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The Project of Artistic Workshops with Students: Achievements and Challenges of Participatory Practice in University Curriculum

Abstract

The paper deals with the issue of participatory practice of students, presented on the basis of the project *Artistic Interventions: Self-Development Through Art*. It was conducted among students of the University of Łódź, Faculty of Educational Sciences, in the academic year 2015/2016. The assumptions and proceedings of this project were presented through the lens of participatory practice in the academic environment.

The workshops offered within the project met the repeatedly expressed self-educational artistic needs of students. The shortage of such classes was one of the main findings that emerged from research on self-education carried out by the author among students at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Łódź, in 2012. The research was carried out using the dialogue method, utilising a group interview technique.

Observations made by the author during the organization of workshops, enrolment, classes and preparation for the final concert and exhibitions of *Artistic Interventions* were tested out against the remarks and experiences of the teachers conducting the workshops. Unexpectedly, offering supplemental, voluntary self-educational activities posed some problems. Although organizing free of charge artistic classes for students is not easy, even achieving this appears not to be sufficient. Creating and sustaining participatory practice among students seems to be essential. This practice would, in the long term, result in increasing their activity and responsibility for their educational process. This situation is related to the issue of staff participation that is more and more often mentioned in the context of university education in Poland.

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Introduction

The founder of Polish social pedagogy, Helena Radlińska, highlighted the significance of culture, comparing it to the soil from which social life grows (Radlińska, 1961). Lech Witkowski, who has made a contemporary interpretation of her works, underlines the fact that in the context of these views no one is a true pedagogue unless they are also social pedagogues, and no one is a true social pedagogue unless they are also culture pedagogues (Witkowski, 2014: 168). Thus, it seems justified to apply the term “participatory practice”, coined within social pedagogy, to activities and initiatives where the predominant feature of which is culture.

The author of this paper analyses the project of artistic workshops for students of the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the University of Łódź, claiming that such workshops can serve as examples of how to apply participatory practice in the university environment.

The term “participation” is usually used when referring to joint work with beneficiaries of social welfare services. Students, however, for reasons obviously different than those of disadvantaged groups, are also sometimes exposed to harmful processes that could be prevented through empowerment. These processes, even though the scale of the phenomenon is completely different than in the case of beneficiaries of social welfare services, can lead to the sense of lack of agency, and sometimes even apathy.

What might the lack of empowerment look like in the university environment? The very fact of being a student indicates independence and enterprise, allowing the assumption that a given person has an idea for themselves, which is being consistently implemented (selection of the programme and university), and that they are organizationally efficient (the necessity to find accommodation in a new place or to commute to the university, and to cope with financial challenges). However, studies today are, arguably, not taken as seriously as they used to be a few decades ago, and particularly pedagogy is not treated very seriously sometimes as it is a programme that can be studied in many different places both full-time and part-time, and it is easy to get admitted to it but after graduation it is difficult to find a job. For years, both pedagogy and psychology have been among the most popular programmes (Informacja o wynikach rekrutacji/Information About the Enrolment Results, 2016), however, competition between candidates for psychology is much stronger.¹ According to the report on the research project *Bilans Kapitału Ludzkiego/Human Capital Balance*,

¹ The only exception is the Pre-School and Early-Learning Pedagogy (Informacja o wynikach rekrutacji/ Information About the Enrolment Results, 2016).

summarizing research from 2012, pedagogy is one of the programmes with the largest percentage of graduates who are professionally inactive (Górniak, 2013): it occupies the third position on this dishonourable list, with a score of 17.10%. Considering the decade before the research, 10.3% of pedagogy graduates are unemployed. The report does not specify whether the graduates who are employed hold positions connected with their education. However, everyday observation and conversations with students and graduates allow us to assume that many pedagogy graduates work in professions unrelated to this field of study; in many cases their jobs are temporary and occasional and taken out of necessity, and not in order to develop professionally in a given field.

In this situation, the Faculty of Educational Sciences of Łódź University needs activities that foster both the objective of giving control over the education process to students and the heightening of their subjective sense of having such control. It is necessary to facilitate their reflection on whether they really want to work in this profession, what they would like to do, and what their strengths are.

These actions lead to empowerment which is not only a value in itself but also the first and essential step to increasing participation. It is very important for students, who are in their first stage of adulthood, but in the university environment they are still treated as pupils sometimes.

Participatory involvement is increased by art activities because art and creative work stimulate independence and autonomy, and avoid simple repetition and imitating. That is why art enriches a person and helps to develop his/her self-knowledge (Wojnar, 1994). Art education cannot do without active participation of a student and his/her decisiveness, so it should aim at increasing participant's autonomy. As Janusz Plisiecki notes, nowadays art demands more than in the past, because it grows from a more complex reality. It is now not enough to be a "receiver", being a conscious participant in culture is essential. That is why art is an important and complicated educational challenge (Plisiecki, 2001). Participatory approaches are implemented successfully, among others, in museum education, where it inclines to creating one's own ideas, sharing them, discussing and building relationships.

As Anna Jarkiewicz notes (Jarkiewicz, chapter in this volume), participation in education encounters many difficulties and one of the greatest is being accustomed to established roles and certain behaviour related to them, which is visible among teachers and students, as well. Another obstacle is fixed organizational schemes, which are difficult to change. As we can see further, similar problems appear in higher education, too.

For this reason it is impossible maybe to expect participation in art education at the university in its most radical form. In this chapter participation is defined as:

taking part in work of a group or a team, contributing of an individual in affairs of a group, bigger collective or local community, cooperation with the other (formally or informally) (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2007: 66).

In a certain situation students take some decisiveness for their own affairs, and some responsibility, inextricably linked to it.

Assumptions of the project

Enhancing empowerment and participation was one of the goals of the artistic workshops *Artistic Interventions. Self-Development Through Art*. They form the subject of this discussion in the context of empowerment and participatory processes in higher education institutions. The project, the essence of which were the workshops, was conducted in the spring semester of the academic year 2015/2016 at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Łódź. Funds for the project were provided by Santander Universities bank as a result of a competition. The project manager was the author of this contribution.

The aims of the project were established on the basis of observations of everyday practice at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Łódź, and talking with students, as described below. These aims were the following:

- Supporting the intellectual and personal development of students, and particularly their skills in self-presentation, self-discipline, self-awareness and creativity;
- Encouraging students to be active in relation to their self-development outside the compulsory curriculum;
- Creating conditions for students independently discovering values of communing within art and artistic classes;
- Developing students' artistic skills;
- Providing students of the two programmes at the Faculty of Educational Sciences – Pedagogy and Psychology – with the conditions for cooperation and getting to know each other better;
- Preparing artistic presentations for the whole academic community of the Faculty of Educational Sciences (Sasin, 2015).

Out of the six significant aims of the project listed, only two are strictly artistic in nature. The aims went far beyond “mere” artistic development of students and enhancing their interest in art. To some extent, this results from the idea behind the project, which required “supporting personal, intellectual and professional development of students with the aim to use their new skills in social and professional life” and “promoting innovation and creativity among students and young academics” (*Konkurs na projekty/*

Competition for Projects, 2015). Regardless of the objectives formulated by the decision-makers, it should be emphasized that communing with art offers benefits going far beyond the development of purely artistic skills. The project in question allowed us to highlight non-artistic benefits of communing with art, which are so important that an implementation of an artistic project might actually meet the objectives of social work the aim of which is – pursuant to the definition provided by IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers) – to support social change, “solve problems arising in interpersonal relationships, and enhance and liberate people in order to enrich their wellbeing” (Marynowicz-Hetka, 2006: 359). Particularly the last part of the definition quoted corresponds with the issue in question. This is why, it can be argued, that many social projects are based on the use of art.

Artistic Interventions consisted of three artistic workshops, each covering 37 hours of classes. These were vocal workshops *Ja i mój głos/Me and My Voice*, artistic workshops *Nie tylko pędzlem/Not only with a Brush*, and multimedia workshops *Moje ja w sieci/Myself on the Net*. The workshops were conducted by specialists combining artistic and teaching competencies; two out of the three teachers work at the Faculty of Educational Sciences. Up to twenty-five participants could take part in each workshop. The classes were aimed at students of both the programmes of the Faculty: Pedagogy and Psychology, including all specialities, full-time and part-time. All those interested had to declare their participation in classes throughout the semester (and not only in some of them), and any possible resignation had to be submitted in writing. The participants received certificates of participation in the project, however, this did not entail the granting of any additional ECTS point. In June 2016, results of the artistic activities were presented to the community of the Faculty of Educational Sciences in the form of a short concert and two exhibitions.

Formal management/arrangements of the project required appointing a project manager as a person responsible for the whole of the enterprise, which did not exclude later decisions about giving some competencies or tasks in a certain field to the others.

Planning of the project was started as early as 2012, and the idea originated from brief research conducted in relation to a national conference *O tożsamość zawodową pedagoga sztuki/For the Professional Identity of Art Pedagogues*. The research used the dialogue method and the group interview technique with a group of 12 future teachers: students of the first year of second-cycle (MA) studies, Education Through Art speciality, at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Łódź (Sasin, 2013). These interviews, the main topic of which was supposed to be self-education and its organization by the respondents, turned out to be a significant source of knowledge of problems and difficulties connected with this

speciality, as suggested by the students. The respondents drew attention to the necessity to meet the increasing requirements of the labour market, and they made attempts to determine to what extent pedagogical studies prepare future teachers for fulfilling their demanding role. They expressed concerns that the studies selected did not prepare them adequately for their future profession, and they confirmed the need to supplement their knowledge and skills:

(...) if we want to be perceived well by our students and feel good in this job, we need to undergo some additional training, find some new techniques when it comes to artistic classes or some ways of sharing musical knowledge, (...) some unconventional methods;

Those who continue their [MA] studies, should answer the question about whether they feel competent enough to conduct classes in any field. If I were to answer this question, I'd say no, and none of the classes offered here are able to fully prepare me for this, and this is where this need for additional training courses comes from (Sasin, 2013: 178).

The respondents noted that there were many additional courses and skills improvement training offers available, however, they could only be accessed outside the university:

People who come here, seeing our curriculum and timetable, immediately start looking for some artistic activity elsewhere, just to get a foothold somewhere, for example, in a cultural centre (dom kulturalny). They spend their free time there and they don't think about starting [anything] here [at the university] (Sasin, 2013: 178).

The lack of previous artistic experience does not translate into a greater interest in such activity – just the contrary, in order for cognitive curiosity to appear, a certain level of knowledge is required, providing the awareness of one's own ignorance and creating a need to change this situation. This is highlighted by D. E. Berlyne: "Epistemic curiosity is not at its maximum with complete ignorance but increases, up to a point, with increasing knowledge" (Berlyne, 1965: 262). In order to arouse students' need to develop in this direction, they should be able to gather at least a small sample of similar experiences.

The research mentioned became one of the reasons behind the organization of the artistic workshops. However, their target group included not only students of Education Through Art but of all pedagogical specialties, and of the Faculty's second programme – Psychology. There are no elective courses in Pedagogy,² so it seemed particularly important to offer students some choice and a possibility of making a decision based on their own judgment.

² Formally, the curriculum includes elective courses, however, students must choose a specific programme if they want to acquire pedagogical qualifications needed and assumed in the educational offer. The choice is thus only apparent.

The first chance to evaluate the project was offered in June 2016, when the participants made their artistic presentations. The next step was to settle on, and report on the project. In October 2017, which was nearly one year and a half after the end of the project, interviews were conducted with all the teachers, the aim of which was to facilitate the interpretation of the workshops in the context of participatory practice in a higher education institution. Interviews with the three persons were conducted using the free-form guided interview technique (Konecki, 2017). The interviewees were described in the chapter as “Teacher 1” (*Moje ja w sieci* workshops), “Teacher 2” (*Nie tylko pędzłem* workshops) and “Teacher 3” (*Ja i mój głos* workshops).

Based on the example of the workshops in question, empowerment can be analysed from two perspectives: as empowerment of students and employees. Students were given an opportunity to select classes, develop their interests, plan their free time, and influence the events taking place at their university. Unfortunately, because of the formal procedures, student’s participation in planning workshops, their goals and programme could not be significant. This situation shows how institutional circumstances obstruct striving for participation at the university: students could not participate in making assumptions of the project, because without these assumptions the project could not materialize. Formulating a detailed plan was an essential condition of taking part in a competition for a subsidy; enrolment of the students was already the next step in the plan.

Artistic presentations at the end of the project were an infrequent example of an offer for the whole community of the Faculty, organized at least partly bottom-up by the students. Departure from the obligatory character of classes and following a fixed curriculum facilitated equal relations between teachers (myself as a formal project manager, too) and participants in classes – students. It indicates that broadening the formal frames of curriculum would be beneficial to reinforce participation at the university. On the other hand, the teachers felt empowered thanks to freedom in structuring and implementing the curriculum and the lack of any need to require certain actions from students (departure from the role of a teacher towards the role of a more experienced companion to artistic activities, a guiding spirit, and an adviser). The teachers’ sense of participation was confirmed by the interviews conducted, an analysis of which is presented below based on successes and difficulties in the implementation of the project. It was impossible to conduct research among the participants of the classes eighteen months after their completion as some of the students had already left the university. At that time, however, I received much feedback proving that the initiative undertaken had been successful. Students frequently asked about similar projects in the future, declaring their readiness to take part in them, and

some of the participants maintained contact and cooperation with the teacher of the vocal classes:

I even get messages with questions about something, they write emails to me, they find me on Facebook and write to me. (...) some of the people still wanted to take part in classes and sing in ensembles, I've invited some to my amateur choir for adults (Teacher 3).

Participation in the project – achievements and impediments

One of the most important objectives of the workshops and one of their successes, even if not achieved without problems, was the stimulation of the students' initiative, which was expressed in the very fact that they took part in the classes, which were not compulsory and for which no ECTS points were awarded. The enrolment for the workshops proved that there was a large group of students willing to take part in them, however, during the stage of organizational arrangements many of them withdrew. They were faced with the fact that participation in workshops required involvement and entailed certain inconveniences: waiting after classes, coming in the evening, devoting their free time etc. All these elements, seemingly obvious, made about a half of the enrolled students withdraw just before the beginning of the classes or after the first classes (there were some standby lists). Just before beginning of the classes there were more candidates than places: 35 persons for *Ja i mój głos* workshop (10 persons on a standby list), 27 persons for *Moje ja w sieci* (2 persons on a standby list), 48 persons for *Nie tylko pędzłem* (23 person on a standby list). However, after the project was finished there was a much smaller number of participants who achieved level of activity and attendance enough to formally certificate their participation: 14 persons at *Ja i mój głos* workshop, 10 persons at *Moje ja w sieci*, 20 persons at *Nie tylko pędzłem*. There were less persons than expected in each and every group. Some students probably enrolled "just in case", on the spur of the moment, and bore in mind that they could resign. Organisational reasons were also significant: considerable number of people resigned when terms of classes were fixed and announced. Reasons they gave were for example: "classes are late, coming back home would be complicated", "I have another class at the same time", "I want to be free at least one evening in a week". Unfortunately, if one group gathers people from different specialities and years of studies, it is completely impossible to fix a time that would be convenient for everybody – all the more as the accessibility of an appropriate classroom is essential, too. Students who gave up during the classes pointed out tiredness or disappointment at classes. It turns out that, paradoxically, that it is sometimes easier to accept inconveniences imposed by someone else,

than those which are a result of somebody's own decision. The necessity to fulfil duties imposed from the top obliges to find additional solutions and helps to mobilize hidden resources. In a voluntary situation students are more inclined toward skipping additional commitment. High frequency of such behaviour indicates that external motivation is more frequent than internal motivation among these students.

This remark encourages us to consider commitment of Pedagogy students (who were majority in the project) in educational process. For dozens of years Pedagogy is one of the most popular fields of study in Poland. It does not result from great prestige of this job, the view of high salary or broad employment possibilities. As it was mentioned above, the ease of admitting and graduating is decisive. It results in negative selection: Pedagogy is considerably often a choice of young people who have not specified interests or professional plans. They are not active at the university and do not show initiative, because extensive development is not their goal – they aim at easy transition to graduation and getting a “paper”. It is extremely difficult to encourage such students to participatory action.

Interviews with the students indicate that, on the one hand, they complain about an insufficient number of artistic classes and they would like to have more such classes on the curriculum, but on the other hand, such classes should not be offered together with the present ones but instead of them. Naturally, an organizer of workshops conducted as part of a one-time project cannot reform the whole curriculum and liquidate subjects that the students consider unnecessary, which was why the interest in additional workshops was smaller than expected. What's more, this experience showed that there is lack of connection between previous, non-academic students' experiences and forming obligatory curriculum. Students' knowledge and abilities gained at the university and outside university, before studies and during them, should be perceived as a whole because they altogether constitute a person's competencies for a chosen field of activity.

Thus, it seems that it is not enough to implement external conditions for empowerment and participation. This must be accompanied by conditions that, by analogy, might be called “internal”: maturity, the measure of which is the readiness to make choices and take their consequences, and readiness to take responsibility towards a group. These skills should be developed already in schoolchildren, which requires the creation of proper institutional possibilities. Students, after twelve years of school education that made them accustomed to carrying out tasks given by the teacher, will not become active and independent overnight, and they will not be able to use the extensive educational offer competently, plan their own development and career, and successfully assess sacrifices they can make for education. School, where nearly everything is supposed to be done as

instructed and even interpretation of literary masterpieces needs to follow a given key, produces young people who might be diligent and dutiful, but who lack independence and the courage necessary to explore the world in a creative way. In spite of emphasizing the importance of working in groups at school, many young people coming to university perceive their activities only in the context of their own needs and they are not willing to undertake activities for a group or a community. The reason is, that in school they are assessed individually, not as a team, and there appears more competition than cooperation between pupils. This is highlighted by remarks of all three persons conducting the workshops. "Teacher 1" said:

Studies that were selective at the beginning and covered five years of education allowed people to get close, they knew what it was all about, and the sense of security was greater thanks to these five years. Now students have this time divided, they don't settle in this space. And there are also external conditions: they have to work, now students already think how they will earn their living after graduation. We were idealists. We went to the university to learn something, for idealistic reasons. And not for money. These are two completely different approaches.

"Teacher 2" noted that it is very difficult to empower students if work with them only starts at the university:

These first classes that come, for them this is a continuation of high school, so there is a great distance between the teacher and the student. They approach exercises given by the teacher like pupils: do something, see whether it's enough, ok, so that's all, I can go.

As could be noticed above, lecturers sometimes do not try to understand determinants of certain students' behaviour. They criticize their passivity and lack of involvement, but do not recognize the reasons of such an attitude. Young people who start their studies usually take with them their school customs and habits. In Polish school, although the necessity of personal treating of a child and changing educational model is expressed for about twenty years, traditional model of education is still dominant. In this model a teacher takes decisions on nearly every aspect of educational process. It is in accordance with expectations of many parents, who believe that this traditional way of teaching, which they know well from their own childhood, would be beneficial for their children. School customs are taken to the university by both teachers (lecturers) and students.

Some students would like to be less controlled, but they are not ready to accept greater responsibility. However, more responsibility should go hand in hand with more personal activity, otherwise it influences educational effects negatively.

Consequences of the respondents' "high-school" approach towards studies were their expectations about the classes, which were mostly supposed to equip them with specific skills useful in their expected future or even present jobs. In this case, the observations of "Teacher 1" and

“Teacher 2” coincide. “Teacher 1”, however, notes that this observation should not be extended over all programmes as it mostly concerns the ones available nearly to everyone due to very liberal enrolment requirements:

I can see that their approach to studies is more and more high-school. This might result from the general immaturity of the young blood, from the lower elitism of students. Less selective students are also less creative, less intellectually able, and less willing to make any self-diagnosis.

This statement follows that “Teacher 3” the reasons of such a students’ attitude she sees mainly in the students themselves – she is less willing to analyze institutional and systemic circumstances and is completely unwilling to analyze her own behaviour and procedures.

Other remarks of “Teacher 3” are related to the fact that she does not work with pedagogy students from the University of Łódź on a daily basis, which is why she could not refer her observations from the classes to the knowledge acquired in other situations; furthermore, she speaks both as a teacher and a student because she still studies (part-time, second major). Based on her experience, she suggests that project activities are the best for students. The programme of Pedagogy at the University of Łódź includes few such activities, and even if they are undertaken, they are initiated by one of the lecturers and limited to specific classes. “What is it that activates students the most? Project activities, telling students to carry out a project together. I myself like such actions, they involve students meeting outside classes, but let’s not forget that this is also enjoyable for them.”

Sometimes university teachers, especially those who at the same time work at school or have such experience, take school procedures to the university. It is easier for them to some extent, because it enables a teacher to act in well-known schemes and gives better control over the educational process, which is important especially when teachers have to fulfil learning outcomes. Change is hindered by lack of analyzing patterns and schemes in one’s action. There is not enough of reflexion and it is not favoured by the educational system.

Introducing changes and establishing new patterns always require bigger amount of energy at the beginning; it might be beneficial only later. Overburdening university teachers with many bureaucratic and reporting obligations is a reason why most of them do not feel strong and willing enough to implement changes. It suggests another source of problems with participation in Polish universities: a systemic problem.

Empowerment of the teachers conducting the workshops was mostly related to freedom in planning the content of classes and the lack of limitations imposed by the curriculum, the syllabus or learning results determined top-down. Teachers’ statements follows that they use this situation to recognise students’ tastes and predilections and to get to know

their potential which helps to form curricula of the artistic classes in a more precise way:

Every interactive challenge involving other people, when one can create something that will test the possibility of untypical responses, the possibility to see how a group responds to certain unconventional tasks, also verifies students' potential from the other side. The lack of obligation to stick to the content of classes in accordance with the curriculum makes it possible to go beyond a certain educational standard and to provoke. What does this give us? Definitely, greater general knowledge of students, of the way people think in general; these are more social aspects, when they do something, going more towards full individualism, self-presentation, self-creation, meaning to see how much people in general would like to expose themselves and whether they know how to do it using visual arts.

“Teacher 2” emphasizes greater possibilities of creation on the part of the teacher, and the possibility of implementing ideas that otherwise would be impossible to put into effect:

I could do some things I have not enough time for during, for example, classes in methodology [art teaching] or artistic forms and techniques because... In this case, it was also an experiment for me, I could see what sells, which classes are most enjoyable for students, or which are simply most fun. I could try out ideas I had been mulling over but had never had time for. I could come up with new things.

What mattered the most to “Teacher 3” was the opportunity to work with a different age group than usual. It indicates openness to new experience and aspiration to develop of this person:

These classes really offered me a lot, most of all this was another choir experience for me, meaning another contact. I conduct amateur choirs where people come voluntarily, they are mostly elderly people, and here we were nearly at the same age and I really liked working with them. I had some fears about how they would treat me, but now we keep in touch.

In all workshop groups, the lack of the necessity to pursue objectives formulated in advance resulted in the co-creation of the syllabus together with the students. Teachers used this opportunity to varying extents. “Teacher 1” developed general assumptions of exercises, and left the decision about the details to the participants: “The assumptions [of the exercises were] my own, general provocation, and they directed me towards the context of the task. They had no complete freedom, unless as part of the task implementation.” “Teacher 2” conducted a survey during the first meeting in order to get to know the expectations of the participants and to be able to come up to them:

In fact, I tried to create a diverse syllabus, so that everyone could find something for themselves, depending on their programme, but I also developed the syllabus adapting it to the expectations of students. During the first class I asked them about their expectations. As most participants were girls from the Department of Pre-School and Early-Learning Pedagogy, they wanted something they would be able to use in their work with children. But I didn't want to provide them with any final solutions because you can find many of them on the Internet, there are all sorts of scenarios there. I wanted these

classes to be oriented towards thinking, so that they would later think how to adjust it to the age of a specific child. And I wanted these classes to be developing and nice.

“Teacher 2” used more free classes to develop students’ initiative, independence and creativity.

During the first class, “Teacher 3” presented the participants fragments of music in different styles in order to stimulate their imagination and to learn their interests:

At first, there was a meeting, so that I knew what the final group would be and whether I would be able to find the right repertoire. Then I asked them in what direction they would like to go: something lighter or strictly sacral, classical or folk. They said that either something light or folk.

During the interview, the respondent emphasized that selecting the repertoire together with the choir is a prerequisite for their involvement:

The conductor cannot choose the repertoire without any consultation with the choir because when I make a decision myself and show them “who’s boss”, there’s no way the singers will come for more than a month or two, because they won’t enjoy it. It’s obvious you have to give them an opportunity to decide.

An unquestionable benefit of the project was the consolidation of the relationship between culture, artistic classes and professional competencies of a pedagogue in the university environment. In order to explain the significance of such an activity, one should refer to the history of the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Łódź. There used to be a programme called Music Education, which included many individual artistic classes in playing different instruments, with musicians from the Academy of Music in Łódź. Many candidates wanted to study here because of such classes. The Music Education programme was discontinued more than ten years ago and the curriculum has changed drastically. However, many lecturers including the Faculty’s decision-makers are still afraid that artistic classes would be considered more attractive, more significant and more valuable than the pedagogical classes, which might weaken the pedagogical ethos shaped in this environment. Implementation of a project treating art as a method for enhancing extra-artistic competencies of future pedagogues – education through art and not only education for art (Read, 1976) – should be thus treated as particularly valuable. It allows enhancement of the empowerment of students through deactivation of the unwritten aversion to art present at the Faculty, which might be regarded as an element of a hidden curriculum (Kwieciński, 2004). It also has to be noted that the existence of a strong, extensive hidden curriculum, which is defined as “all effects of school education, produced without and beyond the intentional activity of teachers (and school as such), which are not openly ascribed to and realized by students” (Kwieciński, 2004: 83), weakens the sense of empowerment of both teachers (pedagogues, lecturers) and pupils (students).

The interviews confirm that participation depends not only on external conditions. It is fostered by greater self-awareness, with individuals who are more self-confident and make better choices and judgments. The need for such insight and reflection is a natural human need:

The conclusion is that people generally use self-expression as long as it isn't direct and doesn't expose too much, but resorts to symbols and metaphors; then they are willing to do it, because generally they want to talk about themselves in some way, but not directly. They also expect confrontation in certain matters. They also want to talk about difficult issues as long as this does not require them to provide any scientific explanation or something deeply professional because they would not be able to do it and they don't feel comfortable with it. But people definitely have the need to express opinions and to talk about themselves ("Teacher 1").

Self-insight, however, requires certain training as it not easy and might trigger defence mechanisms. For many students, self-insight through art is a novelty, which is proven by their difficulties with expressing themselves and with intellectual and emotional exploration:

The tasks that required group work were carried out in groups, but nothing more. I expected more discussions, greater dynamics, more innovative ideas, even though on the visual level these ideas were better than when it came to the actual activity. Their work was rather boring in process terms, they were focused on their work, of course when you provoked it, because when they had a group task they stopped their individual work but they would be obviously glad to retreat to their own space. (...) The aim of the tasks was more to provoke them to think and go one step further than what the world offers, who I am in the face of the world, meaning that these were provocative tasks, but I missed this provocation ("Teacher 1").

Group art classes, such as vocal ensemble, foster the sense of responsibility which is crucial for participation. Participants of such classes personally experience responsibility for collaborative work:

I really liked working with the group. It was better when there were more people, when the attendance was larger. Sometimes the participants said that they had something important at the university, a test or something, and that they would not come. Those choir singers who were nearly always present also noted the difference when someone was missing. (...) I think that [what matters is] contact with other people because a vocal ensemble, or in fact any team is mostly based on cooperation with others. If someone skipped class, then someone else had to show them something, give some advice ("Teacher 3").

Sense of responsibility towards the others is enhanced by mutual understanding and this is fostered by opening up towards the other people. This was experienced by artistic workshop's participants:

One of my aims was to open their eyes a bit, so that they started to observe what was going on and didn't focus in their work on what they were supposed to achieve, the final product, crudely speaking, but appreciated the effort put in it, with the work becoming pleasure for them. To some extent, this is also connected with artistic goals. So that the group integrated a bit, so that they observed, compared their works, and were able to get inspired by others. I encouraged the students to compare their own works, asking: In your opinion, which of your works is the best? This colour or that colour? Preparing

them for self-assessment, self-development (...) I think I managed a bit [to integrate the group], even though you could tell that the students who had enrolled in groups, stayed in those groups, but I can't say that they kept only to themselves. There was one girl studying psychology. I didn't get the impression she was a loner. This resulted from the fact that sometimes you had to pass something, exchange things, glue, scissors etc., some mundane things, but this also contributed to some contact ("Teacher 2").

The greatest problems with the implementation of the project were related to external barriers that were beyond the organizer's control: long waiting time for the results of the competition for funds, then the necessity to reformulate and limit the project's objectives as a consequence of a lower amount of money provided by the sponsor (which was not connected with the project evaluation), and then the necessity to shorten the project to one semester even though two semesters had been planned. All these factors, intensifying the organizer's sense of lack of influence on the whole activity, demotivated the organizer and made it impossible to carry out an intensive promotional campaign. On account of the fact that the project received much lower funds, it was impossible to purchase aids for multimedia classes, which – according to the teachers – was the reason behind the resignation of some of the students:

Regardless of my ingenuity, students who came attracted by the term "multimedia" but received some free software were dissatisfied. Because they don't really respect what I can tell them about the construct, the form, or the analogy with personality; they probably expected some professional specifics: I'll learn some graphic software, something specific, I'll learn Photoshop, I'll learn something else, which will be useful in my job. (...) The fact that the programmes were freeware was disadvantageous. Because what is free is useless. It's primitive. It doesn't offer the effect that could be achieved. So some shortcuts are taken. Even if people have a vision, they're not able to fully develop it with such programmes. And this is frustrating. This brings us to the amateurish level. When you offer classes in a given area, they should be at least on a university level, conducted in a very reliable and professional manner ("Teacher 1").

Comparable remarks were made by the teacher who conducted art classes. She received additional materials and noted that the participants' involvement increased after that:

What also mattered was that they had professional materials, I think this was printing ink and not tempera usually used as a substitute in the case of such activities when working with children, because you know, we can't poison children with such ink. I bought rollers for this purpose, rubber ones. The comfort of work using such materials was different, you know, funds for work with children are always insufficient and you always have to come up with something, to cut costs ("Teacher 2").

Student's disappointment over modest equipment could be probably reduced, if the programme of multimedia workshop would have been developed with them (element of participatory approach). It could have contributed to lower the number of student's resignations.

It was noted that the interest in the classes was limited among psychology students, which indicates that students of this programme of

the Faculty of Educational Sciences have a high sense of identity. This is connected with the fact that these are long-cycle, five-year studies (as required by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education), in the course of which students are offered the possibility to choose from many subjects; also a different campus location was highlighted. The attempt to integrate students of both programmes as part of artistic workshops was not fully successful as the future psychologists' interest in them (despite proper information and advertising) was small. This might have resulted from the belief that classes organized by an employee of the Pedagogy programme and conducted by two lecturers from this programme would be mostly of interest to pedagogy students.

From the point of view of the organizer, the greatest weakness of the project was the lack of any possibility of its continuation. No new edition of the competition for an educational project among students was organized, and there have been no similar initiatives that would allow to apply for funds and thus to repeat the cycle of classes. This would be in every respect desirable as not only would it allow another group of students to take part in the classes, but it would also consolidate the project's environmental effects, such as encouraging students' self-development (which does not only concern the participants of the classes but also other people connected with the Faculty), getting familiar with the value of communing with art and general benefits of artistic classes, and stimulating cooperation and contacts between representatives of the two programmes of the Faculty of Educational Sciences. Comprehensively understood practice of empowerment involves a change on both individual and structural levels. The project described mostly allowed the implementation of empowerment within the individual dimension, whereas its cyclical character could initiate a structural change. To talk about a participatory approach in a certain environment, in this case in a university, it must be implemented consistently and become a *modus operandi*, not only an incidental offer.

Projects similar to the one described above encourage us to wonder to what extent one should put students under pressure with regard to self-development. Some institutional incentives are definitely possible, e.g. in the form of elective artistic classes. This would offer them a possibility to decide, at the same time allowing the university to control their activity level. Teacher 2 draws attention to the fact that awarding students' additional activity in a formal way might sometimes have the opposite effect from what was intended:

This is a difficult question because for one person something additional will be something this person waits for and goes to every week, and really wants to do it. But when this involves getting some points, it may happen that they will start treating it as another thing they just have to get credit for.

Participatory practices in university environment – concluding remarks

Experience gained during planning, implementing and evaluation of a project *Artistic Interventions* proved that the participatory approach in higher education has its own specificity. Despite appearances, this field is rather conservative and not favourable for innovations. Institutional solutions, such as a competition for a project, which was used in this case, do not foster a participatory approach. Taking part in this competition required a detailed agenda which excluded working it out together with its participants.

Participatory approaches require some competences which, in the present situation, cannot be expected from all students. Offering the possibility of participation if participants do not have certain competences is not enough and usually does not produce the desired results. To make participation exist it is necessary to grade difficulties and help participants to fulfil the potential of the situation (which is true for both students and teachers). In an ideal situation, students would be familiar with the participatory approach from previous educational stages. In the project in question, expectations about participatory approach, for students and for teachers, could have been expressed more explicitly.

There is another significant question, namely, whether striving for the greatest possible participation in a university environment should be the aim. The specificity of education makes the relations between students and teachers not completely equal, since taking decision is always connected with taking more responsibility. The person whose knowledge is greater and more comprehensive (not only strictly academic knowledge considered) should be more responsible. Defining the desirable scope of participation would be easier if more projects with participatory approaches were to be launched, evaluated and reflected upon.

Social pedagogy and culture pedagogy are not opposing fields, they are complementary. Their objectives complement one another, so they can be implemented within one activity. As L. Witkowski emphasizes, “from the very beginning, social pedagogy was founded on the understanding of the significance of references to symbolic culture as the heritage, treasury and source triggering spirituality” (Witkowski, 2014: 395). This is confirmed by many artistic projects with objectives falling within social pedagogy. One of them is a project of work with the youth from disadvantaged districts of East Berlin, the effect of which was dance choreography to *The Rite of Spring* by Igor Stravinsky. The project, conducted as part of the Education Programme of the Berliner Philharmoniker, involved eminent artists including Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra players and Sir Simon Rattle

(Berliner Philharmoniker, 2017), and its results were popularized thanks to the documentary *Rhythm is it!* (2004). A different example of a social project using music is *El Sistema* in Venezuela, a mass music education system operating since 1975 (El Sistema, 2017). In the field of visual arts, one can mention an international project for children and youth "Kids' Guernica", inspired by the famous painting *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso, the aim of which is to protest against the war and to promote peace through art and play (website of Kids' Guernica), and a Polish-Norwegian project *Peacepainting*, as part of which pupils from both countries get to know their cultures and traditions (official website of Zofia Solarzowa District Public Library in Biały Dunajec). The above examples, selected out of many others, prove that art has the power to cross barriers, to stimulate development, and to free artistic forces. In every case mentioned above participants could experience a sense of power, enhance self-knowledge and reflectiveness.

Helena Radlińska used the term "invisible environment", which covered, simply speaking, values, ideas, and any heritage of symbolic culture necessary for individuals to make conscious choices concerning their life and world. What is of particular significance in this "invisible environment" is the cultural content; if it is unavailable, it gets wasted "in local social entanglements" (Witkowski, 2014: 45). Thus, the cultural significance of social work consists in showing this "unusual background of immortality" (Witkowski, 2014: 46) and making it possible to use culture understood as a spur to development. The necessary care for the individual's cultural potential is expressed in, among other things, efforts to develop the cultural potential of their living environment. According to Polish psychologist Stefan Szuman (Szuman, 1959), the care of the access to the cultural content should lie not only in enabling contact with the work of art – which he called "availability", but also in helping to understand it and see its value – which he called "accessibility". Better access to the symbolic content was described by Radlińska as "irrigation". Culture is the soil on which the spiritual fruit of efforts put into individual development can grow. Considering so many common features, Małgorzata Kaliszewska even wonders whether there is any point in establishing boundaries between social pedagogy and culture pedagogy (Kaliszewska, 2015: 62). The above deliberations indicate that such doubts are justified.

The analysis presented above shows how many circumstances underlie participation or its lack at the university. One decisive factor cannot be indicated as crucial because what matters the most is a juncture of various conditions.

However, historical background cannot be ignored: in communistic times in Poland there did not exist favourable conditions to develop citizens' independence, initiative and decisiveness – on the contrary, submission and discipline were promoted. Distrust in principals (also teachers and lecturers) and reluctance towards cooperation were common. Many present

teachers are graduates of the communistic school. Not everybody managed to change his/her attitude towards students' activity and there are still many people who think – sometimes not quite consciously – that obedience is one of the most important and most desirable features of a student.

After regaining sovereignty in Poland in 1989 the situation in many environments changed for better. However, in education new difficult factors appeared. High unemployment in the 90s, caused by rapid economic transformation, activated the fact that, due to the lack of other constructive ideas, fast growth in the number of students was perceived as a remedy for this problem. High-school leavers *en masse* went to the university which postponed the moment of their entry to the labour market. Such rapid growth of enrolment rate would not be possible without relaxing university entrance requirements. Entrance examinations for some fields were cancelled. Simultaneously, young people's hopes for job success were aroused: politicians claimed that the lack of an appropriate education is the main reason of unemployment, which in the situation of that time was not very true. Pedagogy was – and is still, to some extent – one of fields of study that were particularly often used as an escape from unemployment.

Participatory practice in universities is also hindered by the educational system itself. Teachers have to plan their work in order to gain strictly defined learning outcomes. It requires detailed planning of the educational process in advance which excludes considerable student participation.

Participation might be of individual as well as of social dimension (Gulczyńska, Granosik 2014: 16–18). Both these ranges interpenetrate and, as can be seen in the above example, striving for participation in its individual scope can stimulate action aiming at social participation. Participation in its individual scope at one point encounters difficulties and barriers that can be removed only by changing some structural patterns. One faces the decision: whether to accept the present state of affairs or to strive for more, but it requires initiating cooperation towards systemic change.

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