

## **Identification of Attitudes of Early School Education Teachers towards Contemporary Art in Early School Education – Construction of a Research Tool by Design**

### **Abstract**

This document is a continuation of the reflections on issues related to the phenomena surrounding the reception of contemporary art, initiated in the scientific study *Around Art Reception. A Model of Empirical Cognition of Early School Education Teachers' Attitudes to Modern Art – A Project Study*. The article presents basic assumptions regarding the exploration of attitudes of early school education teachers towards contemporary art, and its main part is an attempt to present the author's research tool in the form of a measure to identify the attitudes of early school education teachers towards contemporary art in the early school education process. The presented research tool consists of 50 test positions grouped in three dimensions: thoughts and beliefs about the characteristics of the object of an attitude, sensations and emotions associated with the object of an attitude, as well as actions and behaviours towards the object of an attitude, aimed at determining the attitudes of early school education teachers towards contemporary art in the early school education process within the following system: acceptance – ambivalence – rejection. The projected research tool is the initial proposal for further attempts by researchers of the subject to create their original tools for identifying audiences' attitudes towards contemporary art.

**Keywords:** *contemporary art, reception of contemporary art, early school education teacher*

## **Introduction**

Civilisational progress, the scientific and technological revolution and the changing socio-cultural conditions of a globalising world have resulted in the complete unpredictability of the external conditions in which humans will be operating in two decades or even in one. The postmodern reality entails not only the unpredictability of the labour market, lifestyle, identification of competencies of school leavers and identification of the competencies of teachers and their potential for effective teaching and educational impact. It cannot be overlooked that teachers find themselves axiologically lost, uncertain, internally torn and often helpless in the postmodern world that is multicultural, incoherent and characterised by kaleidoscopic changeability. Among the many theories, trends, educational doctrines and various approaches, teachers usually adopt replacement solutions just to survive in the school environment. Those who study teachers' attitudes point out that most teachers are closer to the adaptational standard in their professional role than to the heuristic one. Their conservative tendencies contribute to this situation. Their attitudes and behaviours lack readiness and ability to act unconventionally and innovatively, and they limit themselves to implementing the minimum curriculum in a standardised manner. They often apply strategies and defence mechanisms that allow them to survive in their profession (Kosiba & Madejski, 2014).

Despite certain problems with self-identification, a contemporary teacher should match contemporary times, current trends and challenges of daily life and the future. High flexibility and openness to socio-cultural transformation seem to be necessary. A teacher needs to change along with the transforming education system. Curriculum requirements, educational content and needs are changing. Such changes entail the need to change the methods used in school subjects. Ways that used to be considered effective cease to be while new ones appear, and techniques of educational interaction also diversify. In order to face these challenges, teachers need a positive attitude towards professional training. Updating one's knowledge and skills has always been part of the profession but has never been as important as today.

It is worth noting that early school education teachers are professionally prepared to teach at the first stage of education, covering the first three years of primary school. Those employed in the general education system are responsible for the achievement by pupils of the basic cognitive objectives of early school education, including introducing children to the world of art and preparing them to receive artistic projects through the perception and release of creative

expression and the creation of an open attitude towards the world and people. They also take responsibility for the social development of children, enabling them to participate in society under accepted rules of group coexistence. The primary educational tasks of the teacher during the early childhood education period are directed towards identifying the child's current developmental needs and diagnosing basic school-type skills. Without these activities, the teacher cannot accurately set goals for the child's education and plan activities for the upcoming period of the child's stay at school. The assumed education objectives can only be attained if the teacher uses strategies considering the child's developmental characteristics. Teaching strategies should involve activities that support the child's physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development. A child can gain knowledge and develop skills as part of the memorisation process through contact with the information received directly from the teacher or read in books and by initiating and stimulating thinking processes as a result of the child's own searches, exploration of the environment and reflection.

Implementing a series of tasks aimed at creating a contextually rich educational space for the child and providing an opportunity to develop cross-curricular, interdisciplinary and life-enhancing skills requires specific personal predispositions, theoretical and praxeological competencies, ethical qualities and life wisdom.

Therefore, the topic of the emotional-cognitive-behavioural orientation of early school education teachers towards contemporary art seems interesting, bearing in mind the observations and assuming that the presence of art in the educational space should be as frequent as possible, as this is the only way to overcome the elitism in interaction with a work of art and to make it possible to actually experience art (not treating it as an elitist space 'not to my liking', 'which I do not and will not understand').

It is worth mentioning here that attitudes have been studied for many decades. Links between attitudes and people's behaviour were sought as early as the 1920s and 1930s. Attitude can be understood as a relatively permanent tendency to take a positive or negative view of a thing. Anything and everything can be an object of an attitude: people, places, abstract concepts and any material objects (including aspects of culture and art). Positive or negative evaluations are determined by beliefs, feelings and behavioural intentions towards the object of an attitude. The literature emphasises the need for the three elements of attitude: cognitive, emotional and behavioural (Aronson et al., 1994, p. 314). At present, it is not denied that attitudes may include all elements but, first, these elements do not have to be coherent and, second, an attitude may be mainly based on a single element. Attitude is characterised by two important features: the sign of the attitude as an

attitude can be negative or positive, and the intensity of the attitude: from very weak to very strong.

In the light of the presented statements, the present analyses assume that attitude is a predisposition to judge an object positively or negatively and consists of three elements: thoughts and beliefs about the object of an attitude, affect, i.e., the attitude holder's feelings and emotions towards the object of an attitude, and the behavioural intention and actions towards the object of an attitude.

Given the findings and the fact that comprehensive research on contemporary art has not been carried out in our country for years, while knowledge of it is residual and fragmentary, there is an inescapable need for exploration to identify attitudes towards contemporary art based on precise tools that measure this construct. Therefore, the following analyses focus on the author's version of the measure of attitudes towards contemporary art in the selected group of early school education teachers.

### **Index of Statements Identifying the Attitudes of Early Childhood Education Teachers towards Contemporary Art – Preliminary Version**

The research tool presented in this paper is part of the classic issue of that aspect of art reception that deals with the attitudes and competencies of both potential and actual recipients of art. The axis of structural efforts consisted of the Model of Empirical Cognition of Early School Education Teachers' Attitudes to Modern Art<sup>1</sup> based on the following assumptions:

- Attitudes towards contemporary art are a set of relatively stable dispositions to evaluate contemporary art and react emotionally to it, accompanying beliefs about contemporary art objects and verbal reactions and actions aimed at behaving in a specific way towards contemporary art objects.
- An early school education teacher characterised as a professional mediator between the child and contemporary art is a person whose cultural activities are extensive and varied on account of his or her profession; such a teacher divides elements of popular culture into more and less valuable ones with-

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<sup>1</sup> A more extensive analysis of the empirical recognition of attitudes of early school education teachers towards contemporary art is contained in the publication by B. Mazepa-Domagala (2022, pp. 117–131).

out, however, being guided by any specific external criteria; the teacher's attitude to the various values of culture is reflexive and critical.

- The reception of art among early school education teachers having specialist artistic competence is a separate way to approach art, including contemporary art.
- The basis for identifying early school education teachers' attitudes towards contemporary art consists of the structural three-element concept of attitudes that assumes the existence of three components: cognitive, affective and behavioural (Aronson et al., 1994).
- When studying cultural phenomena, we can introduce a form of specific valorisation into the research procedure, i.e., value judgements, which we nevertheless treat flexibly on the one hand by building a continuum of valuation while, on the other hand, we categorise the evaluations.

It was also assumed that attitude cannot be measured based on one or a few indicators. One needs a complex measure consisting of a greater number of statements, some of which should have a direction in line with the attitude, while for others the direction should be opposite. It was also considered that the five-level Likert format would be convenient for respondents to respond to the designed statements. The designed tool required the adoption of a specific (notional) scoring system, and the resulting point totals should be regarded not as true numerical values (attitude values) but as the basis for ranking the respondents depending on the sign and intensity of an attitude from the most positive (acceptance) to the most hostile one (rejection).

It is worth mentioning here that the designed research tool in the form of an index of statements identifying attitudes of early school education teachers towards contemporary art in the process of early school education can be applied not only to recognise the attitudes of respondents (early education teachers) towards the analysed object of an attitude but also to determine the degree of individual components of an attitude towards the indicated object of an attitude, to estimate which component is dominant in the attitude structure and which is a determinant of the attitude. It can also be used to determine the relations between selected socio-occupational factors (age, gender, education, work experience) and an attitude and its individual components.

With these assumptions in mind, including the three-element concept of attitude, a set of plausible components has been defined to be considered when generating the items of the designed index. Thus, the cognitive component is estimated based on the verbal statements of beliefs expressed by an attitude holder towards the object of an attitude; the affective component of the attitude

is determined by the expressive reactions towards the object of an attitude related to verbal evaluations and statements of the attitude holder's feelings expressed towards the object of an attitude; the behavioural component is made up of verbal statements defining the attitude holder's actions and behaviour towards the object of an attitude.

At this stage of the research tool construction, it was assumed that all test items will have the form of closed statements to which respondents will respond on a five-level scale expressing their degree of agreement with the content of the statement (response categories depending on the wording of the statements: agree; tend to agree; difficult to say; tend not to agree; disagree as well as never; rarely; sometimes; often; always). It is worth mentioning that applying the five-step Likert format is the most commonly used type of a multi-item measure of attitude and allows for the relatively highest internal consistency of individual dimensions with a fixed number of test items.

Based on the adopted assumptions, 80 initial test items related to attitudes towards contemporary art were generated and evaluated by experts in terms of factual and theoretical relevance and linguistic correctness. As a result, after eliminating the statements considered in the expert judgment to be "against the tide" in relation to the remaining statements, a preliminary version of a simple attitude identification index was obtained in the form of a set of 50 statements to be rated by respondents (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Index of statements identifying attitudes of early education teachers to contemporary art in early school education

Statements determining attitudes of early education teachers to contemporary art in early school education	Degree of agreement with a statement				
	Disagree	Tend not to agree	Difficult to say	Tend to agree	Agree
01. Contemporary art is interesting but one has to know it in order to talk about it.					
02. Contemporary art is not for ordinary people and even less for children.					
03. Contemporary art is not true art.					
04. No knowledge of art or the artist is necessary to evaluate a contemporary work of art.					
05. When communing with contemporary works of art, one experiences aesthetic satisfaction.					
06. Contemporary art is just an area that only a small percentage of society find interesting.					

Statements determining attitudes of early education teachers to contemporary art in early school education	Degree of agreement with a statement				
	Disagree	Tend not to agree	Difficult to say	Tend to agree	Agree
07. Contemporary art is the most inaccessible of all areas of culture, a hermetic and esoteric world.					
08. Contemporary art in the education of younger schoolchildren: a) Is an important stimulus of visual sensitivity of a young recipient b) Is redundant with respect to the stimulation of children's artistic expression and in the formation of the perception and reception of art.					
09. Contemporary art has its own rules.					
10. Contemporary art oversteps boundaries and violates feelings.					
11. Contemporary art is good art, you can see the amount of work and skill of the artist in it.					
12. Contemporary art is controversial and unobvious art.					
13. Forms and elements of contemporary art can be successfully used in the early school education process.					
14. Younger schoolchildren are not interested in contemporary art.					
15. The early school education teacher has many opportunities to foster an interest in contemporary art in the art education of pupils in grades I to III.					
16. I don't feel sufficiently competent to introduce elements of contemporary art to early school education.					
17. Art has never been highly regarded in school curriculums.					
18. Learning activities become more attractive when they include selected forms and elements of contemporary art.					
19. Contemporary art is too broad a phenomenon.					
20. Contemporary art has its own language one needs to know it to perceive it at an appropriate level.					

Statements determining attitudes of early education teachers to contemporary art in early school education	Degree of agreement with a statement				
	Disagree	Tend not to agree	Difficult to say	Tend to agree	Agree
21. Headteachers in schools are sceptical towards using elements of contemporary art in the education of its youngest recipients.					
22. My personal mission in my profession focuses on:					
a) The general development of the pupil's personality aimed at developing sensitivity and perceptiveness;					
b) Preparing pupils to participate in cultural life by stimulating visual perception processes and artistic activities;					
c) Bringing joy and satisfaction with the effects of artistic activities;					
d) Developing skills in terms of the perception of contemporary art through the reception of art and the use of information contained in it;					
e) Creation of statements as artistic objects by pupils;					
f) Developing skills in terms of the analysis and interpretation of cultural texts;					
g) Developing the pupils' ability to use simple tools and materials mentioned in the curriculum;					
h) Development of pupils' ability to organise their own work;					
i) Developing the ability to distinguish basic disciplines of the visual arts, the character and function of works in these disciplines;					
j) Demonstrating a desire to shape their own environment artistically and to value and protect works of art and artistic creations.					
23. Early school education should be expanded to include aspects of modern art.					
24. Works of contemporary art are incomprehensible, too complicated.					
25. Delivering educational content that includes aspects of contemporary art requires extra effort and greater commitment from the teacher.					



Statements determining attitudes of early education teachers to contemporary art in early school education	Degree of agreement with a statement				
	Disagree	Tend not to agree	Difficult to say	Tend to agree	Agree
26. I feel that I understand contemporary art, I can perceive it and talk about it.					
27. I am an early education teacher and not someone who knows the topic, I'm not someone for whom art is a lifelong passion.					
28. I feel that introducing elements of contemporary art to art classes in grades 1 to 3 will disrupt the teaching process.					
29. I enjoy teaching classes that include aspects of contemporary art.					
30. My greatest job satisfaction comes when: a) A pupil engages in a creative activity using the basic means of artistic expression and other disciplines of art; b) I can see that my pupils are interested in contemporary art and largely able to interact with art.					
31. When I teach classes with elements of contemporary art, I feel I am an art educator.					
32. I feel that the teaching I do gains in attractiveness when I am an art educator.					
33. Unlike ancient art, contemporary art requires extensive explanations and cannot be understood in any way without extensive curatorial commentary.					
34. I think that contemporary art can be understood and liked by just about anyone, all it takes is willingness, openness and a few words of explanation from the experts.					
35. Early school education curriculum lacks space for contemporary art.					
36. At present, art education in the process of early school education is like a phantom limb, it does not exist in practice.					
37. The reason why contemporary art is not understood is that works of contemporary art are incomprehensible, too complicated.					
38. I think that children do not yet have any formed expectations of art or, if they do, they expect surprise rather than aesthetic delight.					

Statements determining attitudes of early education teachers to contemporary art in early school education	Degree of agreement with a statement				
	Disagree	Tend not to agree	Difficult to say	Tend to agree	Agree
39. Contemporary art requires entirely new languages of description and representation than the primary media available to date, i.e., text and exhibition.					
	Never	Rarely	From time to time	Often	Always
40. I include the aspect/elements and forms of contemporary art in the teaching situations I organise.					
41. I search for occasions to introduce children to contemporary art.					
42. I talk to children about contemporary art as part of my art education classes.					
43. I organise excursions to exhibition venues/institutions exhibiting contemporary art.					
44. I initiate, organise or execute classes and workshops incorporating elements of contemporary art.					
45. I organise children's artistic activities in which live art – visual-performative activities – are only one of the elements.					
46. I try to apply forms of contemporary art in the education of younger schoolchildren.					
47. In preparing younger schoolchildren to participate in cultural life, I work with exhibition institutions and cultural centres.					
48. I look for and try to apply methods that make it possible to convey knowledge about contemporary art and discuss art using a more accessible language.					
49. I am interested in lectures and workshops on contemporary art.					
50. Something I enjoy the most is explaining art, showing that it is absolutely normal and everyone can understand what the artists are talking about.					

Source: Own work.

Explanations: Statements for which the adopted scoring is reversed

In order to synthetically quantify the value of measuring early school education teachers' attitudes towards contemporary art in early school education in line with methodological recommendations<sup>2</sup>, 10 indicator statements were identified for each of the three attitude components in a total pool of 50 statements addressing different aspects of attitude. The evaluation of the cognitive component should be based on statements numbered 02, 03, 04, 07, 08a, 13, 14, 15, 18, 20; the affective component is determined by statements 22d, 22f, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30b, 31, 32 and 38 while the behavioural component is determined by statements 40–49 (Table 2).

**Table 2.** An index of indicator statements determining attitudes of early education teachers towards contemporary art in early school education

Components of an attitude	Statements determining attitudes of early education teachers towards contemporary art in early school education
COGNITIVE COMPONENT  VERBAL STATEMENTS OF BELIEF	02. Contemporary art is not for ordinary people and even less for children.
	03. Contemporary art is not true art.
	03. No knowledge of art or the artist is necessary to evaluate a contemporary work of art.
	07. Contemporary art is the most inaccessible of all areas of culture, a hermetic and esoteric world.
	08. Contemporary art in the education of younger schoolchildren: a) Is an important stimulus of the visual sensitivity of a young recipient
	13. Forms and elements of contemporary art can be successfully used in the early school education process.
	14. Younger schoolchildren are not interested in contemporary art.
	15. Early school education teacher has many opportunities to foster an interest in contemporary art in the art education of pupils in grades I to III.
	18. Learning activities become more attractive when they include selected forms and elements of contemporary art.
	20. Contemporary art has its own language; one needs to know it to perceive it appropriately.

<sup>2</sup> According to A. N. Oppenheim, when studying attitudes, one should not ask individual questions but rather use multiple statements on which the respondent should take a stance. Sets of statements give more reliable results than individual questions because they neutralise the specificity of phrases, which helps eliminate distortions.

Components of an attitude	Statements determining attitudes of early education teachers towards contemporary art in early school education
AFFECTIVE COMPONENT EXPRESSIVE REACTIONS	22. My personal mission in my profession is: d) Developing skills in terms of the perception of contemporary art through the reception of art and the use of the information contained in it; f) Developing skills in terms of the analysis and interpretation of cultural texts.
	26. I feel that I understand contemporary art, I can perceive it and talk about it.
	27. I am an early education teacher and not someone who knows the topic, someone for whom art is a lifelong passion.
	28. I feel that introducing elements of contemporary art to art classes in grades 1 to 3 will disrupt the teaching process.
VERBAL EVALUATIONS AND STATEMENT OF FEELINGS	29. I enjoy teaching classes that include aspects of contemporary art.
	30. My greatest job satisfaction comes when: b) I can see that my pupils are interested in contemporary art and largely able to interact with art.
	31. When I teach classes with elements of contemporary art, I feel I am an art educator.
	32. I feel that the teaching I do gains in attractiveness when I am an art educator.
	38. I think that children do not yet have any formed expectations of art or, if they do, they expect surprise rather than aesthetic delight.
	40. I include the aspects/elements and forms of contemporary art in the teaching situations I organise.
	41. I search for occasions to introduce children to contemporary art.
	42. I talk to children about contemporary art as part of my art education classes.
BEHAVIOURAL COMPONENT SPECIFIC BEHAVIOURS	43. I organise excursions to exhibition venues/institutions exhibiting contemporary art.
	44. I initiate, organise or execute classes and workshops incorporating elements of contemporary art.
VERBAL STATEMENTS DEFINING BEHAVIOURS	45. I organise children's artistic activities in which live art – visual-performative activities– are only one of the elements.
	46. I try to apply forms of contemporary art in the education of younger schoolchildren.
	47. In preparing younger schoolchildren to participate in cultural life, I work with exhibition institutions and cultural centres.
	48. I look for and try to apply methods that make it possible to convey knowledge about contemporary art and discuss art in a more accessible language.
	49. I am interested in lectures and workshops on contemporary art.

Source: Own work.

Based on the assumptions of the applied Likert format, individual response options were assigned numerical values from 1 to 5. Thus, the degree of evaluation of each statement was assigned a number. It has to be noted that the scoring for negative statements is reversed: 5–1; this rule applied to the following statements: 02, 03, 04, 07, 14, 16, 27, 28, 33.

The attitude component indicator is obtained by adding the point values of the responses obtained for each indicator statement from a specific component. Within each attitude component, results can be obtained within the range of 10–50 points; the higher the score, the higher the level of a specific component. Levels of individual components are defined in indicator ranges: low, average, or high. It should be noted that this assessment is based on the standard sten scores (1-10), where 1-4 sten is interpreted as a low level, 5-6 as an average level and 7-10 as a high level.

For each attitude component, it was assumed that the score range of 10–23 indicates a low level, the range of 24–37 indicates an average level of the component, and the range of 38–50 indicates a high level of an attitude component.

Scores of the three components added together result in obtaining an overall attitude index within the 30–150 points range. The following scoring was adopted for the general attitude indicator: 30–67 rejecting attitude; 68–112 ambivalent attitude; 113–150 accepting attitude.

At this point, it is necessary to refer to the assessment of the reliability of the designed research tool, understood as the internal consistency of the tool and aimed at determining Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient. As a result of the validation, good/high values of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient were obtained for all attitude components (cognitive = 0,801, affective = 0,823, behavioural = 0,819). However, it should be remembered that the good/high reliability of the designed tool obtained in the validation test does not guarantee a reliable measurement in every study, and therefore Cronbach's alpha index must be calculated each time.

Summing up this presentation of the author's tool for the identification of attitudes displayed by early education teachers towards contemporary art, it is worth adding that an attitude is by its very nature an ordinal variable, and appropriate measurement categories to describe it are phrases qualified by such words as 'more', 'less', 'significantly', etc. Therefore, arranging the group of people surveyed on a notional *continuum* from the most negative attitude, which in this case is the attitude of rejection, to the most positive attitude, i.e., the attitude of acceptance, is sufficient as a starting point for further analyses, including the examination of the dependence of attitude on other variables.

## **Final Remarks**

The knowledge of professional intermediaries between children and art, i.e., early school education teachers, is crucial from the perspective of art perception and reception due to the teachers' attitudes towards contemporary art. The greater the number of representatives of this social group that display positive attitudes towards contemporary art, the relatively greater the chance of its acceptance among the youngest audience.

The designed research tool in the form of an index of statements identifying the attitudes of early education teachers towards contemporary art is not only an initial proposal and a starting point for further attempts by researchers of the subject to create their own, original tools for identifying the attitudes of audiences towards contemporary art. It is also a voice in the discussion about the possibility of using attitude measures described in the methodological literature when conducting empirical research.

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## **AUTHOR**

### **BEATA MAZEPA-DOMAGAŁA**

Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Pedagogy, University of Silesia in Katowice  
Grażyńskiego 53,40-126 Katowice, Poland

E-mail: [beata.mazepa-domagala@us.edu.pl](mailto:beata.mazepa-domagala@us.edu.pl)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9651-0640>