

STUDY PERSISTENCE AS A CHARACTERISTIC PROBLEM OF CURRENT ELEMENTARY ART EDUCATION IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The education system for teaching singing or playing musical instruments has a long tradition in the Czech Republic. State-guaranteed studies organized in elementary art schools provide students with the basics of education that these starting artists can later develop further at conservatories and universities. Thanks to equal treatment and an extensive network of schools, more than 10% of the total population of Czech citizens aged between 5 and 18 attend the music field. The study aims to find out how many students properly complete their music studies with a leaving certificate and which school years are critical for the successful completion of studies in musical performance or singing. The research was conducted in the Czech Republic at the Elementary Art School in Ostrava, Sokolská třída 15, through a case study of qualitative research and document analysis. The documents included statistical data of 938 pupils studying at the surveyed school during 2007-2024. The research results found by analyzing the documents are divided by individual musical instruments and grades of study.

Keywords

Art school – music – musical instruments – Czech Republic – Ostrava – persistence – singing – students

Introduction

Education in musical performance and singing has a strong tradition in the Czech Republic. Its roots date back to more than three centuries ago. However, studying was not always guaranteed and organized by the state. Only in the period after World War II a comprehensive system of state folk art schools was established, which after 1990 was transformed into a network of elementary art schools preparing future students for education at conservatories and universities of art. Due to its scope, quality of professional background, and accessibility, it currently forms an important element in the environment of the Czech music culture. Elementary art schools are part of the Czech Republic's educational system and offer education in line with current modern trends in teaching to those interested in studying musical performance (Holas, 2004). Although elementary arts education is included in the educational system of the Czech Republic, pupils and students attend school only during their free time after their lessons at elementary or secondary schools. The study of music is conceived as a free time activity, which takes place in the afternoon to evening hours after regular attendance of pupils at elementary or secondary schools. Teaching in elementary art schools is completely independent and has no connection to compulsory school attendance organized in the morning and afternoon hours. Unlike compulsory school attendance, the

state does not fully cover elementary arts education. Pupils have to contribute a tuition fee that covers approximately 18% of the costs of their studies, while the remaining 82% is paid from the state budget. The monthly study costs per pupil are about 0.8% of the average monthly wage of a Czech citizen (Rojíček, 2023).

Students are admitted to elementary art schools based on successfully passing talent exams, demonstrating their abilities, and learning prerequisites (Holas, 1994). Subsequently, they are accepted into four fields: musical, dance, fine arts, and literary-dramatic. The largest proportion of pupils (65%) is admitted to the music field, and the rest (35%) is divided between the dance, fine arts, and literary-dramatic fields (Zatloukal, 2023). An extensive network of elementary art schools guarantees the availability of the study. In the school year 2022/2023, 510 schools with 1106 branches were in operation. 166.770 pupils aged between 5 and 18 were taught in the music field in these schools (Zatloukal, 2023). When comparing the total number of people (1.641.273 people), aged between 5 and 18, permanently living in the Czech Republic, we find that 10% of people in this age group study music at elementary art schools (Rojíček, 2023).

Teaching in the music field is divided into two-year preparatory study for children from the age of 5, the I. grade for pupils from the age of 7, and the II. grade for pupils from the age of 14 (Stárek, 2010). Education at the I. grade of elementary study lasts seven years and is focused on the individual development of the pupil's artistic personality. The aim of the education is primarily to prepare pupils for non-professional artistic activities. The preparation of students for studying at a conservatory is only organized for pupils who demonstrate sufficient talent and ambitions (Holas, 2013). Education at the II. grade of elementary studies lasts four years and is focused on the practical application of the acquired skills of the pupils. In rare cases, pupils then apply to universities of arts or pedagogy. Throughout the whole course of the studies, individual tutoring of singing or playing the selected instrument takes place in the scope of one hour. A collective teaching of musical theory is included in the first five years of the I. grade studies. From the second half of the I. grade (depending on the given school's education program), teaching activities are extended by playing in a chamber group, an ensemble or an orchestra.

"Elementary art school, Ostrava-Moravská Ostrava, Sokolská třída 15, p. o.", located in the center of the third largest city in the Czech Republic, was chosen for carrying out this case study (Hendl, 2008). The fact that the first public music school in the Ostrava region has been in operation for more than 110 years demonstrates not only its exceptional character but, above all, its persisting cultural and artistic value. The Elementary art school became the first Czech music school in the Ostrava region (Zubiček, 2011), making its contribution to the profiling of Ostrava's musical life significant and irreplaceable. The founder of the school, Eduard Marhula (a student of the music composer Leoš Janáček), established it in 1907. This school represented the starting impulse for the creation of other music schools in the Ostrava region (Gregor, 1987). The development of musicality and the influence of these schools is evidenced by the establishment of a conservatory, philharmonic or other musical institutions. Nowadays, the school is located in a historical building in the center of Ostrava and offers students interested in basic artistic education high-quality teaching facilities in the fields of music, dance, art, and literary-dramatic performance. The school currently offers a wide range of disciplines with well-proven high-quality teaching staff. Every year the school organizes national as well as international interpretation competitions for various instruments. Pupils are involved in various activities on a national as well as

international level. The school organizes joint concerts with schools in Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary as part of international cooperation. The most talented pupils are regularly admitted to conservatories and universities of arts or pedagogy.

This original research, which was previously lacking in the Czech Republic, aims to measure the success rates of completing studies at the elementary art school for various grades (levels of education). The research was carried out at the “Elementary art school, Ostrava-Moravská Ostrava, Sokolská třída 15, p. o.”, through an analysis of statistical data from 2007 to 2024. The research aims to uncover the issue of pupils’ ambitiousness and their resilience in overcoming obstacles linked to the difficulty of studying singing or musical performance. If we base our considerations on the fact that studies of singing or musical performance are highly accessible and are being utilized by 10% of children or pupils of a given age group nationwide, the question is whether this group of 10% of the total population of pupils will eventually complete the studies. The main aim of the research is to find out how many pupils complete their studies. Another aim of the research is to find out which school years of study are critical for the completion and how many pupils in the given school year will not complete their studies. At this point, it is necessary to note that obstacles in terms of the unavailability of such studies due to their form, distance, or economic burdens are minimal and negligible. In addition, the issue of pupils being poorly motivated by their teachers is minimal due to the quality of the experienced pedagogical staff. The main obstacles preventing the successful completion of studies need to be sought in a lack of determination (ambition) of the pupil, a lack of desire to acquire new skills, and an unwillingness to overcome obstacles. These questions are answered through a case study carried out via qualitative research, notably by analysis of documents. The documents used included statistical data of 938 pupils studying at the selected school from 2007 to 2024.

Method

Through a qualitative case study (Hendl, 2008), studying and analyzing documents from 2007 to 2024 (Reports about the S24-01 elementary art school, Class books, Reports of pupils and hours taught, and Annual reports on school activities), we aim to find answers to the following questions:

1. How many pupils studying singing or musical performance successfully complete their studies at an elementary art school with a leaving certificate?
2. Which school years are critical for the successful completion of the I. and the II. grade studies of singing or musical performance?

The research included information regarding the course and duration of studies of 938 pupils of the Elementary art school, Ostrava-Moravská Ostrava, Sokolská třída 15. Their participation was not direct, but it was carried out through statistical data during the course of the study. The total number of pupils was divided into two groups by type of study. The first group consisted of 561 pupils of the I. grade and the second group consisted of 377 pupils of the II. grade of study.

All pupils of the I. grade who started seven-year studies between 2007 and 2017 were included in the research. The full seven-year study duration was researched. The last year

included in our research was the final year for students who began in the school year of 2017/2018, i.e., their seventh year, which was the school year of 2023/2024. Therefore, a complete study of 11 consecutive years was performed.

The procedure was similar in the case of the II. grade studies, with the only difference being that 14 consecutive years could be compared, since the II. grade study lasts four years. All pupils of the II. grade who started their four-year studies between 2007 and 2020 were included in this research. The last year included in our research was the final year for II. grade students who began in the school year of 2020/2021, which was the school year of 2023/2024.

All pupils studying piano play, wind instrument play (recorder, flute, clarinet, saxophone), singing, guitar play, string instrument play (violin, violoncello), and percussion instruments play were included in the research.

The analyzed data was processed over the whole researched period (the I. grade – 11 years, the II. grade – 14 years) based on individual instruments or individual school years.

Results

The obtained results are aimed at clarifying the two questions identified in the introduction of the study and are therefore divided into two separate sections.

I. How many pupils studying singing or musical performance successfully complete their studies at elementary art schools with a leaving certificate?

To get the answer to this question, we have chosen the following procedure. First of all, we collected data from the school's documents expressing the number of newly enrolled pupils in the first school years in individual school years (Table 1). We also collected the numbers of graduates from the researched years of study from the statistical documents. That is how we gained the input data into our auxiliary statistics. We then recalculated the obtained data and expressed them by percentage for each grade of study (I., II.), for each instrument: piano, wind instruments, singing, guitar, string instruments, and percussion instruments. Then we added the final data for each school year of the pupils according to the year of the study enrolment to the result. Preparatory studies were included in the research results because a large number of pupils enroll directly into the I. grade and therefore including preparatory studies could lead to distorted conclusions.

The resulting data show that out of a total of 561 newly enrolled pupils in the I. grade, 181 of them completed their studies with a leaving certificate, which represents an average of 32% for all the examined instruments and all the researched school years.

When mutually comparing musical instruments at the I. grade of study, the most successful students are the ones studying the guitar. The opposite is the case for pupils studying string instruments.

A comparison of each school year for all instruments shows us that the most successful school year was 2017/2018, while the least successful school year was 2012/2013. The difference is 34%.

While researching the II. grade study data, we found out that out of a total of 377 newly enrolled pupils in the II. grade, 153 of them successfully completed the study with a leaving certificate, which represents an average of 40% for all the examined instruments and for all the researched school years. This value represents an 8% higher success rate for pupils in the II. grade compared to pupils in the I. grade.

When comparing musical instruments at the II. grade of study amongst themselves, the most successful students are the ones studying the piano. The opposite is the case for pupils studying percussion instruments.

A comparison of each school year of the II. grade for all instruments shows us that the most successful school year is 2017/2018 compared to the least successful school year of 2010/2011. The difference is 48%, which is a very significant variance considering that these are years of study separated by seven years.

II. Which school years are critical for the successful completion of the I. and the II. grade studies of singing or musical performance?

Our answer to this question is based on the obtained data that were also used in the previous question. We have also collected numbers of pupils who have completed their I. or II. grade studies from the statistical documents of the surveyed school. Completion dates were ranked according to the last completed school year of the respective grade of study for each musical instrument separately. We subsequently recalculated the obtained values and expressed the percentage for each study grade (I., II.) separately. The results were first summed up in average values for all musical instruments. Each musical instrument was then recalculated: piano, wind instruments, singing, guitar, string instruments, and percussion instruments (graphs No. 1 and 2).

The results of graphs following the average value of the year of study completion for all instruments, ensure that the second year of the I. grade study carries the highest risk. 24% of pupils will not start the third school year. Afterward, the number of pupils who dropped out has a decreasing tendency. The smallest decrease in pupils is recorded after the 5th year of study.

For the II. grade studies, the first school year carries the highest risk. 41% of pupils will not start the second school year. Afterward, the number of pupils who dropped out has a decreasing tendency. The smallest decrease in pupils is recorded after the 3rd school year of the II. grade studies.

In a detailed analysis of individual musical instruments in the respective researched years of study (graphs No. 1 and 2), we find that in the I. grade, there is a fundamental difference in the study of percussion instruments, which has the largest outflow of pupils after the first year.

Another difference compared to the average is in guitar, where the biggest drop-out of pupils occurs after the third year of study. The piano is the closest to the average.

When analyzing the II. grade studies, the largest difference compared to the average is in the study of wind instruments. Another deviation is present in the study of guitar performance, where the greatest drop-out of pupils occurs after the second year of the II. grade studies. Piano is the closest to the average, which is similar to the I. grade studies.

When comparing the I. and the II. grade studies we generally conclude that the biggest number of pupils who dropped out from musical performance are pupils in the starting school years. If the pupils manage to overcome half of their studies, the probability of getting a leaving certificate is high.

Discussion

The first part of the research responds to the question of determining the number of pupils who have successfully completed their studies in singing or musical performance in the I. or the II. grade study.

The resulting data show that out of the total of 561 newly enrolled pupils in the I. grade study, 181 of them completed their studies with a leaving certificate, which represents an average of 32% for all the examined instruments and all the researched school years. The II. grade study data are slightly more positive. The resulting data show that out of a total of 377 newly enrolled pupils in the II. grade study, 153 of them successfully completed the study with a leaving certificate. The average for all researched instruments and all examined school years is 40%. This resulting value represents an 8% higher success rate of pupils in the completion of the II. grade study than of pupils of the I. grade study.

If we combine both values for the I. and the II. grade, we get an average value for the whole school of 36%.

It is interesting to compare the persistence in the study and the success in completing the I. or the II. grade study between the different musical instruments. When comparing musical instruments at the I. grade of study amongst themselves, the most successful students are the ones studying the guitar. Otherwise, when comparing musical instruments at the II. grade of study, the most successful students are the ones studying the piano. Success in completing studies of individual musical instruments is not identical for the I. and the II. degree. It shows significant differences, which is similar to the results for the individual researched school years.

A comparison of each I. grade school year for all instruments shows us that the most successful school year is 2017/2018. When comparing the II. grade school years for all instruments, the most successful school year is also 2017/2018.

Based on research results, we find that persistence in studying singing or musical instrument play is relatively low in percentage terms. This result was predictable due to the difficulty of the studies and the need to overcome obstacles in terms of the length of study, which is 13 years in total (preparatory studies, I. and II. grade studies). Additionally, the pupil's age (5–18 years) must be highlighted. During this age, pupils go through various critical stages in personality development. Furthermore, the great amount of time needed for everyday homework is crucial. Last but not least, the significant time load of parents is also important. Their engagement in the at-home preparation of a pupil during the initial years of study is highly needed.

The second part of the research responds to the question of determining the critical years of studying singing or musical performance in the I. or the II. grade studies. The information was obtained by processing and extending the data obtained for the previous question. The results show that the highest risk lies in the second school year of the I. grade studies, which pupils do complete, but 24% of the pupils will not start their third school

year. Afterward, the number of pupils who dropped out has a decreasing tendency. For the II. grade studies the highest risk lies in the first school year, after which 41% of pupils no longer continue in the studies. The following tendency of the number of ending pupils is, similarly to the I. grade study, decreasing.

Through a detailed observation of the resulting data of individual musical instruments in the respective researched years of study, we find that in the I. grade, there is a difference in the study of percussion instruments, which, unlike the average values, has the largest outflow of pupils after the first year.

Another difference compared to the average lies in the case of guitar studies, where the biggest drop-out of pupils only takes place after the third year of study. When analyzing the obtained data for the II. grade studies, the largest difference compared to the average lies in the study of wind instruments. Another deviation is present in the study of guitar performance, where the greatest drop-out of pupils occurs after the second year of the II. grade studies.

Comparing the I. and the II. grade studies we generally conclude that the biggest number of pupils who dropped out from singing or musical performance studies are pupils in the initial school years. Other differences are more or less minimal.

From the study results, we find that the difference in the difficulty of studies of individual researched instruments does not have a fundamental impact on the results, but it is rather the personal determination and working habits of the pupils that have a prominent effect. If the teacher can stimulate their interest in studies during the first two years, the probability of successful completion of studies is high. The results of the research also did not confirm the presumptions based on the influence of pupils entering multi-year grammar schools (so-called „Gymnasiums“) after the 5th or 7th year of study at the elementary school. At the time of entering an eight-year or six-year gymnasium, the pupil's drop-out is low, so reducing the pupil's time for home preparation and the high school workload of a gymnasium student does not have a significant impact on the results of this study.

Conclusions

Based on the case study conducted at the Elementary art school, Ostrava – Moravská Ostrava, Sokolská třída 15, we obtained the answers set out in the introductory part. The results of the case study lead us to the conclusion that although more than 10% of the total population of people permanently living in the Czech Republic between the ages of 5 and 18 starts to attend teaching of singing or musical performance offered by the educational system, the success rate in these studies is relatively low.

The main aim of the research was to find out how many pupils complete their studies. From the results of the study, we have concluded that the I. grade study is successfully completed by 32% of pupils and the II. grade study is completed by 40% of pupils. Another aim of the research was to find out which school years of study are critical for the completion and how many pupils in the given school year will not complete their studies. The results of the study showed high risk at the end of the second year of the I. grade and the end of the first year of the II. grade. When comparing both education grades, we have concluded that the greatest number of pupils dropped out of singing or musical performance in the initial years of education at the Elementary art school. The survey results also show the fact that

if the pupils manage to overcome the first half of their studies, the probability of getting a leaving certificate is very high.

The research results can be applied with caution to other schools of a similar focus in the Czech Republic. Here it depends on the location of the school, whether it is located in the countryside or primarily in the city, or whether the region has other cultural institutions that are commonly available, such as operas, theaters, concert halls, conservatories, or art-type universities. In the framework of European music education, the results can only be used to a limited extent, due to the completely different approaches of individual countries to the issue of teaching musical instruments.

At the very end of this study, it is necessary to mention the irreplaceable role of parents with their influence on the necessary home preparation and their willingness to help their children overcome the difficulties associated with music education.

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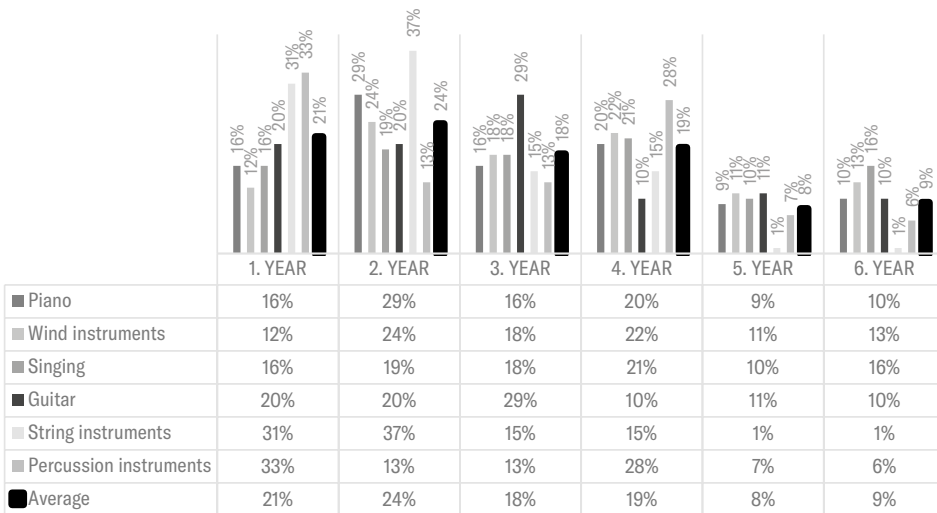
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Table No. 1

Number of pupils																	
Start of studies	I. grade							II. grade							TOTAL I. and II.		
	Piano	Wind inst.	Singing	Guitar	Strings	Percussion	TOTAL	Piano	Wind inst.	Singing	Guitar	Strings	Percussion	TOTAL			
07/08	20	15	4	9	3	0	51	12	3	6	12	1	5	39	90		
08/09	13	11	12	15	5	5	61	17	3	5	9	5	3	42	103		
09/10	27	8	8	9	9	0	61	14	2	5	6	1	2	30	91		
10/11	20	13	6	6	5	2	52	7	1	5	6	2	5	26	78		
11/12	24	14	7	5	2	1	53	5	1	3	12	1	1	23	76		
12/13	19	8	6	7	4	5	49	8	3	5	6	0	0	22	71		
13/14	22	13	4	10	2	2	53	7	4	3	8	2	1	25	78		
14/15	16	4	2	10	3	2	37	11	5	1	4	1	3	25	62		
15/16	20	9	7	8	4	3	51	4	4	6	10	1	0	25	76		
16/17	21	10	6	11	2	3	53	8	5	4	10	0	0	27	80		
17/18	13	7	5	10	2	3	40	7	1	1	4	1	1	15	55		
18/19	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	13	3	4	3	1	0	24	24		
19/20	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	12	3	0	9	3	2	29	29		
20/21	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	12	3	3	5	1	1	25	25		
TOTAL	215	112	67	100	41	26	561	137	41	51	104	20	24	377	938		
Graduates																	
Start of studies	I. grade							II. grade							Percent I. and II.		
	Piano	Wind inst.	Singing	Guitar	Strings	Percussion	TOTAL	Percent	Piano	Wind inst.	Singing	Guitar	Strings	Percussion		TOTAL	Percent
07/08	7	4	1	5	0	0	17	33%	4	0	2	4	0	2	12	30%	32%
08/09	3	2	5	6	0	0	16	26%	5	1	2	1	1	0	10	23%	25%
09/10	5	2	3	6	1	0	17	27%	9	1	2	2	0	1	15	50%	35%
10/11	4	6	0	2	1	2	15	28%	5	0	0	0	0	0	5	19%	26%
11/12	11	6	1	2	1	1	22	41%	3	1	0	5	1	1	11	47%	43%
12/13	7	0	0	1	0	0	8	16%	4	1	1	2	0	0	8	36%	22%
13/14	10	1	0	2	1	1	15	28%	3	1	0	2	1	0	7	28%	28%
14/15	4	2	0	2	1	0	9	24%	4	1	0	3	0	1	9	36%	30%
15/16	6	5	0	3	1	1	16	31%	3	3	2	6	0	0	14	56%	44%
16/17	6	5	5	8	1	1	26	49%	2	2	3	7	0	0	14	52%	51%
17/18	7	4	2	3	2	2	20	50%	5	1	0	2	1	1	10	67%	59%
18/19	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	7	0	3	2	0	0	12	30%	/
19/20	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	5	2	0	4	2	0	13	45%	/
20/21	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	7	0	2	2	1	1	13	52%	/
TOTAL	70	37	17	40	9	8	181	32%	66	14	17	42	7	7	153	40%	36%
Percentage of the number																	
Percent	33%	33%	25%	40%	22%	31%	/	32%	48%	34%	33%	40%	35%	29%	/	40%	36%

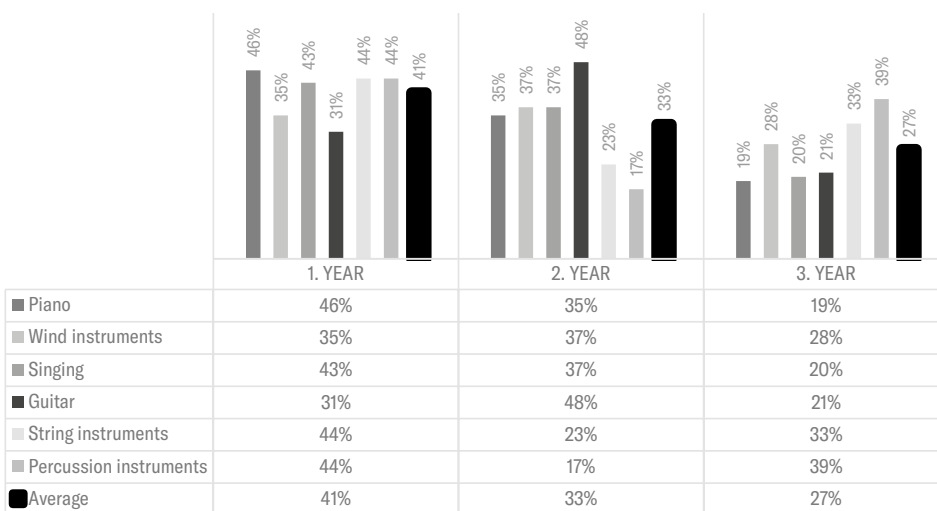
Graph No. 1

I. GRADE BREAKDOWN BY INSTRUMENTS



Graph No. 2

II. GRADE BREAKDOWN BY INSTRUMENTS



About the authors

Jaromír Zubíček studied piano at the University of Ostrava with the Russian pianist Elena Emiljevna Gilels. During his studies, he actively participated in the International Music Masterclasses in Piešťany in the class of pianist Eugene Indjic. At the same time, he established artistic cooperation with the Slovak pianist Marián Lapšanský, under whose guidance he completed his doctoral studies in piano performance at the Academy of Performing Arts in Bratislava. In addition to his artistic activities, he has been an assistant professor at the University of Ostrava since 1999, teaching piano. Since 2007 he has been the director of one of Ostrava's primary art schools. As a researcher, he focuses on the musical history of the Ostrava region and articles on piano playing.

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