

# HIDDEN POTENTIAL OF CHILDREN'S ART EXHIBITIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE INCREASE IN TEACHER'S SELF-EFFICACY

**Katerina Stepankova**

University of Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic

**Abstract.** *A key element contributing to the quality of teaching in all educational areas is teacher's belief in their professional competencies. The paper describes the impact of high or low teacher's self-efficacy beliefs on the quality of their teaching, as well as the ways to promote self-efficacy. We see a gap in knowledge regarding the issue of whether kindergarten teachers are able to recognise the sources of self-efficacy offered by their practice. The aim of the research was to find out whether teachers can use the potential of children's art exhibitions to strengthen their teacher's self-efficacy, not only to present children's art works. A qualitative approach has been applied to the research that involved 30 kindergarten teachers awarded for an excellent level of art education. The research has shown that even the most highly qualified teachers benefit from the exhibition in terms of being professionally inspired and motivated. These are mainly self-efficacy supports in the category of vicarious experience and social persuasion. The impact of perceived personal well-being is also very significant. These findings highlight the importance of self-evident activities, such as the presentation and exhibition of children's art works. They can thus serve as a guide in the conception of exhibitions and conscious support for teacher's self-efficacy.*

**Keywords:** *teacher's self-efficacy, self-efficacy, children's art exhibition, pre-school education.*

## Introduction

The teacher's belief in their ability to work pedagogically is essential to fulfilling their professional mission (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 2006; E. Skaalvik & S. Skaalvik, 2010). The educational background of a teacher (Manning, Garvis, Fleming & Wong, 2017) and the degree of their professional self-efficacy (Garvis, Pendergast, 2010; Garvis, Twigg, Pendergast, 2010; Lemon, Garvis, 2013) have a direct influence on the quality of pupils' education and are considered key to learning even at the lowest levels of education. After completing their university training, opportunities for increasing or deepening the competencies of teachers are considerably limited in both their availability and extent. The reasons for this are not only operational but also personal or financial (ČŠI, 2014). Nevertheless, pedagogical practice offers significant space for learning. To see an educational

opportunity in pedagogical practice requires a teacher that is highly sensitive to the pedagogical process and committed to the profession. It is therefore necessary to identify and to analyse the processes associated with common practice. They can be key to supporting teacher's self-efficacy and creating learning opportunities for educators.

### **Teacher's Self-Efficacy and its Impact on Teaching**

Perceived self-efficacy, that is, the "*beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments*" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3), informs the quality of life in an unprecedented way (Bandura, 1994; Pajares, 2005, 2006). The awareness and belief that I can do things form the basis of human motivation, success and personal well-being (Bandura, 1997, 2006; Pajares 2006). A high level of self-efficacy beliefs influences motivation and efforts exerted to achieve goals, allowing one to overcome difficulties in a better way and perceive them as challenges rather than obstacles (Bandura, 1986, 1994; Pajares 2005, 2006). In the field of pedagogy, this construct is defined as *teacher's self-efficacy beliefs* (Bandura, 1994, 1997; E. Skaalvik & S. Skaalvik, 2010; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). It testifies to the teacher's belief in their professional skills and ability to influence students' learning. Teachers with high self-efficacy have been shown to better motivate students to learn, are passionate, devote more energy to lesson preparation and teaching itself, and are better protected from burnout (Housego, 1990; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010; Garvis, Twigg & Pendergast, 2010; Lemon & Garvis, 2013; Oreck, 2006). Conversely, teachers with low self-efficacy tend to approach teaching routinely, are less successful in motivating students, pay more attention to discipline and formal aspects of teaching (Pajares, 2005; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, Lemon & Garvis, 2013, Bandura, 1994). In areas, where the teacher can rely on a clearly defined curriculum, subject standards, and textbooks in which the content of the curriculum is legibly outlined, teaching delivered by a teacher with low self-efficacy is likely to be only less lively. The content of the curriculum itself should not be fundamentally negatively affected by this. The situation is more serious in the case of subjects whose quality depends directly on the teacher's ability to shape the curriculum. The readiness of the teacher to choose the subject matter, to transform it and to mediate it didactically to the pupils (Shulman, 1987; Janík, 2009) requires high professional background, experience and strong motivation. All these are components that constitute teacher's self-efficacy beliefs.

## **Curriculum and Art Training of Future Teachers**

The area of “Art and Culture” is an educational area where the content of the curriculum and the quality of teaching depend primarily on the teacher and their self-efficacy beliefs. Curricular documents in the Czech Republic are relatively open, and especially in art education they presuppose the active role of the teacher in shaping the content of the curriculum (Maňák, Janík & Švec, 2008; RVP ZV, 2017). At lower levels of education, the teacher is given considerable freedom to influence the content of the curriculum and flexibly adapt it to the current situation in the classroom or the current topics dealt with in other subjects. The curriculum for pre-school education is mostly realised through activities and is formulated as educational possibilities (RVP PV, 2018). In this way, teachers can exercise almost an unlimited measure of freedom in realising their ideas and choosing the content of artistic activities. Given the wide professional scope of these teachers (generalists teachers, kindergarten teachers), and thus the lesser depth of acquired knowledge in individual areas, a curriculum for art education defined in a free and open manner is an obstacle rather than an advantage.

Nevertheless, in fulfilling the curriculum in art education, students’ relationship to the subject and to their own creative and artistic skills is more important than the number of hours devoted to art preparation at university (Garvis & Pendergast, 2010, Lemon & Garvis, 2013; Lummis, Morris & Paolino, 2014; Štěpánková, 2019). Low self-efficacy thus forms the most significant obstacle to achieving quality in art education (Bandura, 1997; Garvis & Pendergast, 2010; Lemon & Garvis, 2013; Collins, 2016; Štěpánková, Pišová & Slavíková, 2016).

### **Sources of Teacher’s Self-Efficacy in Art Learning**

For teachers, their own professional experience and related activities can become opportunities to reinforce self-efficacy beliefs. In art education it is children’s art exhibitions that have this potential. They are conceived as spaces for sharing good practice, and they are much more than just an opportunity to present the creativity of children and the professional skills of the teacher. Their formative power comes from own 1. mastery experience, 2. vicarious experience, 3. verbal and social persuasion, and is completed by own 4. emotional states displayed in reaction to the multi-layered situation. The above moments are considered to be the most important sources in building and enhancing self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1994, 1997).

## The Study

The main goal of the research was to find out whether teachers perceive children's art exhibitions as a potential source for strengthening their self-efficacy in art field, and what specific moments of children's art exhibitions are of special importance to them. The research has been carried out in compliance with a qualitative research method. It was realised in the period between September and December 2020 in connection with the 18<sup>th</sup> children's art exhibition (MŠ Kampanova, n.d.). The selection of respondents was intentional. All respondents were teachers who regularly participate in children's exhibitions, and whose guidance in the area of children art was awarded as an example of good practice. In this group, it is possible to guarantee high level of professionalism in the field of didactics of art education, we can also expect a higher teacher's self-efficacy and sensitivity to practice as a source of learning. If even these teachers should fail to recognize the learning potential of children's exhibitions, it can be concluded that less experienced or less professionally equipped teachers are not able to perceive the opportunities offered by their practice. A total of 42 kindergarten teachers were contacted, 30 participated in the research.

The research was organised into three phases: 1. source analysis and research dealing with the importance and various sources of teacher's self-efficacy, 2. a survey and 3. an interview in a focus group (3 x 10 kindergarten teachers). Questioning teachers was limited to two open-ended questions that required a longer answer from respondents. In this paper, we present only a part of the research concerning the professional benefits of children's exhibitions for teachers. The aim was to give teachers a room to think about the questions at hand, in order not to reduce their response to a choice from given options, and thereby reach a better understanding of the situation (Hendl, 2005, Miovský, 2006; Gavora, 2010). Subsequently, the content analysis of the text was performed, the text was coded, and the topics were assigned to individual categories designed based on the theory of self-efficacy and teacher's self-efficacy. The semi-structured interviews in the focus groups were aimed at a closer examination of the topics arising from the questioning concerning the sources of self-efficacy support as defined by A. Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1997). They were carried out through MS Teams, interviews were recorded upon the consent of the participants. The phenomenon of the group (Miovský, 2006) made it possible to define some topics more precisely or to open new ones.

Research question concerning teachers: *What do you see as the greatest benefit of participating in children's exhibitions for you as a teacher? How does it enrich you professionally?*

## Research Results

Teachers' statements about the professional benefits of participating in children's exhibitions have shown that subjectively perceived benefits correspond with the main sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1997). It was interesting to uncover specific experiences teachers perceive as valuable. In the greatest detail, teachers described phenomena associated with the category of *vicarious experience*. This points to a role model being an important part of the process of strengthening self-efficacy. A role model as a source is considered irreplaceable, especially for those who do not have enough personal experience (Pajares, 2005, 2006; Bandura, 2006). The research also shows that visual experience mediated by the senses is a valuable source of inspiration not only for those who are just learning but even for experienced teachers. All responses included some kind of reference to this type of experience. It was described as a source of inspiration in terms of *art techniques, themes, art materials, children's guidance*. It also pointed to the need to compare one's artistic guidance with the practice of other teachers.

- *The greatest benefit for us is that we can view artworks of other children.*
- *We also had the opportunity to compare our work with other teachers, to be inspired by them.*
- *We also greatly benefited from children's exhibitions, where we had the opportunity to see artworks from other kindergartens and enrich ourselves with other artistic ideas and techniques.*
- *For us the most considerable benefit lays in the fact that thanks to the displayed works, it is possible to see how other schools work with children, what topics they work on, what techniques they use.*

Following the inspiration and the possibility of comparison, the respondents mentioned the exhibition as a source of internal and external motivation for further work with children, and as an incentive for professional growth. The exhibition was also perceived as a goal on which they can focus when working with children. The children's success was perceived by the respondents as an appreciation of their efforts. The expert jury and the presence of other teachers at the opening ceremony significantly increases the recognition. Bandura defines this category as *verbal and social persuasion*, that is, the support and appreciation from others.

- *As teachers, we were very surprised and pleased to see you take notice of the work of teachers and recognise them for their excellency. You are the only one who encourages educators in their further activities in this way, you also support their self-confidence, you confirm that they do their job well.*
- *We were very encouraged by the excellent results of the children.*
- *The level of artistic success was our pride in the school's evaluation and annual reports, as well as during an inspection.*

- *I am glad I can offer something extra to children in our kindergarten. Artmaking that we engage in enriches both me and them. I see the exhibition as an appreciation of this extra effort.*

*Emotional states* (emotional arousal) are closely linked to the previous category, but form another very important source of teacher's self-efficacy support. The children's exhibition is not just about exhibiting the work, but about the experience and emotional perception of the situation, mutual sharing and meeting others in the professional community. Therefore, teachers emphasised the importance of being physically present at the opening ceremony for both teachers and the children. Unlike a competition, an exhibition does not determine winners and losers, and thus creates such conditions that allow one to experience success and strengthen positive emotions.

- *An exhibition of works and a subsequent announcement in the premises of the Faculty of Education of the University of Hradec Králové is very valuable for us and the awarded children.*
- *The competition was spectacular. It was carried out at an excellent level. It presented us with a number of challenges, but also inspired us and enriched us in terms of artistic possibilities and techniques. At the same time, it was very nice to participate in it not only by submitting works, but also to be physically present and enjoy the view.*

*Mastery experience* is described as the most important source for strengthening self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994, 1997, 2007; Pajares, 2005, 2006). The exhibition is an opportunity to present the results of one's work with children while it also shows how one's own mastery experience is perceived. In connection with this category, teachers described the exhibition as an incentive for their learning and as a way to increase their motivation to create art with children, a desire to broaden their horizons, to look for new pedagogical challenges.

- *The artwork of other schools motivates me to constantly look for new information and activities.*
- *I perceive it as beneficial for my work when I can participate in an art competition and exhibition.*
- *Every year, during our visits we would find inspiration for our pedagogical work and constantly broaden our horizons.*

During the interviews, attention was paid to the general statements such as *the exhibition enriches me, inspires me, it is beneficial*, which needed to be specified. The research has shown that the motivating factor for further work is one of the most significantly perceived benefits of the exhibition. It was both external inspiration by techniques and procedures, as well as internal motivation, which has given satisfaction from the work. In this context, the satisfaction of one's work due to children's achievements was very important, that is, the awareness of professional effectiveness to pedagogically act and achieve change in pupils' education (Bandura, 1994, 1997; E. Skaalvik & S. Skaalvik, 2007; Tschannen-Moran, A. Hoy & W. Hoy, 1998) (*Every success of my children makes*

me happy. Small successes of children are a motivation for me to continue working.). There was a strong need for external appreciation (a proof that we do the job well) and recognition (we devote a lot of energy to the work even in our free time). For the teachers, the exhibition was a means of self-presentation and a way to make visible our kindergarten and the work we do. At the same time, it served as a subconsciously used protective factor against professional burnout and stereotype.

Table 1 Sources of Self-efficacy

	Sources of self-efficacy (Bandura)	Sources of self-efficacy (teacher's perception)	Perceived personal benefits
1.	mastery experience	vicarious experience	strengthening inner motivation
2.	vicarious experience	verbal and social persuasion	satisfaction from work
3.	verbal and social persuasion	emotional states	external recognition of one's work
4.	emotional states	mastery experience	self-presentation

The first column of the table presents the most important sources of self-efficacy according to Bandura (1997), the second column lists these categories sorted according to the importance that teachers attach to shows as sources of self-efficacy, the third column lists the personal benefits of children's art exhibitions as perceived by teachers.

### Discussion

The above findings show that 1) teachers perceive the motivational aspect of children's art exhibitions very strongly, without necessarily being aware that they strengthen their professional self-efficacy. 2) 'Vicarious experience' is given the greatest importance of the categories that influence professional efficacy. At the same time, we can observe that children's art exhibitions and activities that belong to the portfolio of common activities of teachers are indeed an important source of information and knowledge. The scientific interest in the 'small events', such as the presentations of children's art works, can provide interesting insights into teachers' motivation, their personal and professional needs, as well as natural sources of learning and education. The researched sample of teachers does not present a representative sample. If these teachers with great professional expertise and presumed higher self-efficacy see children's exhibitions as a source of professional support, it is necessary to think how to use their experience within teacher training as well as the organisation of children's exhibitions. It shows that the concept of the exhibition is important especially in the presentation of diverse

practice, which encourages professional discussion and mutual sharing of experience. Discussions and feedback should be part of large exhibitions as well as smaller ones, e.g. within a school or kindergarten institution. Exhibition organisers should not forget the emotional aspect of the event, and the importance of the experience for the motivation of both teachers and children. Despite the limitations of the study ( $n = 30$ ) given by the number and selection of respondents, we can show that from the point of view of the profession, children's exhibitions allow teachers to:

- strengthen professional self-confidence,
- be inspired by the work of their colleagues,
- feel support and encouragement for further work,
- experience positive emotions associated with one's profession,
- show the founder of the school and the parents the results of their pedagogical work.

Most importantly, however, thanks to the format of the exhibition, teachers can show to children what they can do while showing to parents what can do their children.

## Conclusion

The study is based on the social cognitive theory of self-efficacy by A. Bandura (1986, 1994), a derived concept of teacher's self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran, A. Hoy & W. Hoy, 1998), and focuses on children's art exhibitions as a source for building and strengthening teacher's beliefs in their professional effectiveness. To be able to use the potential of one's pedagogical practice as a source of knowledge and learning is important for the quality of teaching and the well-being of the teacher. The results of the presented qualitative research ( $n = 30$ ) show that children's exhibitions provide teachers with the opportunity to apply their abilities, to get inspired, to increase their motivation to work, and to feel strong emotions. These are the main sources of self-efficacy. In regards to children's exhibitions, teachers have most appreciated the opportunity to share good practice and the inspiration that comes with it, which is referred to as *vicarious experience*, as well as *social persuasion*, which has the effect of strengthening one's motivation. The knowledge offered by this study is applicable in the training of future teachers as well as in the preparation of children's art exhibitions. It can be concluded that the opportunity to share good practice, to engage in discussions, to receive feedback and emotional support are ways to support the learning and internal needs of the teacher and increase quality in art education.

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Stepankova, 2021. *Hidden Potential of Children's Art Exhibitions and Their Impact on the Increase in Teacher's Self-Efficacy*

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