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Grammar School Students' Opinions on the Art Curriculum: An Estonian, Portuguese and Slovenian Comparative Study

TOMAŽ ZUPANČIČ^{*1}, ANNELY KÖSTER², AND TERESA TORRES DE EÇA³

∞ The article presents the attitude of grammar school students towards the art curriculum. It first provides an overview of the characteristics of contemporary art education, with an emphasis on the postmodern art curriculum and on linking course content with students' interests. The study is based on the descriptive and causal non-experimental method, with a sample comprising 387 Slovenian, Estonian and Portuguese students. It was established that the students place the highest value on developing creativity, and are less interested in art history content and learning about the basics of the formal art language. They are attracted to contemporary topics, such as graffiti, multicultural art, the use of new media, and digital technologies. The results of the study provide opportunities for future comparative analyses and starting points for updating art curricula.

Keywords: art education, the art curriculum, grammar school, motivation, students' interests

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Mnenja dijakov o vsebinah pouka umetnosti: primerjava med Estonijo, Portugalsko in Slovenijo

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☞ V članku predstavljamo odnos dijakov srednjih šol do vsebin pouka likovne umetnosti. Najprej podamo pregled značilnosti sodobne likovne edukacije, s poudarkom na postmodernem likovnem kurikulumu in povezovanju vsebin predmeta z interesi dijakov. Raziskava temelji na deskriptivni in kavzalno-neeksperimentalni metodi. V vzorec je bilo vključenih 387 slovenskih, estonskih in portugalskih dijakov. Ugotovili smo, da dijaki najvišje vrednotijo razvijanje ustvarjalnosti. Manj so navdušeni nad umetnostnozgodovinskimi vsebinami in učenjem osnov formalnega likovnega jezika. Privlačijo jih sodobne teme, kot so: grafiti, multikulturalnost, uporaba novih medijev, digitalna tehnologija. Izsledki raziskave nudijo možnost za nadaljnje primerjalne analize in izhodišča za posodabljanje likovnih kurikulumov.

Ključne besede: likovna edukacija, likovni kurikulum, srednja šola, motivacija, interesi dijakov

Introduction

The last thirty years have seen major changes to teaching art at the global level. The main changes have been influenced by the ideas of the postmodern visual arts curriculum (Efland, 1992; Boughton & Mason, 1999; Hickman, 2005; Hardy, 2006b), which emphasises the importance of contemporary art, visual culture and popular culture, as well as the value of connecting art education with the social, cultural and political problems of contemporary society. In accordance with the postmodern doctrine, the curriculum emphasises concepts and ideas (Dawtre, 1996), transcending the prevailing modernist focus on formal visual elements, grammar and language, and erasing distinctions between high and low/popular art (Boughton, 1999). It is very open, fluid and without strict or enduring rules (Blohm, 1995). Efland (1992) provides an answer to the question of the purpose of art – and therefore also of art education – in the postmodern era. In his 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). The importance of contemporary art practices is emphasised by many authors (Cole, 1996; Dawe Lane, 1996, etc.), with these practices being seen as a crucial part of motivation in the classroom. Hardy (2006a) wrote: “Recent research by the National Foundation for Educational Research convincingly concludes that schools which incorporate CAP [contemporary art practice] into their curriculum see an improvement in the motivation and enthusiasm of students while encouraging creativity and thinking skills and widening students’ social and cultural knowledge. The NFER’s Dick Downing elaborates: “Young people are exposed to contemporary art practice all the time, for example through its influence on advertising, the internet and pop video; when it’s included in the curriculum, contemporary art practice appears to provide a very accessible route to learning” (Hardy, 2006a, p. 12).

Burton (2004) emphasises that engagement in the arts has an impact on young people’s motivation for school, especially on how they develop and manipulate imagery and how they perceive and think about their world. Linking art to everyday life and popular culture, as well as to the political and social problems of the contemporary world, is an important part of today’s art education (Boughton, 1999; Jagodzinski, 1999). Stokrocki (2004) links art education to school, community, intercultural and electronic contexts. The multicultural aspect of contemporary education and art education (Boughton & Mason, 1999; Blocker, 2004; Krek & Metljak, 2011) is emphasised together with the importance of sustainable development in art education (Duh & Herzog,

2011; Jabareen, 2012). The sustainable paradigm in art education intertwines with contemporary social issues. Tomšič Čerkez (2013, p. 94) emphasises that the commitment to authentic and current problems in our societies must be amongst the main objectives of sustainable art education.

Parsons (2004) tries to articulate the vision that lies within the current interest in integrated curricula in art education, stating: "It is a vision that harks back to the progressive era and at the same time responds to the contemporary developments in the art world and in society in general. It connects integrated curriculum with a focus on significant ideas, an interest in social problems, and a concern for students' struggle for a stable and healthy identity. It focuses on students' understanding of important topics and on their ability to connect school learning with their real daily world" (Parsons, 2004, p. 791).

In light of these findings, the characteristics of contemporary art curricula are that they are set very broadly and inclusively, they are open to different content and current issues, they are associated with the interests of youth, and they are adaptable and responsive to current social events. The main objectives and directions of teaching art do, of course, remain in the professional domain, while the methods, content and examples of how to realise these objectives are increasingly becoming the domain of individual teachers. The choice of content depends on the affinity of the teachers, the students' interests and the characteristics of the environment, time and society.

Teacher autonomy

One of the general principles of education, as provided by the White Paper on Education in the Republic of Slovenia (Krek & Metljak, 2011), is the autonomy of the educational institution and the individual employed by it. This also includes the professional autonomy of teachers (Krek & Metljak, 2011, p. 14), a factor that is emphasised by contemporary art education professionals. An important characteristic of contemporary art curricula is "the aim of reducing prescription and allowing schools to decide how to teach whilst refocusing on the core subject knowledge that every child and young person should gain at each stage of their education" (Steers, 2014, p. 9). Furthermore: "To nobody's surprise the DfE [2011] reported that there was broad support for reducing unnecessary prescription and bureaucracy and for giving teachers greater freedom to use professional knowledge and for the principle of a National Curriculum" (Steers, 2014, p. 9). Freedom is an important part of the art educational process as a whole. On the grounds of their complexity, contemporary works offer rich possibilities of interpretation on multiple levels. Jagodzinski (1999) wrote: "how

the artworks are structured and the effects of its viewing should remain the art educator's priority" (Jagodziniski, 1999, p. 316) .

The challenge for contemporary art teachers is the unbearable lightness of the freedom to develop their own methods and interpretations of artworks, as well as the freedom to choose topics that are current and interesting to young people. "If we were to adopt the idea that a curriculum is also a narrative, a kind of a fiction we use to portray possibilities for teaching and learning, we might also assume that no universal curriculum is likely ever to meet the needs and interests of all individuals, anymore than one universal kind of art is likely to satisfy the needs of all cultures and persons" (Efland, 1992, p. 119). Many authors emphasise the importance of art teachers' autonomy in areas of curriculum planning and implementation in school (Short, 1995). In his book, Dunn (1995) offers strategies that art educators can use to build up their own curricula.

Slovenian art curricula are facing similar problems to those faced in other countries, some of which arise from the (still) prevailing formalist paradigm that bases visual arts in schools on knowledge and practical work on formal art language. The result is that contemporary "art can seem both mystifying and irrelevant to many young people who see little or no relation between it and the things that are important to them" (Cole, 1996, p. 146). Bračun Sova and Kemperl (2012) emphasise that, despite the reform, "the curriculum for art education does not realise selected components of the competence of cultural awareness and expression, largely due to the curriculum's conceptual structure. Art education is centred principally on art-making activities" (Bračun Sova & Kemperl, 2012, p. 71). The second problem is that numerous syllabi are still too detailed and exhaustive and do not provide teachers with enough freedom in choosing content and work methods.

The modernisation of art curricula considers these contemporary professional findings while also giving teachers increasingly more autonomy in choosing work methods and content. Knowing and understanding students' notions of and interests in content, topics and teaching methods is an important part of developing students' intrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated students show a higher level of interest in the subject. Furthermore, it is easier for a teacher who knows the students' interests to link the content more effectively and position it within the students' system of values, and to develop suitable didactic strategies. However, as has already been pointed out (Tomšič Čerkez, 2013, p. 79), it is not possible to create strategies without proper information about the views of students. The understanding and attitude of students towards the art curriculum were thus the main focus of the study that is presented below.

Research

We were interested in the views of secondary school students regarding the content taught in art education, as well as their attitudes towards the existing art curriculum and what they find more and less important. We were also interested in the content that they would like to learn about and their attitudes towards content that is traditionally not part of art curricula. We wanted to find topics of interest in art education classes in order to improve students' intrinsic motivation, and to determine the topics, aspects and aims of art education that students consider important. This would give us an insight into how students comprehend art education. We were also interested in possible differences between the Slovenian, Estonian and Portuguese respondents.

The research method

The study is based on the descriptive and causal non-experimental method.

Research sample, population

The studied population covers grammar school students aged 15–18, with a random sample of 378 students: 142 from Slovenia, 122 from Estonia and 114 from Portugal. By choosing a sample of three European countries, we sought to establish whether there are any common tendencies. We were also interested in the eventual differences with regard to the country and its education system.

Data collection and instrument

We prepared a questionnaire, the first part of which includes questions on age, school, gender and nationality. In the main part, the respondents used two different 3-point scales. In the first scale, they rated the importance of individual aspects of art education, and in the second they rated their interest in individual aspects, with 1 representing the least important/least interesting and 3 the most important/most interesting aspect.

The questionnaire includes 20 topics and aspects related to grammar school art education: (1) Analysing contemporary artworks; (2) Analysing classical artworks; (3) Art history topics (Antiquity, Renaissance, Baroque, etc.); (4) Learning about graffiti; (5) Art-making with digital media; (6) Social questions (addictions, unemployment, violence, etc.); (7) Different art techniques;

(8) Developing creativity; (9) Learning art language (drawing, colour theory, compositions, etc.); (10) Visiting contemporary art exhibitions (performances, installations, etc.); (11) Visiting classical art museums; (12) Art-making in co-operation with the local community (public art, etc.); (13) Working on personal artistic portfolios (artistic diary, etc.); (14) Drawing skills (realistic and perspective drawing, etc.); (15) Learning and art-making in different sculpture techniques (16); Understanding concepts of contemporary art (17); Making art with the use of new media (video, internet, etc.); (18) Multicultural art (familiarisation with the art of other cultures); (19) Learning classical printing techniques (woodcut, etching, etc.); (20) Art-making and sustainable development (art and the environment, ecology, etc.). The topics in the questionnaire were randomly ordered.

Three different sources were used in preparing the questionnaire, the first of which was art curricula. According to the 2009 Eurydice Report on Arts and Cultural Education at School in Europe (Arts and Cultural Education at School in Europe, 2009, p. 15), the main aims of art education are quite similar in all of the countries studied. Nearly all of the countries mention “artistic skills, knowledge and understanding”, “critical appreciation”, “cultural heritage”, “individual expression/identity”, “cultural diversity” and “creativity” as objectives. The Slovenian, Estonian and Portuguese grammar school art curricula were scrutinised, focusing on individual common parts. In the questionnaire, these are expressed as: developing creativity, learning visual language, art history topics, contemporary art and contemporary visual culture. Secondly, we interviewed different (Slovenian, Austrian, Belgian, Estonian) students of art education from grammar schools and universities, discussing topics related to art education that they find interesting and that they miss and would like to discuss. In the questionnaire, the most frequent answers are expressed in three terms: learning about graffiti, the use of new media and art-making with digital media. Thirdly, we followed contemporary educational and art education theory. In the questionnaire, the most emphasised ideas are expressed as sustainable art education (Krek & Metljak, 2011, p. 39), the use of portfolios (Torres de Eça, 2005; Powell, 2013), multiculturalism, social topics, and local community and public art. The importance of frequent direct contact with classical and contemporary art (Kemperl, 2013, p. 112) is expressed in terms of visiting classical art museums, visiting contemporary art exhibitions (performances, installations), analysing classical artworks, art history topics (Antiquity, Renaissance, Baroque, etc.) and understanding the concepts of contemporary art.

Data processing

Data were processed employing the following procedures:

- means (\bar{x}) of the levels of importance and interest in an individual topic on a scale of 1 to 3;
- means (\bar{x}) of the absolute difference between importance and interest in an individual topic;
- means (\bar{x}) of differences between the expressed importance and interest for every variable;
- graphic display of answers for each national sample (differences in the answers provided by Estonian, Portuguese and Slovenian students).

The sample is too small to offer the possibility for generalisation; therefore, statistical significance cannot be established.

Results and discussion

The results are presented in three sections. The first offers an analysis of the importance of the topics, the second analyses the interest in the topics, and the third provides an analysis of the relationship between importance and interest. Each section provides the distribution of means of the attributed fields' importance, as well as a diagram of the relationship between the Slovenian, Estonian and Portuguese respondents.

Rating of the importance of the topics

Table 1. *Topics ranked according to the mean attributed importance (\bar{x})*

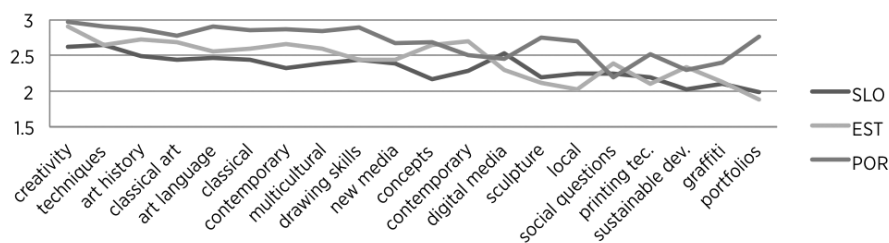
| | Topic/aspect | \bar{x} |
|----|---|-----------|
| 1 | Developing creativity | 2.833 |
| 2 | Different art techniques | 2.735 |
| 3 | Art history topics (Antiquity, Renaissance, Baroque, etc.) | 2.691 |
| 4 | Analysing classical artworks | 2.666 |
| 5 | Learning art language (drawing, colour theory, compositions, etc.) | 2.641 |
| 6 | Visiting classical art museums | 2.627 |
| 7 | Visiting contemporary art exhibitions (performances, installations, etc.) | 2.618 |
| 8 | Multicultural art (familiarisation with the art of other cultures) | 2.609 |
| 9 | Drawing skills (realistic and perspective drawing, etc.) | 2.593 |
| 10 | Making art with the use of new media (video, the Internet, etc.) | 2.503 |

| | | |
|----|---|-------|
| 11 | Understanding concepts of contemporary art | 2.502 |
| 12 | Analysing contemporary artworks | 2.497 |
| 13 | Art-making with digital media | 2.428 |
| 14 | Learning and art-making in different sculpture techniques | 2.349 |
| 15 | Art-making in cooperation with the local community (public art, etc.) | 2.323 |
| 16 | Social questions (addictions, unemployment, violence, etc.) | 2.274 |
| 17 | Learning classical printing techniques (woodcut, etching, etc.) | 2.273 |
| 18 | Art-making and sustainable development (art and the environment, ecology, etc.) | 2.220 |
| 19 | Learning about graffiti | 2.213 |
| 20 | Working on personal artistic portfolios (artistic diary, etc.) | 2.208 |

As shown in Table 1, on a scale from 1 to 3, all of the fields are rated highly (average 2.490); hence, the students find all of the topics important. The topic regarded as the most important is the development of creativity, while the next five topics are connected with learning visual language, art techniques, art history topics and classical art. It can therefore be said that the students' awareness of art education is rather narrow and classical: they link art education with their own creativity and consider it to be a subject in which they learn about visual language, use different art techniques and obtain information pertaining primarily to classical art (ranks 3, 4 and 6) and only partly on contemporary art (rank 7).

On the other side of the scale, the six least important topics are: using different types of portfolios, learning about graffiti, art-making in connection with sustainable development, social questions and cooperation with local communities, and public art. Students less frequently link art education to present social, environmental and other *non-artistic* topics. The only exception is learning printing techniques (rank 17). The reason could be that students find learning about printing techniques to be too specialised a topic, more suitable for art schools. Visiting contemporary art exhibitions, learning about the concepts of contemporary art and using new, digital media are ranked in the middle.

Graph 1 shows a similar tendency by Slovenian, Estonian and Portuguese respondents. Portuguese students rank the majority of items higher than Slovenian and Estonian students, especially learning and art-making in different sculpture techniques, social questions and working on personal artistic portfolios.



Graph 1. Topics ranked according to the mean attributed importance: the Slovenian, Estonian and Portuguese samples

Rating of interest of topics

Table 2. Topics ranked according to the mean attributed interest (\bar{x})

| | Topic/aspect | \bar{x} |
|----|---|-----------|
| 1 | Developing creativity | 2.737 |
| 2 | Learning about graffiti | 2.585 |
| 3 | Different art techniques | 2.561 |
| 4 | Multicultural art (familiarisation with the art of other cultures) | 2.548 |
| 5 | Visiting contemporary art exhibitions (performances, installations, etc.) | 2.541 |
| 6 | Making art with the use of new media (video, the Internet, etc.) | 2.518 |
| 7 | Art-making with digital media | 2.517 |
| 8 | Drawing skills (realistic and perspective drawing, etc.) | 2.500 |
| 9 | Visiting classical art museums | 2.452 |
| 10 | Analysing contemporary artworks | 2.423 |
| 11 | Learning art language (drawing, colour theory, compositions, etc.) | 2.411 |
| 12 | Art-making in cooperation with the local community (public art, etc.) | 2.348 |
| 13 | Social questions (addictions, unemployment, violence, etc.) | 2.311 |
| 14 | Analysing classical artworks | 2.304 |
| 15 | Learning and art-making in different sculpture techniques | 2.302 |
| 16 | Understanding concepts of contemporary art | 2.276 |
| 17 | Art history topics (Antiquity, Renaissance, Baroque, etc.) | 2.250 |
| 18 | Learning classical printing techniques (woodcut, etching, etc.) | 2.238 |
| 19 | Working on personal artistic portfolios (artistic diary, etc.) | 2.212 |
| 20 | Art-making and sustainable development (art and the environment, ecology, etc.) | 2.092 |

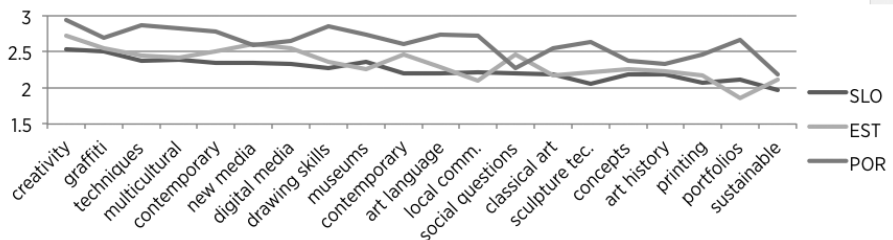
As shown in Table 2, on a scale from 1 to 3, all of the fields are rated highly (average 2.406); hence, the students find all of the topics/aspects interesting. The development of creativity is again ranked as the most interesting. The

different art techniques are also considered important and interesting (importance rank 3, interesting rank 3). The second most interesting topic is learning about graffiti (importance rank 19), the fourth is multicultural art (importance rank 8), the fifth is visiting contemporary art exhibitions (importance rank 7), and the sixth is making art with the use of new media (importance rank 10).

Less interesting (compared to the importance) are the following topics: visiting classical art museums (interest rank 9 – importance rank 6), learning art language (interest rank 11 – importance rank 5), analysing classical art (interest rank 14 – importance rank 4) and art history topics (interest rank 17 – importance rank 3). The results show that students consider art history topics important, but not so interesting.

In Graph 2, a similar tendency by Slovenian, Estonian and Portuguese respondents is again evident. Portuguese students rank the majority of items higher than Slovenian and Estonian students, especially learning about art techniques, drawing skills, learning about art language, cooperating with local communities, classical art, sculpture techniques and working with the use of different types of portfolios.

A lower value of answers provided by Portuguese students is mostly evident in social questions and in art-making and sustainable development. The reason for this might lie in the fact that, in Portugal, art education is present only in individual secondary school programmes that are more oriented towards expressive modules, and students decide on these modules prior to enrolling in secondary school. This might also be why Portuguese students express greater interest in traditional art content (art techniques, drawing skills, classical art) and less in content that is not directly linked to the notion of art.



Graph 2. Topics ranked according to the mean attributed interest: the Slovenian, Estonian and Portuguese samples

The relationship between the rating of importance and interest

Table 3. *The relationship between the importance of and interest in the topics ranked according to the mean differences*

| | Topic/aspect | importance | interest | difference |
|----|---|------------|----------|------------|
| 1 | Learning about graffiti | 2.213 | 2.585 | .372 |
| 2 | Art-making with digital media | 2.428 | 2.517 | .089 |
| 3 | Social questions (addictions, unemployment, violence, etc.) | 2.274 | 2.311 | .037 |
| 4 | Art-making in cooperation with the local community (public art, etc.) | 2.323 | 2.348 | .025 |
| 5 | Making art with the use of new media (video, the Internet, etc.) | 2.503 | 2.518 | .015 |
| 6 | Working on personal artistic portfolios (artistic diary, etc.) | 2.208 | 2.212 | .004 |
| 7 | Learning classical printing techniques (woodcut, etching, etc.) | 2.273 | 2.238 | -.035 |
| 8 | Learning and art-making in different sculpture techniques | 2.349 | 2.302 | -.047 |
| 9 | Multicultural art (familiarisation with the art of other cultures) | 2.609 | 2.548 | -.061 |
| 10 | Analysing contemporary artworks | 2.497 | 2.423 | -.074 |
| 11 | Visiting contemporary art exhibitions (performances, installations, etc.) | 2.618 | 2.541 | -.077 |
| 12 | Drawing skills (realistic and perspective drawing, etc.) | 2.593 | 2.500 | -.093 |
| 13 | Developing creativity | 2.833 | 2.737 | -.096 |
| 14 | Art-making and sustainable development (art and the environment, ecology, etc.) | 2.220 | 2.092 | -.128 |
| 15 | Different art techniques | 2.735 | 2.561 | -.174 |
| 16 | Visiting classical art museums | 2.627 | 2.452 | -.175 |
| 17 | Understanding concepts of contemporary art | 2.502 | 2.276 | -.226 |
| 18 | Learning art language (drawing, colour theory, compositions, etc.) | 2.641 | 2.411 | -.230 |
| 19 | Analysing classical artworks | 2.666 | 2.304 | -.326 |
| 20 | Art history topics (Antiquity, Renaissance, Baroque, etc.) | 2.691 | 2.250 | -.441 |

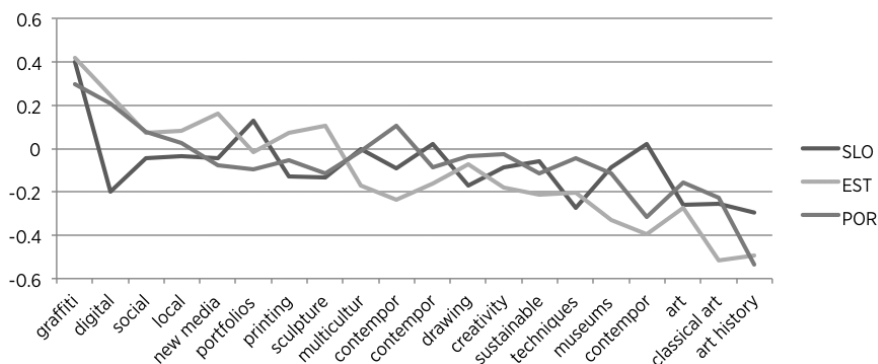
In Table 3, the mean attributed interest in comparison to the mean attributed importance is lower for the following topics: art history topics (-.446), analysing classical artworks (-.326), learning art language (-.230), understanding concepts of contemporary art (-.226), visiting classical museums (-.175) and different art techniques (-.174). The results are similar to the results regarding interest (Table 2). We can assume that respondents see classical art content (art history, knowledge of classical artworks, art language and art techniques) as important but less interesting. The only exception is understanding the concepts

of contemporary art. The importance of understanding the concepts of contemporary art was ranked 11 and the interest for the same was ranked 16. This was surprising, as the interest in other topics somehow connected with contemporary art was high (Table 2: graffiti, rank 2; multicultural art, rank 4; visiting contemporary art exhibitions, rank 5; new media, rank 6; digital media, rank 7). It can be assumed that students do not connect the term concepts of contemporary art with popular culture, new media and social topics, and consequently do not see the connections between contemporary artistic concepts and their own interests. This is not good, as contemporary art content is an indispensable part of art education of today. It is also due to the fact that “the most compelling reason for including contemporary art in the secondary school curriculum is that it reflects on current cultures” (Dawe Lane, 1996, p. 138).

As anticipated, activities that are related to the use of new digital media are very interesting to students (rank 2 and rank 5). The White Paper (Krek & Metljak, 2011, p. 19) emphasises the importance of using new digital media and technologies as one of the more important strategic challenges and directions of the education system. The development potential of information and communication technology (ICT) and the strengthening of its creative use are a necessity in modern societies. ICT is used in teaching and represents an important means of motivation as well as being a means of artistic expression. “Many international and domestic exhibitions have shown that the purposeful use of computer tools for artistic creation stimulates the fine arts creative and formative development of children” (Duh, 2006, p. 289).

The less interesting topics in Table 2 are learning classical printing techniques (rank 18), working on personal artistic portfolios (rank 19) and topics connected with sustainable development (rank 20). With the exception of graffiti, these three topics are also considered less important. The five topics with the greatest difference between importance and interest (Table 3) are learning about graffiti, art-making with digital media, social questions, art-making in cooperation with the local community, and making art with the use of new media.

It can be said that the respondents are highly interested in topics connected with popular culture and their own interests outside school (graffiti, new media, different cultures, etc.), but they do not see them as important parts of art education. As is evident from Table 3, the mean attributed level of interest is ranked higher than the mean attributed importance in six topics, with the biggest difference being attributed to learning about graffiti and art-making with new media. In Graph 3, a similar tendency by Slovenian, Estonian and Portuguese respondents is seen.



Graph 3. Topics ranked according to the importance-interest relationship: the Slovenian, Estonian and Portuguese samples

The following needs to be said regarding the strongly expressed interest in learning about graffiti. The inclusion of popular phenomena that are very interesting to youth in the content and work in art education classes must be deliberate and well grounded. On the one hand, this represents the positive application of the principle of interest in art education. By addressing current phenomena from youth culture, it is possible to achieve a higher level of motivation. Students can find connections between course content, which is often alien, and their interests and their world. The excessive implementation of content that is entirely derived from students' interests could, however, lead to the simplification, banalisation and infantilisation of the content and objectives of art activities. In this respect, Hope (2004) states that "It is not unusual to hear the admonitions that educators should meet students where they are. This sounds reasonable, even logical. However, accepting this view means that both policy and educational challenges are defined by how far students are from the nature of the discipline to be studied. Particularly powerful questions arise here if one believes that education is to lead people to knowledge and skills they do not currently have" (Hope, 2004, p. 104).

The low ranking of working with different types of portfolios in Table 1 and Table 2 is surprising, as the use of various types of portfolios offers a lot of creativity for students. The reason may lie in the students' lack of experience with using developmental, creative portfolios. It is also possible that students consider the term portfolio only as storage of their own artworks, or connect it primarily with assessment processes at school. The attitude towards the portfolio is more positive only in the Portuguese part of the sample (Figures 1 and 2), which may be due to more positive experiences and more frequent and diverse use of this didactic artistic tool in class (Torres de Eça, 2005).

Conclusion

Students regard the development of creativity as the most important and most interesting part of art education, which is an interesting and welcome fact. Art subjects at primary and secondary school level must differ from other, more factually-based subjects, a fact that students are aware of and welcome. This speaks in favour of even greater emphasis on the creative components of art education, as well as the need for a larger share of practical artistic expression and independent thinking. The low level of expressed interest in art history content, in knowing art history periods and in working on portfolios indicates that this otherwise important content could be implemented differently in practice, i.e., in a more interesting and attractive manner, perhaps being linked with content that has been established as interesting to students. Art history content can be linked to current street art and graffiti, to multicultural content, and to the use of new media and digital technologies.

The differences between what students find important and what they would be interested in within the framework of art education show that they have a very narrow view of the subject, a view that is also typical of some teachers. Contemporary theory emphasises the opposite, and openness and the contemporary world should therefore be emphasised in art curricula, with course content also being linked to current social issues.

The low level of interest in the development of drawing skills, learning different art techniques and emphasising art practices within the rules of formal art language indicates that there is a need for greater distinction between primary and secondary school art curricula. Drawing and technical skills and the knowledge of using formal art language represent basic artistic knowledge at the elementary and, to some extent, the lower secondary level. Art subjects in general upper secondary schools should be more directed towards concepts and ideas, towards linking art to the life and interests of youth, and towards current social issues.

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