others). We cannot ignore the fact that the process of education in compulsory education is based on the expected outcomes of the key competencies of pre-school education. It is therefore desirable to pay increased attention to research activities at the basal level of our education system. Domestic research and evaluation activities in the field of primary school education pupils of different types of schools in relation to the content of education in the cur-

³ The complete design of the international research, which in addition to tests of knowledge and skills also uses questionnaires evaluating a number of additional data, allows the interpretation of the results achieved by Czech pupils in a broader context. The integration of various research surveys into long-term cycles, which can monitor the development of the results in time, is also significant (Janík, T. 2013).

riculum are less frequent, however, presented results give us a warning signal not only about the school failure of these pupils, but also predict specific difficulties in their professional orientation and other areas of social life (cf. Zezulková, E. 2011, Zezulková, E. 2014 Kaleja, M. 2014, Bartoňová, M. 2005, Šotolová, E. 2011, GAC 2009 and others).

In primary school education, emphasis is placed on the development of versatile, effective and open communication, developing the communication skills of pupils, which have, in relation to learning, priority status.

The ability to master the spoken and written form of language is related to the development of cognitive processes which are a reflection of the quality of knowledge about the world, a prerequisite for understanding the environment and development of competence towards learning. Expected outcomes of the competence towards learning at the end of primary school education are:

- ability to organize and manage one's own learning,
- willingness to pursue lifelong learning,
- searching, sorting and further using information effectively,
- combining knowledge from different educational areas,
- linking things and phenomena in context based on understanding,
- drawing conclusions for the future,
- assessing one's own progress, planning and predicting possible obstacles and others.

Weaknesses in communication skills may be reflected negatively in learning the basics, in competencies towards learning and relation to lifelong learning and they also have a social significance. A child who has not mastered communication skills at the expected level, is often evaluated worse not only in the school environment (i.e. school failure), but also in the wider area. An important prerequisite for success at school is school maturity and school preparedness, therefore it is necessary to mention other aspects here. If children are admitted to school unprepared or immature, it can induce negative reactions in them because they cannot cope with classes as a result of the immaturity of some important

bodily and mental functions or lack of necessary social experience. Other connections that intertwine and then attach themselves to the beginning of the educational trajectories are factors of the functional and intentional nature of the social environment of the child which determine the actual input and at the same time the course of education. In a certain way, and in many cases, as shown by our earlier research experience, they limit all processes of lifelong learning.

Children are then subject to requirements that lead to their overloading. Increased fatigue, exhaustion, increased sickness and other problems may occur. There is a high risk of school failure, which many pupils have experienced as traumatic. Children may develop the so-called 'unsuccessful child syndrome' with a wide range of school phobia symptoms, e.g. eating disorders, behavioral disorders (negativism, increased aggression, etc.) and other psychosomatic symptoms. These factors may adversely affect the formation of self-image and self-esteem of the child. Special emphasis is therefore rightly put on the fact that schools are entered by children who are prepared for schooling and inclusion in the group of their classmates in intellectual, emotional, social, occupational and physical area. After 1990 the Czech education has been undergoing major changes, which among other things also affects the composition of the pupil groups. Problems with school preparedness are increasing e.g. in pupils from minority groups, asylum seekers' children, pupils with intelligence in the border zone, pupils with disabilities and others. Unfortunately, some pupils do not meet the requirements for school preparedness even after (sometimes repeated) school attendance postponement. In terms of the promotion of inclusive education, all these changes are welcome, and are therefore logically also supported by legislation. We are aware that education in the Czech Republic will become an open system only when it respects the diversity of pupils, balancing the sociocultural differences between them and creating optimal educational conditions for maximum personal development of each pupil (Spilková, V. 2001). We must therefore accept the fact that as a result of the gradual and natural transformation of society there is at the same time more of the risk factors that may (or may not) have a negative impact on the school success of the pupil, e.g.:

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- state of health of the child (chronically and long-term ill children, children with disabilities), which critically objectively determines processes of education,
 - reduced level of mental abilities (mental processes progress in the normal way and lagging behind of development of cognitive abilities occurs for reasons other than brain damage, e.g. the impact of deprivation, negative factors affecting the socialization processes),
 - sociocultural differences pertaining to a different mother tongue,
 - physically spatial and socially excluded environments, whose typical feature are usually negatively oriented life strategies affecting the quality of life, institutionalization due to institutional and protective education,
 - objectively or subjectively bound, possibly mixed, family background dysfunctionality,
 - dysfunctionality in social relations, in any form of social environment of the child, and others (cf. Bednářová, J., Šmardová, V. 2010, Pipeková, J. 1998, Novotná, M., Kremličková, M. 1997 and others).

Selected eligibility for communication skills

Language, communication and pre-reading skills of the pupil are justifiably important measures of school preparedness. The basic components of language (formal and content-related) in compulsory education are strongly supported by teaching reading, and this is a feedback response. In scientific literature, reading is characterized as a type of speech activity, possibly as an act of communication, and it can be assumed that the quality of speech and reading literacy significantly affects the process of lifelong learning.

Speech literacy

The basic condition for language and speech acquisition is on the one hand the ability to differentiate sounds of speech and on the other

hand the skill to grade motions of the complex articulation system elements in the finest way so that the produced sound reaches the form of intelligible speech. In the background of these two mechanisms, which simultaneously represent necessary internal conditions for the acquisition of speech, is the *differentiation ability of the brain*, especially in the field of hearing and motor skills. Gradually, the child acquires verbal experiences across linguistic levels (phonetic-phonological, morphological and syntactic, lexical-semantic and pragmatic) and adopts verbal and non-verbal means of communication (Sovák, M. 1989 Kulišťák, P. 2003 Nelešovská, A., 2005, Belz, H. Siegrist, M. 2011 and others).

The ability of inter-modality, i.e. the ability of linking content from one sensory area to the contents from other sensory areas (e.g. linking sound to a visual image), and making links between different sensory perceptions is a prerequisite for mastering spoken forms of speech. Specific competencies mingled with receptive and expressive component of speech and expressed in its spoken form (the level and scope of vocabulary, understanding semantic relationships in sentences and complex sentences, ability to capture the correct sentence syntax and its structure using different parts of speech, their declensions and conjugations, understanding the sound structure of words, articulation and acoustic performance of sounds, the ability to request information, to express relationships, knowledge, opinions, the ability to keep the topic of conversation, adequate exchange of roles of speaker and listener and others), in our view, overlap with the concept of **speech literacy**. Language and speech control forms the basis for learning read and written form of speech, speech literacy is therefore the initial competence for the reading literacy and competence towards learning.

Reading literacy

Reading literacy as a form of communication is a part of linguistic competence. It requires an understanding of knowledge about reading and readership and their application, and it cannot be developed without pupils' internal motivation and positive attitudes, neither can it be applied without mastering specific reading skills and general social and

cognitive skills. There is also the actual content of reading and readership, which, due to its diversity, creates demand for different ways of reading especially when combined with the purpose of specific reading (cf. Hartla P., Hartlové, H. 2000, Vášová, L, Černá, M. 1986, Fabiánková, B., Havel, J., Novotná, M., 1999, Průcha, J., Walterová, E., Mareš, J. and others).

“Reading literacy is a complex of knowledge and the skills of the individual, enabling him/her to deal with written texts commonly found in everyday life (e.g. a railway timetable, an automatic washing machine manual, an editorial in the newspaper etc.). These are not only reading skills, i.e. being able to read texts and understand them, but also the skills to find and process information contained in the text, reproducing the text content and others” (Průcha, J., Walterová, E. Mareš, J. 1995: 40).

In the international PIRLS (2001) research, reading literacy is defined as *the ability to understand written language forms required by society and/or valued by individuals, and to use these forms. Young readers can derive meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in readership, and for pleasure*⁴.

In the report on the international PISA research the initial definition of reading literacy is broadened further, by processes of thinking about content⁵: *“Reading literacy is defined as one’s ability to understand written text, think about it and use it to achieve one’s own goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate actively in society”* (Straková, J. 2002: 10). Jana Doležalová (2014) evaluates this definition, emphasizing thinking when working with text and expecting ability to work with different types of texts and genres, positively in relation to the traditionally approached literacy.

⁴ The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is organized by the International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement IEA. In the Czech Republic the study is organized by the National Coordination Centre, which operates under the Czech School Inspection.

⁵ The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is considered the largest and most important international research into the measurement of learning outcomes, which is currently taking place in the world. The research is one of the activities of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

She also believes that the characteristics of reading, in which the authors emphasize the inter-modality and blending partial capacities of linguistic competence (knowledge of graphic characters of words, i.e. letters to individual sounds, the skill to convert them promptly in the spoken language, create adequate ideas about the content of the material read, thinking about it, forming attitudes towards the content of the material read and others) already overlap with the term of reading literacy.

The definition of reading literacy includes the constructive nature of reading (understanding and using written language required by society) and its functional nature (serving as a tool of knowledge, enabling functioning in society, the development of individuals and society). Thus, reading literacy is not just reading comprehension, but the functional use of written information for its own purposes. It also allows for the active role of the reader in understanding and further work with the text. The well-established term of reading literacy is supposed to differentiate between new quality of reading and the traditional understanding of reading as a fundamental skill. Reading is the basis for subsequent work with text information, i.e. the initial activity of reading literacy and competence towards learning (Doležalová, J. 2014).

Teachers in primary schools will encounter in their daily practice not only pupils undergoing development of partial skills of speech and reading literacy naturally and without any apparent deviations from the norm but also with those where there are deficiencies of varying scope. In some pupils it is only an extended period of physiological problems, however, in others the development of expected skills not only differs from the norm but also uses different means, or a combination of various factors mentioned above.

The Research of Preparedness of Pupils of Primary School Education to USE Reading as a Means of Gaining Knowledge

For the research investigation according to the assignment of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports with the help of comparative

analysis we set the aim of the research to evaluate whether there was achieved an educational progress in pupils of 3rd year of different types of schools in the monitored areas of literacy in the period of 2nd half of the school year. And further on the basis of in-depth comparative analysis to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the educational reality in the context of curricular postulates. The 3rd year was chosen because it represents an important milestone in the development of the child as a reader because it is focused on the beginnings of a functional usage of grammar skills, i.e. the acquisition and automatization of the skill to read and write with understanding. We expect that pupils from the 3rd year could start using the reading as a means of gaining knowledge, in what is referred to as stataric reading. The results of the learning of pupils are based on managing the reading skills. There exist hypotheses that pupils at the end of the 3rd year who are not sufficiently competent readers and who are also behind in writing, can have more significant gaps in the results of learning. The basic set of the national research (except the capital Prague) was formed by pupils of the 3rd year of primary schools, the selective subset then by the pupils of 4 target groups: pupils with mild mental disability⁶, pupils with intellect in the border zone, pupils with social disadvantages and pupils of intact population⁷. On the basis of another criterion defined by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports the research investigation had to reckon on the minimum of 1 000 involved pupils. Within the scope of the 1st grade of the primary school education is the educational content divided into: 1st period (1st–3rd year) and 2nd period (4th–5th year). The Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education identifies the expected outcomes at the end of the 3rd year (1st period) as indicative (not binding) and at the end of 5th year (2nd period) as binding. Therefore, information about how the pupils can read in the 1st period can be the basis for possible update of educational

⁶ The pupils are educated according to the annex of Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education specifying the education of pupils with mild mental disability.

⁷ The pupils are educated according to the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education.

content within the 2nd period of primary school education (within the innovation process of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education). The research subject was formed by two aspects of literacy:

- the processes of understanding (*Focus on explicitly stated information and its seeking, Deduction of direct conclusions, Interpretation and integration of thoughts and information, Examination and evaluation of content, language and text elements*) and
- the reader's intentions (*Reading for literary experience, Reading to acquire and gain information*).

These processes in real reader's situations are always applied in mutual relations and are based on the context in which the pupils live and learn. In the target focus of the research investigation both these aspects were evaluated separately as well as in mutual interaction. The outline of the research is based on the analysis of methodology of international research of literacy PIRLS done in years 2001–2011⁸. The proprietary methodology and means used for the research were on the basis of the analysis of pilot tests in pupils with mild mental disability modified with respects to their educational-psychological characteristics. Both lines for verifying the reliability and validity of test materials brought several key observations. It was necessary to take them into consideration and to integrate them prior the administration (e.g. the length of the text, font size, formulation of text questions, etc.). The methodology of testing was then adjusted in time allotment for the test and in evaluation of the answers. The length of the test was not limited by time so that during testing the pupils the teachers could use the method reflecting specific needs of the pupils with mild mental disability, which they apply in their daily teaching practice.

⁸ Source: Modified translation of the publication Framework and Specifications for PIRLS Assessment 2001 issued by international centre of the research PIRLS at Boston College in 2000), the Institute for Information on Education, 2002. Available on: <<http://www.csicr.cz/getattachment/cz/O-nas/Mezinarodni-setreni-archiv/PIRLS/PIRLS-2001/Publikace-Koncepcie-hodnoceni-PIRLS-2011.pdf>>.

In order to evaluate the level of chosen processes of understanding and the reader's intention (low level, middle level, high level) the questions were classified on the basis of the methodology of international research of reading literacy PIRLS. The results were calculated from the perspective of achieved score for an individual pupil according to given criteria and in the context of expected outcome of curricular documents⁹.

Interpretation of Key Findings and Basic Recommendation for Practice

The main research questions were differentiated into partial research questions whose formulation was then organized and its phrasing is compact with research areas of reading competence of pupils:

- *VO1) What level is achieved by the pupils of 3rd year of chosen target groups at the end of the observed period in the process of understanding Focus on explicitly stated information and its searching?*
 - In the observed process the pupils of chosen target groups mostly achieve the understanding of a middle level.

- *VO2) What level is achieved by pupils of 3rd year of chosen target groups at the end of the observed period in the process of understanding Deduction of direct conclusion?*
 - In the observed process the pupils with intelligence in the border zone mostly achieve understanding of a low level.
 - In the observed process the pupils with mild mental disability, the pupils with social disadvantage and pupils of intact population mostly achieve the understanding of a middle level.

⁹ The Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education and the annex of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education Specifying the Education of Pupils with Mild Mental Disability.

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- VO3) *What level is achieved by pupils of 3rd year of chosen target groups at the end of observed period in the process of understanding Interpretation and integration of thoughts and information?*
 - In the observed process the pupils of chosen target group mostly achieve the understanding of a middle level.

 - VO4) *What level is achieved by pupils of 3rd year of chosen target groups at the end of the observed period in the process of understanding Studying and evaluating the content, language and elements of the text?*
 - In the observed process the pupils with the intelligence in the border zone and pupils with social disadvantage mostly achieve understanding of a middle level.
 - In the observed process the same number of pupils with mild mental disability mostly achieve understanding of a middle and a high level.
 - In the observed process the pupils of intact population mostly achieve understanding of a high level.

 - VO5) *What level is achieved by pupils of 3rd year of chosen target groups at the end of the observed period in reader's intention Reading for literary experience?*
 - In the observed reader's intention the pupils with intelligence in the border zone, pupils with social disadvantage and pupils with mild mental disability mostly achieve a middle level.
 - In the observed reader's intention the pupils of intact population mostly achieve a high level.

 - VO6) *What level is achieved by pupils of 3rd year of chosen target groups at the end of the observed period in reader's intention Gaining and using information?*
 - In the observed reader's intention the pupils with intelligence in the border zone mostly achieve a low level.

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- In the observed reader's intention the pupils with mild mental disability, pupils with social disadvantage and pupils of intact population mostly achieve a middle level.

 - *VO7) Did any statistically significant educational progress happen in pupils of 3rd year of the target groups in observed areas of reader's competence in the observed period (2nd half of the 3rd year)?*
 - In the observed period statistically significant educational progress in the area of reading literacy was confirmed in pupils with mild mental disability (educated according to the annex of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education Specifying the Education of Pupils with Mild Mental Disability) and in pupils of intact population (educated according to the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education).
 - In the observed period, statistically significant educational progress in the area of reading literacy was not confirmed in pupils with intelligence in the border zone and pupils with social disadvantage (educated according to the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education).

Mastering basal reading literacy requires from pupils demanding activity of thinking, conditioned by concentration and significant effort to overcome obstacles associated with understanding. Therefore, preparedness of pupils in the first period of primary education to use reading as a means of gaining knowledge needs lots of patience from the adults, at the right time and in useful form. The key environment for the development of a child from his / her birth to the moment when he / she starts school is the family. The function of a school in the broadest sense is to deliberately and in an integrated way induce in pupils all forms of communication¹⁰, as well as thinking and to ensure equal educational condition with respect to bio – mental – social disposition of

¹⁰ Speaking, listening, reading and writing.

pupils. The results of the research investigation signal deficits in selected areas of reading literacy especially in pupils who achieve a low or middle level and in pupils in whom the statistically significant educational progress in the observed period was not confirmed. In these pupils the insufficiencies in the level of functional reading literacy can be expected and we can consider them risky from the perspective of school success. Therefore, it often depends on the teacher who matters and the quality of his / her personality and his / her professional competences, whether the period of primary education will be effectively used for the preparedness of pupils to use reading as a means of gaining knowledge.

Final recommendations

Based on the analysis of the results of the research on reading literacy and other key findings in the context of long-term thematically related research activities among the target groups of pupils (see Zezulková, E. 2007, 2011, 2013, 2015) we would like to refer to the spare capacity of the educational reality of internal and external origin, whose utilization can positively influence the risk of pupils' school failure in primary school education. The proposed measures also correspond to the currently anticipated changes declared in the 2020 Strategy, particularly in the areas of improving the quality of teaching, pedagogical skills of teachers and effective management of the education system.

The results of the survey point to a demonstrable occurrence of low and intermediate level in monitored areas of reading literacy (comprehension processes and reading intentions) in pupils with intelligence in the border zone, socially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with mild mental disabilities in primary school education. At the same time they call attention to a lack of educational progress in pupils with intelligence in the border zone and socially disadvantaged pupils, educated according to the Framework educational program for basic education. A higher risk of school failure can be assumed in these pupils.

The teachers must adjust their work, based on knowledge of the curriculum, to the expected pupils' competence development and educational conditions to the educational-psychological dimensions of the at-risk pupils. The specific individual needs of the at-risk pupils in the context of school failure emerging from the weak internal qualities (properties) include:

- different anatomical and physiological bases for the formation and development of reading skills (mental and sensory functions),
- slower, or limited creating differentiation contingent connections in all analyzers influencing the creation and quality of intermodal connections¹¹,
- delayed, alternatively limited speech development in all language levels,
- weakening of volitional qualities, interests, imagination, concentration and motivation for reading,
- less experience related to the development of reading literacy and influencing attitudes to reading,
- weakening of the ability to understand spoken and written form of language and others.

Based on the evaluation of the course and learning outcomes, the teacher systematically reflects a planning process, the teaching itself and its impact on pupils in order to improve their work and thus increase the effectiveness of the pupil's learning. The teacher must individualize teaching with regard to the above dispositions, capacities, needs and interests of individual pupils through acquired competencies:

- use a wide range of teaching forms and methods that encourage active and cooperative learning,

¹¹ the ability of linking content from one sensory area to the contents from other sensory areas (e.g. linking a sound to the graphic symbol of the letter), and making links between different sensory perceptions.

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- enable pupils to acquire internal motivation for acquiring the desired skills and lead them to being accountable for the course and the results of their own learning,
 - affect the learning environment in the classroom and encourage a social climate based on mutual respect and cooperation, that is by applying supportive methods and techniques.

By individualization of teaching it is possible to support significantly the weakened internal qualities (properties) in pupils with the risk of school failure and thus affect the development in the areas of:

- spoken and written forms of speech (speech literacy),
- understanding written and spoken form of speech (reading literacy),
- awareness of the requirements of reasonable difficulty, competence towards learning,
- ability to organize and manage their own learning (search, sort and effectively use information, combine knowledge from different educational areas, based on comprehension putting things and phenomena in context),
- relation to lifelong learning (draw conclusions for the future, assess their own progress, plan and predict possible obstacles) and others.

In order to use the period of primary school education for encouraging the preparedness of pupils to use reading as a tool of knowledge effectively, we propose the concrete measures to optimize the educational conditions in selected target areas of the 2020 Strategy:

- a) In the area of innovation of framework educational programs:
 - to define the term *reading literacy* among educational goals,
 - to diversify the expected outcomes of reading skills in the context of developmental stages and specific characteristics of pupils,
 - not to restrict the development of reading skills only to the “reading subjects”, to promote the use of other subjects to support the functionality of reading,

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- to facilitate setting of different lengths of lessons,
 - develop a methodology for the systematic development of reading literacy in primary school education.
- b) To put emphasis on increasing teachers' competence in the area of undergraduate teacher training and further teacher education:
- to develop pupils' reading literacy, deliberately and in an integrated form promote all forms of communication,
 - to apply the principles of differentiation and individualization of the educational process when organizing activities and determining the content, forms and methods,
 - to adapt and modify the educational content of basic education for children with a risk of school failure so as to achieve consistency between educational requirements and real capabilities of these pupils,
 - to implement support measures for the education of the pupils,
 - to apply an individual approach and work with an assistant teacher in the classroom.
- c) In the area of managing the education system:
- to create personal and material conditions for inclusive education.
 - to anchor the status of a special needs teacher in the statutory instruments and implementing regulations of the Ministry of Education as a valid member of the school's counseling team¹².
 - to create conditions for the introduction of speech therapy with a direct link to the educational process in schools with an emphasis on pre-primary and primary education in order to positively influence the development of speech literacy, prereading skills and reading literacy¹³.

¹² A special needs teacher must be competent enough to provide special educational intervention, including counseling services to children and pupils at risk of school failure, their teachers and legal guardians.

¹³ The starting platform is represented by the *Methodical recommendation ref 14712 / 2009-61 to secure speech therapy in schools*.

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- to strengthen the efficiency of cooperation between educational psychologists and school counseling centres (EPs, SCCs).
 - to strengthen the partnership of teachers and parents in the education process, to engage parents in teamwork and motivation of pupils to education.
 - to incorporate subjects of special educational care appropriate to the needs of pupils.
 - to ensure teaching the subjects of special educational care by professionals who will apply the principles of individualization and differentiation of education.
 - to establish a clear system of support measures for pupils at risk of school failure.
 - to create a concept of preventive and corrective measures for speech and reading literacy development in pre-primary and primary school education.

Summary

Family influence has a crucial effect on children from their birth to school entry in terms of acquiring speech literacy (verbal and pre-reading experience). The mission of the school is to provide pupils with the conditions for the consolidation of the acquired competencies and communication skills and to further extend their knowledge by reading literacy in order for them to cope with its functional level. The need for optimal stimulation of communication skills in school is reinforced in the pupils, who we consider to be at risk in relation to school success. The school, in comparison with the family, is in a more difficult situation. Whether or not the period of compulsory education for the development of key competencies including the competence towards lifelong learning will be used effectively depends on the teacher and the quality of his/her personal and professional competencies. Developing speech and reading literacy skills requires a lot of patience on the part of adults, moreover, at the right time and in a useful form. Both processes expect from pupils a demanding level

of active thinking, conditioned by concentration and considerable effort to overcome obstacles associated with understanding. We cannot expect more advanced mental processes in a conversation related to a certain topic, book or text from a child with a lack of verbal experience or weakened speech and reading appetite (is unable to express himself/herself by spoken language, has not acquired pre-reading skills or a positive attitude to reading etc.). The mission of the school is to deliberately and in an integrated way promote all forms of communication (speaking, listening, reading and writing) as well as thinking and creating an environment of *"the kingdom of speech"* for pupils. It is one of the ways to assure equality of educational opportunities of pupils. If the school is able to develop the expected communication skills in pupils, it fulfills one of its key tasks, which is to equip pupils with the necessary skills for lifelong learning. The level of communication skills (speech and reading literacy) is also a critical determinant of educational and social integration, while the cultivation of a child at the level of primary school education plays an essential role in the system of lifelong learning.

Equal educational opportunities assume the creation of optimal conditions for each pupil in all phases of the educational process (at the admission to education, in the course of education and at its completion) with using the principles of internal differentiation of education and individualization of teaching respecting the capacities, abilities and needs of each child, pupil and student.

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The Possibilities of Speech Therapy Stimulation in Children with Delayed School Attendance

Abstract: Our report presents the Elkonin's training of phonematic awareness. This programme is suitable for 5–6 years old children or children whose compulsory school attendance is postponed. We will shortly be presenting the results of our study that was done in 20 children. The aim of the study was to quantify and to compare the level of phonological ability in the studied group of children before and after the training. We would like to show that it is a very suitable and stimulating programme that is possible to apply in pre-school children with impaired communication ability and the postponement of school attendance which can be risk factors in the process of learning and reading. This training can be applied by special educationists, speech therapists and elementary school teachers after passing the course.

Keywords: phonological awareness, phonematic awareness, compulsory school attendance, reading, group therapy, training of phonematic awareness, effectivity of the phonological therapy.

Introduction

Many children are currently delayed in their mandatory school attendance because of various reasons.

One of the reasons is the disrupted communication ability – simply improper speech. These children repeatedly attend pre-school or visit the “zero” grade at school but with the right logopedic stimulation. Currently,

logopedic stimulation shifted to lower ages in order to prevent the occurrence of more significant problems in the acquisition of those skills at a later age.

We want to introduce the program "Training phonemic awareness by D. B. Elkonin" which we applied to children with impaired communication skills that indicated a postponed mandatory school attendance. By these children there is an expected increase in the problematic acquisition of reading and writing.

If a child with impaired communication ability is supported reasonably and well "saturated" with basic elements of speech, it can prevent later complications in reading and writing.

Training phonemic awareness (the TPhA) mediates an original way of understanding the word and spelling. This is a precondition for better learning to read and write even in the pre-school period. Phonemic awareness training is especially appropriate (Mikulajová, Dujčíková, 2001):

- for children who are "at risk" of dyslexia or as part of prevention of dyslexia (usually these children are identified with disturbed or delayed speech development),
- for socially disadvantaged children as the prevention of future learning difficulties,
- for children attending pre-school to acquire useful skills,
- for dyslexic children as a therapeutic procedure.

D. B. Elkonin developed phonemic awareness training in pre-school children in the 1950's. We used traditional analytic-synthetic approach for the acquisition of reading skills. This method does not respect the individual differences of children in this age. Children work with a primer that doesn't help in the exploration of surrounding reality (Mikulajová, Dujčíková, 2001). Especially for children with special problems in this area, the coaching skills in preparation to learn the sounds and various surrounding sound segments can greatly help them and is very typical for children of this age. This method was adapted for the Slovak language by Mikulajová Marina PhD. The advantage of this method is a simple

structure, based on the most natural elements – rhythm – division of words into syllables.

Visualization of the units, handling with these basic units using identifications of units with sound segmented into the smallest parts of language. In this way children discreetly penetrate the analysis and synthesis of the words and language. Children are working with tokens and so they learn to analyze the phonetic structure of words (Mikulajová, without giving the year).

Phonemic awareness training by Elkonin has four stages:

I. The concept of the word, syllabic word analysis (4 hours) – children are getting used to primer, learn to work with syllables and divide words into syllables, using these syllables by means of the original “elkonins” way (lower arch).

The goal is to become familiar with the quantity of syllables. They will learn to use the word “schema words”, “scheme syllabic words.”

II. Analysis consonant words (12 hours) – learning to navigate the phonetic structure of words, identify the first and last vowel in a word, to distinguish short and long words. They will learn to find out number of vowels in a word.

III. Vowels and consonants (9 hours) – realization of the difference of pronunciation of vowels and consonants, first they work with material - (chips), later children work without chips. Children assign words by color scheme according to the number of phonemes.

IV. Hard and soft consonants (5 hours) – Children learn to distinguish time differences in sound and spelling, realize the importance of correct identification and writing by trained pairs of phonemes.

They work with chips, which are suitable for children for illustrative purposes. The whole process includes 30 hours (i.e. pre-graphemic period).

The structure is based on spelling words by Elkonin (Mikulajová, 2005): allocate a sound – indicate it (material) – check if you are right:

1. Say the word and listen carefully to what you say.

2. Use your voice (stretch your arms, speak louder), sound came first in the whole word, name and characterize the sound.
3. Select a sound symbol.
4. Emphasize the voice of the other (after the third, fourth...) vowel in a word, name and characterize it, marking a sound symbol.
5. Check whether you have allocated all the sounds in the word "read" what you "wrote" (check all phonemes in the word "read" – if the word is complete, it is propaedeutic reading).
6. Determine whether it is called a long syllable, if so, mark it (this requires a vote of the whole word at a time).
7. Check whether you got the whole word, "read" it by syllables.

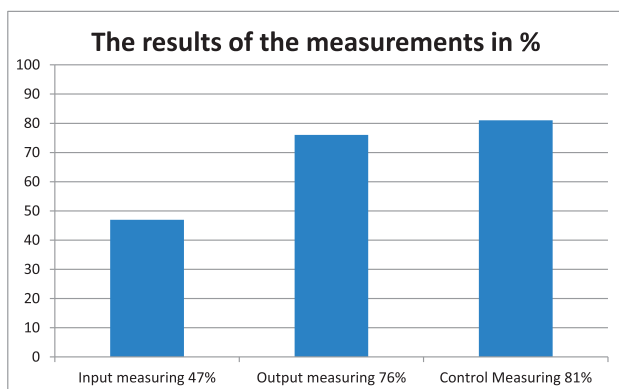
Children work in groups of 2 to 6. This method can also be applied individually, but children lose experience of mutual work.

Own research

In our group we had 20 children who attended the whole subsidy i.e. 30 hours of targeted stimulation. We used the test of phonological awareness (March, 2000) three times and we recorded measurements: *input measuring* (before applying the program), the *output measuring* (immediately after application of the program) or *control measurements* (six weeks after the end of application program). All measurements of phonological awareness were made according to the present test, which has three levels and comprises of 9 subtests:

- I. The level – awareness of rhythm: 1. Awareness of rhymes; 2. Production of rhyming;
- II. The level – awareness of syllables: 3. Syllable analysis; 4. Syllable synthesis; 5. The isolation of the first syllable; 6. Skipping syllables;
- III. The level of awareness of phonemes: 7. The isolation of the first voice; 8. Synthesis of phonemes into words; 9. Analysis of words into syllables.

Each subtest contained 5 tasks that are ordered by difficulty from the easiest to the hardest. Motivational story and training tasks are adjusted to each task. For subtest analysis - sounds of words for better understanding and handling we used chips, each chip with a different colour related to the sound. The child pronounces individual sounds and inserts tokens representing the sounds into the corresponding word scheme. Child receives 2 points for each correct answer, 1 point for a partial one, 0 points for an incorrect or false answer. Total possible points is 90. For each subtest the percentage performance is calculated.



Finally, the calculated overall success of the test.

Conclusion

In our work we wanted to highlight the effectiveness of group therapy by applying the "Training phonemic awareness by D. B. Elkonin". Its main advantage is that the practice of phonemic analysis is conducted separately from the analysis "grafemickej". Therapy lights the intensive operations with new abstract graphic symbols, which strains the visually-spatial discrimination, memory and attention of the child. In this program, the child can handle audio analysis of spoken language by smaller segments. The child learns during training the relevant knowledge of the

language and its phonetic structure. The present program has many "sides" of the positive effects that enrich a child in confidence, interaction within the group and a linguistic.

Also, it would be very useful to anchor the present training hours of language training in the normal type of kindergarten, but also in the preparatory year of primary school, where the possible occurrence of children with problems in specific speech disorders and, therefore, suspected disorders of school skills, is even higher. Here we see room for school speech therapists or special teachers in the development of children's language skills to implement this training program in children at risk in terms of prevention of dyslexia, dysgraphia and dysortographia. We propose to develop the topics into the curriculum throughout the school year and systematically work on this area. We recommend therefore to continue in implementing group therapy.

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The Educational Programs of Catholic Religion/Religious Education for Preschool Children in Slovakia

Abstract: This paper focuses on the educational programs of Religion/Religious Education within pre-primary education, in Slovakia, outlining the legislative view on the issue. It characterises the curriculum of Religion/Religious Education in pre-primary education and the Framework Educational Program of the subject of Catholic Religion/Religious Education for pre-primary education. It deals with the competencies of spiritual formation in a Catholic nursery school. In the conclusions, it provides its own recommendations and methodological ideas, applicable in the educational programs of Religious Education within nursery schools.

Keywords: pre-primary education, nursery school, Religious Education, educational programs.

Introduction

The entry of a child into nursery school can, in most cases, also be associated with his first entry into society. The child copes with a lot of changes and demands are placed upon him since the nursery school is the first link of the school system in which the child begins to fulfil the objectives of upbringing and education.

The main objective of the upbringing and education within a nursery school depends on the objectives of the upbringing and education, referred to in Act. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education (School Act) and on the amendment of certain acts. The education in nursery

schools provides the basic skills leading to the fulfilment of the objectives of upbringing and education, under this Act. The main objective of upbringing and education in the nursery school is the achievement of an optimal cognitive, sensorimotor and socio-emotional level, as the basis for a school education in primary school and for life in society (National Educational Programme for pre-primary education in nursery schools, 2015, p. 5).

Pursuant to § 15 of Act No. 245/2008 Coll., the teaching of Religious Education or Religion is allowed in nursery schools. It is carried out by a pedagogical employee with the appropriate professional and pedagogical competencies. In Catholic schools, education is carried out according to educational programs, in accordance with special regulations.

Based on an agreement between the Slovak Republic and the registered churches and religious communities, each registered church or religious society in Slovakia can teach Religion/Religious Education. The teaching of the Catholic Religion/Religious Education is carried out on the basis of the approved curriculum, which was submitted by the Catholic Church, in accordance with the Charter of Human Rights, the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and pursuant to an agreement between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See on a Catholic Upbringing and Education (Furman, J., 2013).

The aim of the presented paper is to handle the issue of the educational programs of Religious Education for preschool children at both a theoretical and methodological level. We suggest the objectives and content of Religious Education and we briefly address the methods and methodological suggestions for practice in nursery schools.

The Framework Education Program of the subject, Catholic Religion/Religious Education, for pre-primary education

Education in the family and in the nursery school is connected by the common interest for the child and the development of his personality. Some educational principles of family education are basically identi-

cal to the nursery school education, for example, in issues of social learning. Teachers, just like parents, provide children with models of behaviour in the widest possible sense. The whole social environment of the nursery school represents models of social relations in natural situations for the children (Guziová, K., 2002).

The child's parents must agree with the teaching of Religion/Religious Education in the nursery school and the educational process is then planned accordingly. The relevant planning directive for the teacher is the Framework Educational Program of the subject Catholic Religion/Religious Education for pre-primary education.

The Conference of Slovak Bishops, on 16th March 2010, issued the final approval of the Framework Educational Program for Catholic Religion in nursery schools, regardless of the type of school (No. KBS/65/16.3. 2010/MS). In accordance with the Framework Educational Programs for nursery schools, methodical manuals of Catholic Religion/Religious Education are offered for the age categories 3–4 year olds, 4–5 year olds and 5–6 year olds. These are the three methodologies in one batch and together they form 708 A4 pages, including 380 pages of text and 328 pages of attached images – colour images, puzzles, templates and worksheets (Catholic Educational and Catechetical Centre, 2016).

The age group of 3–4 year old children in nursery schools

This group of children still shows a low degree of independence, however, gradually they acquire habits and skills of self-serving and acquire their own identity. The children are moody, their emotions are unstable and they can be upset due to completely trivial things.

The children are gradually developing gross motor skills and the coordination of movements, their fine motor skills develop and their handling of objects improves.

Within them there a concreteness of thinking and visual thinking gradually begins. Perception is characterised by syncretism and globalism, the child is unable to analyse perceived objects. They gradually develop

sensory perception, the child distinguishes the shape and surface of things by touching, recognises smells and tastes, discovers basic colours and responds to the rhythm of music with movement. Their speech is developing and their vocabulary expands. Attention is short-lived and unstable, the child quickly changes the subject of his interests. He is able to play for a short time in a simple way but he still cannot play with his peers.

Content is divided into three themes: 1. God, the Father, 2. Son, 3. Holy Spirit.

The objective of the class is "to experience pleasure from the fact that I am loved." A symbol of the class is the house. It gradually appears in themes and symbolises protection, safety, family and love.

The educational program defines four levels of the symbol:

1. *Factual level* (what the symbol says about itself): The house is big, small, is made of brick or wooden.
2. *Subjective level* (what does it say to me): The house as a place of protection, safety, care, love.
3. *Objective level* (what does it tell us): Every person desires to belong somewhere, have a place in the family, their home.
4. *Religious level* (what does it tell us about the experience of God and man): In the house of the Father, there are many dwellings.

Content standard consists of the following topics associated into the following thematic units:

1. *God the Father*

- God the Father created the world.
- God the Father created man out of love.
- God the Father forgives us every betrayal.
- Love saves.
- God, out of love, blesses Abraham.
- God loves Joseph.
- God the Father also leads us through danger.
- God the Father gives us the law of Love.

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- God looks at our heart.
 - We express love for God through the Psalms.
 - God continuously covers us with his love.

2. Son

- Mary teaches us to expect the Lord Jesus.
- God sends us His Son.
- Bowing shepherds.
- Jesus in the house of the heavenly Father.
- The power of Jesus over nature.
- Jesus – the Good Shepherd.
- The Last Supper.
- Holy Week
- The resurrection of Jesus – Jesus is alive.
- Sunday – a celebration of the resurrection.

3. Holy Spirit

- Jesus promised us and sent the Comforter.
- The Holy Spirit dwells in my heart.
- Mary teaches us to receive the Spirit of Love.
- The Spirit of God fulfils my heart with love.
- The Spirit of God teaches me to love God and people.
- The Holy Spirit fulfils my heart with joy.
- The Spirit of God teaches me to make others happy.
- The Spirit of God creates from us the family of God's children.
- The Spirit of God teaches us to celebrate.
- The Spirit of God teaches us to celebrate our Heavenly Father.

4. Additional subtopic

- Saint Nicholas.

For each topic, cognitive, affective and psychomotor targets are elaborated. The following are examples. In the theme of *God the Father created the world*, the objectives are as follows:

-
- *Cognitive*: To name the things created by God.
 - *Affective*: Using images to realise the love of God in creations.
 - *Psychomotor*: To observe God's creation in nature. Create an exhibition from things created by God.

In the theme of *God the Father created man out of love*, the objectives are as follows:

- *Cognitive*: To name the first people.
- *Affective*: To be happy about the creation of the first people.
- *Psychomotor*: Through a dance, imitate Adam and Eve's joy of creation and of the coexistence with God.

Age category of 4–5 year old children in nursery schools

In children aged three to five years, significant changes take place in their perceptual-motor, cognitive and social-emotional areas. Children become more independent and ever-ready to learn plus hygienic, work and moral habits, as well as the basics of cultural behaviour, are already quite well established in them.

They are more stable in emotional areas, with signs of cognitive, moral, aesthetic and social feelings occurring in them. Children can easier acquire the rules within the group, they are engaged in group games and they better liaise with other children. We can already talk about signs of cooperative behaviour.

Gross and fine motor skills, as well as movement coordination, are improving and thinking is purposeful. The child learns about the wider world through direct observation and sensory experiences are being formed. He is capable of noticing details, especially those which elicit certain feelings or emotional experiences within him.

The child is vivid and mobile, curious and likes to explore. Fantasy and imagination, speech and thinking are developing within him and this means that the sensorimotor and cognitive experiences of the child are

widening. He recognises the outside world only superficially, he cannot understand the facts, events and logical relationships.

Content is also divided into three themes: 1. God the Father, 2. Son, 3. Holy Spirit.

The objective of the class is *"in obedience, to discover the goodness of God."* The symbol of the class is a tree. The tree is symbolising protection, a gift and life. This symbol is defined in four levels:

1. *Factual level* (what the symbol says about itself): The tree – small, big, is part of nature, a fruit tree, a broad-leaved tree...
2. *Subjective level* (what does it say to me): The tree – protection from the sun, represents new life, gives a person fruit – it is a gift...
3. *Objective level* (what does it tell us): The tree – every person desires to be gifted and also be a gift to others...
4. *Religious level* (what does it tell us about the experience of God and man): The tree – as a branch, cannot bear fruit by itself, neither can you, unless you abide in Me (a person is like a tree, about which God takes care of).

The content standard consists of the following themes, associated into the aforementioned thematic units:

1. *God the Father*
 - God created the world both good and beautiful.
 - God forgives us our disobedience.
 - God saves Noah.
 - A man listening to God.
 - A boy listening to God.
 - God helps us.
 - God gives us an angel.
 - God forgives us.
 - God listens to our prayers.
 - God heals.
 - God shows us the way through angels.
 - God sends His Son.

2. *Son*

- The meeting of Mary with Elizabeth.
- The wandering of Joseph and Mary.
- The wise men and their great gifts.
- Jesus as a child listens to Joseph and Mary.
- Miraculous fishing.
- Jesus – the Good Shepherd.
- The Last Supper.
- Holy Week.
- The resurrection of Jesus – Jesus is alive.
- Sunday – a celebration of the resurrection.

3. *Holy Spirit*

- Jesus sends us the Holy Spirit.
- The disciples, together with Mary, believe the words of Jesus.
- The Spirit of God teaches us to listen.
- The Spirit of God teaches us to pray.
- The Spirit of God teaches us to obey those who care about me.
- The Spirit of God teaches us to obey the Heavenly Father.
- The Spirit of God teaches us to help others.
- The Spirit of God gives us wisdom.
- The Spirit of God purifies our heart.

4. *Additional subtopic*

- Saint Nicholas.

For each topic, the cognitive, affective and psychomotor targets are elaborated and again we give examples. In the theme, *God created the world to be good and beautiful*, the objectives are as follows:

- *Cognitive*: Determine, with the help of the teacher, what God created and what people have created.
- *Affective*: To observe the perfection of the laws of nature, given by the Creator.

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- *Psychomotor*: Colourfully highlight both created and man-made things.

In the theme *God forgives us our disobedience* the objectives are as follows:

- *Cognitive*: To find the message of a fairy tale, with a focus on obedience and disobedience.
- *Affective*: To appreciate the actions of positive characters from a fairy tale and from a Biblical story.
- *Psychomotor*: To shape the habit of obedience.

Age category of 5-6 years old children in nursery schools

These children are already quite independent and their developed skills enable them a relative independence from the adults. Feelings are even more stable; the children are able to control excitement or emotions.

They are very curious. They carefully gain new information and this ability gradually improves within them. They are interested in the world of nature and society. They are gradually discovering context and the relationships between objects and phenomena, and abstract and conceptual, or verbal – logical or symbolic thinking starts within them. They are becoming more patient, able to remain within an activity for a long time and complete a given activity. They already have the basis of a sense of duty and development in the area of social communication and cooperative behaviour also starts here. The children quickly and individually establish contacts with their peers, as well as with adults. In games, they can individually plan, organise, identify roles and agree on their progress. They are getting rid of egocentrism and the way of decentration (detachment from each other) begins to apply within them.

The content is also divided into three themes: 1. God the Father, 2. Son, 3. Holy Spirit.

The objective of the class is *"I trust God, who loves me."* The symbol of the class is the Sun. It symbolises joy and gives a feeling of safety. It represents the presence of God the Father, from Whom children are happy, Who sees and hears them and is continuously with them.

The four levels of the symbol are as follows:

1. *Factual level* (what the symbol says about itself): The Sun is a light.
2. *Subjective level* (what does it say to me): The Sun as a symbol of joy.
3. *Objective level* (what does it tell us): The Sun as a symbol of Community.
4. *Religious level* (what does it tell us about the experience of God and man): Jesus as the Sun, towards which we are directed.

The content standard consists of themes divided into thematic units:

1. *God the Father*

- God has entrusted heaven and earth to me.
- What is the greatest work of God.
- The first people.
- God leads Noah.
- God gives Abraham a son.
- The expectation of a child.
- God leads Joseph even though he is in prison.
- The Israelites trust God.
- God listened to those who cry out to Him.
- God trusts me and calls me.
- God blesses us.
- God heals trusting.

2. *Son*

- The expectation of the promised Messiah.
- Nicholas.
- God is looking for a mother for his Son.
- Simeon and Anna.

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- Jesus loves all the children.
 - Mitigation of the storm.
 - Jesus – the Good Shepherd.
 - Supper with the Saviour.
 - Holy Week.
 - The resurrection of Jesus – Jesus is alive.

3. *Holy Spirit*

- Jesus sends us the Spirit Comforter.
- The Spirit of God fills us with joy.
- The Spirit of God frees us from fear.
- The Spirit of God teaches us to trust God.
- The Spirit of God teaches us to trust the good people.
- The Holy Spirit is our Comforter.
- The Spirit of God fills us with courage.
- The Spirit of God fills us with strength.
- The Spirit of God develops within us the correct desires.
- The Spirit of God purifies our heart.

For each theme, the cognitive, affective and psychomotor objectives are elaborated. Again we give examples. In the theme *God has entrusted heaven and earth to me* the objectives are as follows:

- *Cognitive:* To describe the creation of the world.
- *Affective:* Be inspired by the beauty of nature and admire the strength and wisdom of the Creator.
- *Psychomotor:* To create a play area of living nature.

In the theme, *The greatest work of God*, the objectives are as follows:

- *Cognitive:* Give reasons why man is the greatest work of God.
- *Affective:* Be happy about the creation of man.
- *Psychomotor:* Together, create a human figure.

The competencies of spiritual formation within a Catholic nursery school

We present the competencies of spiritual formation in a Catholic nursery school, as defined by the School Educational Program of the A. Bernolák primary school and nursery school, in Martin, which serves as a preview of the draft plan of spiritual formation, within a Catholic nursery school, beyond the subject of Religious Education.

Children aged 3–4 years:

- Express joy.
- Express love.
- Are able to pray a short prayer.
- Pray for their loved ones.
- Pray within the community of children, families and the faithful.
- Make the sign of the cross, bow in the church or chapel.
- Keep quiet in the church or in the chapel.
- Sing children's spiritual songs.
- Make contact with the priest, greet him.
- Are capable of saying simple responses.
- Distinguish between good and evil.
- Ask for forgiveness.
- Help others, with the assistance of an adult.
- Behave in the group, according to the rules.
- Ask for forgiveness and know how to forgive and to express remorse.
- Do good deeds.

Children aged 4–5 years:

- Behave in the group, according to the rules.
- Ask for forgiveness, express remorse.
- Do good deeds.
- Pray through the singing of spiritual songs.
- Pray for a specific intention.

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- Apply actions associated with a visit to the chapel or the church.
 - Take part in the celebration of Holy Mass.
 - Greet with a Catholic greeting.
 - Help others, behave emphatically.
 - Evaluate their own actions.

Children aged 5–6 years:

- Express a prayer individually, through the singing of spiritual songs.
- Express prayer in their own words.
- Listen to the word of God.
- Pray to the patron Saints.
- Participate in the celebration of Holy Mass through singing and responses.
- Distinguish between the prayer of the Holy Rosary and the Stations of the Cross.
- Help others, listen to them, put others first.
- Ask for forgiveness and forgive.
- Express remorse.
- Take responsibility for their actions.
- Express hope (through words, drawings...).
- Work with a children's Bible.
- Ask for the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.
- Express a prayer in silence, become quiet.

Preschool children and children at a younger school age complete a difficult, but necessary, process of separation and individualisation, and also they socially single out as an individual and a personality (Račková, 2007).

Other methodological suggestions applicable in the educational programs of Religion / Religious Education in nursery schools

In the final subchapter, we would still like to add some of our own observations and suggestions on the issue of Religion/Religious Education

in pre-primary education within a nursery school. Here are ideas for literary, musical, dramatic and artistic activities.

Literary activities. In particular, the reading of the Bible for children, whether in the morning in the communication circle with a subsequent analysis of the reading or in the afternoon, before naptime.

In literary activities, work with the Old Testament narratives and work with parables can be highlighted. Children also like the stories about the birth of Jesus and the life of Jesus during his public ministry (healing, miracles, etc.).

Musical activities. We highlight not only singing songs with religious themes, but also the singing of religious songs. The teacher also has to choose songs with text that the preschool children would be able to understand. Practicing the song is preceded by thorough work with the text, so that children could playfully acquire new concepts and calmly develop a relationship towards singing religious songs. Most rewarding in this respect are the songs, which are associated with different times of the liturgical year, for example: Advent, Christmas, Easter.

Drama activities. Just as with literary activities, here it is also very good to work with parables. Art craft activities may follow on the back of dramatic activities, inducing pleasant experiences among the children. The authors I. Rochovská and D. Krupová (2016), referred to the reconciliation of art and drama activities in their publication, *Umelci v materskej škole* (Artists in Nursery School). They work with The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). They use the original biblical text.

An interpretation of the work of art from the well-known Dutch painter, Rembrandt, entitled *The Return of the Prodigal Son* was used with the children in the nursery school.

The objectives of the activities were as follows:

- To express, in their own words, what is painted in the picture.
- To find links between the picture, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, and the biblical story of the Prodigal Son.

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- Intently look at the picture and talk about the major and the minor characters in the picture (What are they wearing? What face do they make? What do their gestures express? In what way are they similar and different?).
 - Express the correlation between the storyline of an image and its artistic presentation (the artistic expression of poverty, wealth, joy, sadness, envy...).
 - Through art (drawings), express love and goodness.
 - To visually interpret (inscenate) the picture, The Return of the Prodigal Son (Rochovská, I., Krupová, D., 2016).

The teacher has revealed to the children that the work is inspired by the biblical story of the Prodigal Son. She read the story while the children were shown the work of art in front of them on an interactive whiteboard. This was followed by a discussion on the image and work. Here are some interesting observations of the children (CH), who answer the questions of the teacher (T).

T: *Who is it?*

CH: *The younger son.*

T: *How do you know he is younger?*

CH: *Because he is on his knees.*

CH: *He is kneeling down, because he took him back.*

T: *What kind of **clothes** does the son have?*

CH: *Ugly.*

T: *Why does he have ugly clothes?*

CH: *Because he travelled a long way.*

T: *What did the father do, when the son returned?*

CH: *He accepted him.*

T: *And how did the painter paint this in the picture? How do we know that he accepted him?*

CH: *Because he is holding him.*

T: *He is holding him, hugging him and blessing him.*

T: *Let's look closer at his **feet**. What is the difference between them?*

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- CH: *He has one shoe on and one shoe off.*
- T: *What happened to his shoe?*
- CH: *It came off.*
- T: *Why did it come off? Why did the shoe come apart?*
- CH: *He walked for a long time.*
- ...
- T: *What does his **head** look like?*
- CH: *It is injured.*
- T: *Does he have hair?*
- CH: *No.*
- CH: *A little bit.*
- T: *And do you think that this younger son is rich or poor?*
- CH: *Poor.*
- CH: *Poor.*
- T: *And when you look at the **clothes** of his father and his son...*
- CH: *Rich.*
- CH: *Rich.*
- T: *I will tell you one more thing; the younger son has something behind his belt. Look, he has a **dagger** there. It is a rare dagger. When this son was leaving his father, was he rich or poor?*
- CH: *Rich.*
- T: *What do you think, why did he not sell it?*
- CH: *Because it is from his father.*
- CH: *That was his only memory.*
- CH: *If he would sell it, he would not have a memory... of the father (Rochovská, Krupová, 2016).*

After this theoretical part, the children were encouraged towards a *visual interpretation* of Rembrandt's works. The teacher was telling the children: *In the story, which is in the picture, the father showed his son the love in the fact that he has accepted him back, even though he was ragged and had spent all the money. He could send him away; he still had a second son. But he has forgiven him, accepted him, he showed him his love. Such*

a love is manifested by God to each of us. If you are a painter and you would like to paint love, what would you paint on that picture?

The children usually suggested that they would draw a love heart. The teacher wanted to direct them to come up with a story that they would paint. The children responded that it would be a story about love. They agreed that they could draw baby Jesus into the love heart, as a message of love. Subsequently, their task was to draw their ideas on A5 paper with crayons and to talk about them. The teacher clipped the finished drawings on a bulletin board and placed them next to a painting on the interactive whiteboard. There were mainly love hearts, flowers, a love heart shaped house, Mary with Joseph and the baby Jesus in the love heart (Rochovská, I., Krupová, D., 2016).

After the activities aimed at drawing, the children were stimulated towards the staging of the story. The teacher has prepared space in the classroom for the staging and she brought a lot of material - coloured fabrics, dark curtain fabrics, various hats and other props, which could be used. Children showed great enthusiasm and actively wanted to participate in the performance, debating which character they would like to portray. The teacher asked the children about their views on how they would create the background, what could the characters wear. First, they created a background from dark curtain fabrics and this was followed by the selection of two minor characters. The children were fascinated that they could depict the "invisible people" in the background of the picture; being cloaked themselves into dark curtain fabrics, where the only visible part was their face. Furthermore, they competed to see who would play the father's older son and younger son. Everyone wanted to participate actively in the staging of the picture. The teacher explained to them that the staging would be repeated several times and everyone would take part in the play. The children adapted the selection of clothes, so that they would look as much as possible like the people in the picture. When the visual aspect of the picture was ready, the teacher encouraged the children to try to figure out what the father and son might speak about when they met. Children who were in the position of the observer could think of how to make replicas (Rochovská I., Krupová D., 2016).

Conclusion

In some cases in the educational standards of pre-primary education content of a religious theme is included. In most cases, however, the teacher must look for connections that may be present to an unlimited extent. The content of pre-primary education is so varied that a creative teacher will find a number of elements of Religious Education in every educational field. After all, love for God, a love for thy neighbour – a fundamental principle of Christian religion – can be found absolutely everywhere (Akimjaková, B., 2014).

The aim of this paper was to summarise the situation in the area of the educational programs of Religious Education within a nursery school in Slovakia, in order to become the stimulus for comparisons with this issue in nearby foreign countries.

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Visual Art in Nursery Schools

Abstract: This paper focuses on the possibilities of applying an interpretation of visual art in a nursery school. It defines the concept of visual arts and briefly deals with the issue of an interpretation of visual arts. It presents a preview of the educational project for the children, called *Umělci v mateřské škole* (Artists in Nursery School), which was published in a complete form within a separate publication. It stresses the importance of implementing visual arts in pre-primary education.

Keywords: pre-primary education, nursery school, visual arts, fine arts, educational program.

Introduction

Playing has an eminent position within a nursery school and the perception of Art and Art Education can be implemented best through play. There are many incentives that can positively shape the inner world of a child by applying the methods of play, and such incentives undoubtedly include fine/visual arts. Aesthetic activity is one of the most natural things in the world for a child, just like playing. If the child is in a free environment and feels happy, nothing prevents their aesthetic expression. That is the most important factor which the teacher in a nursery school should bear in mind when designing an artistic educational activity. A fine art education of pre-school children is necessary for directing not only towards

developing the skills of drawing, painting or modelling, but also for developing more complex skills. We especially mean creative thinking and visual literacy. In the presented paper, we have focused precisely on an interpretation of visual arts, because we consider such an encounter with a work of art as a unique way of developing all aspects of a child's personality.

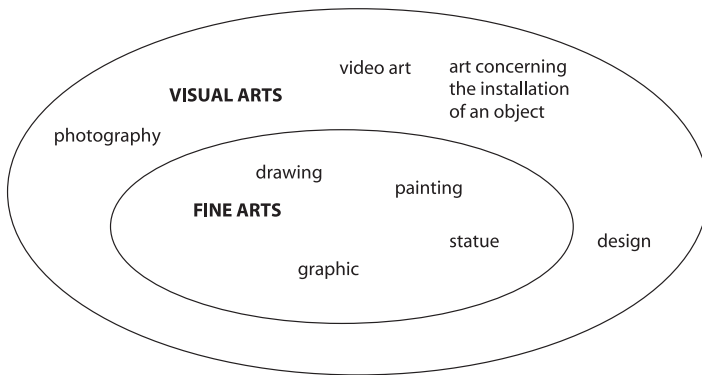
Definition of the concept of visual arts

In the current time, we meet with the term visual arts which is commonly used abroad and is also gradually replacing the common term of fine arts. An explanation can be found in professional literature (e.g. Kožušková, J., et al., 2006). It is explained therein that the concepts of visual and fine art can be understood as synonyms, but in our language environment the concept of fine arts (comprising classical forms: drawing, painting, printmaking, sculpture and so on) is narrower than the concept of visual art, which in addition to these classical forms, also encompasses non-traditional forms, for example, photography, video art, the installation of an art object and also a wide area of design. According to the Encyclopaedia of Art Education, visual art is a modern, but not very clearly defined concept, covering a broad category of artistic disciplines and various subcategories. The wide scope of this concept prevents any attempts of a precise definition, therefore, it is preferable to define the concept of visual art through the appointment of its basic disciplines, which include:

- *Fine Arts* – belongs in its entirety to the basic categories of visual art, includes drawing, painting, printmaking and sculpture, but also calligraphy, illustration and architecture or design.
- *Contemporary art* – includes a host of modern art forms such as assemblage, collage, conceptual art, installation, happening, performances, body art, but also photography, video art, land art, animation or their various combinations.

- *Utility art* – includes, for example, pottery, tapestry, painting on glass.
- *Other forms of visual arts* – in a broader understanding, to visual art we may also assign graphic design arts, fashion design, interior design, computer art, but also tattoos, body and face painting and others.

Fig. 1. Graphical presentation of the relationship of concepts, fine arts and visual arts



A definition of the concept of visual art interpretation

The aim of education towards art at all school levels, including pre-primary education, should enable children to perceive an artwork, think about it and look for context, in order for them to be able to formulate their ideas into both a verbal and visual form. Education through art is carried out mainly through interpretive activities. We recognise works of art at the level of perception, however, it is still not enough for an understanding of them. Understanding is possible at the level of reception, which is one of the objectives of Art Education (Gero, Š., 2002; Zezulková, E., 2013). Without the reception process, a piece of art would be meaningless. Š. Gero (in Gero, Š., Husár, J., Sokolová, K., 2004) divides the process of the reception of artwork into several stages:

-
- The first stage is *motivation*, for example, aesthetic needs, the need for relaxation, entertainment, knowledge, abreaction, shortening boredom, and so on.
 - In the next phase, *perception* follows – the reflection of shapes, colours, lines and their configurations, while at this stage decoding is important too, which would allow us to reveal what the artist has “put” into the work.
 - *Decoding* is possible, if we know the iconographic and formal language of fine arts (similar as to when we read a literary text, we cannot understand it if it is written in a language that we do not know).
 - This is followed by *reflection* – thinking about the work.
 - *Response* – its re-experiencing.
 - These processes culminate in *interpretation*, thus in an artistic experience, formulated by verbal language. The same picture can be interpreted differently each time, similarly each person brings their own opinions to the interpretation.

An interpretation of works of visual art is perceived on two levels – as a *verbal* and a *visual* interpretation. A verbal interpretation uses verbal means of expression. It is directed from a narrative description towards an interpretative interpretation. In order for the penetration into a work of art to result in an adequate interpretation, the observer should be visually and artistically literate, and should perceive the works not only on the basis of normal thinking and normal visual reference. Each process of interpretation is lively and inimitable, and is encouraged and supported by the work through its gradual detection in subsequent reception (Gero, Š., Tropp, S., 2000). Children at a preschool age are just learning to verbally express their thoughts, so it is necessary to thoroughly exercise care in selecting the works which we want to verbally interpret with them. We begin with simple works. in which they can find a story. Later, we may choose more difficult works to understand, but in no case do we force children towards a verbal expression. We let them perceive art works and encourage the spontaneous reactions of children.

When selecting works of art simultaneously, we make sure that we do not work with works that could interfere with the child's emotionality. R. Pondělíková (2015) states the verbal interpretation algorithm. More about the verbal interpretation of visual arts in pre-primary education may be seen in the publications: *Využívanie interpretácie vizuálneho umenia v predprimárnom vzdelávaní* (The Use of an Interpretation of Visual Art in Pre-primary Education) (Krupová, I., Krupová D, Akimjaková, B., 2010), *Umelci v materskej škole* (Artists in Nursery School) (Rochovská, I., Krupová, D., 2016), and in publications by E. Zezulková (2013, 2014). According to J. Geržová and I. Hrubničová (1998, p. 114), we understand artistic interpretation (from the latin *interpretatio* – interpretation, explanation) as “...an artistic process based on a reflection of art through arts, artistic works through artistic work, using a wide variety of other artistic procedures (allusion, citation, appropriation, etc.)”. According to Š. Gera and S. Troppa (2000, 2002), visual interpretation is implemented through creative art activities – copies of art work, free mimicking of art work or of the completing and the special feature of the work of art. Visual interpretation is followed by artistic paraphrase and reinterpretation. The authors further characterise artistic paraphrase as a creative process, based on a reflection of the work of art through a work of art. Here various art processes apply, e.g.:

- allusion,
- citation,
- appropriation,
- invocation,
- camouflage,
- commentary,
- persiflage,
- repaint,
- destruction,
- recycling,
- reinterpretation.

A further explanation of the listed concepts, together with illustrations of specific examples, may be found in the publication, *Umelci v materskej škole (Artists in Nursery School)* (Rochovská, I., Krupová, D., 2016). The authors, B. Akimjaková and M. Oravcová (2011), have also written about visual interpretation.

Project: Artists in Nursery School

The objective of the proposed art project was to bring different types of visual art to children at a preschool age through the interpretation of specific works of art. At every stage of the project, we present partial objectives, material and technical support, the course of the activity and observations from a verification of the proposed activities in a nursery school, completed with photo documentation. In one part of the project, we focused on the works of world artists and their interpretation. We have chosen the works of world-famous authors such as Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, Leonardo da Vinci, Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, Edvard Munch and Pablo Picasso. Each activity for the children started with a verbal interpretation of the works, from which we made a PowerPoint presentation. We continued with a visual interpretation and the final products we processed within a separate publication (Rochovská, Krupová, 2016). In some suggestions on the interpretation, we mentioned also interesting facts about the life or work of the author, which are primarily intended for teachers. However, it is up to them whether and how they will situationally use this information when working with children, in the case where they will show a greater interest in the artist, his work and his interpretation. Here we present a sample of one activity, which focused on the interpretation of the art work, *Sunflowers*, by Vincent van Gogh.



Fig. 2. Sunflowers

(Image Source: *Wikipedia*)

Vincent van Gogh is considered the father of Impressionism¹⁴. Although the other Impressionists influenced him, his style, however, was individual and original. While he was regarded as unimportant during his lifetime, today, he is a recognised artist who even has his own gallery in his home country, the Netherlands. This unforgettable artist had a favourite flower – sunflowers – to which he devoted a major focus of his work. One of these pictures (Fig. 2), we have chosen for the interpretation by children, and we wanted to draw the attention of the child to the mastery of the use of colour and technique, using impasto paints, applied by the artist in his work.

¹⁴ The endeavour of Impressionism was to show a landscape or object as it appears to the eye, exactly at a given moment; the picture of an object or landscape changes at every moment, so the most accurate is the picture in the moment, which leaves in us the strongest impression - IMPRESA; the impressionist picture mostly appears like a mass of marks and blurred areas, only in the distance does it get its correct impression (Guillaume, 2012, p. 29).

Partial objectives:

- To describe the image, the *Sunflowers*, in their own words and think up their own name.
- Express their views on why Vincent van Gogh liked to paint sunflowers.
- To paint a sunflower, using impasto colours (undiluted tempera).
- Visually interpret the picture of the *Sunflowers* – to create a collective work from the individual work of the children, to make the background and vase for the sunflowers.

Material didactic resources: a reproduction of the picture of the *Sunflowers*, a PowerPoint presentation (available at <http://ulozto.cz/x6JBCLAr/umelci-v-materske-skole-rochovska-krupova-prilohy-rar>), tempera paints, tools for painting (tablecloths, glasses with water, paint brushes, sponges for wiping brushes, etc.), scissors, glue.

The course of the activity: We have started the activity with information about the history of the work. Children were introduced to Vincent van Gogh, the teacher showed them his three self-portraits (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Self-portraits of Vincent van Gogh

(Image Source: *Wikipedia*)

- T: *Do you think that it is the same artist in all three images?*
- CH: *I know. This one on the side is the same as this one.*
- CH: *No, they are not the same.*
- CH: *They are all the same.*
- T: *Children, in all three of these images is the same artist, called Vincent. Look at his face, how does he look?*
- CH: *I can see, like this (she makes a frowning face).*
- CH: *I can see like this...*
- CH: *They all have a mouth like this (shows with the corners down).*
- T: *Do they have it like Mona Lisa had?*
- CH: *No.*
- CH: *No.*
- CH: *No, they do not have such lips.*
- T: *What does it mean when he pulls a face like this? Try to show, how he has his mouth.*
- CH: *I showed it, too.*
- T: *What could we learn about the painter according to that?*
- CH: *I think that they are ... I think they are frowning.*
- T: *And when someone is frowning, what does it mean?*
- CH: *That he is frowning.*
- CH: *That he is angry.*
- CH: *That he is frowning.*
- CH: *He is frowning.*
- T: *What do you think, why is this painter frowning and sad?*
- CH: *Because he did not do well at painting.*
- CH: *I think he forgot to put a hat here and there...*
- T: *If he forgot, can he still do it?*
- CH: *Yes.*
- T: *Could he solve the problem?*
- CH: *Yes.*
- T: *Children, this painter had a very sad life. He did not have a wife, nor kids and he had an ill soul.*
- CH: *He is sad, because he did not have a wife, nor a family and does not know how to smile, because he never tried.*

T: Throughout his life, he painted pictures of mainly nature, flowers. He loved to paint sunflowers.

The teacher showed the children photos of the exterior and interior of the Vincent van Gogh gallery in Amsterdam, and told them that in this gallery there is a vast number of paintings by the artist. For the teachers, we report that the painting of the *Sunflowers* is currently located in the National Gallery, in London, and its reproduction is in Amsterdam, in the Gallery of Vincent van Gogh.

Furthermore, we looked at the *content* of art work. The teacher showed the children a magnified image of the sunflowers and asked them questions:

T: Do you know what these flowers are called?

CH: Something like dandelions?

T: It probably only reminds you of that, due to its colour. With what colour are they painted?

CH: Orange.

CH: And here is green.

T: Orange, green, what else?

CH: Yellow.

CH: Brown.

CH: Blue.

The teacher showed a real picture of a sunflower to the children.

CH: That is a sunflower.

CH: A sunflower.

T: And what do you think? What did the painter call his picture?

CH: Sunflower?

T: Do you think, he called it after this flower?

CH: A sunflower.

T: And is there only one sunflower?

CH: No.

T: So, how did the painter call his painting?

CH: The Sunflowers.

After the response to the last question as to why the artist liked to paint sunflowers, the children can be led towards the thought of how sunflowers feel – whether they are “happy” or “sad” flowers, when they love the sun. Also, their colour – yellow – was the colour of happiness according to Vincent van Gogh. In this way, he was seeking for happiness that he did not find in his life, at least in the pictures that he painted.

T: Children, I told you that there may be a riddle hidden in the pictures. What do you think, why did Vincent paint so many sunflowers when he was sad?

CH: He wanted to cheer himself up.

CH: Because he liked them a lot and he wanted to be happy, at least about this picture.

T: What was his favourite colour?

CH: Yellow!

CH: Yellow!

CH: Yellow!

For teachers, here are some notes about the picture, as characterised by J. Dolejšová (2012). The flowers are placed on a buttery yellow background, which is separated from the ochre table with a blue line. The flowers are in different stages of their life cycle. Angular yellow petals are painted with an incredible energy, while the grainy structure of dark orange ovaries consists of pointy touches of the paint brush. The piece is an expressive study in the colour, yellow, a symbol of sunshine and happiness, it reflects joy and hope.

In addition, the teacher also showed the children other paintings of the sunflower theme (Fig. 4). Children looked for their similarities and differences. They may also notice the colourfulness of the paintings and flowers in the picture, vases, background, the number of flowers or their shapes...



Fig. 4. A multimedia presentation on the interpretation of an image IV

(Image Source: *Wikipedia*)

The children could also think about the *form* of the interpreted art work. They watched the picture of real sunflowers, saying their views on how the work was painted.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the teacher gets familiar with the technique with which the picture was painted, and teaches it to the children in an appropriate form. Vincent van Gogh painted with *im-pasto* paints, thus used a thick oil paint, which was deposited in such a dense way that the images were, so to speak, plastic. The children could understand it better if we compared them, for example, to a rough wall, or if we had some picture painted with a thick layer of paint, which they could touch. They may make the visual impression by enlargements of the work in a presentation.

For the teachers, the artist's original artistic style can still be specified, characterised by applying glowing and bright colours, with quick and wide strokes of the brush. He thus created colour spaces, using the effect of complementary colours (for example, the blue colour in the picture with the sunflowers is a complementary colour to the yellow). His paintings did not respect the principles of deep perspective, with which

he achieved flatness. Also the colours used were not real and thus he achieved an expression of his inner restlessness and tension.

The conclusion of the activity consisted of a *visual interpretation* of the work, the *Sunflowers*. Each child focused on one detail in the picture – one flower, and then painted it on an A5 or A4 format, and tried to imitate the technique of painting of Vincent van Gogh. They watched a preview of the painting of the *Sunflowers* (Fig. 5) and we particularly drew their attention to the density of colours and brush strokes, which were fast and wide.



Fig. 5. A demonstration of the technique of painting with impasto paints **Fig. 6. Painting Sunflowers**

Children painted with a dense undiluted tempera (Fig. 6). They cut out the painted flowers (Fig. 7) with the teacher helped the younger children. Since we had plenty of painted sunflowers, two children painted the background on an A3 card according to their imagination, and other two children painted vases. Finally, along with the teacher, they made a definitive work by sticking it together (Fig. 8.9).



Fig. 7. Works of the children



**Fig. 8. Collective creation
of the children I**



**Fig. 9. Collective creation
of the children II**

In reflection, the children expressed what they liked the most from the whole morning:

- *That we were painting flowers.*
- *That Ivana cut out the vase and we painted the background.*
- *Sunflowers, that I painted the vase and background.*
- *I was making sunflowers, we were pretending to be artists.*
- *That I was looking at paintings and the painter. We were making flowers and he had an ill soul.*
- *The yellow colour reminded him of happiness. He did not have a wife or children, that is why he had a sad life.*
- *I was making sunflowers.*
- *We were playing at being painters.*
- *We were playing at being painters.*
- *That I was making flowers.*
- *I was making a flower.*



Fig. 10. The publication Artists in Nursery School

Conclusion

The implementation of interpretive activities in a nursery school requires guidance by a teacher who is competent both from the side of educational content, but also from the artistic side. As J. Belko (2001) claims, only a creative teacher in a nursery school is able to create a creative atmosphere. A creative teacher is able to make everyday things special and everyday phenomena seem new and thus to separate (a thing, story, phenomena ...) from the trivia of everyday life and place it at the centre of our (visual) course of events by making it seem different. Making something different also means story or motif telling, when the teacher gives the children the opportunity to discover the story or motif from a different angle, in a different light and another connection to that which they are used to. The interpretation of visual arts offers many stimuli that can enormously enrich the emotional world of children. In addition to getting to know a lot of theoretical information, they get to know great artists and their works, they learn about various art techniques, through interpretive activities, and they may experience adventures which will resonate in them for a long time to come.

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The Dramatization of Stories and Role-play in the School Environment

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to highlight the important position of methods of creative drama with a focus on dramatization and role-play which enable a child to acquire new knowledge and skills through personal, emotional and practical experience in the educational process in active drama activities. Creative drama is based on experiential learning and it enables creative work with kids, builds their confidence, creates a space for self-fulfillment and builds on the creative potential of the child. Activities which create space for self-expression of a child and bring joy and a sense of accomplishment are proposed at the end of the article.

Keywords: creative drama, experiential learning, dramatization, role play.

Introduction

The pre-primary period of education forms a major milestone in the education of children. Children start their path to acquiring a complex education in kindergartens. Every level and type of school that children participate in, enriches their knowledge and brings new experiences. The learning that a child gains in a kindergarten forms the basis of his or her personality.

The pre-primary childhood period is characterized by considerable activity, spontaneity, interest in getting to know themselves and their

environment (Rochovská, 2011), as well as the desire to experiment, explore and constantly look for something new in life. The activity and responsiveness of children manifest themselves primarily in activities that engage their speaking, observation and listening. Every teacher needs to be well prepared for working with children in this early period of their life. The teacher is a facilitator, organizer, and creator of the educational process. It depends on him or her what form and method he or she will use to catch the children's attention and motivate them, and what environment he or she will create to increase their engagement, active participation with their peers in the creative process, as well as openness to communicate and enjoy the experiences and lessons learned.

The paper stresses the importance of methods of creative drama – focusing on dramatization and role play – which make children interested and offers them by acting in the role of someone else the opportunity to travel and explore the unknown world, and actively address and perform different tasks which positively affect the development of their personality.

Experiential learning and the creative playwright

Building on the children's natural desire for knowledge, we must help them to create a comprehensive knowledge system, attitudes and universal human values. They adopt such competences in the best way through experiential learning – which educators and psychologists classify to effective types of learning. According to I. Rochovská and D. Krupová (2015), it would be the most ideal if an all-day stay of a child in kindergarten would become an unforgettable experience.

Experiential learning is one of the most effective forms of learning. A child gains learning through experiences that happen in his or her own active work. A child acquires new knowledge, experience, creates a proper idea and knowledge of the world, creates a relation with nature, society, but also with himself or herself – and all this based on their own experience (Švábová, 2007). Experiential learning accentuates inner processes of a child, builds on his or her emotional and personal experience, and

attaches significance to his or her activity. I. Rochovská and D. Krupová (2015) are convinced that it is possible to support the development of child's emotional side naturally through experiential learning. A sense of understanding and the ability to express emotions affect thinking and behavior of children in kindergartens.

M. Horňáková (2010) stresses that the affectionate relationship in a group also forms the basis of child's development. As E. Petlák (2006) claims, children value activities that are free from stressful situations, where they have possibility of self-fulfillment and feel accepted, as well as experience success and joy from their activity.

The importance of experiential learning is based on the personality development of every child which:

- Enables them to acquire new knowledge through their own creative activity,
- Helps to keep long-lasting attention and concentration,
- Motivates them towards openness of expression,
- Brings the joy of acquirement of new experience through his or her own creation,
- Increases interest in group work,
- Provides an opportunity for self-fulfillment, self-expression, and self-reflection,
- Helps them to learn new skills in a way that cannot be lost in their further development,
- Leads to independence and development of free personality (Švábová, 2014).

The success and quality of the various activities performed by children depends not only on their internal condition and appropriate environment. They are also a result of the ability of a teacher to motivate children, the methods and strategies he or she uses, and what he does to help to form, develop and transform their personality. As reported by Janoško P. and S. Neslušanová (2014), responsibility for children can be initiated and encouraged by constant communication, participation and

interest in what children are experiencing, what they desire, what they want and need, but also what may or may not do.

The use of activating methods, both creative and experiential, leads to the creation of a space where children may work on their self-realization and self-regulation and where they have the possibility to seek different approaches to problem-solving through mutual communication, thus gaining new valuable personal experience necessary for life.

Creative drama is considered to be one of the alternative methods for the development of children's creativity from early childhood. Its methods allow us to find the way to a child and, to a large extent, it contributes to the formation and development of children, both in terms of their cognitive and non-cognitive ability.

In the past, we have had the opportunity to meet creative drama as a method of education in the area outside of the classroom. It appeared in children's theater, in work with artistic text, and in various drama activities at school. Currently the method is irreplaceable and indispensable in kindergartens as it develops the direct and spontaneous expression of children. B. Way (1996) emphasizes this change and describes creative drama as "*the practice of life*" which should be included in creative work of every teacher. In primary schools, creative drama can already be taught as part of a curriculum – but only with the assumption that a teacher is an expert in the field of creative drama.

A number of authors deal with the issue of creative drama in the specialist literature (Machková, Valenta, Way, Benešová, Bekéniová, Kollárová, Kovalčíková). A unifying feature of all definitions of creative drama is that the aim of education is to nurture the free and comprehensive development of the personality of a child.

According to J. Valenta (2008), the basic roots of creative drama are drama and theatre. We can understand creative drama as a system of driven, active, artistic and socio-anthropological teaching of children or adults that is based on the use of the principles and practice of drama and theatre. However, such teaching in schools takes into account creative-artistic and teaching requirements, as well as individual and common options for the further development of the participating individuals.

E. Machková characterizes creative drama as learning from experience. It is based on an examination, learning and understanding of human relationships, situations and the inner life of people from present time or the past, real or imaginary. This examination and learning occurs in fictional situations through the utilization of role play or dramatic negotiations in an induced situation (Machková, 2000). It is based on communication and contact. Children participate in various practical exercises based on the principle of understanding, cooperation, interplay and team creativity.

Creative drama is based on learning by experience as:

- an emotional phenomenon that is limited in time (e.g. the experience from hearing music, reading a story, or pictures we work with),
- the phenomenon as a dynamic-process where the diversity of feelings and emotions is observed in the course of time,
- the result of combination of both the emotional and dynamic experience which remains in long-term emotional memory (Bekéniová, 2012).

Creative drama is an educational system that focuses on personal development as a whole, as stated by L. Bekéniová (2012). Its learning content is largely interdisciplinary and organized into concrete situations that carry the element of story and the problems that need to be tackled. Creative drama is not a dramatization of a literary text, work with puppets or a role play. It is primarily active learning based on practical experience which comprehensively develops the whole personality of an individual. Experience is gained by solutions to fictional situations – often coming from a real life. In creative drama, the child becomes the subject of education, and has the opportunity to actively participate in the educational process. Thus he or she gains the opportunity to understand oneself and his or her environment. He or she becomes a source of knowledge and acquisition of various life experiences.

Methods of creative drama

Creative drama is a creative process in which variable methods of creative drama are applied when working with children in kindergarten. It is important that a teacher selects the best methods in order to raise the enthusiasm and interest of children in active work.

Teachers currently have the opportunity to utilize a myriad of methods of creative drama. According to E. Machková (1998), a number of methods were developed in the last 80 years of creative drama, as well as different variants arising from the educational situation where the methods of drama education were applied. Some methods were taken and processed from acting; others were created in related fields, such as social training, others from children's games, creativity trainings and fields of art in education. Many methods originated directly from the practice of creative activities.

Creative drama is a dynamic and creative process that encourages spontaneous activity on the part of a child. The essential and most frequent methods of creative drama are classified as: role-play, improvisation, interpretation, dramatic play, dramatization, pantomime, puppet and marionette shows. Game is the core method which leads children to openness, relaxation, spontaneity, creativity, joy, and deepens their interest in reality.

Experience learning is the most natural and effective form of learning for children. The method, when adequately chosen, enables children to act in various roles and acquire the ability to work in groups with their peers. It improves their communication skills, confronts their own attitudes to attitudes of the others, and strengthens their self-confidence in drama situations.

To successfully achieve an effective educational objective, a teacher selects a combination of several methods of creative drama. Methods are not used separately. It is important to respect the target focus of education and also the specification of the content. Methods that encourage the socializing of children, their self-realization and learning through personal experiences are prioritized. creative drama methods and their ap-

plication brings an amazing opportunity to lead children to the observation of reality, the development of their ideas and feelings, and helps them to express themselves through movement, facial expressions, gestures or words.

Improvisation and interpretation

Improvisation and interpretation are essential methods of creative drama that significantly affect the development of children in pre-primary education.

Improvisation is part of the daily activities in kindergarten. As stated by B. Way (1996), it is a spontaneous activity that all children can handle – regardless the age or the level of abilities. It does not need a pre-prepared scenario as it is not a game which depends on the ability to read or learn dialogues. It activates all mental functions and depends on the application of own individual resources.

Improvisation is a creative method where a teacher plays an important role. He or she - in accordance with educational aim and content – prepares a story in advance and evokes a situation in which a child has the opportunity to express himself or herself individually. The advantage of improvisation lies in the emotional and acquired experience. According to M. Benešová and D. Kollárová (2000), creative drama is not a play act and neither a preparation of children for the stage. It is a preparation for life.

One of the basic methods of creative drama includes the method of interpretation. It is a creative work with literary text including all means of expression. When an inspiring literary text is close and understandable for children, and has a quality content and formal side, it creates space for children to express themselves and to inspire their own creativity. It brings excitement and unforgettable experiences which has a positive influence on their personality. Stories that children have a close relation with are the ones which enable them to unleash their imagination and fantasy; stories – which develop their verbal and non-verbal communication,

stories – where they can play a role which allows them to discover, experiment and win. The teacher is the one who provides children with this opportunity to explore their environment and surrounding nature in creative and playful activities through realization of various stories.

Role-play

Role play is a key method of creative drama. According to J. Valenta (2008), role play is an educational method that leads to the achievement of aesthetic-educational, personal and social development goals on basis of improvisation and subsequent reflection of dramatic situation with valuable educational content. This situation is conducted through the role-plays of participants who represent more or less fictional objects (various creatures or natural phenomena) through their behaviour and actions. It includes the possibility to play himself in some degrees of authenticity.

Children like to impersonate someone else and express themselves in the drama situations which they identify with. A positive atmosphere helps them to develop their communication with a community. This method of creative drama is popular in schools.

Creative drama understands role-play as a social concept and thus it is a way of specific social behavior which is expected and presumed from the respective role. According to E. Machková (2005), a role-play is an activity in which a player takes something other than an inherent role (in terms of social role, not theatrical).

Regardless of age and experience, role play empowers a full range of communication techniques, builds confidence, creates space for self-expression, and promotes interaction in the group. It increases the incentive to work and learn, has a facilitation function and it is a means of relaxation.

In creative drama, role play is usually undertaken as collective improvisation. In such an act, everyone plays a role of someone else (e.g. an animal) or represents a thing (e.g. a magical scarf). It involves also children

who are timid, less creative, including individualistic players. In this way children get the opportunity to gain different experiences and eventually manage to empathize with different roles without any obstacles. According to V. Hašková (2014), teamwork leads to the removal of barriers that exist between children and their coexistence is improved in such a cooperative atmosphere.

Role play can have several levels in drama activities:

- a) *Simulation level* – in which a child plays himself or herself in some fictional situation and has the possibility to act and play according to his or her own decision.
- b) *Alteration level* – the child acts in a different role, acts in a role of someone else, thus not in a certain attitude he or she might have in such situations, but with an attitude of a character he or she portrays.
- c) *Characterization level* – the most difficult type of role play, in which a player represents a character, having a complex picture of him or her – the psyche, and understanding of inner world under the influence of the drama text (Valenta, 2008).

We work with children in the pre-primary period mostly at the simulation and alteration level. As reported by D. Kollárová (2005), a symbolic game forms the basis of the first two role-play stages. It enables children to escape into a fictional world. It is familiar as they know it from well-known creative and thematic games. It allows them to implement their observations from the world of adults, as well as fairy tale heroes in literature or television.

Dramatization

Dramatization is considered one of the popular methods of creative drama. It is based on the analysis of the long-term results of research on the methods of creative drama used in activities with children in schools.

It represents the top phase of creative drama. Teachers approach dramatization after practical experience with improvisation, interpretation, role play and drama activities.

Dramatization is a creative process rather than the memorization of the literary work. Dramatization represents a rendition of a particular story, in which various kinds of tools or puppets can be used. Drama texts, which encourage children to be naturally physically active and express themselves verbally, must create a space where they can express themselves in a way which brings joy and sense of accomplishment from these situations.

Preparation of dramatization and its procedures

Dramatization means primarily a good selection of literary artwork in which the principle of the simplest to the more complex text is applied. According to D. Kollárová (2005), in a hearsay interpreted text, a child will accept only what he or she with his or her intellect and emotional maturity is able to cope with. Therefore teachers must begin with simple drama games and exercises which do not comprise the difficult situation. Thus children can express themselves in the form of simplest movements in a role play. In the following exercises, children mimic the various sounds of animals, wind, storms, north wind, motion portrayal of the situation, animal walk, fairy-tale characters (princess, prince, witch). Example of activities:

1. Move freely in a room in the rhythm of a rhyme. Mimic the walk of an animal as a role-play (e.g. frog, elephant, stork, bear, and rabbit).

E.g. *Stork went around the house and said number (5)*. Children perform a slow walk with knees lifted up to the waist. They imitate the long beak of a stork with their hands outstretched in front.

Present a well-known rhyme (e.g. a rhyme in which a blacksmith forges a horseshoe). Imitate the role of a blacksmith and make horseshoes with a hammer.

2. Rendering content of children's songs and expressing it through movement.

E.g. Children may sing a traditional song about musicians. They play the roles of musicians playing on drums and violin.

3. We also meet with dramatization in activities with music, movement and motion. Children may move around space and express roles of dancers, animals, snowflakes and various natural phenomena with use of body movements (e.g. wolf and three pigs, funny bunny with big ears, weaving of a daisy-chain, etc.) (Lysáková, 1989).

The smaller children are, the more we look for literary templates that create a space in which children may release their creativity and learn to connect words with movement and thus support their natural development. Gradually it moves to templates with rich variety of characters and situations, initiatives with a simple conflict, clear dialogue and storyline enabling creative work in the group.

Dramatization of fairy tales

A fairy-tale is irreplaceable in activities with children in kindergarten. They can address each child individually. If a teacher chooses to dramatize a fairy tale, he or she has to make sure that the children are familiar with the story and are able to imitate movements, sounds, words, situations and characters that are part of the story. Not every fairy tale is capable of satisfying child recipients and of evoking the same experience. To get the full attention of a child, a fairy-tale must:

- Be clear,
- Complexly encourage curiosity,
- Encourage perception, imagination, and fantasy,
- Help to develop cognitive skills,
- Bring joy and deep emotional experience,
- Involve and motivate to participate in creative activities.

When choosing the fairy tale, a teacher takes in regard *pedagogical objective, topic, age of children, the composition of the group, their level of experience, and the way they work with the story* (Švábová, 2014, p. 50).

A fairy tale has an educational character and prepares the child for life through the stories. When children understand and connect with a fairy tale, it has a positive influence on their communicativeness, responsiveness, sensitivity and ability to answer various questions. Dramatization of fairy tales enriches their language and the ability to express themselves independently.

We meet also with free dramatization in practice. In free dramatization, children are involved in the creation and transformation of the original story and the teacher reduces or expands texts, especially if he or she wants to involve all children in activities. The creative teacher likes to amend and change a story together with children, and combine the original story with a new one. In this way, a different environment is created and new situations arise with new characters. Children have a great joy when they can be actively involved in the educational process.

Children like to dramatize fairy tales they know well and whose motives they have already spontaneously used in creative games, with some parts almost being known by heart. The informal atmosphere and conditions which make children comfortable have a great importance in dramatization. Teachers need to encourage every child and clarify that everyone has something which may have enriching and developing effect on a group. A teacher coordinates communication in the group during drama activities which influences how immersed the children are in their roles and how well they identify with their character.

Below you may find an example of an activity (based on a well-known fairy tale in Slovakia). The story empowered children to express their feelings in an active and creative way – which arose from problems tackled in the activity and their role play.

Express with a movement, motion and words a situation from fairy-tale stories.

Danka and Janka fairy tale (based on the fairy tale written by Maria Durickova, 1990).

Initial text: Danka and Janka are twin sisters who are quite the same. They are so identical that when Janka looks in the mirror, she is not sure if she sees herself or her sister Danka. They often quarrel. When Janka says that something is white, Danka will argue that it is black or pink. But they agree on the main things. Going to a circus – it fits them both. And both of them like ice-cream. However, while Janka likes vanilla and Danka prefers strawberry, they enjoy fairy tales both the same. They just need to hold their hands, make a jump and suddenly they appear in a fairytale.

Tasks:

1. Create pairs and act out a dramatic situation in which Danka and Janka stand in front of a mirror and look back and forth. Look at your hair, nose, and eyes. Suddenly you are surprised. You are exactly the same. Change your mood, become happy, sad, laugh, then cry, cover your eyes, cover your whole face. In the end give yourself a round of applause, jump from joy and shout: "We are the same!"
2. Act out a dramatic situation in which children are in the role of Danka and Janka and seek answers to questions, such as:
 - a) Why is everything around us white, black or pink?
 - b) What would happen if everything around us was just white or black, pink, blue, red, green, or yellow?
3. Play out a drama situation in which children express their satisfaction from walking to an ice-cream shop in the role of Danka and Janka. Tasks:
 - a) On the way lead a dialogue about which ice-cream you like the most.
 - b) Ask an ice-cream man to sell you your favorite ice-cream.
 - c) Taste the ice-cream. Suddenly one of the ice-creams falls to the ground and messes your shirt, pants, and skirt.
4. Play a drama situation in which Danka and Janka go to a circus. Tasks:
 - a) Express joy or fear of meeting the animals (and imagine what animals are in the circus).

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- b) Act in a situation when animals are preparing for their performance. Suddenly a clown blows a trumpet, animals appear and start dancing in front of Danka and Janka.

Questions at the end of activities:

Why do Danka and Janka look in the mirror, what do they see? What would happen if everything around us was just white or black, pink, blue, red, green, or yellow? Danka and Janka love ice cream – do you remember what flavor? What animals did Danka and Janka see in the circus? What did they like in the circus the most? What animals did the girls like the most?

Work with fairy tale characters is interesting for children in kindergartens. Through participation in role plays, dramatic stories and fairy tales, children experience a joy from satisfaction; they get to know each other and their environment. According to Z. Hlaváčová (2014), we should allow children to have as much joy and positive incentives as they need to make their lives full of laughter, success and happiness – because there is nothing worse than the sad face of a child.

Fairy tales and their dramatization deserve to have the attention of teachers and children.

Conclusion

Creative drama belongs to alternative, non-traditional forms and methods of education in the contemporary creative – humanistic educational process. It is based on the involvement of children and the encouragement of their creativity and independence. Experiential learning is an important asset when working with methods of creative drama as it emphasizes the personal experience and activity of a child.

Dramatization of stories engages children in role plays through which they become more engaged, experiment and open up, and start believing in themselves and collaborate with others in a friendly and

peaceful atmosphere. Drama activities allow children to experience success through their own involvement, and to gain new knowledge and experience necessary for life.

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Health-related Knowledge Development in Roma Pupils

Abstract: The paper discusses possible ways of systematic implementation of intervention programs designed for the development of health-related knowledge and skills in Romany pupils. The research results indicate a considerable educational potential of a health education intervention program pursuing substantial increase in health-related knowledge in Romany primary school pupils. The results suggest that pro-health programs integrated in school curricula are a relevant part of health-oriented education of Romany pupils.

Keywords: health, education, Romany pupil, intervention program, knowledge, primary school.

Theoretical framework

Social disadvantage is a significant factor that causes education problems and disadvantages for Roma pupils. Since none of the former education programs have succeeded in overcoming Roma education problems it is necessary to seek and verify a new education paradigm that will reflect specific features of the Roma minority and will concentrate on education progress of individual pupils (taking into consideration general quantitative criteria and established standards). By implication, it is necessary to identify and introduce education strategies that will support the talents of Roma pupils through innovative and stimulating approaches interrelating education and positive experiences.

In general, the successful and balanced development of cognitive, social-affective and psycho-motor aspects of personality is determined by the life-style structure and contents and the related level of health. Any discrepancies between the structure and the contents of life-style of Roma, on one hand, and the generally established and recognized standards, on the other, are negatively projected onto the physical, mental and emotional condition of Roma children/pupils. This fact correlates with the serious health problems and high frequency of socio-pathological phenomena in Roma children and youth. This situation is significantly influenced by factors like different family education; tolerated drug-addiction; low level of health awareness; inadequate individual and community hygiene; irregular, one-sided and poor-quality nutrition; poor quality and quantity of motion activities; absence of a systematic daily routine – a life-style based on irregular and accidental activities; poor knowledge of reproductive health; absence of health-prevention awareness; high illness-rate and frequent disabilities; lack of interest in education to health. The fact that Roma children identify themselves with the behaviour of their parents and their community manifests itself in their specific attitude to health. A limited functionality, or even dysfunction of family education (including education to health) imposes additional tasks upon school education. In particular, school curricula put the emphasis on education to health thus establishing the necessary conditions for positive intervention and subsequent turn in various adverse health-related parameters pertaining to Roma pupils' life-style, especially pupils from a socially handicapped environment.

Health parameters in the Roma population are much worse than in the majority population. This is undoubtedly a consequence of a way of life that does not respect the requirements of a regulated life-style. As a result, Roma represent a risk group for the occurrence of tuberculosis, infectious diseases, injuries, poisoning and burns. Many of them suffer from respiratory system diseases, support-motion system problems, frequent sensory diseases, mainly diseases of the eye and adnexa. Roma children increasingly suffer (compared to the majority population) from skin and parasitic diseases, for example, salmonellosis, scabies, pediculosis – infes-

tation, pyoderma – purulent skin disease, trachoma – chronic purulent conjunctivitis and corneal fungal infections – diseases caused by fungi; viral hepatitis A, but also B and C, is more frequent in Roma communities. Isolated and segregated communities are characterized by a high incidence of contagious diseases due to adverse life conditions, such as jaundice, tuberculosis, meningitis. The incidence of primary congenital glaucoma has been reported, too. A higher incidence of mental diseases has also been reported (oligophrenia). The incidence of phenylketonuria is extremely high (Bernasovský & Bernasovská, 1996; Liba, 1999; Ginteret et al., 2001, 2004; Horňák, 2005; Matulay, 2009; Bartošovič & Hegyi, 2010). The life-style of Roma is typical of the high consumption of unhealthy food – overly high consumption of cheap fat meat, sausages, animal and vegetable fats, consumption of sweetmeats and sweet beverages, insufficient consumption of whole-grain products, fruit and vegetables, milk and milk products. Furthermore, consumption of fish, eggs, leguminous plants and vegetables are very low. They are replaced with bread and sweetmeats (Popper, Szeghy & Šarkozy, 2009). An early and tolerated consumption of drugs is another serious problem. Many Roma children smoke and drink alcohol, thus imitating the behavioural model of their parents, relatives and the community as a whole. A monitoring of Roma children (1012 respondents – Roma pupils attending the 3rd year of primary school, without regard to their age), aimed at the identification, analysis and evaluation of the initial contact and experiences with drugs (alcohol, tobacco, solvents) in children, their families and their community (Liba, 2006, 2007) revealed that Roma children drink alcohol and smoke (rarely volatiles – toluene) as early as primary school age. Alcohol and tobacco are considered to be an integral part of Roma life. Baška et al. (2007) report on the relation between the smoking habit development age and the intensity of smoking, i.e., the number of smoked tobacco products per day – the earlier age of regular smoking the higher the intensity of smoking at a later age. Furthermore, Popper, Szeghy & Šarkozy (2009) confirm the high consumption of tobacco products in Roma – it exceeds 50% in all examined age groups as well as in both males and females. Excessive consumption of medication was reported for almost all Roma communities (mainly

ibuprofen, paracetamol, diazepam (Bartošovič & Hegyi, 2010)). Many Roma are only aware of those diseases that can be directly perceived, mostly inflammatory diseases, conditions accompanied with fever, injuries, poisoning, burns, influenza, etc. The symptoms of other serious diseases (genetic diseases, degenerative diseases, autoimmune diseases, tumours, and mental disorders) are frequently ignored and, therefore, they are not cured (Popper, Seghy & Šarkozy, 2009). Interestingly, the Roma population consider their health condition more positively than it is in reality. This fact, no doubt, reflects the level of health awareness in Roma and the specific reference frame for assessment of their health.

All the above-mentioned facts suggest that the structure and contents of the life-style of Roma children are evidently influenced by their self-identification with the life-style of the family and the community. This results in the lack of relevant knowledge of and skills in health protection and support. This is, in turn, reflected in an inadequate stance to the generally recognized standards of life-style.

This paper examines the possibilities of supporting the healthy development of Roma children from a socially handicapped environment. I am aware of the fact that the preparation, implementation and evaluation of the whole process is conditioned by a systematic theoretical and empirical reflection of the current situation and subsequent re-definition, modification and possible innovation of the established educational procedures. Better knowledge and skills of Roma children from a socially disadvantaged environment can and should be supported by situations that, through motivating and stimulating strategies, make it possible to pursue pro-health education objectives.

Given this background, we verified and evaluated the education efficiency of a pro-health intervention program focused on the knowledge of health and healthy life-style in Roma children from a socially disadvantaged environment.

Research problem

Is there any correlation between a program of pro-health intervention, on one hand, and the positive (effective) development of the health-related knowledge in Roma pupils from a socially disadvantaged environment?

Research question

Can a program of pro-health intervention significantly improve the level of knowledge of Roma pupils about health and healthy life-style?

Research objectives

The required changes in the level of knowledge of Roma pupils from a socially disadvantaged environment will be achieved through a purposeful and targeted program of pro-health intervention).

Hypothesis

Significant positive changes in the level of knowledge of Roma pupils from a socially disadvantaged environment (health, healthy life-style) will be achieved by means of a health-education intervention program.

Research method

Our research sample included twenty Roma pupils attending the 3rd year of primary school. They met the attributes of homogeneity in terms of their level of knowledge (school results), their interest in and

motivation for learning, the approach of their families to education and, primarily, their social status – socially disadvantaged (4 boys and 16 girls). The oldest pupil was eleven, the youngest one was nine. The average age was 10.85. The boy-to-girl proportion was 1:4.

The health-education intervention program was implemented as part of school education – nine two-hour sessions (natural science and physical education classes) during one school-year. The program interconnected general and specific objectives and methodological procedures with education needs and requirements reflecting the respondents' potential. The program emphasized an individual approach, concentration, perception, and exactness; it activated verbal activity, contributed to the development of word-stock, and stimulated the motivation structure in Roma children from a socially disadvantaged environment. The program covered six themes (human body, health factors, hygiene, nutrition, drugs, motion activities).

The education efficiency was evaluated by means of a knowledge test – a pre-test (in accordance with the National Education Program for Primary Schools, 2008). The post-test implied the education themes (in accordance with the National Education Program for Primary Schools, 2008) as well as our program of health-education intervention whose education forms, methods and tools (for example, interactive whiteboard, dramatization, motivating fairy-tales, pantomime, singing songs, motion games, information-communication technologies, etc.) supported and developed the specified themes of education to health (in accordance with the National Education Program for Primary Schools, 2008). The contents, the formal relevance (understanding the questions) and the duration of the knowledge test were verified within the pre-research period. The teacher of our respondents took part in classroom testing together with the researchers (as approved by the school management). The test included 13 tasks – 4 matching tasks, 5 selection tasks, 1 rearrangement task, 1 open production task, 1 creative answer task and 1 completion task. The tasks were based on listening, underlining, writing, combining, rearranging, circling, crossing and completing.

Research results and discussion

The hypothesis was verified by comparing the input knowledge test results with those of the output knowledge test obtained after the completion of the health education intervention program. The significance level of our testing was $\alpha = 0.05$ (i.e., 5 %). The data were analyzed and interpreted by means of a statistical method, in particular, the descriptive statistics the objective of which is data description, processing, arrangement, their graphical representation, and calculation of fundamental statistical characteristics. In addition, we employed the Anderson-Darling normality test in order to identify the distribution of individual cohorts. This made it possible to select the most appropriate statistical method for confirming or rejecting the research hypothesis. If the value calculated by means of the Anderson-Darling test was below 0.05, the analyzed data did not meet the condition of normal distribution. The research hypothesis was tested by the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-test that is used to compare medians from two independent samples.

Statistical calculations were done by means of the Minitab 15 – Statistical Software. The results were compared to the critical values specified for the given amount of data.

The p-value is the level calculated by the Mann-Whitney test. It represents the probability of error due to the postulation of difference between the variables examined: $p \geq \alpha$ implies null hypothesis H_0 ; $p < \alpha$ means that null hypothesis is turned down: in this case, the alternative H_A hypothesis applies.

In verifying the hypothesis I selected a few respondent answers that meet the requirement of relevant knowledge of health and healthy lifestyle.

Healthy foodstuff

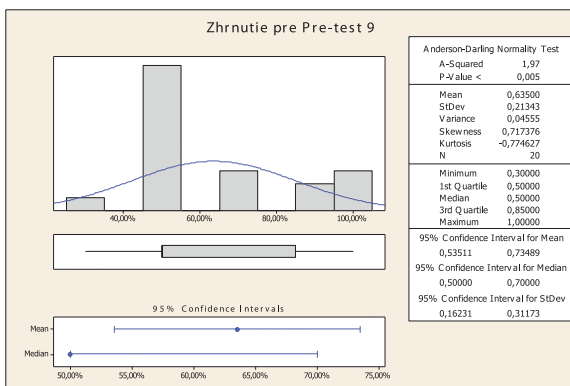


Diagram 1. Descriptive statistics– pre-test

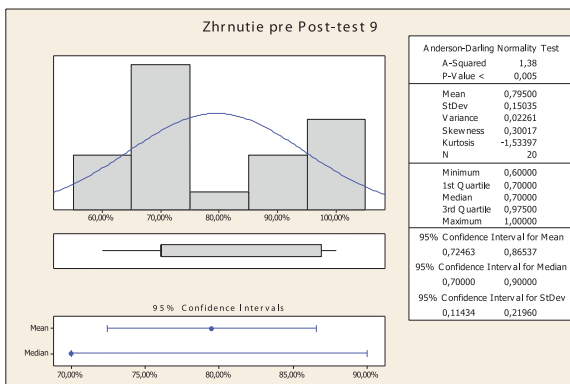


Diagram 2. Descriptive statistics – post-test

The following conclusions can be drawn from this summary:

Given the fact that the data does not have normal distribution, the median value of 50% will be considered to be a mediocre success level in the pre-test, 70% in the post-test. The maximum success level in both the pre-test and the post-test was 100%, the minimum value in the pre-test was 30% and in the post-test 60%. The calculated pre-test dispersion was 4.56%, the post-test dispersion was 2.26%.

Since the p-value calculated by the Mann-Whitney U-test ($p=0,006$) is lower than the specified significance level α , the null hypothesis has been turned down and the alternative H_A hypothesis has been accepted. The H_A hypothesis assumes that the level of knowledge of Roma pupils about healthy foodstuffs will change significantly in favour of the output test thanks to the implementation of the health-education intervention program. The result is represented in Diagram 3.

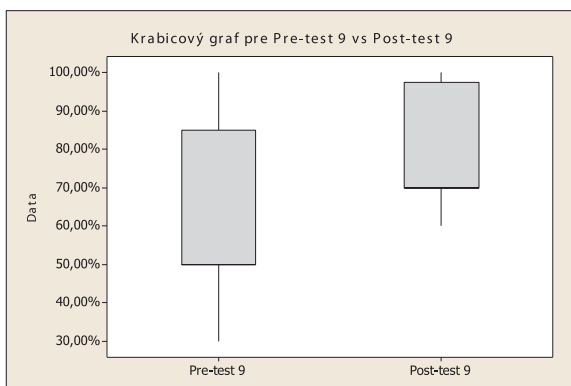


Diagram 3. Box diagram – pre-test vs. post-test

Drugs

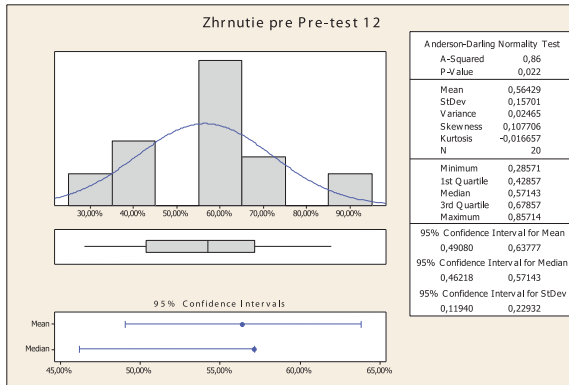


Diagram 4. Descriptive statistics – pre-test

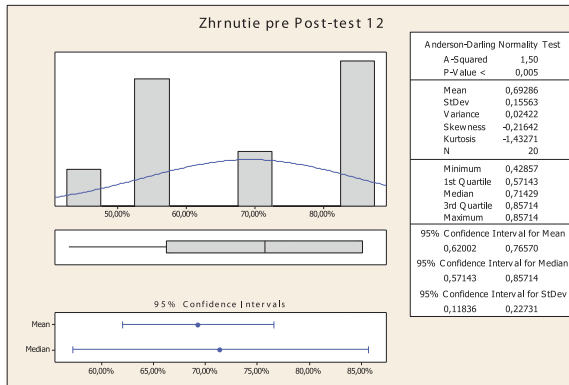


Diagram 5. Descriptive statistics – post-test

The following conclusions can be drawn from this summary:

Given the fact that the data do not have a normal distribution, the median value of 57.14% will be considered to be a mediocre success level in the pre-test, 71.43% in the post-test. The maximum success level in both the pre-test and the post-test was 85.71%, the minimum value in the pre-test was 28.57% and in the post-test 42.86%. The calculated pre-test dispersion was 2.47%, the post-test dispersion was 2.42%.

Since the p-value calculated by the Mann-Whitney U-test ($p=0,0196$) is lower than the specified significance level α , the null hypothesis has been rejected and the alternative H_A hypothesis has been accepted. The H_A hypothesis assumes that the level of knowledge of Roma pupils about drugs will change significantly in favour of the output test as a result of implementation of the health-education intervention program. The result is represented in Diagram 6.

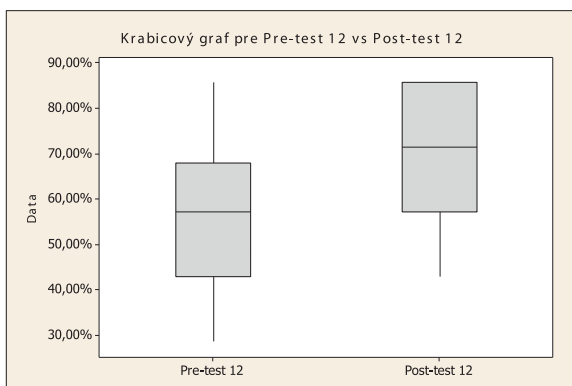


Diagram 6. Box diagram – pre-test vs. post-test

Overall knowledge test results

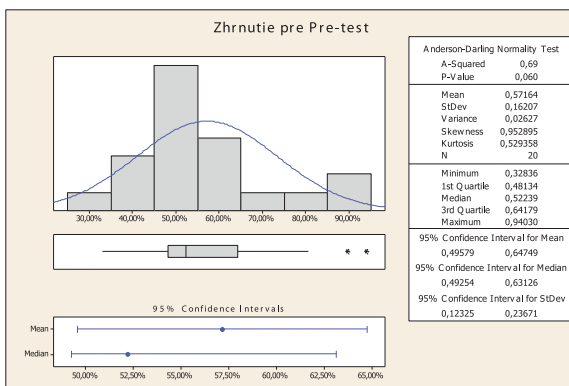


Diagram 7. Descriptive statistics – pre-test

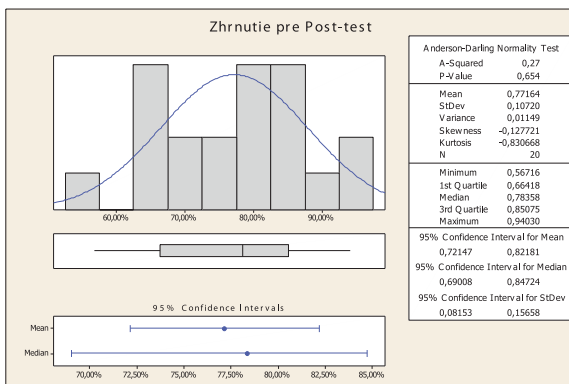


Diagram 8. Descriptive statistics – post-test

The following conclusions can be drawn from this summary:

Since the data correspond to normal distribution, the median value of 52.23% will be considered to be a mediocre success level in the pre-test, 78.36% in the post-test. The maximum success level in both the pre-test and the post-test was 94.03%, the minimum value in the pre-test was 32.84 % and in the post-test 56.72 %.

Since the analyzed data have normal distribution in this case a parametric pair t-test was employed for comparison of the results. Since the p-value ($p=0,000$), calculated by the t-test, is lower than the specified significance level α , the null hypothesis has been turned down and the alternative H_A hypothesis has been accepted. The H_A hypothesis assumes that the level of knowledge of Roma pupils about health and drugs will change significantly in favour of the output test as a result of implementation of the health-education intervention program. The result is represented in Diagram 9.

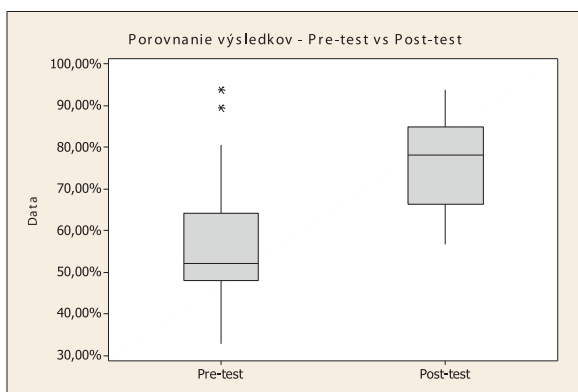


Diagram 9. Box diagram – pre-test vs. post-test

Roma pupils from a socially disadvantaged environment preferred the tasks consisting of circling and underlying the correct answer. They did not like the tasks based on the completion of words or even whole sentences, which is, no doubt, connected to their cognitive limitations manifested in both their verbal and written use of language. Personal assistance (in data collection) was required for explaining individual test items to pupils.

Conclusions

The health-education intervention program reflects the current educational conditions. Its implementation pursued the verification of causal relations between the examined variables and subsequent objectification of the education influence, i.e., the education efficiency of the program. I realize that the objectivity of my findings and their interpretation may have been influenced by certain undesired variables, including circumstances and events that had not been planned before the research implementation, for example, education conditions, teacher personality, school attendance by pupils, family influence, etc. I am aware of these factors that affect the process of education. Therefore, I tried to compensate for their unpredictable effects by careful preparation, fair cooperation with the school teachers, direct program implementation as well as by objective interpretation of the results obtained.

It may be concluded that the structure and contents of the health-education intervention program (temporal succession of the daily routine, observation of specific rules, climate, sense of cooperation, development of responsibility, awareness of ones capabilities, etc.) significantly improve the level of the health-related knowledge of Roma pupils from a socially disadvantaged environment. The program provided me with important information about the way of improving the pro-health knowledge and enabled me to compare my findings with the currently established procedures. In addition, it contributed to the development of the desired cognitive operations in the specific area of education.

The implementation of the pro-health intervention program is an effective supportive strategy of improving the level of knowledge of Roma pupils from a socially disadvantaged environment. The research results suggest that pro-health programs integrated in school curricula may become a relevant part of a systematic education strategy in which the knowledge of health and healthy life-style is an inherent part of a systematic development of the value system in Roma pupils. The ultimate goal of this effort consists in making the care of health an accepted life value and need of the Roma minority.

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REPORTS & REVIEWS

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Review of the Publication: *Umělci v mateřské škole* [Artists in Nursery School]

Reviewed publication: Rochovská, I., Krupová, D., *Umělci v mateřské škole* [Artists in Nursery School]. Prague, 2016. ISBN 978-80-262-1120-4, p. 144.

In 2016, the Czech publishing house Portál published a publication entitled *Artists in Nursery School*. Its authors are Ivana Rochovská and Dagmar Krupová. The authors are an excellent example of the theoretical and practical cooperation which can result in specialist publications, in this case dealing with the issue of the interpretation of visual art at a theoretical level, culminating in practical demonstrations of its application in nursery school practice.

As a reviewer of this publication, I can state that it is mainly devoted to teachers in nursery schools, but can be a source of inspiration for all teachers who are trying to convey visual arts to the children of today in a less traditional form, with an emphasis on experience.

The authors themselves state: "One of the aims of this publication is to highlight the importance of using an interpretation of visual arts as a means of creating the basis of visual literacy among children in a nursery school." They have sought to fulfil this objective in the first chapter.

The next chapter deals with a theoretical explanation of the concept of the interpretation of visual art, focusing on the possibility of a pre-primary education. They characterise a verbal and visual interpretation of works of visual art and their specifics in the application within a nursery school.

The core of the publication is the third chapter, consisting of a comprehensive project focused on bringing together different types of visual art to pre-school children, particularly through an interpretation of specific works of art. The project consists of three parts – within the first of which is a central theme, the interpretation of works of a Slovak painter of world renown, Dominik Skutecký; in the second part, the children are familiarised with works by world renowned artists – Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn, Leonardo da Vinci, Vincent van Gogh, Claude Monet, Edvard Munch and Pablo Picasso, and interpret them verbally and visually. The third part focuses on recognition of the work of contemporary Czech and Slovak Fine Arts - Jiří Sopko, Igor Korpaczewski, Blažej Baláž and Igor Kalný.

As we can see, the selection of artwork by world authors is focused on world famous works of art. Also, the authors sought to highlight contemporary Czech and Slovak artists and bring them to the forefront.

The textual part of the whole publication is suitably supplemented by photographs, documenting the procedure during the implementation of activities and images and the artwork of the aforementioned authors. A significant contribution to teaching practice is made by the comprehensive treatment of the theoretical background, focusing on the issues of visual art and the development of visual literacy in a pre-primary education and the issue of the interpretation of visual arts. A practical benefit also lies in the careful processing of the theme and its inspiring pragmatic part, through which this publication will find its readers within a pedagogical community.

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Marta Oravcová

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Review of the publication: Ježišove blahoslavenstvá. Biblicko-spirituálne zamyslenia [The Beatitudes of Jesus. Biblical Spiritual Reflections]

Reviewed publication: Trstenský, F., *Ježišove blahoslavenstvá. Biblicko-spirituálne zamyslenia* [The Beatitudes of Jesus. Biblical Spiritual Reflections]. Ružomberok, 2016. ISBN 978-80-561-0385-2, p. 80.

The author of the publication, *The Beatitudes of Jesus*, prof. František Trstenský, studied Biblical Sciences and Archaeology in and obtained his doctorate in Theological Sciences. He is currently a professor at the Theological Institute in Spišská Kapitula - Spišské Podhradie, which is part of the University in Ružomberok. He lectures on the New Testament and Biblical Greek. The following information about the author suggests that it is worth reading some of his work – his professionalism, meaningfulness and comprehensibility, may be attributed to his latest publication, which was published by the publishing house of the Catholic University in Ružomberok.

The A6 format of the publication already appears very practical. The reader will be interested, already before opening the book, by the cover itself with a picture of frescoes, by Fra Angelico (Giovanni da Fiesole), depicting Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Dominating the fresco is Christ – the Teacher, sitting on a rock in the middle of a barren landscape; on the ground around him, sit apostles and they are looking at him. Already through the selection of this work for the cover, the author wants to suggest something. According to him, the picture by Fra Angelico is not just about the impartial observer, but it is a call to be a part of it. Similarly,

during a reading of the publication, *The Beatitudes of Jesus*, the author encourages us "... to become one of the apostles, who will listen carefully, with his face drawn to Jesus, to the words of his teacher" (p. 11).

The publication has a very logical and coherent structure. The author has devoted the first chapter to a justification of the selection of the image on the cover. In the next chapter, he goes on to talk about the Beatitudes in general. He notes how difficult it is today to talk about Beatitudes, because nowadays people have completely different criteria for happiness, as opposed to how Jesus sees them. The author relies on a number of Old Testament quotations and the Psalms, but also indicates the precise location of the term "beatified" in the New Testament. According to the author, Beatitudes "...do not form the peak, but a gateway through which we enter to the requirements of the Gospel of Christ" (p. 9).

The next chapter talks about the Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew and the author explains their solid structure. Then, in the individual chapters, he devotes himself to each of the Beatitudes separately. He relies on the words from Greek, through which he brings the reader greater light into the understanding of many concepts and formulations. He also explains the perception of the Beatitudes in the context of the time and the religion in which they were written.

Particularly valuable are the author's considerations and his efforts to more extensively "translate" the individual Beatitudes in his own words. From all of those, we shall at least state the first of them, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Mt 5:3). In the words of the author: "*The fullness of happiness and joy belongs to those, who confess that they need God and create Him space in their lives, because in such people God already operated and brought His work into fulfilment*" (p. 34). In the publication, there is an incredible fountain of valuable ideas and its first reading encourages the reader to begin studying it deeper. The language of the publication is scientific; the author processed the issue in a very knowledgeable way, however, so that it is understandable to the lay public, the community of the faithful, who have an open heart to delve more fully into the Gospel of Christ.

Undoubtedly, references to sources and the literature of big names like Pope Francis, John Paul II or J. Ratzinger also contribute to the quality of the publication.

In conclusion, he has sought to encourage the reader towards reaching for this exceptional publication, in what way if not with the quote by the author himself: *“To be beatified is to tread the path directed towards God. It is a relief from an unhealthy connection towards ensuring our own lives. This is what makes a man free to listen to God, fulfil His will in order to serve others”* (p. 20).

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