



Arts in a Roma school (Slovakia)

Summary

“Arts in a Roma school” is an innovative practice developed by a Slovak arts teacher, Jan Sajko. The practice created and implemented new teaching methods for students from poor Roma communities. The children were encouraged to work at their own pace, enjoy their creative work and develop their own personal ways of expression. The practice draws from the richness of Roma culture to stimulate the creativity of children. It has been developed in the school of Jarovnice (near Prešov, Slovakia), an institute attended only by Roma students, mostly living in very poor social conditions.

The project

The project aims to awaken the artistic talent of primary school students from a very poor Roma settlement in eastern Slovakia. In fact, practice has shown that institutional education often fails with students from poor Roma communities, leaving the children feeling detached and uninterested in school work. Roma children, need a different focus to the Slovak middle-classes as they have special problems caused by the poor social conditions in which they live. Roma children also have to cope with negative stereotypes. These prejudices and discrimination have negative repercussions on Roma children. In this context, the practice intends to:

- Deliberately work with the student’s thinking, feelings, and actions in order to transform the student’s value system;
- Respect the individuality of the students and their diverse psychological, intellectual, emotional, and physiological development;
- Develop artistic and creativity skills in Roma students;
- Promote a strong and positive self-identity.

Sector(s) covered

Main Sector

Society

Other Sectors

Arts and creative industry

Approach

Different artistic activities have been organised by Jan Sajko. For example, the students and the teacher read fairytales together and listen to Roma songs either from tapes or from students’ singing in the classroom. The teacher invites the students to illustrate the songs and folk tales. Sometimes the children provide songs or tales and translate them into Slovak so the class can discuss ideas for illustrations. In their paintings, the children use recycled disposed materials (e.g., used paper cartons, old journals, egg shells), which lead them to creatively compose their artwork and use abstract forms. Classroom conversations have been organised. These debates focus on different forms of art (e.g. sculpture, architecture). The students are encouraged to talk about art pieces, and express personal impressions on particular forms of art. To promote such discussions, the teacher visits art galleries and exhibitions with his students. After a school trip to a gallery of modern art in Stuttgart in Germany and watching an exhibition of cubist artists (e.g., Picasso), the children were impressed by this art method, which was new to them. When they came back, they enthusiastically presented information about cubism to all children in their classroom and showed photos of cubism that they brought from the gallery.



Element of innovation – the process

The main innovation of the project can be found in the original teaching methodology used by Sajko to release the artistic potential of Roma children and develop their personality.

The students' free choice is always a fundamental part of each lesson. During the classes, students can choose their art techniques and project activities at any time. The teacher makes the students' work meaningful, practical and socially visible. For example, the students' artwork made in the classroom is used to decorate the school's interior. The key for teaching success is the teacher's communication with the students and the playfulness of classroom activities.

The teacher suggests themes for artistic work that are familiar, meaningful, and important for the students such as "my family" and "important events and experiences for me." These themes help to develop better relationships with other people, better attitudes toward the students' artistic work, and respect for students' work.

Students' artwork is typically based in real life situations such as family events such as settlement, a marriage party, a funeral, visiting a city. The teacher encourages students to use their feelings and emotions in their artistic production.

Roma traditional songs and folklore fairytales have a special place among arts lessons.

Key successes

(outcomes, results, impacts)

The art of Jarovnice students was recognised and awarded in numerous national and international art competitions in India, Japan, Hungary, Germany, Czech Republic, USA, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Norway, Finland, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Sweden.

Jarovnice artwork won competitions among many thousands of participants. For example, in 1998, Jarovnice students were awarded two gold medals, two silver medals, and nine bronze medals at the International Children's Art competition, with over 200,000 works of art presented from around the world. The hardest working and most creative students are rewarded by going on trip abroad with Sajko to see the exhibitions of their work.

Transferability and sustainability

The practice implements an innovative methodology to encourage the artistic expression of disadvantaged children. As such, it can be used also in other contexts, characterised by poor social and economic conditions.

Special Highlights

The main innovation of the project is the original teaching methodology used by Sajko to release the artistic potential of Roma children and develop their personality. Teacher communication with the students, the playfulness of activities and the focus on the students' real life situations are the key elements of this new successful learning practice. The practice draws from the richness of Roma culture to stimulate the creativity of children.



Key characteristics

General purpose of the practice	The practice stimulates innovative/creative behaviours in people and implements an innovative/creative solution to society problems
Target group	Roma pupils
Type of learning	Formal
Level of implementation	Local
Funding	Public
Time frame	Jan Sajko started teaching arts in 1983
Leading organisations	School in Jarovnice

Further information

Website of project

<http://www.jan.sajko.szm.sk/>

Contact details

Ján Sajko, Art Teacher

sajko.jan@post.sk

Additional Information

<http://ematusov.soe.udel.edu/jano/>