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**VALORIZING THE ARTISTIC CULTURE OF THE STUDENTS**  
**IN THEIR TRAINING TO BECOME PRIMARY AND PRESCHOOL**  
**TEACHERS**

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*Abstract*

This study investigates aspects related to the artistic knowledge, profiles and teaching techniques of primary and pre-school certification students from University of Oradea's Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education program. The study includes 126 participants who completed a survey about their knowledge, artistic profiles and techniques for teaching art and music in preschool and primary school classes. The survey consisted of 24 items, 5 open ended questions, one question asked participants to make connections among specific art elements, and eighteen Likert scale questions. The purpose of this study is to assess how well our pre-service teachers understand and are prepared to teach art and music to their future students. It is important for professors at the university to understand how prepared our students are in the field of art so that we may continuously improve our teaching program. This study answers the following research questions: 1. How prepared are our pre-service students to teach music and art when they become preschool or primary school teachers? 2. How do students propose to select the repertoire of songs and work materials for artistic and plastic education activities? 3. How important is teaching music and art in the minds of our students? Based on the results of our research, we will make recommendations for the improvement of our music and art teaching program at the university.

**Keywords:** artistic culture; artistic education; primary and preschool education, art; teaching;

**1. INTRODUCTION**

What is art today? What does culture mean today? What does this mean for the artist, the public, the critic, the educator? How is artistic culture now formed and how is it transmitted? What is the basis of the arts initiation? The difficulty of answering the above questions and defining art and culture results precisely from the fact that their status changes constantly. In spite of the large number of definitions of art and culture, the synthesis of perspectives provides an incomplete picture.

In the present paper we do not intend to formulate exhaustive definitions of what art, culture, education are, but to capture their essential aspects, which, when harmoniously combined, contribute to the preservation of authentic value as a constant, always alive in the culture of humanity.

Primary and Preschool teachers play a vital role in the process of developing a culture that is opened to the arts in our young students. As professional educators who train our future teachers, it is important for us to continuously grow in our knowledge and skill to help prepare our students to become primary and preschool teacher who will further the arts in their classrooms.

## **2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

From the artist's point of view, art must not be defined but be breathe. Art is the human activity through which the preoccupations, beliefs, questions, ideas etc. get outlined as they merge with the emotions and feelings they generate. At the risk of setting out a cliché idea, we agree that the artist merges with her/his art to such an extent that an attempt to articulate her/his ideas about it is superfluous. We can see, however, that if prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century artists were mainly concerned with finding new forms of illustration of reality, afterwards, the creator's attention goes further on the idea of translating a play of possibilities into art a play.

Escaping from the reality of everyday life in trying to (re) find goodness, beauty and truth in their purest form is one of the possibilities that art gives us all. The idea that art "is an exhale of the everyday world and an attraction of the whole human being - as a unity of living and thinking - to another world, proposed and portrayed in the very work of art" (approx. quote) (Aslam & Moraru, 2017, p. 49), emphasizes that man has access to this world of art with the help of the keys of knowledge and sensation.

After a proper initiation, the art consumer has only to let go of the spell of artwork, rediscovering the world as if for the first time. We can ask whether there is aesthetics beyond beauty or whether harmony is just an attribute of art, and the answer can send us with the thought of a very wide audience, including those in peripheral areas, where the aesthetic takes particular forms. It is worth remembering, in this context, the artistic creations that fall within the aesthetic of the ugly, as forms of expression of the less beautiful but certainly intense experiences. Regardless of the aesthetics in which art falls, it is currently a product for anyone. The difference between art consumers is given by the level of education related to the arts.

We agree with the statement that "since art suggests an alteration of the mundane, a transformation of everyday world, artist and viewer to some extent, need landmarks in their journey, and these landmarks have been given over time what was called artistic canon" (approx. quote) (Aslam & Moraru, 2017, p. 56).

The art critic sets milestones and places artists' creations on a value scale based on aesthetic criteria. Although art is now being addressed to a wider audience, the spectrum of works of art that require critical analysis narrows. So, for contemporary critics, art is a form of elitism that requires profound knowledge, a living intuition, and refinement.

The consonance of the above ideas is illustrated synthetically in the statement: „All artistic manifestations can be reduced to the common denominator of the communication act. Hence, the syncretism of the arts, through which works are not so differentiated, even when their raw material is different. Painting bears the rhythm of music in the germ, as music is a sound architecture. Poets have often rhythms in melancholic tones, as painters have given their panels a musical harmony.” (approx. quote) (Mociulski, 2013, p. 9)

As noted in the previous paragraphs, most art studies give greater importance to the artistic product, that is to creating art. The process of artistic creation is less debated. Is it because the artist's fuss or the phases through which matter passes to the completion of the artwork does not necessarily fall into the aesthetics of beauty? Or because artistic labour is an inner, mysterious act, inaccessible to the eye of the outside world? Psychology is the field that attempts to capture the specificity of the act of creation, placing at its core creativity as an essential attribute of the human personality.

The popularization of works of art is an extensive and complex process carried out on several levels, which involves different approaches depending on factors such as culture, age, level of education,

economic level and interests of those to whom it is addressed. In the context of this paper, we turn our attention towards one who helps prepare the art consumer, the teacher. The way the teacher relates to art, the extent to which he/she feels and knows the arts and his/her willingness to be opened to new. The teacher's permanent curiosity will be reflected in his/her work with the children.

As a "patrimony of values, the axiological universe in which man acquires his dignity" (approx. quote) (Georgiu, 2001, p. 37), human culture is formed and developed through a dynamic and continuous education. We find this idea also in the literary studies of Umberto Eco (2002), which states, "every human being lives within a certain cultural model and interprets the experience based on the universe of assimilation forms he has acquired" (approx. quote) (p. 149). Since culture is a goodness that man acquires, he assimilates it, we can agree with the statement: "Artistic education is defined in short as a sum of means of learning that will provide the student with access to art and, thereby helping him to form a vision of himself and of the world in which he lives" (approx. quote) (Iacob & Mihăilescu, coord, 2016, p. 17). Artistic education activities carried out with children are of great importance not only to achieve our fundamental goal of shaping and developing artistic culture, but also because through art they have the chance to escape from the demanding reality of student life. Art proposes a different world. At the same time, art forms a consistent part of what we call generic culture and represents both the factor that produces permanent changes in its evolution, and its stability factor (Wolf, 1999, p. 289).

According to Radu (2008, pp. 79-81), the level of knowledge and graphical representation of an adult who has not trained in this direction stagnates at the point at which he reached at the age of puberty. From a musical point of view, we can also talk about the fact that the lack of continuous training in vocal and/or instrumental singing leads to lower interpretive capacities. Can we, therefore, consider that in initial teacher education for primary and preschool, we must limit ourselves to capitalizing on those knowledge and artistic skills that pre-service teachers have acquired during gymnasium studies? Shouldn't young students have teachers who are prepared to effectively integrate the arts into their lives in school? Doesn't the university have an obligation to move its future teachers beyond what they learned about the arts in gymnasium?

### **3. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study investigates aspects related to the artistic knowledge, profiles, and teaching techniques of primary and preschool certification students from University of Oradea's Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education program. The purpose of this study is to assess how well our pre-service teachers understand and are prepared to teach art and music to their future students.

### **4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study answers the following research questions: 1. How prepared are our pre-service students to teach music and art when they become pre-school or primary school teachers? 2. How do students propose to select the repertoire of songs and work materials for artistic and plastic education activities? 3. How important is teaching music and art in the minds of our students?

### **5. RESEARCH METHODS**

#### **5.1. Participants**

The study was attended by 126 students from the University of Oradea, the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences, specializing in Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education. Out of these, 19 students (15.1%) are in the first year, 43 students (34.1%) are in the second year, and 62 students (49.2%) are in the third year (2 students (1.6%) did not answer in the questionnaire); 71 students (56.3%) are enrolled in the regular day program and 54 students (42.9%) are enrolled in the weekend program (one participant did not answer). The average age of the students is 26.2, the students range in age from 19 to 56 years old. There are 123 female students (97.7%) and 3 students (2.3%) are males. There are 71 students (56.3%) who come from urban areas, and 52 students (41.3%) from rural areas (3 students (2.4%) did not complete this question).

89 of the participants (70.4%) graduated from high school and 35 students (27.7%) have earned a 3-year or 4-year university degree (2 students (1.6%) did not answer this question). 65 participants (51.6%) graduated from the theoretical profile high schools, 25 students (19.8%) graduated from technological high schools, and 27 students (21.4%) graduated from vocational high schools (8 students (6.3%) did not answer this question). Additionally, 96 students (76.2%) have no experiences of working in education, while 30 students (23.8%) have at least one year of experience working in education.

### 5.2. Method and evaluation tool

We developed a questionnaire containing 24 items: 5 open ended questions, one question asked participants to make connections among specific art elements, and eighteen Likert scale questions. The questionnaire items ask for answers about knowledge, artistic profiles, and techniques for teaching art and music in preschool and primary school classes.

To investigate how students receive information in the field of arts, 7 items were devised. To capture how they can capitalize on educational practice, 17 items were developed. Four questions (16, 17, 18, 22) relate to how students receive information in the field of music culture and education. These questions include: 16. *What types of music do you listen to?* 17. *List your three favourite artists.* 18. *Name your three favourite piece/works/songs.* 22. *Asses your own level of creativity* (scale of 1 – 5). Items 21, 22 were designed to illustrate how students receive information in the field of artistic and plastic education: 21. *List three painters that you know.* 22. *Assess your creativity level* (scale 1 – 5). Additionally, students were asked to answer questions related to the qualification of the teaching staff with which the music education classes were held in their previous stages of preparation. These questions included: 19. *The qualification of the teacher that conducted the music class was:* Fully Qualified, Substitute Qualified, Substitute Unqualified, Other Qualified, Unqualified. 20. *Grade on a scale of 1-10 how effective the music classes were for you.* Eight questions (Questions 8–15) were developed to investigate how students intend to use arts information in educational practice and translate them into musical education activities. This section of the survey included questions like: 9. *In interpreting songs with children, I care about ...* 11. *From my point of view, interpreting a song means ...* Items 1-7 required students to provide an answer on how they translate into artistic and plastic education and technology education information from the arts. These questions included items such as: 1. *When I have visual arts and practical skills, I choose the colouring plate because ...* 7. *When I choose my work patterns, I first take into account the following criteria ...* Additionally, students were asked to provide an answer on the self-perceptual level of creativity and the importance given to artistic education in the activities of preschool, lower school and gymnasium students. (item 23). *Assess the role of arts activities in preschool, lower school and gymnasium* (item 24).

## 6. FINDINGS

The study results are presented using descriptive indices or by showing the percentages for the response for each category of the questionnaire items. The quantitative analysis of the results is presented considering first the organization of the questionnaire items around the dimensions of education: musical education, artistic-plastic education, and technological education. Second, data around the capacity to receive and apply information in the artistic field in didactic activity with preschool and small school children.

### 6.1 Reception of artistic and musical culture by students

From the students' answers to item 16 (What kind of music do you prefer to listen to?) the favourite music genres include:

1. classical music (m = 3,032, sd = 1,430)
2. pop music (m = 3,008, sd = 1,456)
3. religious music (m = 2,814, sd = 1,478)
4. ambient music (m = 2,806, sd = 1,406).
5. maneels (m = 1,387, s.d. = 0,871)
6. rock music (m = 1,935, s.d. = 1,311).

For item 20 (How attractive did you consider the music education classes in the gymnasium?) the students assessed their musical education classes as attractive. The mean score for students (on a 1-10 scale) was 7,698 (s.d. = 2,284). 82 (65,1%), assessed their music teacher in gymnasium classes as a tutor; 16 students (12,7%) rated their music teacher as a teacher of a different specialization; 6 students (4,8%) rated their music teacher as a qualified substitute; and 6 (4,8%) rated their music teacher as an unskilled substitute.

The sources from which students find information in the arts include:

1. the Internet (m = 4,174, s.d. = 1,035)
2. TV shows and TV documentaries (m = 3,376, s.d. = 1,261)
3. reading (m = 3,312, s.d. = 1,227)
4. concerts (m = 2,584, s.d. = 1,302)
5. exhibitions (m = 2,704, s.d. = 1,313)
6. art albums (m = 2,768, s.d. = 1,287)

Painters Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Picasso, Grigorescu and Luchian are mentioned by approximately 100 students (80%). Names such as Andreescu, Boticelli, Renoir are found in approximately 38 students (30%). Brauner, Klimt, Monet and Miess are mentioned in considerably smaller proportions.

The preferred composers and artists mentioned by respondents cover a wide variety of musical genres. Students named the following: Vivaldi, Mozart, Beethoven, Porumbescu, Aurel Tamas, Florica Ungur, Florica Duma, and Andra, Smiley, Il Divo, which shows that students' musical preferences are diverse. The musical works or favourite songs listed are in most cases associated with the performers or composers mentioned in the previous item.

#### **6.2 Valorizing of information from artistic culture in artistic-plastic and technological education by students**

The reason students respond to the use of colouring cards (item 1) in visual arts activities and practical abilities is:

1. they easily associate with the topic of the week or the day (m = 3,672, s.d. = 1,196); used by children (m = 3,619, s.d. = 1,144),
2. using their children, they get beautiful works (m = 3,352, s.d. = 1,14)

On the other hand, the lowest average for this item is for the answer variant being used successfully by other colleagues (m = 2,992, s.d. = 1,273).

The highest average for item 2 in the use of cut elements offered for assembly in children's works during practical skills were as follows:

1. I prefer not to give children cuts but leave them to cut them off (m = 3,261, s.d. = 1,213)
2. will fall more easily during the given working time (m = 3,258, s.d. = 1,396)
3. children will not be injured during work (m = 3,432, s.d. = 1,315)

The lowest averages were obtained because less time would be allocated and explained (m = 2,296, s.d. = 1,136) and because the small ones could not perform other steps in the work (m = 3,328, s.d. = 1,169).

Item 3 of the questionnaire refers to aspects that students take into account when selecting their work materials for the activities. According to the answers offered, the work materials are selected according to:

the consistency between the type of brush, the working material and the work stand (m = 3,968, s.d. = 1,054)

the materials are of quality (m = 3,928, s.d. = 1,001)

brushes of all sizes (m = 3,640, s.d. = 1,240).

Students would not opt for cheap material (m = 1,944, s.d. = 0,961) and would not leave parents to choose the work materials (m = 2,064, s.d. = 1,112). However, in determining the correlation between working materials and the obtained workmanship (item 4), it was found that students only achieve 36,14% of the correct correspondence in the use of water-colour work, 46,51% correct correlation in the use of work with coloured pencils, markers and 54,21% in the use of tempera, gaus, and acrylic work

techniques. A fairly high percentage is also for those who do not provide variants for the three correspondence situations (13,25%, 24,41%, 16,86%) when solving item 4.

Since one of the common rules in the classroom is to protect the group/classroom furniture and clothing, to prevent possible shortcomings in artistic and plastic education (item 5), students consider it important to use water ( $m = 4,00$ ,  $s.d. = 1,077$ ), that it is more important to experience and use dressing gowns or materials to protect the furniture ( $m = 3,333$ ,  $s.d. = 1,332$ ) or to work clean ( $m = 3,332$ ,  $s.d. = 1,411$ ). They do not intend to offer homework ( $m = 1,976$ ,  $s.d. = 1,124$ ) or use exclusively coloured pencils and markers ( $m = 2,656$ ,  $s.d. = 1,032$ ).

When looking for work patterns (item 6), they prefer patterns downloaded from the internet ( $m = 3,976$ ,  $s.d. = 0,924$ ), books ( $m = 3,632$ ,  $s.d. = 1,096$ ) and less from other colleagues ( $m = 2,848$ ,  $s.d. = 1,150$ ).

The criteria according to which they choose the work materials (item 7) are those related to the beauty of the work ( $m = 4,048$ ,  $s.d. = 1,014$ ), the novelty of the working technique ( $m = 3,736$ ,  $s.d. = 1,078$ ) with which the children are familiar ( $m = 3,658$ ,  $s.d. = 1,014$ ).

### **6.3. Valorizing of information from artistic culture in music education by students**

In choosing the song they propose to teach children (item 8), the students consider the following:

1. the content of the ideas of the song ( $m = 4,040$ ,  $s.d. = 1,080$ )
2. the song to be dynamic ( $m = 3,968$ ,  $s.d. = 1,054$ )
3. have a simple formal structure consisting of easy-to-memorize phrases ( $m = 3,84$ ,  $s.d. = 1,065$ ) ( $m = 3,736$ ,  $s.d. = 1,012$ ).

They choose less songs that contain explicit interpretation ( $m = 2,48$ ,  $s.d. = 0,894$ ), or do not specifically follow that the voice of the performer is beautiful ( $m = 2,544$ ,  $s.d. = 1,285$ ).

In interpreting songs with children (item 9), students intend to focus on:

1. the appropriate breathing ( $m = 4,024$ ,  $s.d. = 1,019$ )
2. the song's content ( $m = 3,888$ ,  $s.d. = 1,044$ )
3. the accuracy of the tune ( $m = 3,824$ ,  $s.d. = 1,032$ )
4. the singing of the song ( $m = 3,492$ ,  $s.d. = 1,100$ ).

When I give the tone for a song (item 10), students:

1. aim to keep the same tone for each interpretation ( $m = 4,246$ ,  $s.d. = 0,943$ )
2. use a laptop / phone / tablet application ( $m = 3,456$ ,  $s.d. = 1,241$ )
3. do not think the tone is not important ( $m = 1,680$ ,  $s.d. = 1,051$ )
4. would not even use a musical instrument ( $m = 2,136$ ,  $s.d. = 1,095$ ).

From their point of view, students think that interpreting a song means (item 11):

1. to play respecting the formal structure of the song ( $m = 3,658$ ,  $s.d. = 1,339$ )
2. respect the ratio between voice and instrument intensity ( $m = 3,584$ ,  $s.d. = 1,320$ )
3. sing in concordance with the musical accompaniment ( $m = 3,576$ ,  $s.d. = 1,357$ )
4. sing synchronized ( $m = 3,560$ ,  $s.d. = 1,247$ )
5. interpreting interpretations ( $m = 3,560$ ,  $s.d. = 1,240$ )
6. less singing at will, regardless of context ( $m = 1,928$ ,  $s.d. = 1,130$ )
7. singing loudly ( $m = 2,160$ ,  $s.d. = 1,152$ )
8. just sing ( $m = 2,232$ ,  $s.d. = 1,171$ )

To encourage children to sing clean and easy (item 12), students consider that:

1. the guidelines should be correctly formulated ( $m = 4,208$ ,  $s.d. = 0,994$ ),
2. it is necessary to explain and model the desired sound pattern ( $m = 4,039$ ,  $s.d. = 1,091$ ),
3. giving the personal example ( $m = 3,944$ ,  $s.d. = 1,186$ ).
4. I do not care about this ( $m = 1,408$ ,  $s.d. = 0,976$ )
5. let the children intuitively sing ( $m = 2,464$ ,  $s.d. = 1,111$ ).

In musical activities (item 13), students admit that it is important to explain as much as possible each indication ( $m = 4,008$ ,  $s.d. = 1,110$ ), but it is important to ensure the music flow ( $m = 3,912$ ,  $s.d. = 1,164$ ). At the same time, the music has a greater weight than the speaker ( $m = 3,688$ ,  $s.d. = 1,102$ ), it contradicts with the answer it is good to stop after solving each task to make judgments (even after a song), which also got an increased average ( $m = 3,619$ ,  $s.d. = 1,205$ ).

In the musical activities with children, students would prefer to learn and to sing (item 14):

1. songs from different children's songs (m = 3,976, s.d. = 0,902)
2. internet songs (m = 3,547, s.d. = 1,128)
3. songs from the children's repertoire (m = 3,51, s.d. = 1,202)
4. songs taken from colleagues (m = 2.624, s.d. = 1.090).

The self-assessed level of students' creativity (item 23) is slightly above average (m = 3,491, s.d. = 1,165 on a five-step Likert scale).

The role of artistic education during the stages of human development is considered to be important, both at preschool age (m = 4,555, s.d. = 0,908) and small school (m = 4,447, s.d. = 1,063) and gymnasium (m = 4.103, s.d. = 1.158).

## 7. CONCLUSION

The results of the descriptive study undertaken allowed us to obtain the answer to the research questions but also to reflect on the validity of the answers provided, in accordance with the spontaneous observations of the course activities, seminars, or specialized practice conducted by the applicants with the students along their training at the level of bachelor studies.

Research Question 1: *How prepared are our pre-service students to teach music and art when they become preschool or primary school teachers?*

Compared to seminar activities where students actually solve certain didactic tasks, their answers to the questions in the questionnaire indicate a wider artistic culture and a better knowledge of working techniques and art-specific language elements. Therefore, in interpreting the results of the work instrument used, we do not exclude the possibility that the students have selected desirable answers instead of the variation corresponding to the action they are taking. Students' answers indicate a medium level of their artistic culture (like gymnasium graduates), but a real concern for continuous training as a prerequisite for their professional activity.

It is interesting to note that there are a number of contradictions in the answers given by the students. For example, they say it is equally important to provide detailed explanations of musical interpretation and to perform musical activities in which the speech has a very small weight. Another contradiction can be found in the answers that underline the importance of the exact tone for singing the songs in the repertoire and the lack of any musical instrument as a landmark. From the answers offered, students demonstrate that they understand the importance of using quality work materials, but less than half realize correct associations in the correspondence of working techniques.

Research Question 2: *How do students propose to select the repertoire of songs and work materials for artistic and plastic education activities?*

According to the answers most often, students are looking for online resources for didactic activities and do not intend to take over from other colleagues' ideas about the songs they propose to children or the teaching materials (e.g., colour cards etc.).

Although the collection of songs is mentioned by a considerable number of respondents as a source for the diversification of the repertoire of children's songs, the activities carried out with the students reveal that their solfegiosis skills are limited.

Research Question 3: *How important is teaching music and art in the minds of our students?*

Students consider that the study of arts is very important in all stages of the development of children and young people.

### Perspectives

While initial teacher education for primary and preschool education is late for the acquisition and development of imaging techniques and vocal and instrumental vocal skills, we can still guide students' learning to capitalize on their artistic culture in order to adequately choose content. Beyond the context of courses and seminars, we offer, for example, extracurricular student activities, aimed at viewing art films illustrating the inner world of artists. These can be followed by debates on the topics presented in the films, on cinematographic achievements etc.

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