

THE CONTRIBUTION OF SPECIAL ART EDUCATION IN SHAPING THE MENTAL AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING OF THE INDIVIDUAL

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Abstract: *This paper presents the goals of the study field and project Special Art Education at the Department of Art at Masaryk University in Brno. It assesses individual results of educational practice conducted among selected groups of clients. It focuses not merely on the results of the art activities implemented, but first and foremost on their process, which may have an influence on the mental and social well-being of those involved.*

Key words: *Special Art Education, selected groups of clients, educational practice, artistic self-fulfilment, mental well-being, social safety*

Special Art Education is a bachelor study field offered at the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University in Brno. It focuses on the organisation of art activities for clients from socially disadvantaged groups. Students are offered theoretical and practical art disciplines, and are also acquainted with special pedagogy, social pedagogy, art therapy, etc. (a detailed list of disciplines is available at is.muni.cz). Since 2010, the project Special Art Education, which is co-financed from the European Social Fund and the state budget of the Czech Republic, is also being run at the Department of Art Education with the aim of expanding the existing activities of the Department of Art Education at the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University in Brno, which (within the framework of development of interdisciplinary relations with the Department of Special Education, the Department of Social Education and the Department of Psychology at the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University) offer students a significant increase in their proficiency and competency with a view to finding work with socially disadvantaged groups. After taking a theoretical course and a new media course, the students take part in creative workshops in the environment of socially disadvantaged groups. They are given the opportunity of working with clients in refuge facilities (in Zastávka u Brna and Kostelec nad Orlicí) and an old people's home (Podpěrova, Brno), and become acquainted with the issue of free-time activities for Romany children (The Museum of Romany Culture) and children placed in the Diagnostic Institute for the Young (Veslařská, Brno). The final group with which students of special art education work are mentally handicapped clients (The Social Care Institute in Nové Zámky u Litovle).

These art activities take the form of regular art workshops, courses taking place over a number of days, and other one-off events focusing on particular topics. The students get to know the specific features of the individual units and remain in close contact with their tutors – professionals with great knowledge and experience in leading the art studios at the specific institutions. Many of the clients at the given institutions have gone through traumatic experiences and difficult situations in life, and for many of them it is not easy to come to terms with the fact that they now find themselves in institutional care. These clients are exposed to pressures of many and varied kinds, and frequently experience stressful situations. If they are exposed to stress, which is understood as *“an internal state of a person who is either directly threatened by something or expects such a threat and believes that he or she does not have sufficiently strong defences against unfavourable influences”* (Křivohlavý J., 1994, p. 10), then ways of alleviating the effects of this stress must be found. As I. Žaloudíková (2001, p. 65) states, *“part of knowing how to handle and deal with extraordinarily difficult situations involves education (or self-education) leading towards positive thinking and perception”*. We can, therefore, anticipate that special art education “educates” the client in positive thinking and perception by means of artistic activity – i.e. in an active form. Clients are offered the chance not merely of coming to terms with difficult situations in life, but also of clearly determining their further direction in life, shaping a positive relationship with themselves and the outside world, and alleviating stress and relaxing.

Before beginning their practical experience, the students meet up together with a psychologist, a special educationalist, a didactician and a tutor to present their art project proposals designed for a specific institution. This takes the form of an open discussion in which all those taking part can join, sharing their own experience and knowledge of the issues. Students completing this form of educational practice get to test the benefits of art activities for themselves. These benefits, as has been indicated, do not lie primarily in mastering an artistic language or its formal refinement. Work in art workshops becomes an opportunity for “participant reciprocity”. According to H. Babyřádová (2005, p. 85) this should *“create a specific atmosphere that is relaxed, unprejudiced, open and inspirational.”* An awareness of reciprocity offers an opportunity to communicate with others and help one another resolve technological procedures, enables the sharing of experience, and offers a chance of holding talks on the works produced. If a student has a certain concept, he or she should also be open to the activities of the clients and approach them as unique personalities with individual knowledge, experiences and values in life. This openness on the part of the initiator of art activities should also take in a respect for ethnic, religious and cultural differences, for which reason he or she should be accessible to clients rather than playing a “controlling” role. He or she should accept the specific conditions in which he or she works with clients and, in particular, respect their ideas about their own work. If artistic means of expression are offered, the primary focus should not be work produced with the “outward effect” in mind. Clients master their own artistic language on the basis of experience that can be further developed during the course of other artistic activities. Activities that are associated with pleasant experiences may have a strong motivational character, for which reason the initiator of art activities should support the artist in the need to create, in order that external stimuli are gradually transformed into the client’s own internal

motivation and the need to come to terms actively with the outside world and his or her own problems. The special art education tutor Eva K., who has extensive experience of working in art studios in refuge facilities, has created graphics with clients under the specific conditions in force in Foreigner Detention Facilities. These clients stay in places with barred windows, in isolation, under the supervision of the police (foreigners without a residency permit, for example). She documents the importance of art with a specific example – one of her clients depicted his family, and this picture took the place of a photograph for him, and he carried it with him “over his heart”.

During the preparation of art workshops, the students make use of their own work, which provides inspiration in, for example, the selection of means and topics of artistic expression. Low self-esteem and a lack of confidence in their ability to create something engender anxiety in these clients and an unwillingness to express themselves artistically by drawing and painting. This is true predominantly of adults, for which reason there should be a wide range of means of artistic expression. Clients are offered new media (they get the chance to use a video camera, camera and data projector). The art teacher, who should have the ability to assess a specific situation, respond readily to it and offer alternative means of artistic expression, also plays an important role here.

Students consider communication with the client a difficult skill, for which reason it is often associated with a feeling of uncertainty. If students find they can handle a situation well, successfully establishing contact with the clients of refuge institutions for example, they can overcome the fear arising from language barriers, manage the spontaneous behaviour of hyperactive children in the studio, etc. Such experiences then provide great motivation for their educational work and a personal “gain”, as is documented by the following comments – “... *this was my first long-term practical experience, and I had the chance of trying out how to behave in situations like this. I discovered a great many things to think about.*” (Kamila K.); “... *the chance to look into another world, to break down prejudices about refugees, a view of other cultures, was extremely useful to me.*” (Tomáš P.); “... *the most wonderful thing was when I began to feel the barriers between me and some of the clients breaking down and they began to trust me.*” (Martina F.); “... *I looked at my fellow students (colleagues) from a different point of view, and I think that is also important.*” (Markéta T.). Many students state that it was necessary for them to display empathy and patience in communication, particularly in the beginning when they were building a relationship with clients to persuade them to take part in an artistic activity later. This experience is described by the student Pavla J., who worked with old people. “*I tried to put myself in their place, while carefully watching their reactions to my initiative.*” She then expresses her feeling of satisfaction when she managed to involve a client known for being “grumpy”, who at first did not like anything and considered everything pointless, in an art project. “*I began making fun of everything artistic with him. After a while, he began communicating more, smiled and took an interest in art.*” The clients often persist in a feeling of their own lack of ability and helplessness. This may be a way of drawing attention to themselves and attracting the attention of the art teacher.

Special art education offers clients the chance of expressing themselves, sharing creative work, being active, creating untraditional approaches and means of expression for them, and this can be documented by an event that aimed to overcome “something

that has restricted them all their lives”. The student Pavla J. called this event “*throwing art materials out of the window*”. In spite of initial worries, the event produced interesting “results” – “even the walking stick of a lady who is extremely particular about refined manners flew out of the window”. The student adds that, “she expressed a desire to discover and try out new things”. It is, therefore, surprising for students when they come up against the views of staff members who believe that their efforts are futile or pointless.

The benefits of art activities should always be assessed from the position of the client. As Tomáš V., who works at the art studio in Zastávka u Brna, says, “*we don't produce great works of art every day. The workshop is a pleasant place for our clients where they feel good. It is a meeting place. They don't always have to make something. The aesthetic quality need not be what is important for the client. What is important is to take the clients seriously and respect them...*” This view is confirmed by the following situation described by one of the students. While she was painting a rainbow with an eight-year-old Turkish girl, she noticed a woman watching, who did not say anything and seemed, in the words of the student Milada T., to be frustrated. It occurred to her to try to engage the woman in the art activity through the little girl. She whispered to her to dip her brush in the paint and hand it to the woman. She explained to her that the woman would like to paint but was evidently afraid. The girl hesitated for a moment, then mixed the paint and handed the brush to the woman, who took it shyly and joined the little girl, and they painted the rainbow together. Even though they did not talk together, the little girl smiled at the woman. As the student describes the situation, “*that moment was a turning point. The woman asked for some paper and paints and began painting.*” At first, she did not talk to the students, but the more she painted, the more she opened up to them. She talked of her daughter, from whom she was separated, and about missing her. She gradually felt a need to talk with the student about her paintings. This situation made a great impact on the student, who realised the benefits of her educational practice, which was providing her with such valuable experience and showed her that this artistic work should be associated with feelings of satisfaction in the client and the chance of seeing the work produced by others. The students can share their new experiences resulting from their work with these clients at a reflective seminar. They also learn to reflect the course and results of what is often mentally demanding educational work under the guidance of an experienced psychologist.

Although the emphasis should be placed on the creative process, original and artistically impressive works are also created during these art activities. Their presentation can have strong motivational and stimulating benefits for the client, for which reason the works produced by clients are displayed to the public and appear at exhibition venues and in the media, which is one of the planned results of the grant project. These exhibitions should provide those producing the given works with an opportunity of enjoying their own “moment of fame”, thought they are also an opportunity for acquainting the public with the issue of social disadvantaged groups.

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The views of students in the study field Special Art Education at the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University in Brno

PŘÍNOS SPECIÁLNÍ VÝTVARNÉ VÝCHOVY K UTVÁŘENÍ DUŠEVNÍ A SOCIÁLNÍ POHODY JEDINCE

Abstrakt: Příspěvek představí cíle studijního oboru a projektu Speciální výtvarná výchova, které jsou realizovány na katedře výtvarné výchovy MU Brno. Zhodnotí dílčí výsledky pedagogických praxí, které probíhají u vybraných skupin klientů. Zaměří se nejen na výsledky realizovaných výtvarných činností, ale především na jejich průběh, který může mít vliv na duševní a sociální pohodu zúčastněných aktérů.

Klíčová slova: speciální výtvarná výchova, vybrané skupiny klientů, pedagogická praxe, výtvarná seberealizace, duševní pohoda, sociální bezpečí