

## SELF-REFLECTION IN THE PREPARATION OF THE FUTURE FINE ARTS TEACHERS AS THE KEY STRATEGY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING

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**Abstract:** The self-reflection of the micro-lesson realized within the didactic disciplines of the study program "Teaching Fine Art in Combination" at the Department of Art and Education of the Faculty of Education of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra is an important part of the future teacher training. The student has the possibility to verbally reflect his/her own output immediately after its realization as well as with a time delay in written self-reflection. Structured self-reflection becomes a part of the seminar work, which describes the preparation, demonstrates the motivational presentation and photographically documents the course of the micro-hour. Thus, the students get the tool to learn the key competences of the future teacher through the principles of methodology aimed at their personal development.

**Keywords:** fine arts education, didactics, critical thinking, self-reflection, micro-lesson

### 1 Introduction

One of the key competencies of the teacher is undoubtedly the ability to be creative not only in the field of art but also in the field of practical life, the ability to critically perceive surroundings and information, as well as the ability to think critically and evaluate the situation or outcome of his own and others activities. Our pedagogical approach uses both verbal and written self-reflection of students to develop such competencies.

### 2 Theoretical background

According to Gogolová (2013), experiential learning is aimed at initiating emotional experiences through which one gains experience in meaning of „skill“. These include e.g. outdoor activities, use of all kinds of arts and sports. The activity is not directly focused on learning something. The activities are playful and the game pulls participants to a strong experience through which they learn spontaneously. They also learn from common analysis, post-activity reflection. Reflection (evaluation and generalization), mostly directed by the teacher, transforms the emotional experience into a form of experience that can be used in practice. According to Cimermanová and Straková (2012), micro-education provides space for students to verify in secure environment the selected practices and techniques used in the learning environment. This approach gives students the space to get to know each other as teachers and observe themselves and their colleagues even at the cost of creating a simulated environment. Hupková (2004) believes that the quality of the school can be improved if the emphasis on teacher training is increased, and one of the methods may be the self-reflection of educational activities. Self-reflection includes describing, analyzing, evaluating, ordering, generalizing, refining our educational practice, the ability to manage our own future and professional growth, and increasing the effectiveness of education. It lists the following phases of self-reflection: 1. Start the process. 2. Collection and arrangement of information. 3. Analysis and interpretation in the context of previous experience. 4. Creating a plan for future pedagogical activity. Those principles led us through our teaching strategies.

### 3 Application of theoretical bases into practice

In the spirit of the concept of experiential learning, the students of the "Teaching Fine Arts in Combination" have tried teaching through the realization of a micro-lesson. Teaching took place in the classroom or in the school areal/exterier, starting with warm-up activity in the form of a game and simple physical or psychical activity, but always in relation to the theme and aim of the lesson. This was followed by a motivational, mostly pictorial

presentation, the assignment of the task, its repetition, explanation of misunderstandings, finally its updating, independent art work, and finally an evaluation. This happens immediately after the micro-lesson as a full-featured part of the lesson and evaluated by both students/teachers and students/pupils. Our students were encouraged to self-evaluation and to solving problems by themselves. Each student stepped in front of the classmates, presented his/her lesson, expressed his/her own opinion and led a discussion. The students had the opportunity to express themselves (both verbally and in writing or visual form) and evaluate the process of the lessons, the atmosphere, the results of the artistic and educational work.



Pictures 1 - 2. Two slides of the presentation for ice-break activity: the students should guess, which insect inspired the jewelry – well chosen task in accordance with the main topic.



Picture 3. The selected slides from the very well made motivational presentation about the secession jewelry, which shows the personal interest of the student in the topic.



Picture 4. Independent work of the students/pupils.



Pictures 5. – 7. The best results of student art work – jewelry inspired by secession style, imitating fly and dragonfly, all made with precision, concentration and passion.

### 3 Research of critical thinking in the students' self-reflections

Our qualitative research examines a society from the position of a humanitarian paradigm that is interested in the quality of social situations. According to Plichtová (2002), it is important to achieve a useful knowledge of only one environment than to infer the generality which we can apply to the entire population. According to Strauss and Corbin (1999), qualitative research serves to reveal the nature of phenomena, to obtain new information, or to gain new views on known phenomena. Consequently, the researcher may not have a hypothesis. The research takes place in a natural environment (e.g. in a lecture hall) and the research is selected on the basis of a certain concept. According to Juszyc (2003), qualitative research presents itself in narrative or essayistic form of text and consists in analyzing of phenomena and interpreting a meaning.

The aim of our qualitative research was to identify the elements of critical thinking in the students' self-reflections.

The research sample were the students of „Teaching of Fine Arts in Combination“, namely 7 female students and 1 male student. The time schedule was given by the structure of the academic year. The data were obtained during the exam period at the Department of Creative Arts and Art Education of the Faculty of Education of the CPU in Nitra, according to the current schedule in the winter semester of the school year 2018/2019, processed at the end of July 2019. Thus we obtained text material contained 8 self-reflections as the last part of the written seminar work, which describes the preparation, demonstrates the motivational presentation and photographically documents the course of the micro-lesson (pictures 1. – 10). The structure of the self-reflections was given by the teacher: 1. Description of the lesson; 2. Expectations versus reality; 3. Evaluation: positives and negatives of the lesson; 4. Planning of future pedagogical activity. For the purposes of this paper we analyzed only the second, third and fourth point of reflections. The method of data acquisition was the written text of structured self-reflective pedagogical diary of the students and the method of data processing was its qualitative content analysis. From the possibilities of content analysis we chose three basic methods of work with data: description, analysis and interpretation.

#### 3.1 Self-reflection analysis

According to Janoušek (1986), the result of the analysis of documents should answer the questions: *What does this document represents and what goals were pursued in its creation? What is its context? Who is its author and what conclusions can be drawn about him? What is the credibility and factual content of the document? What is the evaluation*

*component of the document and what are the conclusions drawn from it? We will answer these questions.*

The 8 students' self-reflections were absed on the instruction of the teacher who wanted to familiarize her students with this method of teacher self-assessment. Students obtained a 4-point self-reflection structure and the range of text was determined from half to one A4 page. The teacher kept in mind that this text could be researched and evaluated, so she was in the position of a researcher, what is welcome in qualitative research, as there could be no distortion of the data inaccuracies in the communication between the researcher and the task submitter. The reflections were made by the students who attended the seminars of the mandatory subject Didactics of Fine Arts Education. The students themselves chose topics from the actual curriculum for fine arts education. The teacher facilitated the process of preparation and realization of the micro-lessons. On the basis of the texts it is possible to draw conclusions regarding the ability of the students to critically perceive, think, evaluate and plan. The credibility of the document is high because the students already know from the last semester that it is safe to express their opinion, even though it is different from the group or the teacher. The classroom atmosphere was relaxed.



Picture 8. The chosen results of the art work in the lesson „Vitrage“ (Sword, Land, Sunset), all were finished after the lesson, during the school break.



Pictures 9. – 10. One slide from presentation describing the medieval pot helmets and the photos from the lesson: preparing the helmet from the paper, completed helmet, photo pose of the student in helmet, made at home, finished after the lesson, led by enthusiasm and strong inner motivation.

#### 3.2 Research results

We used the readable parts of the reflections and corrected some sentences to be more clear, because the students expressed themselves freely, used their real language, with the lack in area of stylistic and grammar. We leave out word wade and repeated information, but still we cared a lot about the real meaning of their expressions, also we did not comment thoughts which were clear enough but we added the comments based on our own observation. We highlighted the parts important for our research

aims and we replaced the words „students, pupils, classmates“ by pronoun „they“ in to avoid confusion.

Student 1, topic Secession

2. *Expectations vs. reality*

My interpretation and presentation *did not turn out as I expected*. Presenting the new substance was *stressful* and the presentation was *not well prepared*. On the other hand, *their activity and correction were very well managed*. The student work was done *beyond my expectations*. Each created according to their ideas, created many kinds of beetles and each jewel is actually wearable. There were *no complications* during creation.

3. *Evaluation - positives and negatives*

The presentation I prepared for the students was *too long and I had a great stage fright during the presentation*, which made me *forget some of the information* I wanted to mention. I would *evaluate* them very *positively*. They *actively answered questions* and *worked* continuously throughout the lesson. The lesson was *relaxed* and they were doing *what they should*.

4. *Plan for future pedagogical activity*

*I would simplify and shorten the presentation*. During the lesson I would *ask more questions* to them and *divide the activity* of the pupils into two teaching units so that each pupil can complete their work.

We consider as valuable the personal information about her jitters, and the confession that she did not tell everything she should. The reflection is complex, includes good and bad parts in harmony. She could experience all good aspects of her lesson including the great results and she learned from her mistakes.

Student 2, topic Illustration

2. *Expectations vs. reality*

I was *expecting a little better discipline*. Anyway, I guided them, *the lesson was pleasant* and *the work was adequate to the skills*. I *expected* that since they had more art tools in the classroom, *they would choose more techniques* than drawings and paintings, so the products would be more diverse. However, *they could choose the technique themselves, so it was fine*.

3. *Evaluation - positives and negatives*

I *appreciate* they all worked *actively* and had a *pleasant atmosphere with many conversations*. I also think they were *interested* in the topic, besides the presentation I *brought* them a few *books for inspiration*, they had several questions, which *made me very happy*. I consider as *negative the time limit*. They thought about work a lot, they wanted to work as good as possible so they did not rush.

4. *Plan for future pedagogical activity*

I would *not change anything*, I liked the lesson, they were *happy* with it too, *but I would advise* them in advance to use e.g. water colors that would help them finish the picture and *it wouldn't take as long*.

We see the contradictions in a few moments. She wanted more discipline, but appreciated vivid behaviour, she let them choose the technique, but was not satisfied with the chosen ones, she would not change anything, but still she would do something different. However, the lesson was motivated and led good and the process also results were great. She showed emotional approach to education, emphasizing the positive mood during the lesson, maybe it has some connection with the fact that she is very good and impressive artist.

Student 3, topic Vitrage

2. *Expectations vs. reality*

I *expected pleasant cooperation* on the lesson, their engagement and also their *good manual skills*. My *expectations have been met*.

3. *Evaluation - positives and negatives*

I am *glad* that I did not restrict them during their initial activity, because I could see their creative thinking this way. I think it was a very *nice diversification* of the lesson *to watch a video* showing the stained glass production process. It was also seen that *they enjoyed their work* on stained glass windows and some had an *inner motivation* to finish their stained glass *after the lesson*. I see the *negatives* in my *quick talk* and *expectation of a similar level of perception* of stained glass as I have, also in the

fact that I *was not entirely sure* of the answers to the students' questions.

4. *Plan for future pedagogical activities*

*I would shorten a ice-break* tangram activity, because one group has put together several solutions to show their creativity, but ultimately prolonged the activity and used the needed time. I *would ask even more questions* about their own experiences with the subject. I *would certainly ask more times* if they understood the different steps of the procedure. Since this work was more time consuming I *would definitely divide it* into 2 lessons. I *would reduce my expectations* of pupils' knowledge and interest, and *would be better prepared* for the lesson in theory.

She sees quite rational way the positives and negatives and finds the reasons and explanations of the processes. She appreciates her own effort and good parts of the lessons, but still she sees her weakness and she knows (decides) how to overcome them. Her personality with strong confidence seeks for the solutions for all difficult situations.

Student 4, topic Perspective

2. *Expectations vs. reality*

I *expected a pleasant atmosphere* in the classroom, pupil engagement and also *good manual skills*. My *expectations have been met*.

3. *Evaluation - positives and negatives*

I am glad that they already had an idea what the perspective was during the initial activity. I *think they liked the work and relaxed*. I see the negatives in the fact that I *did not have any activating questions* for many pictures in the presentations.

4. *Plan for future pedagogical activities*

I *would choose only pictures* for which I would have activating questions and *better examples* in presentation. I would certainly *ask more times* in the future if they understood the assignment of their work. Because this topic was more difficult to implement, I would *reduce my expectations* of their *knowledge and interest*, and *would be better prepared* for the lesson in theory.

He admitted that he was not well prepared in theory, as a few other students. They only chose random information and picked the first few shown pictures from internet, without critical evaluation, because they used to do it that way. They don't doubt internet information and they consider them as the same quality as the information in the science books. We don't say them (and we don't think so) that every book is better than internet, only we let them confuse themselves with contradictory, empty and half information during their presentation and let them learn from their mistakes in the secure environment with acceptance, understanding and humor.

Student 5, topic Medieval

2. *Expectations vs. reality*

I expected the presentation to be short enough to create, decorate and paint the helmet, but as a result lack of experience, *the presentation was too long and the production took a long time*. At the same time, I *expected that I would be able to better explain the work process* to them, but what I asked them to do was too difficult.

3. *Evaluation - positives and negatives*

I *positively evaluate the atmosphere* in the lesson, which was also pleasant because of listening to medieval music. Their *interest* during the presentation and production of helmets was also *positive*. I negatively evaluate my presentation. It would be better if I asked the pupils more about their experiences. Also the material for the helmet was not very suitable.

4. *Plan for future pedagogical activities*

I would consult the historian at school to find out what the pupils know about this topic. In the final evaluation I would like to *highlight especially the effort for the creation* and the actual *design of the helmet*, because this kind of creation is very *difficult* and because everyone had a good feeling of the work result.

She emphasized the common problem of the micro-lessons: the presentation. The micro-lessons taught the students to make the presentation much shorter than they wanted. We could see they repeat their experiences from the schools: the content of

presented content is full of useless, uninteresting information which nobody can use in a real life, in practice. They discover they can do the presentation different and creative, they have only to think what would be interesting for themselves. We consider the work with stereotypes as a very important part in development of critical thinking.

Student 6, topic Video

#### 2. Expectations vs. reality

At the lesson I expected a good atmosphere, active answer of the students to the questions from the presentation and their cooperation. All my expectations have been met.

#### 3. Evaluation - positives and negatives

The lesson was in a relaxed and cheerful atmosphere. They were active and did not disturb the course. I explained the topic and showed videos. But then I began to talk about too much theory and they lost their attention. The pupils worked together and agreed on everything without any problems.

#### 4. Plan for future pedagogical activities

In the future, I would be more involved in the presentation and would ask them more questions about the subject. I would choose more up-to-date images to engage them and encourage conversation.

She talks about another common problem: they use to sit quiet during their university lecture, and it takes a little time to learn how to make the lecture interactive. They are encouraged to ask the pupils about their experiences with any topic, even from the movies or PC games, and to ask them questions about presentation, to keep their attention and build their motivation. They can see how their classmates lose their attention after sixth or seventh slide of presentation, thus they learn by critical thinking how to animate, choose and organize text and pictures.

Student 7, topic Bodyart

#### 2. Expectations vs. reality

I expected a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, active involvement in the teaching process and also their creativity. I can say that my expectations have been met.

#### 3. Evaluation - positives and negatives

I positively evaluate the whole lesson, pupils were active and communicative, immediately answered questions. During their creative activities they showed their creativity and art skills. I consider as negative less time for the activity itself.

#### 4. Plan for future pedagogical activities

In the future, I would focus on explaining more precisely what I expect of them and thus making it easier for them to understand the task. I would also divide this topic into two lessons so they could spend more time for the creative process and for evaluation.

She did not put much effort into the reflection, she talked about common and general facts in education. Although her presentation was not very good, she did not write about it and did not think about any changes. After the state exam showed that she does not want to teach at all, and this lack of interest also lack of critical thinking is visible in her reflection.

Student 8, Sculpture

#### 2. Expectations vs. reality

I expected pleasant cooperation in the lesson, engagement of them and also their good manual skill. My expectations have been met.

#### 3. Evaluation - positives and negatives

I think the class was going according to my wishes. They were active and involved in the topic. They understood terminology I used. I see the negatives in the presentation, it could be more elaborated.

#### 4. Plan for future pedagogical activities

I would give the students more time. I would elaborate the presentation in detail so that the form was more transparent and thus easier to remember. I would have better prepared theoretically.

She had not very high expectations from the lesson thus their fulfillment was not so difficult, plus the classmates were very kind and made what they should, due to the good relationships in the classroom. We can say this type of education makes good

relationships between the classmates in global, because they have an opportunity to know each other through their reactions during the lessons, through the results of their art works, which show their personalities by new way. They learn to help each other and during the art work they use to talk about everyday and sometimes about things important for life. Often they spontaneously start to talk about the mission of a teacher.

### 3.3 Research Conclusions

To be better prepared theoretically – this wish is repeated and fortunately it can be achieved with some effort. We can tell our students are creative – they can create the original lessons with original artistic thinking, but after the micro-lessons they know that critically selected information is the important base of the education. The second repeated wish was to better explain the task and the artistic process: there were many misunderstandings and uninvited surprises, and all students realized the importance of this part of the lesson.

Four of our students used the same or almost the same two sentences, in meaning „I expected cooperation in the lesson, engagement of them and also their good manual skill. My expectations have been met“. Other parts of reflections were made mostly with different and often personal content. Maybe because they did it the first time, at the start of reflections of their lessons, the students helped to each other but then discovered they can make it without help and they continued individually.

Seven out of eight students critically analyzed their micro-lesson but one student did not take advantage of the self-reflection potential. The examined students compared their expectations with the reality of the lesson, evaluated their output and the approach of their classmates in the pupils' roles, and based on previous thought processes decided to change the approach to planning a future, improved lesson. The students were aware they were gaining experience also through their mistakes.

The research has sufficiently demonstrated the benefit of using a self-reflective pedagogical diary (self-reflection) to acquire new teacher competencies in the student preparation. It can be stated that whether the lesson turned out "good" or "less good" did not affect the beneficial role of the self-reflection. The students themselves saw in their writing that each lesson contained both positives and negatives, and from both they can learn.

### 4 Recommendations for practice

Based on the results of the research, we have to recommend oral and written self-reflection as an effective tool for acquiring the key competencies of the future teachers, especially their ability to think critically, evaluate the course and outcome of the process, as well as thoughtfully and responsibly plan their future teaching. The micro-lesson had also proved to be an effective means of preparing a future teacher. We were able to determine a relatively wide variation in the scope of the diary so that students did not write mechanically just to fill rows. Despite not all students worked completely independently, it did not negatively affect the main meaning of their reflections.

### 5 Conclusion

Our methodology applied to the didactic disciplines, implies the transfer of acquired experience to students in their future pedagogical practice of teaching fine arts education, and allows them to develop their pupils' creativity and critical thinking. However, these abilities are also developed in other subjects, for example in the theoretical disciplines (Rěčka, 2019). Rěčka says cognitive and aesthetic knowledge of universal human values presented in art can positively influence the development of cognitive and emotional qualities and can inspire creative and critical thinking. In the above-mentioned ways, the idea of complex art education is fulfilled and thus the personality of student, the future teacher, is naturally developed, which is also the main mission of art education at our department.

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