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**Review on the monograph
„Interpretation of the artwork in pre-school education“
(Ivana Rochovská et al.) Ružomberok 2021, s.423, VERBUM
ISBN 978-80-561-0889-5**

**Recenzja monografii pt. „Interpretation of the artwork
in pre-school education“ współautorstwa Ivany Rochovskiej,
Uniwersytet w Rozomberku**

The monograph was published as a result of a national project funded by the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic. The focus of the work is on early childhood education and the integration of the arts. The authors primarily examine the pedagogical perspective on the role of the arts (visual arts, music, literature, and drama) and their incorporation into educational practice, with an emphasis on the interpretation of artworks suitable for young children. They address the reception and perception of art in pre-school education, as well as the positive influence of the arts on the development of the child's personality. This interdisciplinary subject matter is particularly relevant and essential in the context of contemporary educational needs.

Based on the current curriculum guidelines for pre-school education in Slovakia, the theme of artwork interpretation is included within various

educational domains, primarily the areas of "Human and Art", "Language and Communication", "Human and Society", as well as "Human and the World of Work", among others.

As highlighted by the authors of the publication, the integration of artistic stimuli is a characteristic feature of pre-school education. Just as various art forms and genres are interwoven in the world of art, pre-school education is shaped by its holistic approach, which simultaneously engages multiple senses, focusing on children's active involvement and the emotional aspects of their personality.

The monograph is organised into four chapters, spanning over 400 pages. The first two chapters are theoretical in nature and draw upon the latest sources from both international and domestic literature, as indicated in the reference list. Each artistic discipline is initially discussed individually, after which the emphasis shifts to a syncretic approach to art education within pre-school settings.

The first chapter primarily addresses the current state of the topic and the theoretical foundations of artwork interpretation in pre-school education. The entire chapter focuses on art. The authors note that, although we have a general understanding of what art is, the process of creating art, the various artistic media, forms, and genres, and the reasons why people create art, we are still unable to definitively answer the question of what art truly is. However, the main aim of this chapter was not to provide a definition of art. Instead, the authors explore how art is reflected in the education of pre-school-aged children. They argue that, for this age group, perceiving art and artworks as a source of sensory exploration, and engaging with art in terms of aesthetic activity, is particularly relevant.

Art and its integration into education can have a profoundly positive impact on the development of individuals' personalities, as well as their educational outcomes. Numerous studies have demonstrated that art, in its various forms, can provide measurable benefits to learners. The authors also align with the view of art in pre-school education through three key functions: art as play, art as a means of knowledge, and art as a means of communication.

The chapter discusses visual art as a stimulus for the child's visual communication. Research examining the benefits of visual arts for children has revealed that engaging in visual arts activities positively influences the development of critical thinking. The impact of experimental activities, particularly those focused on contemporary visual art, was also explored, highlighting their role in fostering the child's creative potential and artistic skills. The authors compare the concepts of fine art and visual art in the monograph, providing a clearer understanding by referencing both traditional and contemporary media and approaches.

A relatively new approach in pre-school education is the interpretation of visual art. The curricular documents from the history of art education in Slovakia were analysed in terms of their application to visual art interpretation.

One specific sub-chapter focused on the distinction between "education in art" and "education through art". The text was further enhanced by photographic documentation of activities with pre-school children that centred on interpreting visual art. These activities included artworks such as Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, Maximilien Luce's *The Good Samaritan*, and Picasso's *Three Musicians*.

The topic of music as a means of understanding beauty is addressed in one of the sub-chapters of the monograph. It begins with a review of the latest research focused on music education, both *to* and *through* music. The state curriculum is then analysed from the perspective of music interpretation. Additionally, alternative educational approaches, such as the Montessori method of music education in pre-schools, are also considered.

Children's literature is presented as a source of knowledge and emotional development in the monograph. This distinct sub-chapter begins with a review of research on the use of literary art in the education of pre-school-aged children. The pre-school education curriculum is then analysed from the perspective of incorporating literary art into teaching, and book blogs are introduced as a resource for pre-school educators, highlighting the current availability of children's literature.

Finally, the topic of dramatic expression and the methods of creative drama is explored in another sub-chapter within the first chapter. The use of dramatic elements is regarded as a crucial way of expressing personal emotions, enhancing children's imagination, fostering independent action, and improving social and cooperative skills. For this reason, the role of dramatic education in pre-school children's development is strongly emphasised. Research findings suggest that the application of creative drama contributed to better cohesion within the classroom and had a positive impact on children's behaviour. Consequently, the significance of using creative drama as a didactic tool in education is highlighted. The active process of creative drama inherently involves creative thinking as part of the overall creative process. Creative drama offers valuable opportunities to nurture children's creativity, not only on an individual level but also in terms of group creativity within the school setting. It provides experiences that enrich children's imagination while simultaneously enhancing their group interaction and social skills.

The structure of this sub-chapter follows a similar pattern to the previous ones. The authors present current research on creative drama in pre-school education, along with an analysis of the curriculum from the perspective of integrating creative drama and dramatic arts.

The focus of the second chapter is on syncretism in art within pre-school education. Particular attention is given to comics and illustrations as examples of syncretic genres in pre-school art education.

Many of the studies cited in the monograph have confirmed that engaging in activities centred around artworks has a positive impact on pre-school-aged children. However, the effectiveness of interpretive activities in kindergartens depends on the teacher's competence in both pedagogy and the arts. A search of online research databases revealed that no studies or large-scale surveys have been conducted to assess the opportunities for kindergarten teachers to acquire knowledge in the theory and history of art, nor the extent to which they incorporate the interpretation of artworks in pre-school education. The central focus of the research was the interpretation of works of art within pre-school education.

The third and fourth chapters of the monograph present the empirical part of the research, which aimed to explore kindergarten teachers' perspectives on the use of artwork interpretation within pre-school education and to identify potential avenues for its further development and improvement. The study focused on evaluating how frequently and in what ways interpretative approaches to art are currently applied in educational practice. It also explored the attitudes of teachers towards art, alongside the extent to which they are afforded opportunities—either during their initial teacher training or through continued professional development—to acquire knowledge of art theory and history. The research further examined whether such educational opportunities influence not only the frequency and manner in which artwork interpretation is implemented in kindergartens, but also teachers' personal views on the value of art. An additional objective was to consider the possible relationship between teachers' attitudes towards art and their actual engagement with interpretative methods in practice. Finally, the study sought to provide a detailed account of how the interpretation of visual artworks is carried out in kindergarten settings.

Following the thoroughly developed research project, the innovative and comprehensive research findings were presented. The study focused on examining the use of artwork interpretation in pre-school education across three dimensions: the current state of its implementation, the opinions of kindergarten teachers on art, and the opportunities available for teachers to acquire knowledge about the theory and history of art during their undergraduate training or through other forms of education. A total of 366 kindergarten teachers responded to the self-constructed questionnaire, while 5 teachers participated in a semi-structured interview. Additionally, observations were made of two educational activities focused on the interpretation of artwork in kindergartens.

The research revealed that the current state of using artwork interpretation in pre-school education can be characterised as below average. Additionally, the opportunities for kindergarten teachers to acquire knowledge about the theory and history of art during their pre-graduate training or through other educational avenues were found to be below average, as were the teachers'

opinions on art. A statistically significant positive correlation was observed between these dimensions of artwork interpretation in pre-school education.

Based on the research findings, several benefits and recommendations for pedagogical practice were proposed. It is recommended to raise awareness among kindergarten teachers regarding the importance of art interpretation in pre-school education, to place greater emphasis on the didactic use of art, and to provide more targeted stimuli in professional training, particularly regarding the pedagogical application of art. Furthermore, it is advised to enhance the competencies of kindergarten teachers in the field of art. Such improvements are expected to increase teachers' interest in integrating art and its stimuli into both their own lives and the children's activities within the kindergarten setting.

Art and its application in education can have a profoundly positive impact on the development of individuals' personalities, as well as their academic outcomes. The issue of interpreting works of art in pre-school education represents one approach to making various forms of art accessible to children through their own reactions to these artworks. This process particularly supports the development of creative and critical thinking, as well as cultural literacy. The monograph's thorough treatment of this topic, from theoretical analysis to a mixed-method approach in empirical research, provides a comprehensive solution to the issue, offering concrete applications and proposals for activities in pre-school education.

The monograph also includes eight appendices. The first appendix presents a glossary of terms related to art and artworks. The second appendix features illustrations of dramatic activities for children. The fourth appendix contains a sample of the questionnaire used in the research.

It is unusual for a scientific monograph to include raw data, but in this case, it is considered advantageous, particularly for researchers working on the interpretation of artwork in pre-school education. The inclusion of raw data offers the potential for further research, especially using a qualitative approach. The monograph features the transcripts of teachers' responses to interview questions, as well as the transcripts of observations of educational interpretive activities.

One of the appendices presents proposals for continuous professional development for kindergarten teachers, focusing on artwork interpretation. The final appendix includes photographic documentation from art competitions and children's creativity exhibitions. The main author of the monograph is actively involved in working with pre-school-aged children in kindergartens, specifically in the areas of fine art education and the interpretation of visual artworks by renowned artists. The children's works were recognised and awarded in the aforementioned competitions and exhibitions.

The ambition of the project participants, as well as the authors of the monograph on artwork interpretation in pre-schools, was to contribute

to the existing body of knowledge in the theory of pre-school education, particularly in relation to educating young children *to* art and *through* art. The aim was to enrich this knowledge and to incorporate new research findings and recommendations for improvement into the practical application of pre-school education. The authors expressed confidence that these visions will be realised in the near future.

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