

Let us learn to look and sing.

The art and music conference at the faculty of education of the university of west bohemia in pilsen enabled the hitherto lacking professional dialogue on the revision of art education in the framework education programme for basic education

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Introduction

On 1 November 2024, the Departments of Art and Music Education and Culture of the Faculty of Education of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, in cooperation with the Departments of Art and Music Education of the Faculty of Education of Charles University in Prague, organised the first interdisciplinary art and music conference <https://www.ucmesedivatazprivat.fpe.zcu.cz/>. Eighty speakers and a total of 200 participants attended. The conference was dedicated to the founder of *art comparatistics*, doc. Jaroslav Bláha.

The main topic was the revision of *the Framework Education Programme for Basic Education* (RVP ZV) in the field of *Arts and Culture*. In the documents for

the new RVP ZV, the field of *Visual Art Education* is merged with *Film and Audiovisual Education*, and the field of *Music Education* is merged with *Drama and Dance and Movement Education*. Many teachers and experts oppose the planned changes. They are concerned about the decline in the hourly allocation for the existing core subjects of *Arts and Culture*, i.e. visual art and music education, as well as the unprofessional treatment of the educational content of all fields of arts education, and the suppression of developed visual art and music didactics. Some puzzling hybrid fields are emerging, and it is unclear how they will be implemented in schools. As a result, the conference became a platform for a genuine professional dialogue on the education programme for arts education,

the real possibilities of the Czech education system, and the need to convey the basics and continuity of visual art and music education to primary school pupils.

The conference stressed the need to preserve core disciplines while also exploring the possibility of integrating other domains of arts education. Unfortunately, we note that no dialogue on this topic has been conducted with experts in the fields of visual art and music education since the beginning of the curriculum revision by the *National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic* (NPI ČR). As a result, 14 experts in the fields of visual art and music education from various universities and schools have resigned from the working groups of the NPI ČR. From the outset, the revision was approached as a kind of social mandate rather than as an opportunity to achieve the goals professionally and realistically, thereby offering children equal education opportunities. Differentiating arts education in different primary schools will only exacerbate inequalities in access to education.

The unconventional format of the conference was attractive and relaxing for participants. In a very friendly atmosphere, there were numerous musical performances by students of the music department, a performance by the *Jiříčky* children's choir, a happening by Prof. Kurt Gebauer, several exhibitions and performances by students of the visual art department, and, of course, contributions from conference participants from

across the Czech Republic and abroad. The opening plenary lecture was given by doc. Jaroslav Bláha on the interdisciplinary topic *Between the Seen and the Heard*, which traced the so-called musical phase of painting, two levels of the relationship between painting and music, whose genesis relates to the emergence of the artistic and musical avant-garde from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries until the First World War.

The conference papers and the results of the discussion will be published in a professional monograph. The structure of this book has already taken shape at this point, as the conference helped to crystallise three main thematic areas, namely: *Curriculum and Educational Content of Arts Education, Artistic Comparison, and Digital and Audiovisual Literacy*.

Curriculum and educational content of arts education

Section A addressed the most pressing issue: the application of various artistic disciplines—art, music, film and audiovisual arts, movement and dance, and drama education—into primary school practice. There was a discussion on including these fields of arts education in a way that would not disrupt the continuity of existing primary arts education, i.e. visual art and music education. The presenters outlined the possibilities of integrating other fields of arts education,

which are considered complementary nowadays, into the new curriculum, insisting that there is a space for them in elective subjects. Based on examples from abroad, it was found that in all the countries presented, visual art and music education function as essential arts education, and other artistic disciplines in basic education are considered optional. For example, Finland and Germany's curricula and education programmes were presented in depth. The changes being prepared in the Czech Republic therefore have no precedent anywhere in the world (cf. Uhl Skřivanová & Plíhalová, 2022).

The conference also showed the contemporary state of didactics and research in visual art and music education. Competence frameworks have become a focus of interest, whether in terms of the recommended European key competencies for general education or the emerging professional frameworks for teacher graduates in the Czech Republic.

The follow-up doctoral colloquium initiated a discussion on current topics in the didactics of art and music education. The first thematic area focused on the crucial goals of art and music education in the context of the contemporary world. Across the presentations, there was an emphasis on an active, creative and critical approach to artistic creation. PhD students see visual art and music education as important components of general education. The second common theme was innovations in teaching methods in visual art and music education. The pre-

senters reflected on the possibilities of interpreting art in teaching, experimenting with means of artistic expression, overcoming stereotypes and prescriptive methods, creative composing, and the use of humour as a tool of education. The third recurring theme was the linking of visual and auditory means of expression. In music activities, we can encounter different types of graphic recordings that facilitate the students' creative process. Methods of comparing visual art and music offer further creative impulses.

Art comparatistics

Section B was devoted to art comparatistics. The term *art comparatists*, which has not yet been fully established in the Czech environment, is promoted by doc. J. Bláha. In the past, the term *comparative art history* was used. However, this term related to the outdated linear concept of art history, which has not been valid for more than thirty years. It has been replaced by the coherent principle of complex structural connections, not only in different temporal cross-sections but also in disciplinary contexts. This approach, which involves working with cross-cutting themes, has replaced the chronological interpretation of art history.

Doc. J. Bláha found his ideal environment for applying and developing the specific field of art comparatistics at the Department of Art Education of the Faculty of Education of Charles University in Prague, where he began teaching

in 1985. For more than thirty years, he taught the comparative course *Contexts of Art 1 and 2* and published, among others, the monographs *Výtvarné umění a hudba I, 1 a 2* (2012, 2013) and *Křižovatka geneze moderního malířství a hudby* (2007). Later, at the Department of Art Education and Visual Culture of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen, he continued to teach similar comparative subjects, which have become the theoretical basis for the didactic use of interdisciplinary relations in the future pedagogical practice of graduates (cf. Bláha, 2020).

In section B of the interdisciplinary conference, discussions built upon the work of doc. J. Bláha, exploring the possibilities of using art comparison in school practice. It was evident from the contributions that cross-curricular reflection on the expressive possibilities of different art forms teaches pupils and students to consider the deeper structures of artworks and better understand their historical and societal contexts.

Audiovisual education and film as part of arts education

Section C dealt with digital and audiovisual literacy. Participants agreed that current film and audiovisual education outputs only replicate the model of professional filmmaking practices to introduce teachers, students and the public

to the issues of creating a complex film medium. Individual attempts to conceive a methodology of teaching film and audiovisual education are primarily suitable for various extracurricular activities and hobby film clubs. They are an example of a misunderstanding of the essence of the contemporary creative concept of visual art education and art pedagogy.

It is impossible to invent a new field of education, an interdisciplinary “potpourri”, called *Visual and film/audiovisual education*, without making any effort to explore the professional connections deeply. If we want to build a curriculum for the next generations responsibly, integrating film and audiovisual education into visual art education, which has a sophisticated teaching methodology and is a fundamental pillar of art pedagogy, must be deepened in practice (Duncum, 2004; Mašek, 2022; Mašek & Zikmundová, 2012).

The NPI ČR and the current team of experts in the field of *Arts and Culture* should recognise that in designing the curriculum, it is necessary to build on the sophisticated methodology of the art disciplines and to consider the moving image and sound in the context of the development of learners’ creativity. An example of this approach is the methodological publication *Učit se film* (2015) by doc. J. Vančát and doc. M. Smetana, which applies the best methodological practices of arts education.

In conclusion – visual art and music education as a basis for general education

In the current visual age, where social media images play an increasingly important role, concepts along the lines of those in Comenius' *Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart* are more relevant than ever. The philosopher of education, Jan Patočka, rightly recognised Comenius as the founder of universal education in a democratic society and an opponent of one-sided approaches in education (1997). Long before compulsory schooling existed, Comenius wanted education in all basic subjects for all people—"artificium omnes omnia docendi!". And this can only be achieved in compulsory education in primary state schools with education courses of fundamental importance.

In art education—often the only place where students learn to reflect and look critically at media images—visual literacy is cultivated. At the same time, the subject is dominated by practical activities. This practical work is crucial for cognitive development, especially in the early years. It is a way of putting an idea on paper, regardless of how organised the idea is, or a process of modelling, constructing or conceptualising thoughts. This multilayered creative act enables learners to articulate their relations to the world.

Images and music, like language, are part of every human culture. In the evolutionary development of mankind, music has helped to organise the life of human communities. Even today, human communities are formed through communal singing or through the music of different generational cultures. In music lessons at school, individual voices combine to form a choir. In an orchestra, different instruments come together according to the score to create a sonic experience. This requires courage and enhances social skills and the complexity of music perception, just as image perception enhances the brain's cognitive performance.

Of course, theatre, self-produced film, and dance as an expressive game with one's own body belong in a school that introduces the rising generation to the whole range of cultural inventions from past to present. But every stable house stands on a solid foundation, a foundation from which other arts education subsequently draws. Visual art and music lessons connect the present with history and tradition and transmit Europe's cultural heritage. They encourage critical reflection on what we take for granted and develop the ability to make responsible judgements. In primary school, visual art and music education are indispensable foundations for all further education, where head and hand, mind and heart merge.

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