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Teachers' and Artists' Collaborative Teaching and Learning

SONJA RUTAR^{*1}, TINA ŠTEMBERGER² AND BOGDANA BOROTA²

∞ The new dimension of a stimulating, open and innovative learning environment in education is recognised in the integrative collaboration of all those involved in the educational process. Such an environment provides children with a variety of contextual experiences to enter the symbolic world of culture and art. Collaboration between artists and teachers has been identified as an essential approach to improving the quality of planned arts practice in kindergartens and schools. In order to improve collaborative teaching between teachers and artists in Slovenian pre-schools and primary schools, a design-based research methodology was used. The paper presents a snapshot of the pre-intervention situation and the impact of interventions that involved teachers in collaborative work with artists and children's participation in the educational process. The study involved 116 preschool teachers and 148 primary school teachers. The results showed the importance of involving artists in the educational process. By involving artists in the pedagogical process, teachers can gain information about how children can participate experientially and expressively in artistic experiences, which 1) relieves the burden of predetermined and overstructured curricular practices, 2) enables pupils to participate experientially and expressively in artistic experiences, 3) provides teachers with insight into children's experiential and expressive capacities/competences, and 4) provides artists with insight into the possibilities of integrating authentic artistic experiences into education.

Keywords: arts education, children's participation, emergent curriculum, learning environment, professional development

1 ^{*}Corresponding Author. Faculty of Education, University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia; sonja.rutar@pef.upr.si.

2 Faculty of Education, University of Primorska, Koper, Slovenia.

Sodelovanje učiteljev in umetnikov pri poučevanju in učenju

SONJA RUTAR, TINA ŠTEMBERGER IN BOGDANA BOROTA

~ Nova dimenzija spodbudnega, odprtega in inovativnega učnega okolja v izobraževanju se kaže v povezovalnem sodelovanju vseh vključenih v izobraževalni proces. Takšno okolje otrokom nudi raznolike kontekstualne izkušnje vstopanja v simbolni svet kulture in umetnosti. Sodelovanje med umetniki in učitelji je opredeljeno kot bistveni pristop za izboljšanje kakovosti načrtovane umetniške prakse v vrtcih in šolah. Za izboljšanje sodelovanja med učitelji in umetniki v slovenskih vrtcih in osnovnih šolah je bila uporabljena raziskava načrtovanih novosti pri pouku. V prispevku je predstavljeno stanje pred skupnim poučevanjem vzgojiteljev/učiteljev in umetnikov ter po njem. V študijo je bilo vključenih 116 vzgojiteljev in 148 učiteljev. Rezultati kažejo na pozitivno vlogo vključevanja umetnikov v vzgojno-izobraževalni proces. Z vključevanjem umetnikov v vzgojno-izobraževalni proces lahko učitelji pridobijo informacije o tem, kako lahko otroci izkustveno in izrazno sodelujejo v umetniških izkušnjah, kar 1) zmanjša obremenjenost z vnaprej določenimi in preveč strukturiranimi kurikularnimi praksami; 2) omogoča učencem, da izkustveno in izrazno sodelujejo v umetniških izkušnjah; 3) učiteljem omogoča vpogled v izkustvene in izrazne sposobnosti/kompetence otrok; 4) umetnikom omogoča vpogled v možnosti vključevanja avtentičnih umetniških izkušenj v izobraževanje.

Ključne besede: umetniško izobraževanje, sodelovanje otrok, porajajoči kurikulum, učno okolje, strokovni razvoj

Introduction

Arts as a curricular domain and as content is present in the Slovenian education system from preschool to the end of secondary education (Taštanoska, 2019). In the pre-primary period, kindergartens are given the autonomy to determine the number of hours devoted to art or the extent of arts content in their programmes. However, this is subject to the stipulation of a balanced curriculum, which requires that all curricular areas be represented equally in the curriculum as implemented (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, 1999).

Compulsory school curricula (for students aged 6 to 15) and secondary school curricula allocate a certain number of hours to the arts. In the initial first three grades of compulsory basic education, music and art are taught by the class teacher. According to Article 38 of the Basic School Act (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, 2024), a subject teacher may work with the class teacher in teaching music and art. From grade four, a subject teacher may also teach music and art. In Slovenian kindergartens, primary schools and secondary schools, teachers are autonomous in their choice of teaching methods and are therefore able to decide by themselves how the lessons are delivered (Krek & Metljak, 2011).

Starting from the premise that children in kindergartens and schools should be given an opportunity for high-quality artistic experiences – education in and through the arts – the project SKUM – Developing Communicative Abilities Through Cultural Arts Education (2017–2022) was implemented in public kindergartens and schools. The basic objectives of the SKUM project were:

- to determine how kindergartens and schools make it possible for children/adolescents to get in touch with high-quality artistic experiences;
- to develop didactic approaches in artistic and other educational fields as well as new forms of linking educational work with artistic activities, including those in less well-established areas of art, with the aim of raising the level of communicative abilities of children/adolescents (SKUM, n.d.).

The key principles for the implementation of the project activities were: 1) the collaboration of kindergartens and schools with artists, and 2) the participation of children and pupils in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the pedagogical process. We assumed that only the joint work and collaboration of educators and artists in the pedagogical process can give children access

to 1) direct artistic experience of experiencing, 2) knowledge development and 3) self-expression. These are the phases and activities that we see as key in arts education.

In order to develop collaborative teaching between teachers and artists in Slovenian preschools and primary schools, design-based research was used as the main methodology. This paper presents a snapshot of the situation at the beginning of the project and the impact of interventions that involved teachers in collaborative work with artists and children's participation in the educational process.

Rationale for teacher-artist collaboration and children's participation in education

Art in education is a planned activity, but it depends on the knowledge and competences of teachers (Bračun Sova & Kemperl, 2012) as well as on their attitudes (Denac et al., 2011). Planned activities reflect the very mission of education and the education system. The purposefulness of the curriculum is what ensures that all children are provided with the content and incentives that are defined by professional consensus in the curriculum's objectives or content. It is therefore the teacher's task to provide children with experiences and opportunities that some of them may never have in their everyday or home environment.

In cultural-arts education, the emerging curriculum, in particular, has the role of balancing, complementing and co-creating experiences in a pedagogical process to which the child contributes in terms of content and process, through his/her prior experiences, knowledge and initiatives. In this pedagogical process, the artist can enter with intuition, openness and responsiveness to the child's process of experiencing, learning and expression. As previous studies have shown (Podobnik & Borota, 2022), the artist's knowledge of the artistic field and the process of artistic creation is the starting point for planning strategies together with teachers and children.

Only an emergent curriculum can go beyond the rigidity of a pre-planned curriculum (Osberg & Biesta, 2008), while at the same time ensuring children's participation in education (Rutar & Štemberger, 2018). Despite the fact that cognition is a sociocultural interactional process in which knowledge is constructed in an interactional process of knowing (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996), the planning, implementation and evaluation of the pedagogical process can be characterised by the teacher remaining constrained by his/her own experiences and perceptions, and by statically determined plans of how to carry out the pedagogical process. Instead, the process can evolve into collaborative

work and mutual exchange of content and practices with colleagues, students, parents, artists and other institutions, thus enabling the creation of a learning community of co-responsible and complementarily participating individuals who co-create the process and knowledge with the children, without preconceived dominant notions of end results and roles (Freire, 1997) in which the process and the outcome are known in advance.

In considering the issue of excessively goal-oriented pedagogical structuring and the actions of individual teachers who remain constrained by preconceived expectations and content, it becomes evident that children in Slovenian kindergartens and schools have limited opportunities to engage with authentic experiences (Rutar et al., 2022). Furthermore, there is a paucity of opportunities for children to engage in cultural and artistic experiences in museums, galleries, theatres and concert halls. The results of research on the learning environment for artistic activities (Podgornik et al., 2022, p. 91) show that the situation varies across educational institutions. Kindergartens and schools that do not have dedicated spaces for artistic activities make use of so-called 'multipurpose rooms', as well as spaces in the dining hall, lobby and corridors. The central space for cultural and arts education in kindergartens and primary schools is the playground or the classroom and, to a much lesser extent, the other indoor and outdoor spaces of the kindergartens and schools themselves.

The fundamental process premise of the SKUM project was the incorporation of artists into the pedagogical process. This addresses three pivotal concerns: 1) an excessively goal-oriented structuring of the educational process that prioritises the outcome (and reduces emphasis on the process), 2) the individual limitations of the content and process inherent to the work of individual teachers, and 3) the dearth of authentic artistic experiences for children. Indeed, educational planning is a crucial element in guaranteeing that all children have an opportunity to obtain significant experiences that are pertinent to their development. This establishes the educational role of kindergartens and schools – the role that schools play in society for all children – through the quality of the learning experience, with the purpose of ensuring equal opportunities for all children.

Over-structuring the teaching process can make it impossible to recognise children's prior experiences, to listen to and positively acknowledge their initiatives, and to involve children and other adults. As Duh (2015, p. 92) stated, children's opinions differ due to personal perspectives and associations. Taking account of children's perspectives in the emerging curriculum ensures the emergence of a curriculum that is meaningful for the child. It also enables a curriculum in which a greater quantity of diverse content and processes can be

developed than originally planned. The emerging curriculum allows children to encounter the content and ways of experiencing and knowing that are developed with children and adults in the educational process, that is, in learning communities and communities of shared meaning-making. It is the artist who can provide this through his/her intuitive interaction with children, adults and materials in various forms of collaboration.

Collaboration between artists and educators is therefore regarded as a crucial strategy for enhancing the quality of planned artistic activities in early childhood education settings. As Hoekstra (2018, p. 3) asserts, dual professional practice necessitates the negotiation of roles and positions at the individual level, with implications for pedagogy. However, the binary opposition of artist versus teacher does not fully account for the diversity of practices in which art-making and teaching are combined. Chemi (2022) has observed that “in collaborative practices between artists and schools, uncertainty affects teachers and educators as well as artists” (p. 38). Teachers are often uncertain about the content of the curriculum, the organisation of the timetable, their role in partnership with artists and how they should assess children’s learning. Although they value the arts as an experiential and pedagogical tool, they may still feel uncomfortable about integrating the arts into the whole curriculum. Based on data from interviews with artists in the Slovenian context (Podobnik & Borota, 2022), it was found that artists enter the school environment with a rich artistic oeuvre and can therefore focus more than the teacher on the themes, content, materials and techniques of artistic expression. The research showed that, depending on the pedagogical situation and the children’s reactions, artists leave the planning open for free expression and exploration of the artistic language. Artists have the ability to see the situation, to observe carefully, and to recognise and respond intuitively to children’s creative potential. This loosens up the structuring of processes and opens different paths to achieving the goals (p. 141).

We assume that the formation of a learning community of children and adults (teachers and artists) reflects the understanding that knowledge acquisition involves individual and social processes (knowledge and community formation) and, in line with Morrissey and Kenny (2023), contributes to the professional development of teachers. According to Watkins (2005), it is characteristic of these classes and groups that conversations about learning become part of the community and that responsibility for knowledge is shared: community members take responsibility not only for themselves and others, but also for what they should know and for ensuring that others know what they should know. Furthermore, learning is enriched, co-constructed and based on shared

understanding, shared meaning-making (one's own ideas are shared and meaning is verified with others) and shared problem solving. Thus, there is shared metacognition of the learning process. At the same time, individual/subjective and shared experiences, meanings and concepts are established in a dialogical and complementary way in a collaborative learning community.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to find out:

- how often and in which forms of collaboration teachers planned artistic practices before the start of the project;
- how often and in which collaborative forms cultural and artistic activities were planned before the start of the project;
- how often and in which collaborative forms teachers reflected on their work before the start of the project;
- how the intervention within the SKUM project contributed to the professional development of teachers in the planning and implementation of collaborative cultural and artistic practices.

Method

Design-based research

In order to develop collaborative teaching of teachers and artists in Slovenian preschools and primary schools, the study utilised design-based research as the main methodology. As confirmed by Anderson and Shattuck (2012), design-based research can, based on data on the efficiency of interventions, improve educational practices through various and numerous refinements of the broad variety and levels of such interventions. Underpinned by this methodology, the research was designed as a cyclical process.

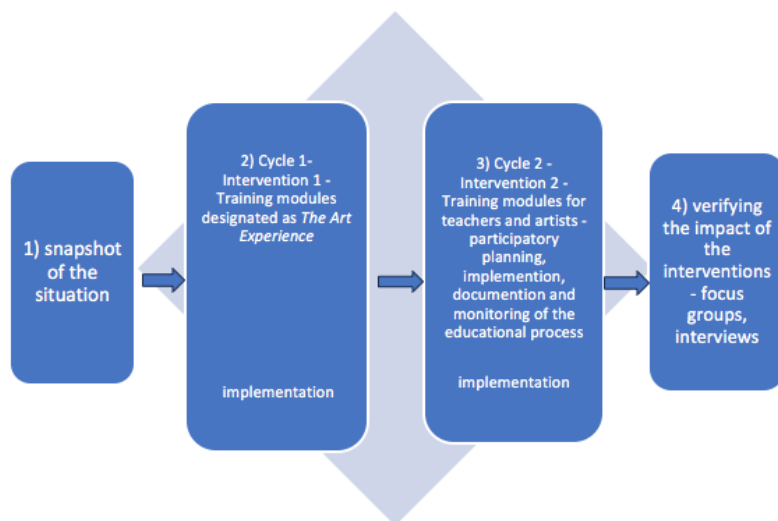
Participants

The research was carried out in the Slovenian public preschools and primary schools that took part in SKUM project. A total of 116 preschool teachers and 148 primary school teachers completed a questionnaire.

In the second stage of the study, after the second cycle of implementing and refining interventions, 4 preschool teachers and 16 primary school teachers took part in focus groups and 20 artists were interviewed individually.

Figure 1

Design-based research on teachers and artists collaborative teaching and learning



Cycle 1 – Intervention 1

A series of training modules entitled *The Art Experience* were developed. The modules were designed and implemented by a team of educators and artists. The training sessions, which were delivered by the artists, encompassed a range of disciplines, including the performing arts, film and multimedia, photography, dance, literature and music. The principal objective of the training was to enable the participants (preschool and primary school teachers) to: 1) engage with art as a means of accessing the world; 2) develop an appreciation of the ways in which art can foster curiosity and sensitivity to the real world and imaginary worlds; 3) gain insight into the creative processes of artists and their artistic creations; 4) engage in the exploration of artistic expression alongside artists and the practice of fundamental techniques of artistic creation; and 5) establish connections with artists with whom they would like to collaborate.

This was followed by the implementation of the new findings in educational work in preschools and primary schools. The main innovation was the collaborative teaching of artists and teachers and the integration of the arts with non-arts curricula. The innovative approach to teaching was tested over an extended period, usually as a multi-month project. The artist was involved in the pedagogical process continuously or sequentially as the need for his/

her intervention became apparent. In order to be able to carry out the planned pedagogical process and artistic practice competently in the intervening period, the artists underwent prior additional training on the chosen topic. These trainings became of interest to the whole kindergarten and school collectives, so that individual projects developed into school-wide projects. Artistic practice became a connecting element within the kindergarten and the school, as well as between the school and the sociocultural environment, enabling the schools to develop into cultural hotspots.

Cycle 2 - Intervention 2

As the SKUM project placed a strong emphasis on collaboration between artists, teachers and children, teachers and artists were invited to participate in the training modules. The aims of this training were: 1) to reflect on the principles of integrating the planning, implementation and documentation of the pedagogical process; 2) to test the planning of pedagogical processes according to the principles of the evolving curriculum in collaboration with all those involved in the pedagogical process; 3) to become familiar with the ways of monitoring and documenting the pedagogical process; and 4) to learn about the reasons for integrating documentation into the pedagogical process. To this end, a pedagogical planning tool was developed that focuses on planning the development process and the inclusion of all of the participants in all of the phases of the pedagogical process.

The implementation of this type of planning strengthened the monitoring of the teaching process and the children's progress. Thus the children's potential in artistic and non-artistic areas was better recognised.

Data collection and analysis

At the start of the project, a snapshot of the situation was taken using a questionnaire consisting of 13 closed questions, 16 sets of five-point rating scales on the frequency of the practices mentioned, and 3 open-ended questions. For the purposes of the present paper, we used data from three sets of five-point rating scales on (i) the frequency of collaborative forms of planning cultural and artistic practices, (ii) the frequency of planning collaborative activities for pupils, and (iii) the frequency of collaborative forms of professional reflection by teachers. The questionnaire was developed on the web application ika. At the beginning of the project, the preschool and primary school teachers participating in the SKUM project were invited to fill in the questionnaire. The data collection took place in November–December 2018.

The second phase of data collection, which sought to ascertain the potential impact of the project, was conducted at the conclusion of the project. Focus groups were employed for this purpose, as Štemberger (2021) suggests that such groups are an appropriate method for evaluating the implementation and results of a project, as they allow for the perception of progress as well as the identification of further needs. The second rationale for the implementation of focus groups was provided by the objective of the study, which was to investigate the potential benefits of collaborative teaching between teachers and artists. The focus groups were conducted in August 2021 to facilitate the sharing of experiences between the participants and the generation of insights into the synthesis of their individual and collective experiences of the collaborative teaching of teachers and artists. The artists were interviewed individually. Given the circumstances of the ongoing pandemic, the focus groups were held in the Zoom videoconferencing environment.

In line with the purpose of the study, the data obtained from the questionnaires were subjected to basic descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS software. The results are presented in tabular form. The data gathered from the focus groups and interviews were analysed in accordance with the principles of qualitative analysis, with a particular focus on the participants' perceptions of the contribution of the SKUM project.

Results and discussion

At the initial stage of the project, our objective was to ascertain the frequency and formats in which teachers plan cultural-arts practices, as well as to determine the individuals involved in the planning process and the frequency of their involvement.

Collaborative forms of planning cultural and artistic practices at the start of the project

Table 1
Basic descriptive statistics of different collaborative forms of planning cultural and artistic practices in preschools and primary schools

Collaborative planning practices	Preschool			Primary School		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
together with a teacher from a related field	114	3.2	1.2	144	3.5	1.0
together with other teachers	113	2.4	0.9	142	3.2	1.0
alone	114	3.2	1.2	145	3.4	1.2
together with pupils	113	3.7	0.8	143	3.3	0.9
together with other school professionals (counsellors, management)	111	2.4	0.9	143	2.8	1.0
together with representatives of cultural institutions (curators, animators, etc.)	112	1.9	0.8	142	2.2	1.0
together with artists/experts	112	2.1	0.8	142	2.0	0.8
together with parents	113	2.2	0.8	142	1.8	0.8

Note. Sample – *n*, arithmetic mean – *M*, standard deviation – *SD* (Ratings: never – 1; rarely – 2; sometimes – 3; often – 4; very often – 5)

The SKUM project’s initial survey of collaborative forms of planning cultural and artistic practices in preschools and schools revealed that educators predominantly engage in planning activities with other educators or teachers, independently and with children/pupils. It is uncommon for educators to engage in planning activities with parents, representatives of cultural institutions or artists. This suggests that there has been no perceived need to extend planning and involve artists, parents and other cultural institutions directly in the planning process. While teachers demonstrate awareness of the value of collaboration with colleagues and pupils, there is a notable absence of collaboration with other individuals and institutions from the environment, who could contribute to the planning and implementation of arts activities in preschools and primary schools in terms of content, process and expertise.

Planning collaborative activities for pupils at the start of the project

From the perspective of the sociocultural understanding of constructing experience, we were interested in the extent to which children have the opportunity to collaborate and create with practitioners, learners and experts, as well as the nature of these opportunities.

Table 2
Basic descriptive statistics of planning collaborative forms of activities for pupils

Pupils collaborative work forms	Preschool			Primary School		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I plan art activities as a creative process in which the pupil creates with the support of professional staff	115	3.9	0.7	146	3.3	1.0
I plan art activities as a creative process in which the pupil creates	116	4.0	0.7	148	3.5	1.0
I plan art activities as a creative process in which the pupil creates together with an artist/expert	115	2.2	0.8	147	2.1	0.9

Note. Sample – *n*, arithmetic mean – *M*, standard deviation – *SD* (Scores: never – 1; rarely – 2; some-times – 3; often – 4; very often – 5)

The findings indicate that teachers predominantly conceptualise art activities as a creative process, whereby pupils are encouraged to engage in the act of creation. This approach is observed to be more prevalent in preschool settings, with an average rating of *M* = 4.0, compared to *M* = 3.9 in primary schools. The same creative process is employed in preschool settings with the support of professional staff, with an average rating of *M* = 3.9, compared to *M* = 3.3 in primary schools. The findings indicate that although pupils are afforded the opportunity to engage in a diverse range of interactions, teachers adopt a supportive role, facilitating independent work while limiting opportunities for collaboration with an artist. In preschools, the mean score was *M* = 2.2, while in primary schools, it was *M* = 2.1. It can be concluded that artists had not yet been acknowledged as a source of diverse content, modes and artistic practices in preschools and schools, at least at the outset of the project.

Collaborative forms of professional reflection by teachers at the start of the project

The assumption that collaborative reflection, involving a multiplicity of perspectives rather than a single dominant viewpoint, represents a source of professional development led us to investigate the frequency and nature of interactions between preschool and primary school teachers engaged in reflection with others.

Table 3

Basic descriptive statistics for teachers' collaborative forms of professional reflection

Teachers' collaborative forms of professional reflection	Preschool			Primary School		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
alone, individually	102	4.0	1.0	136	3.8	0.9
in discussions with teachers from related fields	102	4.3	0.7	136	3.8	0.7
in discussions with other teachers in the school	101	3.2	0.9	136	3.4	0.8
in discussions with colleagues or other colleagues in training sessions	102	2.9	0.8	136	3.3	0.8
by reviewing documentation with pupils	102	3.1	1.0	136	2.9	0.9
looking at documentation with colleagues	102	2.7	0.9	136	2.5	0.8

Note. Sample – *n*, arithmetic mean – *M*, standard deviation – *SD* (Scores: never – 1; rarely – 2; sometimes – 3; often – 4; very often – 5)

At the initial stage of the project, it was observed that the teachers surveyed engaged in professional reflection with their peers from related fields (preschools $M = 4.3$, primary schools $M = 3.8$), as well as alone, individually (preschools $M = 3.8$, primary schools $M = 4.0$). However, it is apparent that they did not perceive documentation material or the review of documentation material as a crucial instrument for their own professional development, despite the fact that such practices are typical of educational settings and the documentation theories of Reggio Emilia (Rinaldi, 2005). These theories consider documentation material and its review, as well as collaborative discussions when reviewing documentation material with children and colleagues, to be a central element of professional development.

The contribution of SKUM to the professional development of teachers in the field of the collaborative planning and implementation of cultural and artistic practices after the interventions

In 2021, our objective was to identify and examine the impact of interventions in the SKUM project, which involved teachers engaging in collaborative work with artists and children's participation in the educational process. This entailed an investigation of the way children's initiatives contributed to the planning, implementation and evaluation of cultural and artistic activities, and the extent to which this influenced the professional development and transformation of the pedagogical process. Prior research findings from the project (Smrtnik Vitulić et al., 2022) indicate that an educational process that takes place in collaboration between teachers and artists creates the conditions for artistic experiences in which the participants experience and recognise the meaning of art and internalise its values (p. 71). The research findings also demonstrate that when arts activities are integrated into the educational process, the reception and experience of art as well as the learning and teaching process are transformed (p. 72).

In our research, the participating teachers indicated that both they and their pupils acquired knowledge and understanding of specific areas of art. *It was emphasised that artists from diverse fields should collaborate with teachers, given that teachers alone are unable to provide pupils with the same level of artistic experience that can be offered through such collaboration.* Thus, the teachers emphasised the importance of collaborative work as a fundamental aspect of the planning and implementation of the teaching process, given their recognition that they are unable to provide a meaningful artistic experience on their own, without the input of an artist.

The teachers expressed a desire for more frequent and intensive contact or collaboration with artists in the future. *It is their desire that artists be continuously involved in the educational process, rather than just for the limited duration of a project. It is emphasised that the planning of cultural and artistic education should be based on the pupils' wishes, backgrounds and individual differences.*

The teachers also stated that the project had enabled them to grow both personally and professionally. We note that they *identified opportunities in the arts to develop different ways of teaching and learning, including science, through artistic activities.* We also find that the teachers recognise the contribution of the project in terms of gaining concrete experience of working with artists and, in doing so, gaining insight into new approaches, *particularly in terms of*

teaching a wide range of subjects through the arts or, as they put it, “bringing artistic approaches into the teaching of all subjects” and cross-curricular integration. It can be concluded that the teachers experienced working with artists and art as universal content and form that goes beyond previous pedagogical approaches and practices.

Given that the teachers had very rarely collaborated or planned cultural-artistic practices with artists before, the insight into the nature of professional development is captured in the following statement, which suggests that only authentic experiences and direct opportunities for artists and teachers to engage in a direct pedagogical process can contribute to the insights that they feel they could not have gained in any other way.

Working with artists has given me rich, unforgettable experiences. No book, no workshop, can give you that. Working with an artist on the spot is a priceless experience.

The teachers emphasised that the project had changed the way they planned, not least because the artists were involved in the planning and teaching stages. They welcomed this change, but noted that it also brought other changes to the learning process:

[...] we liked this way of working very much, but we need to organise the lessons in a project-based way, integrating the learning content with each other. The pupils showed increased motivation, curiosity, new connections between pupils, increased interest in art, and joy of getting to know the artists.

The complementarity of the teacher's and the artist's action in education can thus create the conditions for social development and relationships between students, as well as the development of knowledge and other fundamental human dimensions, such as motivation, curiosity and enthusiasm for art, which is established by art as the communication of feelings, according to the definition of art offered by Tolstoy (1904).

In this context, documentation played a decisive role in professional development, with new meanings, in line with the pedagogy of listening developed by the Reggio Emilia pedagogy (Rinaldi, 2005). Documentation became a platform for participation, learning, metacognition and interpretation for all those involved, as the teachers became accustomed to it during the project:

[...] several photos and videos were taken. The students also took part in the evaluation of the projects [...] They were encouraged to express their opinion [...] (it took place) [...] collecting videos, photos, establishing the

initial situation, collecting children's interests, collecting impressions, opinions, extensive evaluation (ongoing and final, everyone's reactions).

The teachers who participated in the study clearly distinguished and linked the roles of teacher and artist in the pedagogical process through the statement:

A first-hand visit to the school by the artist has always remained a fond memory for everyone. As teachers, we are 'enculturated' into the norms of the culture, so the experience of meeting a 'different person' among the pupils (especially in the first years of school) gave the pupils a broader idea of the good and interesting people in the school.

As well as providing an opportunity for collaboration between artists and teachers, the project also offered professional assistance in the pursuit of self-development as an artist and as a teacher. As Kind et al. (2007) assert, by shifting the conceptualisation of identity from a singular, fixed entity to a multiplicity of selves and expressions, educators can cultivate an 'artistic self' and advance their engagement with art in education to a more profound and personal exploration of their artistic identity. Similarly, artists can develop their pedagogical identity without compromising their artistic identity.

The participating educators also emphasised the importance of fostering a culture of trust, even when the artist's approach to their work differs from the educator's previous experiences and expectations. This indicates that educators acknowledged the necessity to move beyond preconceived notions and expectations, and to recognise the value of the artist's unique ability to engage with children in a manner that is distinct from traditional pedagogical approaches. This is of paramount importance, as the positive circle of recognition is developed through reciprocal recognition. This entails mutual respect and appreciation of each other's skills and abilities (Huttunen & Heikkinen, 2004, p. 3).

The direct presence of the artist in the group certainly had an impact on the level of performance. There was a lot of negotiation, cooperation and coordination between the teacher, the children and the artist. It was this that allowed the children to discover, experience and express themselves in art, even in the 'chaos' that sometimes ensued. At the same time, the trust of the educator in the artist was also important, as he or she might have acted differently, and the children would have missed out on an important experience and creativity in the process (preschool teacher).

The collaboration between the teachers and artists was presented in a synthesised manner from the perspective of the artists, who made the following observations:

[...] I have great respect and appreciation for the role of the early childhood teacher and the school teacher, and I think it is very powerful in our school system. However, as the teacher is also increasingly involved in the world of bureaucracy and data collection, he or she loses time where he or she could react in a relaxed way as an artistic creator. [...] But my work is mostly about expressing myself. As a human being, I have to work with my body, my voice, my emotions, so I understand the child from a different point of view [...] When I play with a child, I can anticipate through play which skills might be close to the child. Whether it's movement skills or art skills or word skills, sports skills or social skills [...] Through my experience, I can give him access to a creative practice where he can express his 'idea' and feel creative [...] Many times, in my workshops I have heard the words: "I don't know how to do that". I like to focus on these, because for me the biggest challenge is for the child to surprise himself and to see that he can do it, if he believes in himself. And this is the stepping stone for further situations, where the 'child' will often have to be able to encourage himself. I understand the barriers and the obstacles, and that together we can do it. I also see the teacher in all these roles, but it's a little different when the 'artist' is present [...] because it creates a different way of working with them (intermedia artist).

The teacher primarily follows the curriculum, not so much the individual development of the individual. At the same time, his or her practice is limited to educational methodology and processes. The artist is still committed to his creative practice and allows himself 'mistakes', tests in the sense of "if it doesn't work, it will work". The artists puts the untested in context and together with the teacher and the pupil they can discover a new approach, a new method (painter and curator).

The form of collaboration with artists thus brings a complementarity of teacher and artist into the pedagogical process, as observed in similar research, which has found that artists are inspired by what children do, while adults are inspired by each other. Over years of collaboration, teachers and artists learn to lean on each other, to take extra risks, to reflect on their decisions and to offer alternatives (Wolf, 2008, p. 100). The results of the present research suggest the following complementarity of roles and collaboration between teacher and artist: 1) the teacher who works in a goal-oriented way structures the path to the

goal, plans from the curriculum, and focuses on cognitive processes and outcomes; and 2) the artist who focuses on processes, especially experiential and creative processes, works with self-expression, intuitively opens multiple paths to the goal, communicates multilingually (with verbal and artistic languages), and seeks, discovers and realises the potential in the individual.

Teachers and artists report that the changes and effects of collaborative teaching between teachers and artists are manifested in children and young people at the level of cognition, experience and expression in and through art, at the cognitive and socio-emotional levels. This empirical evidence supports Herbert Read's (2015) thesis on education in and through art, which emphasises that art has great educational potential and that art and artistic experience are the basis for education, as the goals of teaching and learning are unconsciously integrated into the process of artistic expression and creation. At the same time, regarding the subjective position of the individual as a creator of meaning and sense in art, as Kroflič (2022a) argues, meaning is always formed in the individual's consciousness as a result of the interaction between the artist/teacher, the artwork/object of teaching and the learner.

Conclusions

The SKUM project – Developing Communication Skills Through Cultural Arts Education (2017–2022) was implemented in public kindergartens and schools (primary and secondary) in Slovenia with the aim of providing high-quality arts experiences for children in kindergartens and schools.

In order to develop collaborative teaching between teachers and artists in Slovenian preschools and primary schools, design-based research was used as the main methodology. Based on this methodology, the research was designed as a cyclical process. This paper presents a snapshot of the situation at the beginning of the project and the impact of interventions that involved teachers in collaborative work with artists and children's participation in the educational process.

The first intervention involved training modules designed and implemented by a team of educators and artists. Delivered by artists, the training sessions encompassed a range of disciplines, including the performing arts, film and multimedia, photography, dance, literature and music.

The second intervention had a strong emphasis on collaboration between artists, teachers and children. Teachers and artists were invited to participate in the training modules. The aims of this training were: 1) to reflect on the principles of integrating the planning, implementation and documentation

of the pedagogical process; 2) to test the planning of pedagogical processes according to the principles of the evolving curriculum in collaboration with all those involved in the pedagogical process; 3) to become familiar with the ways of monitoring and documenting the pedagogical process; and 4) to learn about the reasons for integrating documentation into the pedagogical process.

At the beginning of the project, the teachers typically planned the teaching process alone or with their closest colleagues, and very rarely with parents, pupils and artists. Similarly, the frequency of planning for children's collaborative learning was not high. Moreover, professional reflection with colleagues was rarely based on documentation. At the end of the project, we found that the new form of collaboration between teacher and artist and the participation of children in the educational process had made a significant contribution to changing the opportunities and ways in which pupils experience, learn about and express themselves, and acquire, deepen and consolidate knowledge in pre-schools and schools.

In the new context, the collaboration with artists changed and enriched: 1) the content of cultural-artistic practices; 2) the teaching methods, by increasing the frequency of project, cross-curricular and interdisciplinary work; 3) the responsiveness to students' initiatives, by listening, discovering student interests and involving student initiatives in decisions; and 4) the documentation, by involving all participants in the learning process in continuously evaluating and documenting the process, and by listening to everyone's reflections.

The involvement of the artist in the pedagogical process provides a sociocultural experience of shared meaning-making through learning processes involving experience, cognition and expression, which is also characteristic of all forms of experiential learning. Previous studies (Rotar Pance, 2022) have shown that learners have a better understanding and retention of content through artist-led activities.

Our research findings highlight the fact that collaborative work between teachers and artists ensures that: 1) the rigidity of predefined and structured curricular practices is reduced, 2) pupils are able to participate experientially and expressively in artistic experiences, 3) teachers gain insight into children's experiential and expressive capacities/competences, and 4) artists gain insight into the possibilities of integrating authentic artistic experiences into education.

Concurrently, the findings indicate that fostering collaboration with artists is an essential element in stimulating teachers' enthusiasm for designing arts-integrated curricula. However, the artists involved in the SKUM project (Podobnik & Borota, 2022) note that a complementary way of working requires mutual trust and respect, which can be built up through an ongoing, more

permanent partnership. At the same time, teachers' interest in arts-oriented pedagogy is also of paramount importance, as evidenced by the observations of Bačlija Sušić and Županić Benić (2018), who found that in the context of early childhood education, teachers who demonstrate a high level of sensitivity and personal engagement with one or more artistic disciplines tend to devote more time to creative activities when working with children.

Despite the fact that school and preschool teachers have already acquired the knowledge to teach art in education during their initial training – where they learn about the content and didactics of music, visual and performing arts – including an artist in the project brought a first-person artistic experience that goes beyond preconceived interpretations (Kroflič, 2022b), which can be an obstacle to direct experience, subjective cognition and expression.

The findings are derived from a specific context within Slovenian public kindergartens and schools, which may limit their applicability to other education systems or cultural contexts. Future research could therefore involve different education systems and cultural contexts, including different age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds and types of educational institutions, in order to assess the generalisability of the findings. Longitudinal research designs that track changes over time could also be implemented in order to assess the sustainability of collaborative teaching practices and student outcomes beyond the duration of the project.

The practical implications of the findings of the present research for the integration of the arts into education relate to the insight that actively engaging teachers in the developmental research process fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to implementing changes in pedagogical practices. Conversely, the incorporation of metacognition enables educators to engage in reflective practice regarding their pedagogical processes. The fostering of collaboration between teachers, artists and students creates a dynamic learning atmosphere that enriches the educational experience, fostering creativity and the experience of beauty.

Ethical statement

The research was conducted in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the University of Primorska, Slovenia, and as part of a project whose documentation, together with the research, was approved and accepted by an independent panel that reviewed the tender documents.

Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Biographical note

SONJA RUTAR, PhD, is a full professor of Science of Education at University of Primorska, Faculty of Education. Her research focuses on children's participation in education and inclusion. She has participated in numerous projects with the aim of providing a supportive learning environment to ensure academic success and well-being for all children, with a particular emphasis on the development of preliteracy skills and early literacy. She is an active member of both national and international project groups, with a focus on the development of digital skills, as well as the assessment and assurance of quality in education.

TINA ŠTEMBERGER, PhD, is a full professor of Educational Research Methodology at University of Primorska, Faculty of Education. She primarily focuses on developing participatory data collection methods, but she has also done much research on initial teacher education, teacher competence and using digital tools in teaching and learning. Recently, she has been involved in many projects on using generative artificial intelligence tools in education.

BOGDANA BOROTA, PhD, is a full professor of music didactics at University of Primorska, Faculty of Education. Her research field is music pedagogy with a special focus on early music learning and teaching. She publishes contributions in monographs and scientific journals. She has participated in several projects in the areas of cultural and artistic education and a stimulating learning environment. She led the project Developing Communication competences through cultural-art education (SKUM). Furthermore, she has participated in the updating of the curriculum for musical art in primary school (2024) and the curriculum for kindergartens (2024).