



CZECH COUNCIL OF INTERNATIONAL
SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION THROUGH ART

Sirs
Ing. Robert Plaga, Ph. D.
PhDr. Jindřich Fryč
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the CZ
Karmelitská 529/5
118 12 Praha 1

Olomouc, 23 Feb 2021

Re: Open Disagreement with the Revision of Framework Education Programme for Elementary Education

Dear Minister,
Dear State Secretary,

Please allow us to express our opinion on the current revision of the Framework Education Programme for Elementary Education in the form of an open letter.

As a professional organisation linked to the international community of art educators, we do not agree with this revision. Although we understand the need for curriculum innovation and the importance of computational thinking and digital technologies, we cannot accept the reduction in content and teaching time for the Arts and Culture in the Framework Curriculum.

We would also like to oppose the way in which these changes, essential for art education, were communicated. Not only did the revisions fail to reflect or discuss the activities of expert groups, they completely neglect the results of various projects, which sought opportunities for the integration of content related to informatics and digital literacy into existing educational fields. Many of our members have been involved in these activities in an effort to contribute to developing functional innovations based on their pedagogical experience, research and professional and methodological activities, and have now been presented with a fait accompli without taking into account their professional and pedagogical views.

Please, see below the grounds on which our disagreement with the revision is based on.

Yours sincerely –
Petra Šobánková

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The open disagreement was signed by the members of the board of the Czech Section of INSEA:

m. p. doc. Mgr. Petra Šobánková, Ph.D.
m. p. PhDr. Aleš Pospíšil, Ph.D.
m. p. Mgr. Václava Zamazalová
m. p. Mgr. Karel Řepa, Ph.D.
m. p. Mgr. Jana Jiroutová, Ph.D.
m. p. PhDr. Věra Uhl Skřivanová, Ph.D.
m. p. Mgr. Kateřina Štěpánková, Ph.D.
m. p. Mgr. Lucie Tikalová, Ph.D.
m. p. Mgr. et Mgr. Klára Zářecká, Ph.D.
m. p. Mgr. Barbora Škaloudová
m. p. Mgr. Monika Plíhalová

Argumentation for our disagreement:

1. Reduction of the minimum teaching time for Arts and Culture

We do not agree with this reduction for either art education or music education. Both of these fields of education are practically the only ones that allow students to work in other way than just with conceptual schemes, and offer intentional use of the language of art to express the pupils' own subjectivity and to reflect on complex cultural phenomena. Art and artistic communication are not unnecessary 'extensions', but the very bases of human culture. In addition to their own importance, they have many fundamental applications, whether we are considering the importance of creativity in all areas of life, or, for example, the growing importance of the cultural and creative industries. High-quality education in the field of arts education is crucial for their development – and reducing the already limited teaching time of these fields in elementary education will reduce the quality of teaching, and affect the implementation of curriculum goals and its impact on pupils' development in these areas.

Why is teaching time for art education so crucial?

Art education is traditionally based not only on receptive, but also on practical creative activities, which by their nature need sufficient time. Considering any content domain of the art curriculum – be it the development of sensory sensitivity, the application of subjectivity in creative or interpretive activities or the verification of communication effects – each of them presupposes the implementation of educational tasks and projects that are complex and often time-consuming. Even the youngest pupil knows that 'nothing can be completed in an art lesson that lasts only one hour'.

Cutting down the number of hours cuts down art education itself. This is shown not only by practice, but also by research, which confirms that the lack of time for artistic activity reduces the quality of teaching and negatively affects the fulfilment of expected outcomes or the degree of development of creativity. If pupils are to continue to be in contact with material and more sophisticated artistic and technological practices, if they are to learn to understand visual communication and to acquire interpretive skills that are key in today's world of images, further reduction of already short teaching time cannot be accepted. Reducing lessons leads to the reduction in the quality of teaching. Participating in creating a supportive and stimulating atmosphere for art making, understanding and learning not only artistic values in a broader social and cultural context is a challenging and very valuable objective of the curriculum, and therefore limiting teaching time will negatively affect art education as well as the all-round development of pupils. It will also have a negative impact on educational opportunities in museums and galleries.

2. Reduction of educational content

We do not agree with the reduction of the educational content of art education. The expert working group in charge of art education reached some conclusions and recommendations, but these are not taken into account in the current revision. In particular, passages related to today's key competence, namely the ability to name and interpret visual images, have been removed from the curriculum without any expert argumentation.

The ambition of teaching pupils to name and recognise elements of 'images' around us is disappearing from the curriculum, the outcome that would encourage pupils to communicate, to explain their attitudes with awareness of personal, social and cultural conditionality of their own value judgments has been reduced. This single example of the many severe cuts shows a lack of understanding of the importance of a truly key need in today's society. What good will digital competences do for us if we do not understand their potential and risks in the world around us, if we do not learn to reflect on social processes in their complexity?

Art – in this case especially contemporary art, including the art of new media – teaches us these skills. It shows us the risks of today's world, it teaches us to think in a global context and with an awareness of the personal level. As the curriculum also declares, it is essential to be aware of oneself as a free and active individual through creative and interpretive activities, to learn a creative approach to the world and to understand the creative process as a way of finding and expressing personal experiences and attitudes to phenomena and relationships in a multifaceted world.

We cannot accept the reduction of educational content also because it will be counterproductive for the development of digital literacy, which is naturally related to the content of contemporary art education.

3. The importance of art education for children and society

Our community is determined to work for art education and to fight for giving today's pupils the opportunity to learn about the world of art and culture within elementary education. Digital technologies surround children from an early age. We agree that it is necessary to learn how to handle them as well as to reflect on their advantages and disadvantages. At the same time, a care must be taken to ensure that opportunities for handicrafts and experimentation with materials and creative practices are still present in the lives of children and pupils. Needless to say, there are well-known ties between the development of cognitive functions and sensory perception, or between thinking and hand activity and tactile experience.

The importance of art education for child's development is much broader: learning through one's own work is based on subjectively unique perceptions, feelings, experiences and ideas, it develops creative potential, it cultivates child's expressions and needs, and shapes their authentic hierarchy of values. These meanings are declared in the curriculum and there is a consensus on their importance. So let's not prevent them from being fulfilled, and if the authors of the revision do not want to strengthen art education, let them at least not hamper it!

4. Informatics and digital literacy in art education and other educational fields

We are of the opinion that information and digital competences need to be developed in relation to a specific area. In this context, we would like to recall, for example, the project of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports entitled *Support for the Development of Digital Literacy (CZ.02.3.68 / 0.0 / 0.0 / 16_036 / 0005366)* launched in 2017, which dealt with the support for digital literacy across all levels of education and in all areas and educational fields. The project not only mapped the possibilities of supporting and developing digital literacy, but also practically verified these possibilities and pointed out functional solutions and the ways of implementing this area into education. Thanks to the verification of digital educational resources for each individual subject in practice, it was shown that support for the development of digital competences is possible even in kindergarten and is feasible in all areas, including art education. It has been verified that art education provides a functional platform to support this type of literacy. Why were these findings not taken into account in the revision?

Like other competences, digital literacy or computational thinking cannot be cultivated without the reference to specific subject content, or, without the reference to a specific field of education. For example, art education is a field that is more closely linked to the world of technology than others – let's just recall new media art or creative industries such as film, advertising, gaming, design, etc. None of these influential disciplines, the basics of which children acquire in childhood, for example in art education, can do without the use of digital technologies and the ability to creatively use their potential. It is therefore unacceptable and absurd to us that the necessary strengthening of pupils' digital skills should take place at the expense of art education.

In this context, we need to remember that cultural and creative industries are key drivers of the Economy 4.0 representing dynamic segments with low investment costs and high added value. According to our judgement, integrating the contents of informatics with the contents and reference framework of artistic disciplines is the right step also in the context of future development. It is no coincidence that, for example, Asian countries are striving to achieve the level of creativity that is already being cultivated in Western democracies.

While elsewhere they realise that the quality of cultural and creative industries does not arise spontaneously, but is closely connected with the cultivation of creative arts skills from an early age, and strengthen this area in the national curriculum, we declare a vision of *Country for Future*, but are ready to break down what is valuable. Creative industries will be an essential component of the new economy (4.0), and art education combined with digital technologies and digital tools has the potential to prepare pupils for this future. So why are we reducing it instead of strengthening it?

5. The way in which the revision was communicated

Our members devote themselves to art education through their practice as well as their professional and methodological activities, because they feel their duty to preserve it as an important part of the curriculum and the lives of children and youth. They do not do this for themselves and their own gratification, but because they are well aware of the importance of art as a specific way of learning, and want to fight for the preservation of opportunities to use the language of art as an independent means of communication. In this context, we feel offended not only by the insensitive revision itself, but also by the way it is (not) communicated. We are aware of the complexity of such processes and the diversity of views on the issue. However, we are protesting against inviting to the revisions representatives of only one party and making decisions “about us without us”.