

The Development of Art Appreciation Abilities of Pupils in Primary School

Abstract

In Slovenian schools pupils have few opportunities to observe, understand and enjoy works of art. Contemporary art education in Slovenia should aim to combine the development of productive and receptive artistic abilities. This would make more comprehensive artistic development of pupils possible.

In this study we monitored the development of the art-appreciation abilities of 10–11-year old pupils in primary schools in northeastern Slovenia. The results show that the level of art-appreciation abilities is somewhat average, however, girls showed higher developed art-appreciation abilities than boys. Based on the results we can conclude that the development of art appreciation abilities in our art-education program is given too little attention.

Keywords: art appreciation, visual arts education, primary school, perception and reception of artworks

Introduction

Contemporary art education works in two directions: the first is directed toward developing the creative abilities of pupils, and the second tries to establish a suitable attitude towards works of art and culture. (Duh & Zupančič, 2009). Quality art education can best be achieved with the implementation of both productive and receptive artistic activities. The role of understanding our contemporary cultural environment has become one of the most important aspects of modern teaching

methods. Such is the opinion of Efland, who wrote: "Given the crises in culture, what is the purpose of art and hence the purpose of art education in the postmodern era? In my view the function of the arts continues to be 'reality construction.' And hence we teach art to widen and deepen our understanding of the cultural landscape we inhabit." (Efland, 1992, p.118). Art education is therefore a subject where pupils continuously express themselves creatively and also develop the ability to receive and perceive works of art. This is referred to as art appreciation.

Art appreciation in education and its definition

Back in 1902, Alfred Lichtwark wrote that the primary goal of observing artworks "is not to deepen one's knowledge, but to awaken and strengthen the skills of observation and the ability to perceive so as to form a basis for the formation of taste." (Laven, 2006, p.134). Franz Čizek incorporated this idea into his youth art school, which he established in Vienna in 1897. In this way he was able to give equal importance to making art and observing works of art. In his school the children were relaxed and happily talked about the work that they created. By using these techniques, Čizek set up one of the major milestones in art education (Gutteridge, 1990). The Japanese Kanae Yamamoto (1882–1946) must also be mentioned. In the first two decades of the last century he had already included art appreciation in his school curriculum (Ishikawa, 2008). A landmark change was also made by Arthur Lismr, who developed a school of art appreciation for both children and adults in 1910 (Nairne-Grigor, 2004). In the former Yugoslavia, Kraguljac and Karlavaris introduced the term art appreciation in the 1970s. It was used to describe the process of the active reception of quality works of art and the creative internalized reaction to them. The term appreciation combines the perceptive and receptive ability of both children and adults. It indicates the complexity of the phenomena by observing and accepting artworks as a process of art evaluation. Art evaluation is not just passive observation, but a dynamic process that allows for the establishment of a relationship between a work of art and the viewer. Art appreciation is based on feelings associated with experience and acceptance of the harmony and expressiveness of artistic elements (Duh, 2004). In the United States, between 1980 and 1990, new movements began recognizing the importance of art appreciation. Eisner (2002) wrote that the appreciation of artworks by pupils is a reflection of the importance that society as a whole gives to art education. Despite the results of many American studies (Meyer, 2009 Amrein-Beardsley, 2009), which show high public support for the importance of art education, schools actually attach increasingly less importance to art education. From this perspective, Jackson (2009) appropriately raised the question: how can such a message affect the development

of art appreciation and how can it affect the way in which art teachers motivate pupils?

Art education in the Slovenian education system emphasizes the encouragement of free artistic expression, while less attention is paid to the appreciation of art. The art education curriculum in Slovenia also states the following: "The subject is based on the discovery and encouragement of pupils' creativity, innovation, artistic sensitivity, observation abilities and judgment." (Učni načrt /Compulsory curriculum/, 2011). With the implementation of innovative work methods, art appreciation abilities can be successfully developed out of the existing Slovenian programs and curricula.

Development of art appreciation abilities

Payne believes that we need to start early encouraging the development of art-appreciation. He wrote: »It is important to bear in mind that a creative approach to art appreciation is needed if taught to younger children.« (Payne, 1990, p.105). The systematic teaching of art appreciation should be implemented by the entire education system. In art appreciation it is understood that a pupil sees a work of art, understands it and enjoys it (Duh, 2004). In developing art appreciation in the teaching process it is important to delineate the nature of art appreciation abilities. According to Kraguljac and Karlavaris (1970), there are two theories: (1) art appreciation ability is a specific talent that exists or does not exist in the pupil, and (2) art appreciation ability is part of pupils' broader capabilities, such as: perception, imagination, association, memory, emotion, and overall evaluation. Numerous studies (Duh 2004, Kraguljac & Karlavaris 1970, Kraguljac 1966) support the theory that art appreciation abilities are equally present in children as all their other abilities. This means that all normally developed children have these abilities, and that they can be developed with adequate education.

Art appreciation can help to clarify the problem of valuing a work of art, as either positive or negative, depending on pupils' perceptive and receptive abilities. This requires practice and initiative and helps to develop the ability to describe what is seen with the most appropriate words (Barrett, 2007). Stout points out that artistic writing is one of the most powerful ways of strengthening critical responses to art and developing personal abilities in art education. Writing is an important link between language and visual images (Stout, 1993).

In primary school, the perception of complex art forms, in all their subtle details, is a task that requires a lot of training and experience. Artistic structures are received through perception and observing. "Observing is actually discovering structure. Structure shows us the art's components and the order in which

components affect each other. Painting and sculpture are manifestations of such exploration of structure” (Arnheim, 2003, p. 265). Systematically directing students’ attention to concrete elements and structures of a work of art can lead to more subtle perception of art. This can then trigger more subtle emotional reactions and can lead to a more comprehensive experience of the artwork. “In schools, a manner of observing and experiencing paintings needs to be established that will enable these elements to become a part of the students’ interests. This will generate conditions for the successful development of art appreciation abilities” (Duh & Čagran & Huzjak 2012, p. 628). In visual arts education, teachers can utilize different methods for the reception of artworks. This is done by stressing the analytical, comparative and meditative components. The latter is stressed by the method of ambivalent associations. Awe states that it relates to “the multi-layered nature of the artist’s expression on the one hand and the processes of associations on the other. That they vary and diverge due to their subjective nature” (Awe, 2001, p. 34). Learning is based on the connection between current sensory stimuli and the memory of good or bad experiences (Seumel, 2001).

Observing and receiving artwork, and thus the development of art appreciation, go through different phases that different authors interpret in different ways. Pagany (1993) has determined four phases: (1) the perception of an artwork with all the senses (2) the releasing of emotions (3) the transformation of the images into speech according to the impression left by the painting on the student and (4) activity. The first three stages favor the reception of paintings and the fourth requires production. In a program especially designed for secondary school children, a number of authors (Anderson, 1988; Clark, 1960; Feldman, 1987; and Jones, 1986) have described seven steps or phases in observing artworks: (1) preparation for viewing (2) first impression (3) description (4) analysis (5) interpretation (6) background information (7) informed judgment, which is a culminating reflective activity in which students come to some conclusions about the artwork (Arts Education, 1996). Another group of authors (Ishizaki, Wang and Parsons, 2008) emphasize six fields in art appreciation: (1) Association (2) Observation (3) Impression (4) Analysis (5) Interpretation and (6) Judgment. In order for pupils to be able to enjoy art forms and internalize them, they first need to recognize them.

In visual arts education, it is therefore important for pupils to adopt the technique of viewing aesthetic objects with regard to their obvious visible qualities. This technique needs to be learned and nurtured. It must also be flexible enough to be adapted to different works of art and the different personalities of the observers. Seumel points out that in choosing teaching methods, “other factors are also important, such as the size of the group, group dynamics, students’ motivation, age,

level of previous knowledge as well as the limitations of space and time” (Seumel, 2001, p. 10).

Research Methodology

General Background of Research

The purpose of this study was to determine at what level is the development of art appreciation abilities of pupils in the 5th grade of primary school, aged 10–11. Besides doing fine art activities and developing creativity, contemporary art teachers are attaching more and more importance to the development of art appreciation. Therefore, we were interested at what level is the development of the art appreciation abilities of children according to the sample. We were also interested in whether there is a difference between the perceptive and receptive abilities of the pupils. We wanted to determine whether gender has an effect on the developmental level of the appreciation abilities of children in this age group.

Methods, sample of research, and hypothesis

In our research, we used the descriptive, non-experimental method of empirical pedagogical research. The study involved 12 primary schools in Slovenia, located in the Maribor school district. Of these, six were urban and six were suburban schools. We used a random research sample which included 307 children in the 5th grade of primary school, aged 10–11. By gender, the sample comprised 150 girls (48.9%) and 157 boys (51.1%).

In the study, we were interested in the level of art appreciation abilities of primary school pupils aged 10–11. The hypothesis of our survey was put into the form of research questions.

General research questions (RQ-G):

RQ-G1: At what level is the development of the perception of artworks by pupils?

RQ-G2: At what level is the development of the reception of artworks by pupils?

RQ-G3: Is there a difference between the perceptive and receptive abilities of pupils?

RQ-G4: At what level is the development of the art appreciation abilities of pupils?

RQ-G5: What is the distribution of art appreciation abilities of pupils?

Specific research questions (RQ-S):

RQ-S1: Is there a difference in the achieved level of perception by pupils according to their gender?

RQ-S2: Is there a difference in the achieved level of reception by pupils according to their gender?

RQ-S3: Is there a difference in the achieved level of art appreciation ability of pupils according to their gender?

Instrument and Procedures

For our research we used the AP test, which is part of the LV1 test (Duh, 2004). The AP test follows pupils' art-appreciation development, and is based on the answers received from multiple-choice questions. The formation of the test was based on various studies on this topic (Kraguljac & Karlavaris, 1970, Berce-Golob, 1990, Duh, 2004, Duh & Zupančič & Čagran, 2011, Duh & Čagran & Huzjak, 2012). The AP test produced sufficiently reliable results. The AP test was designed in the form of a questionnaire with eight questions. All the questions were based on the artwork of Paul Cezanne *Blue Vase* (oil on canvas, 52 x 63 cm, Musee d'Orsay, Paris). The questionnaire and the image were obtained from a Web site (AP Test).

Data Analysis

The data we obtained was processed with the use of the computer program SPSS. The parameters of the basic descriptive statistics were used to show frequency distributions. The existence of differences in gender was tested with the Leven F-test and t-test for independent samples.

Research Results and Discussion

The results are presented in three sections:

In the first part we present the level of art-appreciation abilities of primary school pupils aged 10–11. In this context, we were also interested in at what level is the development of their perception and reception of artworks and whether there is a difference between children's perceptive and receptive abilities in observing and experiencing works of art.

In the second part we show the distribution of art-appreciation abilities by children.

In the third part, we were interested in the influence of gender on the development of the art-appreciation abilities of the pupils.

Level of art-appreciation abilities of pupils aged 10–11

With the AP test we determined the level of the development of art-appreciation abilities of pupils in primary school, aged 10–11. The art-appreciation abilities

of the pupils were determined by the total amount of points they received in the categories of visual perception, visual reception and knowledge.

Table 1. Statistical results of points scored according to Maximum, Minimum and Average in determining the level of the art-appreciation abilities of pupils.

Tasks	n	Rang		Mean	Stand. deviation	Skewnness	Kurtosis
		MIN	MAX	\bar{x}	s	Skew	Kurt
Perception	307	1	9	6.895	2.210	-0.271	-0.790
Reception	307	0	14	8.371	3.096	-0.657	-0.081
Knowledge	307	0	3	1.895	1.449	-1.709	-0.550
Appreciation	307	4	26	17.162	4.555	-0.190	-0.407

The results (Table 1) show obvious differences when comparing the averages between the obtained levels of perception and reception. For the criteria of perception, the pupils obtained a higher average ($\bar{x} = 6.895$), which is 76.6% of the total possible points. For the reception factor ($\bar{x} = 8.371$), the students reached only 60% of the total possible points. The pupils obtained a slightly higher, but average score in perception (RQ-O1) and a lower score in reception (RQ-O2). The perceptive abilities are shown in the form of free artistic creativity, technical knowledge, familiarity with art materials and the ability to observe aesthetic phenomena in the environment and in works of art. This is all intertwined with the skills of free artistic creativity, which still has a leading role in the process of art education. In the process of the reception of artworks, intellectual and emotional processes are intertwined with global, synthetic experiences and an analytical-critical evaluation of the individual layers of the artwork (Karlavaris, 1991). This process develops more slowly.

The results of the level of art-appreciation abilities show a relatively low, but expected average ($\bar{x} = 17.162$) with deviation ($s = 4.555$). The table shows that the distribution is slightly skewed to the right ($KA = -0.190$) and relatively normal ($KS = -0.407$). Similar results ($\bar{x} = 17.647$) for the same age of pupils (10–11 years old) were obtained in previous research (Duh & Čagran & Huzjak, 2011). We found that the development of art-appreciation abilities of the pupils involved in our study is at an expected level. This provided the answer to our research question RQ-O4.

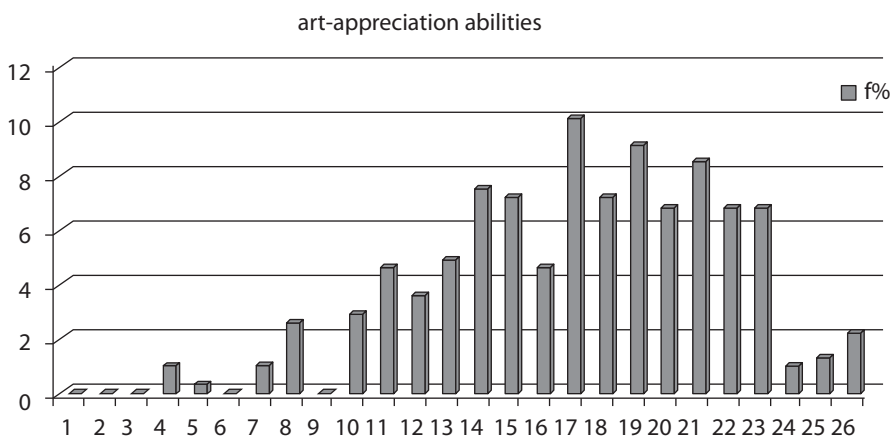
Art-appreciation is an ability that can be successfully developed with high-quality education. This fact can be seen in the comparative results of a recent survey (Duh & Zupančič & Čagran, 2011) done on pupils aged 13–15. For their age range

they obtained higher results. The 13 year-old pupils scored a higher average ($\bar{x}\bar{x} = 18.469$) than the younger ones ($\bar{x}\bar{x} = 17.647$). The 15 year-old pupils scored even better ($\bar{x}\bar{x} = 19.269$). However, this result is just barely at an average level for pupils who are finishing primary school after nine years of schooling.

Frequency distribution of the results of the art-appreciation abilities of pupils aged 10–11

In the continuation we are interested in the dispersion of the collective achievement of the whole sample ($n = 307$) for the level of art-appreciation abilities (RQ-O5). The frequency distribution of art-appreciation abilities for the pupils aged 10–11 can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Frequency distribution of pupils' art-appreciation abilities



From the graph (Figure 1) it can be seen that the frequency distribution of the overall results of the boys and the girls for the level of art-appreciation abilities shows a normal distribution of the obtained results. It can be concluded that the dispersion of the achievements in art appreciation is similar to the dispersion of the results of the pupils' other abilities in heterogeneous groups. This answered our research question RQ-O5.

The role of gender in the development of art appreciation

In the study, we were also interested in whether there is a difference in the achieved level of perception and reception between the pupils according to gender. We wanted to know whether there is a difference in the achieved level of art appre-

ciation abilities between the pupils according to gender. The results of the level of visual perception, reception and ability of art-appreciation for 10–11 year-old primary school pupils according to gender are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of the t-test of differences between the mean and the F-test of equality of variances (Leven's F-test)

Factors	gender	n		Mean	Stand. deviation	Test of homogeneity of variances		Test of differences between means	
		f	f%	\bar{x}	s	F	P	t	P
Perception	M	157	51,1	6,745	2,195	0.524	0.470	- 1,222	0.223
	F	150	48,9	7,053	2,221				
Reception	M	157	51,1	8,063	3,179	0.779	0.378	-1.787	0.075
	F	150	48,9	8,693	2,983				
Appreciation	M	157	51,1	16,624	4,614	0.763	0.383	- 2,132	0.034
	F	150	48,9	17,726	4,408				

Table 2 shows that there is no statistically significant difference ($P = 0.223$) in the average level of perceptive abilities according to gender. A comparison of the arithmetic means shows slightly better results in favor of the girls (RQ-S1). Similar gender differences can also be observed when comparing the level of receptive abilities. Gender differences are not statistically significant ($P = 0.075$), but they show a tendency in favor of the girls. A comparison of the arithmetic means shows better results for the girls than the boys. We have found that the girls achieved a slightly higher level of reception than the boys (RQ-S2).

A comparison of the levels of art-appreciation abilities shows that there is a statistically significant difference ($P = 0.034$) between genders. We found that the girls achieved a higher level of art-appreciation abilities than the boys (RQ-S3). The results are not surprising, since we have observed similar differences in other studies. In other research (Duh & Zupančič & Čagran, 2011) on older pupils (13–15) it was proven that girls achieved higher levels of perception, reception and art-appreciation. For all three factors, the girls achieved higher averages, but not at the level of statistical significance.

Based on the fact that the ability to appreciate art is, like other abilities, naturally inherent, a connection can be made to other findings (Barrett, 1950, 2007; Burman, & Bitan, & Booth, 2008), which prove that girls show higher levels of development than boys. This is also reflected in the level of the development of art appreciation abilities. The difference is especially apparent in receptive skills, which involve

emotional perception of art and the ability to express their emotional perception of artworks using words.

Conclusions

With the assumption that art appreciation abilities are inherent in everyone, we carried out empirical research on a random sample ($n = 307$) of students from Slovenian schools, aged 10–11, in which we studied their level of art appreciation abilities. We statistically analyzed the pupils' levels of perception and reception, dispersion of art appreciation abilities and the role of gender.

We found that the pupils' perceptive abilities are more developed than receptive ones. The level of art appreciation abilities is somewhat average, which has already been shown in earlier research (Duh, 2004; Duh & Čagran & Huzjak, 2011). The perception of artworks is a prerequisite for the development of art appreciation and is to a greater or lesser extent inherent in all pupils. We did not detect any differences according to gender in the level of perceptive abilities. Subtlety of perception can lead to a more accurate reception of artworks, especially when there is an admixture of emotional and spontaneous components intricately intertwined with conscious and rational components. Making sense out of all this involves learning and practice. In this study we delineated the differences in the development of receptive abilities according to gender. The female sample reached a higher level of development of receptive abilities than the male sample.

The pupils' attention must be directed towards concrete elements and structures in the work of art. Some individual layers of artworks may be easier to bring closer to pupils, others more difficult. With some pupils, this happens sooner and with others later, but definitely not at the same time (Duh, 2004). We need to consider the age and gender of the students and their experience with visual arts. Gender is a factor where statistically significant differences in the level of development of art appreciation can be seen. We confirmed the assumption that art appreciation is a part of the general abilities inherent in us all. The findings show that the results of the pupils, according to their art-appreciation abilities, are quite evenly distributed.

Artistic creation and other activities related to artworks help each pupil to become aware of his or her own visual experiences and to acquire the potential for an artistic viewpoint and critical relation towards his or her own environment. Art appreciation is thus part of their general abilities. The development of artistic design, sensitivity to artistic language, aesthetic experience in the process of expression, technical experience, working with varied materials and other activities

have a beneficial effect on the development of art appreciation abilities (Duh & Zupančič & Čagran, 2011). Moreover, we know (Kraguljac & Karlavaris 1970) that by developing art appreciation abilities, we can have a positive impact on the pupils' artistic creation. School programs should develop art appreciation for all pupils on the basis of artistic content. The existing art education programs and coarse plans for primary schools in Slovenia provide no concrete instructions for developing art appreciation, but still leave a sufficient opportunity for planned development of appreciative abilities. The task of teachers is to identify these opportunities and realize them in accordance with the modern paradigm of visual arts education, which emphasizes the equal importance and positive mutual interaction of artistic creation and art appreciation.

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