

The Model of Specialised Artistic Competences of Early Childhood Teachers. Conceptual Approach

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Abstract

The present paper is the result of a reflection on the professional competences of early childhood teachers. It outlines the considerations on understanding the concept of competences, taking into account their ambiguity and varying semantic scope. The original understanding of specialised artistic competences of the early childhood teachers was presented in conceptual terms and an attempt was made to present the original model of the specialised artistic competences of early childhood teachers in the form of a three-segment structure, created by the distinguished areas of this competence, named by the author as domains of competence, together with their components and basic indicators. The study is addressed to researchers studying this issue and teachers of early school education, it is also supposed to be a voice in the discussion on shaping and development of the specialised artistic competences of early childhood teachers and, according to the author, to encourage reflection in this field.

Key words: *teachers' professional competences, teachers' specialised artistic competences, pedeutology*

Introduction

Social evolution and changes in the functioning of school make teachers constantly face new challenges and tasks. The effectiveness of their professional work is greatly influenced by continuous professional and personal development based

on the expertise, experience and competences that become a significant feature of professionalism in this sector. The source literature mentions many kinds of teacher competences. They are classified in different ways, depending on the particular theoretical assumptions, as well as the understanding of the role, function and tasks of the teacher in the modern educational system. Pedagogical publications, irrespective of the classification adopted, always emphasise the incompleteness and selectivity of the description of the competences and their classification, as well as the fact that the comprehensive and unambiguous formulation of a specific set of competences, which the teacher should have, is impossible or at least problematic. This results from the fact that the profession of teacher is carried out in various socio-cultural and economic conditions, which makes the educational situation in which the teachers participate and which they encounter quite contextual and unique. Nevertheless, the multitude of interpretations of different approaches to teachers' professional competences, including specialised competences, shows they are an important category in pedagogy. The level of professional competences of teachers depends on the way in which the teachers work and the efficiency of this work, while their content and formulation reflect the particular educational philosophy and the evolution of the teachers' role.

However, according to the report *Arts and cultural Education at School in Europe-Brussels 2009*, the process of developing the specialised competences of teachers of artistic subjects, including teachers carrying out the art education process, is not of particular interest. Moreover, the studies undertaken so far to identify the actual knowledge in arts and the level of practical skills of teachers in visual arts and the issues of teacher education and development, of their professional competences, including specialised artistic competences, show insufficient levels of these competences and highlight areas for improvement (Kunat, 2016). Therefore, in the light of the above-mentioned phenomena, the competences in visual arts of early childhood teachers – which in the broad sense covers both the knowledge of art and culture, the problems of perception and understanding of works of art and aesthetic, as well as the practical approach to art – gain particular meaning.

In view of the above, and in the light of the idea that a well-prepared teacher – a professional rather than an amateur, whose knowledge, skills and attitudes determine professional and effective teaching – plays a key role in properly implemented art education at school, the author of this paper proposes to complete the teachers' professional competences with specialised artistic competences needed for early childhood education. Attempts have thus been made to make the scope of these competences more specific in a way that would enable capturing their specificities. An original model of specialised visual competences have been formulated by the

author to improve the tools used in educational diagnosis aiming at evaluation of the preparation of teachers for educational tasks in the field of visual arts.

The concept of competence seems crucial to the content of subject under consideration in this study, and so the first part of the study focused on its explication.

Competences – explication of concept

Encompassing the term of competences in the framework of a definition is by no means an easy task. Therefore, it should not be surprising that the researchers studying this issue have never been unanimous on what the competences are and what predispositions they consists of. The lack of unanimity in the definition of competences results in several emerging classifications and models of competences – with different theoretical bases – and the wide range of concepts with which competences are identified. There is a tendency to build models that aggregate individual skills into more general, internally coherent categories, which does not facilitate the development of a consistent definition for this term. In addition, the ambiguity of understanding the concept of competence is due to the dual use of the word “competence” itself, which is applied to describe both the effect of the action and the characteristics defined by the skills of an employee.

Here, it is worth noting that competences are often associated with concepts such as skills, abilities, knowledge, behaviours, individual variables, attitudes, values, experience, and emotional intelligence (Packard, 2014, p. 313–319). In addition, competences can be considered as a basis for operational efficiency, a condition for the construction of a psychosocial identity of an individual, the ability to act in a reflective way, a condition of distancing understanding and the potential for emancipation.

Despite the lack of a single universal approach to the definition of competence, in this study – in order to maintain theoretical consistency – the concept of competence is recognised as a term used to describe a certain type of behaviour of an individual aimed at achieving a high level of performance, and to describe both the knowledge that people are expected to have and the skills needed to successfully play specific roles (Dubois, Rothwell, 2004), assuming that these competences are always a personal category, depending on the ability of the individual to perform certain activities, taking into account the social context of their performance and the ability to adapt to it; they are observable, as they manifest themselves in behaviour; they are linked to the performance of professional tasks and their application enables the expected results to be achieved at work; finally,

they are dynamic, which means that their expression is time-varying, that they can be developed and shaped in the course of professional preparation by improving knowledge and skills and by shaping specific attitudes.

Competences, understood as a cognitive structure consisting of knowledge, skills, personality and values, occupy an important place in the professional development of a teacher. Researchers in this field focus on the issues of building competences needed to successfully complete the tasks included in a specific education concept. Thus, in the catalogue of teacher's competences, we can find a number of classifications and models of competences. The most common categories of competences are: substantive, educational and methodological, pedagogical, praxeological, moral, fundamental, necessary and desirable. Other encountered categories of teacher's competences include interpersonal, personality, communication, creative, IT and media. The competence catalogue of early childhood teachers provide the following competences: interpretation, diagnostic and interventional, pedagogical and psychological, communication, planning and design cooperation, interaction, self-educational, as well as specialised (related to a given subject) and didactic.

The presented typologies of the teacher's professional competences clearly show their diversity. There are, however, some common dogmas in them: each of the recognised categories of competences has a similar structure and they are dominated by a classic perspective of knowledge, skills and attitudes. What differentiates these competences is the set of characteristics of the individual and situation factors that interact with each other, conditioning behaviours that are conducive to the performance of assigned tasks in a specific area. At this point it should be noted that the achievement of an optimal set of professional competences will always contradict the essence of the teacher's work, as it is one of those professions where the final form of qualifications cannot be defined. Knowledge, skills and attitudes that determine professional and effective teaching are always unfinished, insufficient, constantly demanding corrections, and must therefore be continuously improved and developed. This is linked to the rapidly changing working conditions and changes in the social environment, to the development of scientific knowledge and to the uniqueness of educational situations.

In view of the diversity of divergent perspectives in the field of the teacher's competences, including the professional competences of early childhood teachers, and given that this group is required to be specialised in each field of knowledge – in each educational area – and thus to have the appropriate information, which enable them to properly transmit their knowledge, the direction of the explications being made has to be clarified.

Therefore, in this study, all the considerations are being made from the perspective of specialised competences (competences related to a given subject) of the early childhood teachers, and further explications are focused on the specialised artistic competences of teachers, which are so essential in the implementation of the process of early childhood art education process.

The model of specialised artistic competences of early childhood teachers –subjective approach

Art education at the level of early childhood education is a process of systematic learning and understanding by the child of visual arts in its various aspects and relationships; it is aimed at introducing the child into the world of values particular to visual arts, facilitating the understanding of the language of visual arts, activating the child in the process of reception of the works of art and encouraging the child to spontaneous artistic creation. Leaving aside the wider discussion about the need for such education, and stating that it is indispensable or at least desirable, it should be assumed that the primary objective of art education for young children is to educate a future recipient of visual arts (in a narrow sense), recipient of visual forms (in a broad sense), and finally – their future creator.

It is worth pointing out here that the way in which potential recipients perceive the artistic objects, discover their general meaning and the sense they have for them personally, depends not only on the piece of art itself, but also on a number of characteristics of the recipient, such as: the possibilities and patterns of perception, the state of formation of personal cognitive structures, intelligence, emotional properties and individual experiences, especially those related to visual arts (first experiences most often determine later aesthetic preferences, internal harmony, as well as the development of intellectual, emotional and creative activity). Therefore, in order to prepare pupils for full and valuable interaction with visual arts, it is important to provide them with the ability to consciously recognise and see, which means developing and improving quality competences in the area of perception and reception of visual arts, i.e. knowledge of visual arts, the ability of creative perception and expression, the ability to evaluate, socio-moral sensitivity, aesthetic sensitivity, awareness of the function of art in human life, respectful attitude to beauty and art (see Mazepa-Domagala, 2005).

Understanding the language of visual arts by the child (pupil) requires well-informed educating, subtle and skilful leadership and guidance, especially in terms of aesthetic sensitivity, which is an inborn, constantly evolving disposition of every

person and which is favourable to motivate the child to have contact with visual arts. As a consequence, educational activities in the area of shaping the perception, reception and artistic expression at the level of early childhood education should be carried out by qualified and skilled teachers who have a wide knowledge in this field, as well as cultural experiences and skills to plan educational situations aimed at the reception of visual arts and the creation of visual objects. It is worth pointing out here that a teacher who knows, understands and deeply values visual arts, and – moreover – who knows how to develop awareness of art and through art, how to shape the aesthetic side of the personalities of the youngest participants of the educational process, will – in addition to such shaping and enrichment of pupils' aesthetic awareness – also influence the formation of permanent personality traits also in the scope of social, moral and living attitude and activity.

In view of the complexity of the tasks of art education, as well as the changes in visual arts and thus in creative and reception approaches, and given that teachers involved in the process of art education is faced with the need to develop continuously, to raise their own general and pedagogical culture, the aims of this paper – in the form of a proposal for a structure of specialised artistic competences presented in a model-based approach – gain particular meaning.

When trying to develop a model of specialised artistic competences of early childhood teachers, it is worth referring to the concept of artistic competences formulated by P. Bourdieu, which covers the skills acquired in the educational process by the recipients of visual arts and their qualifications as viewers. The term “artistic competence” itself means for P. Bourdieu knowledge of the rules governing the classification of artistic products which enable to situate the work in accordance with its stylistic characteristics in the universe of artistic objects (Bourdieu, 1968, pp. 589–612); it includes cognitive, emotional and volitional elements, knowledge of art and its practical use, i.e. application to a specific artistic message; it does not, however, concern the ability to create works of art. The level of this competence – according to P. Bourdieu, depends on the complexity and sophistication of the system used for the classification of the works of art and the degree to which it is mastered by the recipient. Therefore, in order to properly perceive the work of visual arts, it has to be relatively unsophisticated, or the recipient must have the knowledge required to understand it properly. In this perspective, the knowledge of visual arts, understanding and knowledge of artistic and classification concepts, as well as formal and practical issues, is becoming an important element in the process of perception.

In the context of the above-mentioned observations, which shall be the starting point for the present study, and having in mind the number of various

definitions of the concept of *competence*, in this paper the specialised visual competences are a set of permanent, genetically determined pre-dispositions of a teacher; factual knowledge – which is the most important component of this competence – acquired through learning and experience; the ability to perceive visual arts, including the ability to value a visual object, which is based on knowledge of the principles of classification of visual products and enables to value the work – in accordance with its stylistic characteristics – in artistic terms; as well as attitudes, beliefs and values.

The focus of the present explications has been put on the presentation of the structure of specialised artistic competences of early childhood teachers in the form of an original competences model.

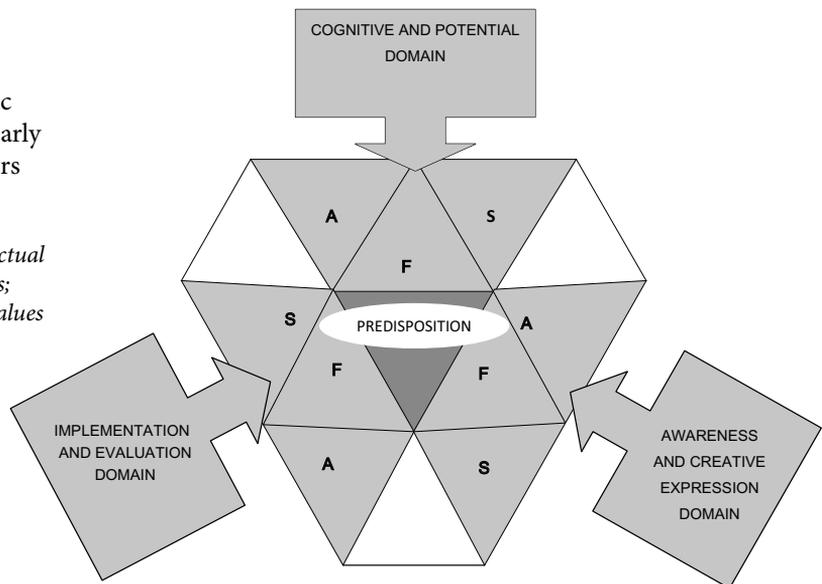
Thus, given the key areas of art education at the level of early school education, i.e. the perception and reception of visual arts and expression through visual arts, we shall present the specialised artistic competences of early childhood teachers as a three-segment structure, in which each of the segments – seen as a domain of competence – consists of a set of factual knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviours that originate from biological predisposition; qualities and habits based on predisposition and established within a series of experiences, including aesthetic ones.

Integrated model of professional specialised artistic competences for early childhood teachers is presented on Diagram 1.

Diagram 1.
The model of specialised artistic competences of early childhood teachers

Explanation: *F* – factual knowledge; *S* – skills; *A* – attitudes and values

Source: Own elaboration



As pointed out, the basic elements of the structure of the original specialised visual competences model for early childhood teachers are three domains of competence: potential and cognitive domain, awareness and creative expression domain, as well as implementation and evaluation domain.

Cognitive and potential domain – the organisation and course of the perception and reception process of visual works – includes specialist knowledge from the field of visual arts, which is recognised as an awareness of the knowledge resource and the extent to which the teacher understands it before and during the educational task undertaken in the field of art education, which in this case means a set of knowledge on art, including knowledge of the fundamentals of visual quality, and knowledge of art history in terms of knowledge of styles, artistic directions and works of art, that have been acquired through learning and experience. Within this domain of competence, the following categories of behaviour have been distinguished: the ability to recognise works of visual arts, including the perception of artistic elements and the unobvious links between them, as well as the readiness to critically understand visual arts and finally – the aesthetic sensitivity.

Awareness and creative expression domain – determines the organisation and course of the creative process and includes knowledge of cultures and ways of expression, understanding how to express and communicate ideas creatively using different forms of visual arts, as well as categories of behaviour, i.e.: the ability to use and apply artistic techniques and media, to engage in creative processes, to express and interpret figurative and abstract concepts, experiences and emotions in various forms of visual arts, and to be open to the diversity of artistic expression.

Implementation and evaluation domain – determines the evaluation of the creative process by referring to the area of knowledge of children's creativity in the artistic process, the ability to categorise/value a visual image and to diagnose children's artistic abilities, constructive reflection in the context of the evaluation of creative processes, as well as creativity and attitudes represented by the preferred behaviour of motivating the youngest creators – pupils of the childhood education to engage in artistic activity and appreciate their ideas, understanding and applying the language of evaluation in a positive and socially responsible manner and the sensitivity to the aesthetic qualities of the artistic objects.

The structure of the specialised artistic competences of early childhood teachers is presented in a tabular format which – as it is assumed – also clarifies the specificity of these competences (see Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of the components of the structure of specialised artistic competences of early childhood teachers, broken down by competence domain

Domain of specialised artistic competences	Components of the competences structure	Indicators of the structure of specialised artistic competences
Cognitive and potential domain conditioning the organisation and process of the perception and reception of the work of visual art	knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge of basic concepts and visual terms • knowledge of visual techniques and media • knowledge of the fields of visual arts • knowledge of artistic directions • knowledge of architectural styles
	skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to recognise works of visual arts, including the perception of visual elements and the unobvious links between them (Polish art, foreign art)
	attitudes beliefs values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • readiness to critically understand works of art; • aesthetic sensitivity – experiencing aesthetic satisfaction in direct contact with a work of visual arts
Cognitive and potential determines the organisation and course of artistic activity	knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge of cultures and ways of expression (local, national, European, global) • understanding the fact that visual arts can be a way of both seeing and shaping the reality; • understanding the different ways in which ideas are transferred between the artist and the recipient of art • understanding how to express and communicate ideas and meanings in a creative way using different artistic forms
	skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ability to use and apply techniques and media of visual arts • ability to engage in creative processes • ability to express and interpret figurative and abstract concepts, experiences and emotions in various forms of visual arts
	attitudes beliefs values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • openness to the diversity of visual expression; • openness to emerging new phenomena and opportunities in the field of visual arts; • respect for the diversity of visual expression; • readiness to participate in visual projects

Domain of specialised artistic competences	Components of the competences structure	Indicators of the structure of specialised artistic competences
Implementation and evaluation domain, determining the evaluation of creative process	knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge and understanding of the process of children's visual creation • understanding of the principles and ways to evaluate work of visual arts
	skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluating work of visual arts in its aspects: formal (language of visual arts), artistic (artist's idea) and aesthetic (ideological content) • diagnosing children's visual abilities • constructive reflection in the context of the evaluation creative processes • creativity, including imagination, creative thinking, problem solving
	attitudes beliefs values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • motivating the youngest creators – children to engage in artistic activity and appreciating their ideas • sensitivity to aesthetic qualities • need to understand and apply the language of assessment in a positive and socially responsible way

Source: *Own elaboration*

At this point, it is important to point out the particular position held in the structure of professional competences by indicators, which are behaviours, activities, skills and attitudes characteristic for the given competence which shows us that the person has the given competence. In the presented structure of specialised artistic competences of early childhood teachers, the indicators included in different domains of the specialised and artistic competence are presented in a basic structure, which means they are open to be developed, detailed and complemented. Nevertheless, the designed set of indicators, which are composed – as it has been assumed – of basic, and observable behaviours subject to evaluation, is a prerequisite for the achievement of educational tasks in the field of art education of pupils at the level of early childhood education and it can be successfully used in educational diagnosis aimed at determining the degree of preparation of teachers for these tasks, for example in terms of planning one's own career development.

Therefore, on the basis of the above-mentioned indicators, by assessing each of them in the adopted/specified scale of evaluation, possibly on the basis of a list of indicators defined for each level of competence, or by assigning indicators to

different levels of competence, but differentiated in terms of quality, we can obtain estimation of the level of knowledge, skills, attitudes and predispositions – both within each of the competence domains and in a coherent approach – and identify the extent of any competence gap, that is of any differences between the current level of the competence and its model level.

As it has already been pointed out, although competences are not permanent, they develop or are transferred with new tasks, the degree to which they are mastered can be measured and evaluated. To this end, competence levels are defined in terms of the scale of competence development assessment.

In the model of specialised artistic competences under development, the intersection of the distinct competence domains and their components, together with the proposed indicators, allows this competence to be graduated, in order to reflect the skills and expected attitudes of the teacher, in order to meet the assumed requirements and to enable the core of educational activities in the field of art education to be carried out at the level of early childhood education.

Therefore, in line with the adopted competence model, a scale of assessment of their development has been developed to determine the level to which the specialised artistic competences are mastered by early childhood teachers. Four levels the artistic competence intensity have thus been distinguished:

Low level – fragmented theoretical knowledge within the competence domains, difficulties in selecting information relevant to the issues being analysed, not always correct identification of the relationship between the data which results in making mistakes when drawing conclusions on their basis, clear inability to cope with the tasks requiring this competence, including the evaluation of visual works and the diagnosis of children's visual abilities.

Basic level – basic knowledge within the competence domains, irregular use of competences; making mistakes in non-standard situations and within autonomous design of tasks, including diagnosis and evaluation of child visual creativity; skilful execution of tasks in the case of following a pattern; problems in the realisation of slightly more difficult tasks.

Good (expected) level – having a well-established expertise within each of the competence domains, proper performing of most tasks requiring the use of a given competence, making mistakes in new, non-standard teaching situations.

Above expectations (advanced) – deep expertise with in each of the competence domains, accurate execution of tasks requiring the given competence, high levels of performance, efficient execution of even the most demanding tasks requiring the given competence, ability to creatively use knowledge, develop skills and attitudes.

Finally, one more issue is worth raising. The identification of specialised artistic competences can be done by observing the behaviour of teachers during the process of art education, their self-assessment of the level of this competence and the assessment of factual, specialised knowledge with test method. Each of these approaches applied to assess the level of specialised artistic competences of early childhood teachers requires the use of appropriate tools to analyse and evaluate the preparation of these teachers for the reception of visual arts. This issue, however, goes beyond the scope of this study.

... instead of conclusion

As it has already been pointed out, art education at the level of early childhood means a process that results in the increase of the child's knowledge in the area of broadly understood visual arts, the understanding of its language, deepening the aesthetic and moral sensitivity of the child, increasing the level of the child's involvement in the creation and reception of the value of art, as well as the acquisition of competences which determine the perception of visual products and enable artistic self-expression. In this context, it is important to prepare the teacher for the implementation of educational activities in the area of visual arts, with the use of high-level specialised artistic competences. The explications presented in this study are the first step in consolidation of the model of specialised artistic competence under development. This is only a stage of cognitive recognition of the issue under consideration, which requires further theoretical findings and coherent practical implications, however – in the opinion of the author of the study – it can contribute to moderating discussions and further research on the shaping and deepening of professional specialised artistic competences of teachers in early childhood education.

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