

# AN INSIGHT INTO THE PRACTICAL TRAINING OF FINE ART STUDENT TEACHERS IN SLOVENIA THROUGH THEIR VISUAL AND MULTIMODAL REFLECTIONS

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An important aspect of the teaching practice of future art educators is the development of their reflection skills. Writing reflections can be of great help to students in this regard. In the academic year 2021/22, students reflected on guided practice in the form of a visual essay. We were interested in how students experience practical training. We were particularly interested in the kind of messages students offer about practical training when they can express themselves visually. We used a visual research approach, as visual research strategies are a direct and tangible way of understanding the experience of the participants. We found that the visual essays differed in their artistic expression and the content that students wanted to emphasize (awareness of one's own body, experiencing progress, experiencing effort and uncertainty, the contrast between fears before the performance and pleasant feelings after the performance, time constraints, etc.).

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# VPOGLED V PRAKTIČNO USPOSABLJANJE ŠTUDENTOV LIKOVNE PEDAGOGIKE V SLOVENIJI SKOZI NJIHOVE VIZUALNE IN MULTIMODALNE REFLEKSIJE

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Pomemben vidik pedagoške prakse bodočih likovnih pedagogov je razvijanje njihovih sposobnosti refleksije. Pri tem je študentom lahko v veliko pomoč pisanje refleksij. V študijskem letu 2021/22 so študentje likovne pedagogike refleksijo vodene prakse podali v obliki vizualnega eseja. Zanimalo nas je, kako študentje likovne pedagogike doživljajo praktično usposabljanje. Posebej nas je zanimalo kakšna sporočila podajajo študentje likovne pedagogike o praktičnem usposabljanju, kadar se lahko izrazijo vizualno. Uporabili smo vizualni raziskovalni pristop, saj vizualne raziskovalne strategije omogočajo neposreden in otipen način razumevanja doživljanja udeležencev. Ugotovili smo, da se vizualni eseji razlikujejo po likovnem izrazu in vsebini, ki so jo želeli študenti poudariti (zavedanje lastnega telesa, doživljanje napredka, doživljanje naporov in negotovosti, nasprotje med strahovi pred nastopom in prijetnimi občutki po nastopu, časovna stiska ipd.).



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## 1 Introduction

Study programmes that train future art educators differ in the amount of studio experience (Vella, 2016) and pedagogical experience that students get through practical training. The interweaving of artistic and pedagogical content has a significant impact on the development of the identity of an art teacher. Thornton (2005, 2013) talks about the concept of the artist teacher, which combines the qualities, attitudes, knowledge and skills of an artist and a teacher as a single identity in which both aspects are equal. Therefore, it is understandable that practical training is an important part of study programmes that educate future teachers.

Concerning practical training, Kowalchuk (1999, p. 71) stated: “For student teachers, it is a period of putting learning into practice, of relating theory to reality.” Practical training represents an important and irreplaceable learning experience (Rorrison, 2010) which has not only short-term effects but also long-term ones, since the success of the practical training affects graduates' future career decisions and professional formation (Sprague & Percy, 2014). Problems faced by future art teachers in practice may be related to class management, their organizational skills (especially in the organization of students' practical work), lack of in-depth content and organizational preparation for lessons, inability to adapt flexibly to the different needs of students (ability to explain the art task in different ways), insufficient knowledge of different artists, etc. (Kowalchuk, 2000). The success of the practical training depends on the relationship established between mentors and students, and on the tasks that students have to complete—namely, that the students follow the mentors' instructions, follow them in different situations, observe them, and that mentors direct, guide, evaluate and significantly influence the students on what kind of experience students will gain (Ulvik, Helleve, & Smith, 2018).

An important aspect of the practical training of future art educators is the development of their reflection skills. Dewey (1910, p. 6) stated: “Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitute reflective thought.” One way that allows students to develop the ability to reflect is through reflective diaries. “Reflective diaries create a platform for personal feelings and narratives by involving learners in processes of self-assessment and self-reflection and are considered an effective tool in teacher training practice” (Barromi

Perlman, 2016, p. 1) Furthermore, reflective diaries in various forms are an important tool in self-learning (Delacruz & Bales, 2010; Sangvanich & Chinokul, 2018) and they can be viewed as “training grounds for critical reflective practice” (Pavlou, 2021, p. 256).

Reflective diaries and reflections can differ based on the communication mode. Bertling (2019, p. 30) notes, “visual reflections uses imagery, where subject matter, materials, techniques, and compositional element can communicate meaning metaphorically”. A verbal communication mode is used more often, but reflective diaries can also be visual or multimodal. Visual reflections often include words, which can turn them into multimodal text or ensembles. Multimodal ensembles include three aspects, namely textual elements, visual images and design elements (Serafini, 2014). One form of multimodal text is the visual essay. A visual essay is characterized by the fact that it conveys information through a sequence of images and the juxtaposition of images (juxtaposition brings a new message) (Pauwels, 2012). Roes and Pint (2017, p. 2) note: “In the process of making images of our environment, different bodily experiences, like affects, emotions, feelings and movements are mobilised in the creation of meaning.” A visual essay often also includes shorter text (titles, provocative questions, intra-iconic text, etc.) and/or longer text (introduction, text next to images, and conclusion). The whole multimodal composition, however, usually presents some critical commentary on a topic and acts as a kind of explanation or discussion. The visual material included in the visual essay is original (photographs, drawings, illustrations) or acquired and/or modified.

Practical training of second level fine art students at the Faculty of Education of the University of Maribor takes place in two ways. Firstly, students are assigned three learning units which they complete with the help of a mentor at the selected high school (guided practice). Secondly, students undergo three weeks of practical training at a secondary school. In three weeks, fine art students teach high school students (six teaching units), and they observe and analyse the lessons conducted by their mentor (six teaching units) and other fine art students (six teaching units). After completing the practical training, students write a report (reflection on the completed practical training). Student reflections are often very sparse and impersonal.

## **2 Method**

### **2.1 Objectives and research questions**

In the 2021/22 academic year, students reflected on guided practice in the form of a visual message. We noticed that when fine art students give their impressions of practical training exclusively in words, they usually write impoverished texts in which they state facts. Entries are usually very generic and impersonal. As part of the practical training, we presented them with the features of the visual essay, which was a less familiar way of conveying ideas and knowledge.

In the research, we were interested in how fine art students experience practical training. We were particularly interested in what kind of messages fine art students give about practical training when they can express themselves visually and/or multimodally.

The following research questions were asked:

- In what way will the fine art students present their practical training experience?
- What will be their messages about practical training?
- What will they highlight in their messages?

### **2.2 Research sample**

A convenience research sample was used. In the 2021/22 academic year, 16 second level fine art education students completed guided practical training. We included in the research the reflections of nine students who agreed to use their visual essays for research purposes.

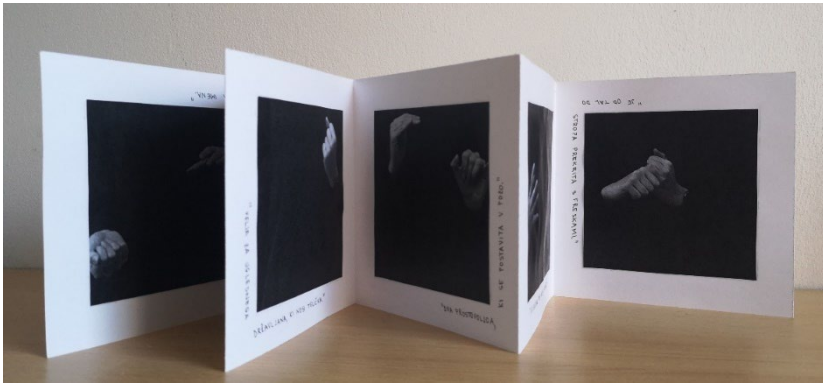
### **2.3 Data collection and processing**

We used a visual research approach. Visual research strategies are a direct and tangible way of understanding the experience of research participants (Patton & Higgs 2011). For the purposes of research with the help of visual images (visual arts-

based research practices), we can use different modes of artistic expression, e.g. photography, painting, drawing, comic book design, collage, sculpture, ceramics, installation, combined techniques, etc. (Leavy, 2020). Springgay, Irwin, and Kind (2005) establish the term "a/r/tography" to refer to a creative and interdisciplinary research methodology combining art, research, and teaching to denote research through the process of creating works of art and writing, where the two elements are not repeated but the connection between the two creates additional meaning. This is also typical for all multimodal texts or multimodal compositions in which each communication code carries a certain meaning and only summative analysis reveals the common meaning (Jewitt, 2008). In the analysis of visual and multimodal works, we proceeded from a/r/tography, which also brings understanding of the message through metaphors and metonymies (Springgay et al., 2005).

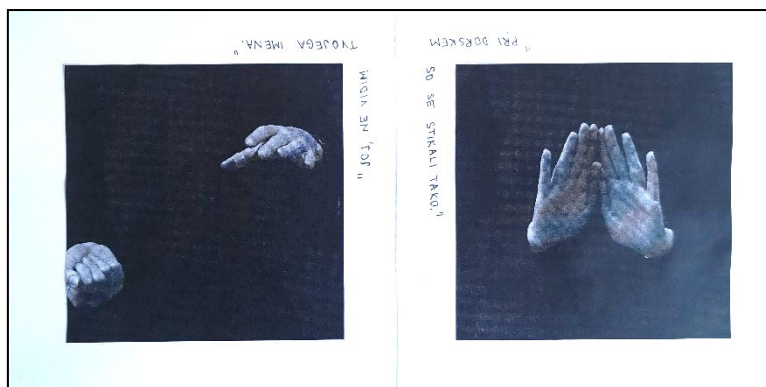
### 3 Results

#### 3.1 Leporello



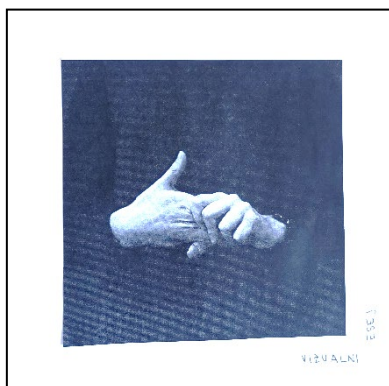
**Figure 1: Leporello**

The student prepared her reflection on the practical training in the form of a leporello (paper folded into an accordion-pleat style) (Figure 1). Leporello consists of twelve pages. The first and last pages are intended as the front and back of the book.

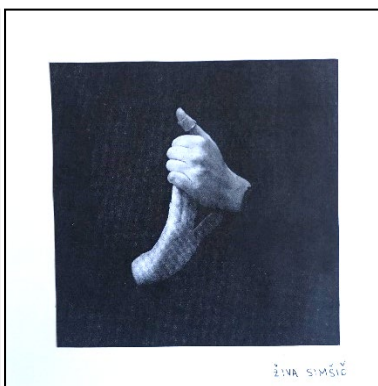


**Figure 2: Leporello (detail)**

On the cover, the back and six pages, the student showed eight hand gestures on a black background (photographs) and supplemented them with text (Figure 2), while on four pages she inserted only the text on a white background. The first (Figure 3) and the last gesture (Figure 4) show the beginning and the end of a lesson: the former indicates uncertainty and stress, while the latter also maintains a high level of tension and unrest.



**Figure 3: Leporello (detail)**



**Figure 4: Leporello (detail)**

Next to each gesture are added sentences that the student uttered during a certain gesture, namely: (1) "Oh, I don't see your name"; (2) "At Doric [column - author's note] they met like this"; (3) "He is considered a respectable citizen who carries calves"; (4) "Two volunteers striking a pose"; (5) "He looked really strong"; (6) "It

is covered from floor to ceiling with frescoes”; (7) “Experienced”; (8) “Teaching”; (9) “Fine arts”; (10) “Arts.”

### 3.2 Collage on a black background



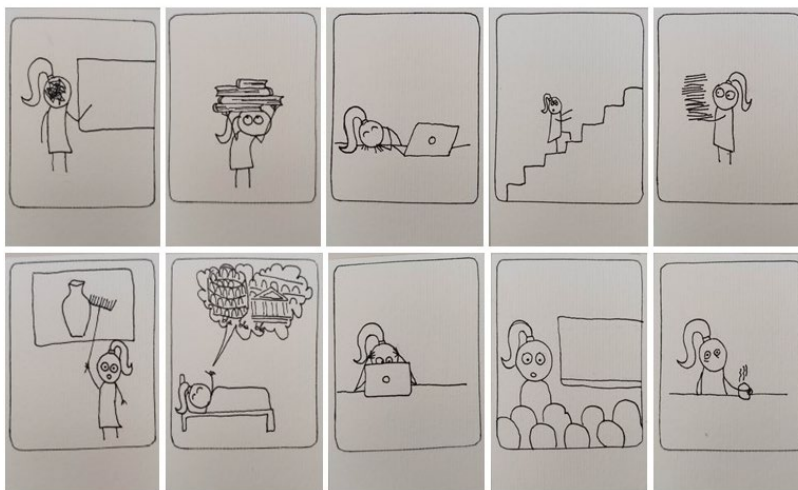
Figure 5: Collage

This student prepared a collage (Figure 5) of photographs, inscriptions, illustrations, and reproductions of works of art and decorated the composition above and below with a meander. She added a brief text next to it. She used two photos of the class with herself standing in front of the blackboard and teaching the students. In the foreground, she added a stylized illustration of herself (with a blank face, no eyes, no nose, and half of her face covered by a mask), and we also see an illustration of a Greek vase and the coronavirus. In the collage, she included two questions that she asked the students, namely "what is depicted in this work?" and "what do you know about ancient Greece?", as well as the words "stylized" and "preparation". In the lower part of the collage, the Kahoot code and a yellow post-it note with the inscription "believe in yourself" have been added.



In the accompanying text, she pointed out that she was very nervous at the beginning, that she gradually became more confident and relaxed during teaching, and that her communication with the students gradually improved. She also mentioned good cooperation with mentors and problems speaking clearly under a mask.

### 3.3 Ten drawings

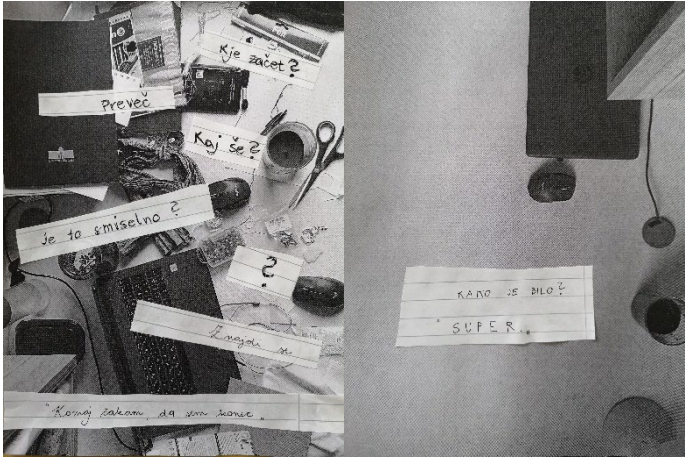


**Figure 6: Ten drawings**

This student produced a series of ten simple drawings (Figure 6), where she presented her teaching experience. On the first, she depicted herself in front of the blackboard as a teacher with a scrawled face as a metaphor for the confusion in her head. In the second drawing, she depicted herself carrying a book on her head (burden); in the third she is depicted falling asleep next to the laptop (fatigue). Then, in the fourth drawing, she showed herself climbing up the stairs (overcoming obstacles). In the fifth, she is depicted with a set of books in her hands (upright posture, sovereignty). In the sixth drawing, she is standing in front of a blackboard: there is an antique vase on the blackboard, and she is pointing at it with a broom (classroom improvisation). In the seventh drawing, she is depicted lying in bed and dreaming about the learning material (all-encompassing experience of the teaching performances). In the eighth drawing, she again depicted herself in front of the computer, staring at it and supporting her head (even more preparation for class and

studying of the material). In the ninth drawing, she depicted herself in front of the class with her eyes wide open (astonishment, perhaps surprise at the reactions of the students). In the tenth drawing, she is depicted with a cup of coffee and large dark circles (fatigue).

**3.4 Photo transformation (before and after)**



**Figures 7 and 8: Transformed photos**

This student took two black-and-white photos of her desk, top-down view (Figures 7 and 8). In the first photo, the table is full of various objects (keyboard, computer mouse, scissors, papers, pen, string, glass, folder with the University of Maribor logo). Inscriptions are added to the photo (inscriptions are written by hand and on lined paper, small print and small letters ("Where to start?", "Too much", "What else?", "Does this make sense?", "?", "Find yourself", "I can't wait for this to be over"). The next photo is almost empty: we see a closed laptop, a computer mouse, a glass. The inscription is added (again on lined paper, handwriting, capital letters) "How was it? "Great." The student showed the state before the teaching performance in a class (preparation, confusion, uncertainty, restlessness) and after the performance (satisfaction, calmness).

### 3.5 Collage and handwritten text



Figure 9: Collage

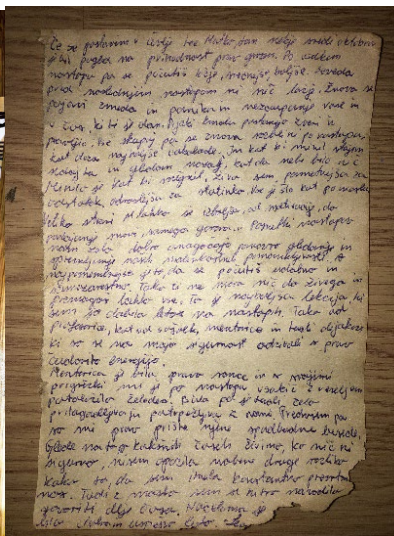


Figure 10: Handwritten text

This student prepared a collage and text (Figures 9 and 10). She created a collage of black and white photocopies of photographs of herself and artworks, three coloured illustrations (reminiscent of old sewing magazines), and schematic representations of Greek columns. Individual images are supplemented with various notes. Some are about preparing a teaching lesson and performance. ("What am I doing this afternoon until 11:30 p.m.? Preparing for Monday"; "Don't stick to the written preparation like a blind person clinging to a lamp post, be willing to improvise"; "Adapting"). Some refer to the student's introductory presentation—i.e. the first words the student says in class. Possibilities are written, but also crossed out ("Hello. How are you? Hi. "). The student added a URL link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=faG5mmkDbyc> to the song "Teenagers" (My Chemical Romance), which in the first verse problematizes the attitude of adults to teenagers ("They're gonna clean up your looks, with all the lies in the books to make a citizen out of you"). Lead singer Gerard Way said about this song: "It's a commentary on kids being viewed as meat; by the government and by society. That's how I felt in school, and after 9/11 happened that's how I felt in general" (Teenagers by My Chemical Romance, n.d.).

The student connects this URL link with a red line with the word "expectation", which is connected with the word "reality" and then with the note "I can't wait for the teaching practice". The text "Greek art" appears twice, and "Today we will focus on Greek art" once. The student has added a photo of a negative rapid test for covid. The added text is written in capital letters and additionally typed so that it can be read without difficulty. Also in the written text, the student points out the tiring period of preparing for the teaching performances. She highlights the lack of time, as the semester is shortened by four weeks due to the teaching practice. She also highlights the fears that appear before teaching a class and the pleasant feelings that appear after the teaching performance. She mentions her mentor as an important person. She recognizes that there are still many things she can improve (motivation of students, presentation of material, speech), but that the most important thing is that she feels comfortable and confident in the class. She also points out that it was difficult for her to get used to speaking with a mask.

### 3.6 Collage with a parking ticket



Figure 11: Collage with a parking ticket

This student presented her experience in a collage (Figure 11), to which she added a description in text. She included in the collage photos of herself in the classroom, reproductions of artwork, and words (associated with teaching performance—namely written preparation, collaboration, Greek art, hybrid performance, finding a parking space). In the collage, she also added the questions that were occurring to her at the time, namely, will I be able to succeed, when will I finally have free time, where will I find a parking space. In the central part of the composition, she placed the title (Teaching performances in high school) from which the other elements radiate. She explained her decision for the selected composition in the added text, where she wrote that the circle in the centre of the composition reminds her of a clock. The time crunch was always present. She added her car to the composition as she spends a lot of time on the road (driving to college and home), and the parking ticket from the last day of her teaching practice in high school. She chose photos of herself by focusing on her gestures while watching videos of her teaching performance and observing how her gestures change depending on certain situations in the classroom.

### **3.7 Collage with a blue line**

The student prepared a collage (Figure 12) by taking one page of a written preparation for a teaching performance in high school as a basis and lighten the colour of the document. On this background, she placed black and white photos and inscriptions and interlaced everything with blue lines. The first photo shows an excerpt from the book or textbook: next to it is the inscription "Read, translate...". In the second photo, there is a view of the computer screen, on which the written preparation is open. The inscription "Write..." is added next to it. The third photo shows part of a clock and next to it is the inscription "Free time?... What is this?" The fourth photo shows a set of masks and the caption "You just have to breathe...". The fifth photo shows the student's legs and running shoes. Added text: "The evening before...relaxation." The last image is a black and white reproduction of Norman Rockwell's (1894–1978) fine art work "Young Valedictorian c. 1922". Shown is a girl in a white dress receiving her diploma. The word "Performance" is added.

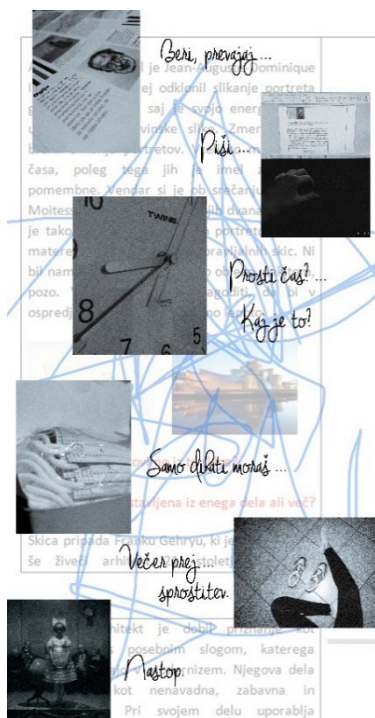


Figure 12: Collage

### 3.8 Illustration



Figure 13: Illustration

The student created an original illustration (Figure 13) in which she included some text. The illustration is a combination of line drawings, partially coloured in soft, pastel colours. In the central part is the title "Me through practice from 1. to - ." In the lower left part, she has depicted two Greek columns on which a girl sleeps. She has added two teaching performance portraits of herself, but it looks like the self-portraits are continuing outside the format. In the lower left part, she has depicted a girl in flowers with a book in her hands. In the upper part of the composition, she has depicted a division with the mind on the left and the heart on the right. The mind is depicted as a brain in the head asking the question "Do you know everything? Definitely?" The heart is shown as a stylized heart with the words "Beautiful peaceful". In the upper part, there is the inscription "Everything will be ok! Everything was ok!"

### 3.9 Written preparation for a lesson

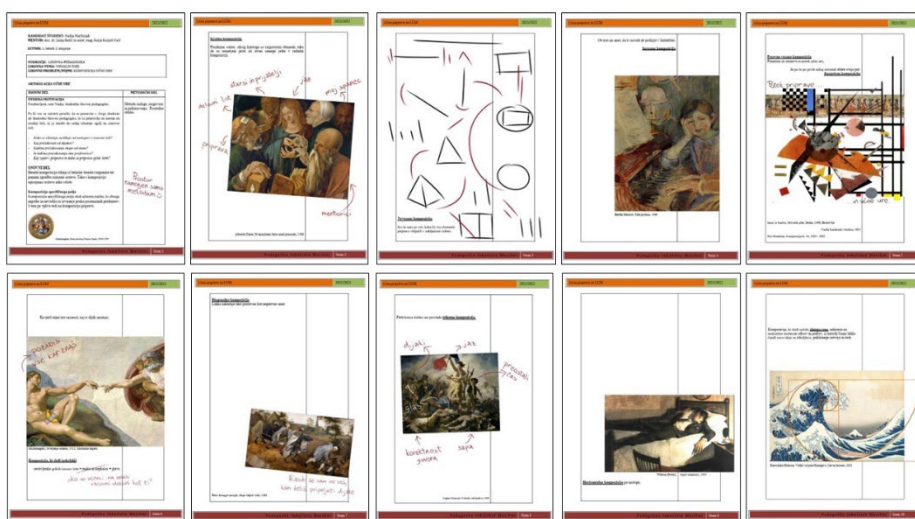


Figure 14: Written preparation for a lesson

This student prepared the visual essay in the form of a teaching preparation, choosing the composition of the lesson as the topic (Figure 14). She designed the introductory motivation as a conversation with the students, asking them how the new experience differs from teaching performances in elementary school, what to expect from the high school students, what expectations the high school students

have, what expectations the teacher has, what to include in the preparation and how to start writing the teaching preparation in the first place. Then, in the written preparation, she included an explanation of the composition and specific forms of the composition (circular, unbound, cut out, etc.). She compares each composition to the dynamics in the class and her own feelings (initial uncertainty, fear of unpredictable situations and final optimism). For example, for a loose composition, she writes the following explanation: "When you yourself do not know how to integrate all the elements of the preparation into a finished whole." Next to the diagonal composition, she includes the text "It can indicate both a positive and a negative direction." She chose Pieter Bruegel the Elder's work "The Blind Leading the Blind" (1568) as an example and wrote "Sometimes you don't know where you want to take the students." She ends the preparation with a reproduction of Katsushika Hokusai's "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" (1831), in which she engraved the scheme of the golden ratio. At the same time, she wrote the following explanation: "A composition that follows the principle of the golden ratio suggests an endless possibility of slips and falls from which we will be able to draw new ideas for improvement, professional development and growth."

#### 4 Discussion

The results of the analysis show that each student chose her own approach. Various visual essays were created. In most cases, images are combined with text. Three main approaches can be observed: short text in the image, short text below the image, and longer added text. In one case, ten drawings were created without text. The visual material used by the students in the visual essays is diverse: photos, photoshopped photos, photos obtained from videos, drawings, illustrations, schematic representations and reproductions of famous artworks. The interaction between text and image is complementary, the images emphasizing the intensity of the experience.

The resulting artworks (visual essays) each have their own artistic language. They differ from each other, although the students describe a similar experience. In four cases, students designed the visual essay as a collage. Collage is a form based on the assembly of pre-existing materials and is "closely associated with 20th-century art, in which it has often served as a correlation with the pace and discontinuity of the modern world" (Kachur, 2003, para. 1) Collage as an art form often appears in the art therapy process and can help to create meanings by juxtaposing images



(photographs, magazine clippings) and making connections between them (Malchiodi, 2012). The students' decision to use collage is expected as it has a lot of narrative power. At the same time, collages appear less structured, chaotic and intertwined.

The following five works by the students are very different in form, although the illustration made by the student works like a kind of collage in terms of the composition of the images. In the other works—i.e. in the leporello, photo transformation (before and after), ten drawings, and written preparation for the lesson—the time dimension is given. Linearity is emphasized in the leporello, ten drawings and written preparation, as we move with our eyes from left to right, from one page to the next. In the photo transformation work (before and after), we observe only two time periods, the chaotic state before the teaching performance and the calm afterwards. A simultaneous succession (Nikolajeva, 2003) is visible in the leporello, as it is a sequence of depictions of the human figure (in this case, hands) in time-separated moments which are perceived as a whole. The changes that occur in each subsequent frame indicate the time difference between the previous and the next scene. In the only visual essay where there are just ten drawings and no text, we recognize the elements of a wordless picture book. When reading a wordless picture book, the reader must extract meaning from the pictures, which offer multiple potential meanings; individual pictures or scenes are usually separated into individual frames (Lysaker, 2019).

The students conveyed the message with the help of metaphors at both the level of motive and the level of composition. We understand a visual metaphor as a symbol for something else (Steen, 2018). For example, one student uses an artist's artwork (Norman Rockwell's "Young Valedictorian") in her visual essay to show the importance and seriousness of performing in front of high school students. She chose a piece of art that shows a neat little girl in a dress with a big bow in her hair with clasped hands. The little girl is standing on a stage. We recognize the little girl as a metaphor for the feelings of smallness and immaturity regarding the role that lies before the student. On the level of composition, we can observe the free compositions offered by the collages and understand them as representations of all-encompassing and various factors that influence the course of practical training. They emphasize feelings of uncertainty and questioning concerning students' own words and actions. In linear compositions, however, we recognize a tendency

towards balance and control over the course of practical training and one's own emotions.

References to Greek art appear in most of the visual essays, which is to be expected. The student teachers receive guided teaching practice during the winter semester at the high school while the high school students are studying Greek art, according to the curriculum. Other themes are also present (e.g. composition in fine arts), but in concrete examples most references to Greek art are visible in words and images.

The central message that can be understood from the visual essays is the all-encompassing feeling of a new experience, the students' striving for successful preparation for teaching, and the presence of the dominant subject matter (Greek art). The students' messages are not impersonal as they differ in artistic expression and the content they wanted to emphasize. Through visual and multimodal reflections, the following topics emerged:

- Awareness of one's own body. Students usually have problems with how to stand in front of high school students, how to introduce themselves, etc. This uncertainty is shown very well in the leprello with hand gestures (gestures during teaching performances). Gestures and the human figure are present in most visual essays.
- Experiencing one's own progress. The experience of progress is emphasized more in the accompanying notes than in the pictures. Barromi Perlman (2016, p. 1) notes: “Focusing on emotions, inhibitions and personal growth are part of the approach to critical reflective writing, in which the practitioner takes a conscious look at his emotions, experiences, actions, and responses, in order to draw out meaning and have a higher level of understanding.”
- Experiencing efforts, insecurities and time constraints is present throughout the visual essays in both words and images. In several visual essays, the demanding and time-consuming writing of preparations and the fear of how the performance in class will go are highlighted.
- The contrast between fears before the teaching performance and pleasant feelings after the performance is present in some visual essays.

- Fears unrelated to teaching practice (finding a parking space on time, shortness of breath when speaking from behind a mask, fear of Covid, testing for Covid). Students teachers' fear of Covid has also been shown in other research and has affected the course of student teachers' practical training (Delamarter & Ewart, 2020).

With the help of the analysis of visual essays, we found that the students approached the preparation of their reflections very seriously. Their reflections are in-depth and include various aspects of practical training. Visual diaries and visual essays are a meaningful form of monitoring the teaching practice of fine art students, as they allow students to express themselves through artistic means, which can help them make more sense of their teaching practice and connect it to their artistic expression. Zupančič (2020, p. 37) notes: “Art provides insight into what we miss by looking through conventional forms, and this applies at least partly to the innovative model for creating the student teaching report.”

The results cannot be generalised because of the nature of our research, but they can give us a better insight into the understanding of the importance of the visual and multimodal way of expression in the formation of in-depth reflections among fine art students. At the same time, the results of our study raise questions about the importance of developing visual and multimodal literacy among students and educators. The materials used in the pedagogical process are highly multimodal, which means that messages are conveyed with different modes of communication. In a multimodal text, a visual communication mode is most often present. Therefore, in the future, the development of multimodal and visual literacy should be approached more systematically in the field of education.

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