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## Aesthetic Education of a Child in the Field of Visual Arts. Historical Contexts Towards the Present Day

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*Wychowanie estetyczne dziecka w zakresie sztuk  
wizualnych. Konteksty historyczne ku współczesności*

**Abstract:** The issue of aesthetic education, including that of a child, has a long tradition in Polish and foreign research and pedagogical concepts. The article presents the value and purposefulness of aesthetic education and education through art. Education through art has its transfer to other spheres of human life, which is often forgotten. This leads to the omission of art in education. Particular attention was paid to art education, in other words, art or, more broadly, visual education in contemporary pedagogy. Socio-cultural conditions shape social awareness in terms of the place of art, the development of pupils' creativity in kindergarten, at school and outside. Significant magazines related to this subject were cited, which were published in Poland in the interwar period, and they are currently lacking. The content of the article systematizes the scientific view on art education embedded in the Polish tradition and its contemporary proposals. This allows the reader and those interested in these issues to see the value of tradition and contemporary concepts in art education. It provides an inspiration for new research and teaching practice.

**Keywords:** aesthetic education; art education; early school education; children's creativity

**Abstrakt:** Problematyka kształcenia estetycznego, w tym dziecka, ma długą tradycję w polskich i zagranicznych badaniach oraz w koncepcjach pedagogicznych. W artykule przedstawiono wartości i celowość wychowania estetycznego i edukacji przez sztukę. Wychowanie przez sztukę ma swoje przeniesienie na inne sfery życia człowieka,

o czym często się zapomina. Prowadzi to do pomijania sztuki w edukacji. Szczególnie uwagę zwrócono na wychowanie plastyczne, inaczej plastykę czy – szerzej – edukację wizualną we współczesnej pedagogice. Warunki społeczno-kulturowe kształtują świadomość społeczną w zakresie miejsca sztuki, rozwoju twórczości wychowanków w przedszkolu, w szkole i poza nią. Przywołano znaczące czasopisma związane z tą tematyką, które wydawane były w Polsce w okresie międzywojennym, a współcześnie ich brak. Autorki opracowania systematyzują ogłęd naukowy na temat edukacji plastycznej osadzony w tradycji polskiej oraz w jej współczesnych propozycjach. Pozwala to czytelnikowi i osobom zainteresowanym tą problematyką dostrzec wartość tradycji i współczesnych koncepcji w edukacji plastycznej. Stanowi to inspirację dla nowych badań oraz praktyki pedagogicznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wychowanie estetyczne; edukacja plastyczna; edukacja wczesnoszkolna; twórczość dziecka

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays aesthetic education is a recognised and important field of education and upbringing. Its assumptions form the basis of the fundamental aims of shaping a comprehensively developed personality. Art, understood in the wide sense of the term (Tatarkiewicz 1975, p. 21 et seq.) and being the content of aesthetic education, is the basis of educational interactions, including sensitivity to the beauty of nature and cultural products. The reaction to beauty is expressed in an aesthetic attitude. Aesthetic education is also defined as a synthesis of emotional and cognitive education in the field of culture, stimulating the development of a creative attitude. The assumptions of aesthetic education, based on the material of art, form the foundation for the aims of shaping a multilaterally developed personality of the pupil at the level of early school education. In the multiplicity of its functions and the diversity of its forms of existence, art is representative for culture, simultaneously constituting its matter. The always dynamic space of the cultural landscape is the environment in which young people grow up. The educational opportunity taken as a realization of aesthetic education has been present in the programs of Polish schools for over a hundred years.

For the researcher of Polish education, the educator who appreciates the role of art in upbringing, it is interesting how the pedagogical views oscillating around the assumptions of aesthetic upbringing were formed, how they were reflected in practice, who propagated the ideas of aesthetic upbringing, what rank was given to this field of education in the past and how it is nowadays.

The aim of this paper is to organize and reconstruct selected facts connected with the formation of the idea of aesthetic education in Poland. The research procedure requires distinguishing views and concepts from the complexity of the pedagogical field, as well as recalling persons – authors who spoke about the importance of aesthetic upbringing for the development of the child, presenting analyses and interpretations of pedagogical work in this field. An accompanying thread, complementing the scope of aesthetic education and at the same time creating its context, is the evolution of views on “art of the child”, taking place in the same period of time.

Due to the vastness of the issue, the research area was narrowed down to aesthetic education in the field of visual arts. The tradition of the interwar years was taken into account, but beyond the time borders of the independent Poland, since the birth of the universality of education and aesthetic education should be sought at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are many precedents for the assumptions of aesthetic education or the conscious application of elements of aesthetic education in the Polish territory. It was Sebastian Petrycy from Pilzno who already recommended a variety of exercises of the body and mind of children, appreciating the study of painting (cf. Śleziński 2012, p. 146). One can quote the views of Izabela of the Czartoryski family and their extensive implementation (see Skutnik 2019).

However, the period of the last century was chosen for the analyses, as the universality of education, also the universality of aesthetic education, is shaped during this period. Presenting the state of research concerning the development of aesthetic education on the Polish ground, a review of the literature on the subject was performed, the technique of document analysis was applied, the historical reflection was used to attempt to reconstruct the development of Polish pedagogical thought concerning the use of visual arts in education and upbringing. The chronological and problematic arrangement has been preserved. The article has an illustrative character.

#### ATTEMPTS TO DETERMINE THE TERMINOLOGY AND STATE OF RESEARCH

The concept of aesthetic education is broad, most often understood in modern times as sensitivity to the beauty of nature and cultural products (sensitivity to various kinds of phenomena) expressed in an aesthetic attitude. Aesthetic sensitivity defines the level of development of aesthetic experience. It is the basic condition for the perception and experience of beauty, the training of aesthetic culture, which lead to interest in art (Gołaszewska 1979, p. 21). Aesthetic culture is defined by Maria Gołaszewska not as a culture of patterns, but of initiatives and inventions. According to Wincenty Okoń, aesthetic education is understood as the totality of conscious interactions and own activities of the pupil, in which aesthetic and artistic values are used to deepen emotional life, to develop creative activity and expression, and to enable him contact with various fields of art (Okoń 1984, p. 348).

Aesthetic education, as suggested by Bogdan Suchodolski, is the shaping of good aesthetic taste, the ability to experience and evaluate works of art, as well as tastes in one's own artistic, reproductive or creative activity and the development of aesthetic sensitivity (Suchodolski 1969, p. 22). The terminological findings of Irena Wojnar should also be mentioned. The author specifies:

Aesthetics, pedagogy and also colloquial speech most willingly use the term “aesthetic education”. It is wide enough to define all postulates concerning the education of human sensitivity to beauty and art, and at the same time general enough to avoid the necessity of specifying what actually is to be the result of such education (...) artistic education is a term which more precisely defines directional, professional preparation for artistic activity, that is, for practising some kind of art (...) In modern times, a third term has appeared, that of “education for art” (...) In comparison with the term “aesthetic education”, the term “education through art” seems to have a wider scope. It suggests not only shaping sensitivity to beauty and the ability of aesthetic appreciation, but also including art in the whole process of educating a comprehensively developed, reasonable, creative and sensitive human being. (Wojnar 1963, p. 148)

This understanding is still valid today, since it assumes knowledge of the theory and history of art, the improvement of skills in using the senses as tools for cognition and creation, it also concerns the improvement of manual skills, as well as the broadening of social and personal competences.

The issue of aesthetic values in the education of children and young people falls within the scope of axiological education. It is a world of values that is exclusively created by man, who defines and presents himself in this way. He presents his needs, aspirations and dreams. These are values that should be kept in mind in the course of education (Szuścik 2012, p. 403 et seq.).

Providing the state of research in this field among the Polish researchers exploring the meaning of aesthetic education, there should be mentioned first of all Maria Gołaszewska, Bogdan Suchodolski, Stefan Szuman, Irena Wojnar, who are also the founders of specific concepts of aesthetic education. The master among them is Władysław Tatarkiewicz. Axiological and historical aspects of this field of upbringing, on the other hand, are analysed by: Janusz Gajda (2006), Marian Nowak (2008), Katarzyna Olbrycht (2007), Mirosława Zalewska-Pawlak (2001, 2017). Currently, adjacent threads regarding upbringing and education through visual arts are undertaken by: Anna Boguszewska (2007, 2013, 2019), Kalina Bartnicka (1971), Katarzyna Dormus (1998), Marcin Jaworski (2017), Dariusz Kubinowski, Urszula Lewartowicz (2018), Wiesława Limont (1994, 2005), Marek M. Tytko (2013), Krystyna Pankowska (2013), Anna Steliga (2012), Urszula Szuścik (1999a, 2006, 2019), Anna M. Żukowska (2019) and many other researchers.

## THE TURN OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES. BEFORE REGAINING INDEPENDENCE

Education as a pedagogical problem emerged in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It refers to all fields of art, although initially it concerned only poetry and literature, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was mainly associated with the visual arts. The Polish concept

of aesthetic education, which developed at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and continued into the interwar period, took into account the influences of Western aesthetic thought on the grounds of pedagogy and philosophy.

For the Polish aesthetic and pedagogical reflection the thoughts of Stanisław Karłowicz (see 1907), or Aniela Szcówna (1915, p. 36) were important. In 1903, Janina Mortkowiczowa published the study *O wychowaniu estetycznym* [*About Aesthetic Education*], devoted in a programmatic way to the idea of propagating the material of art among the youngest generation, expressively inspired by the views of John Ruskin. At that time, Wanda Ciot-Mazowiecka, who critically assessed the reality of education and aesthetic upbringing, stated that: "To prove in today's epoch the importance of aesthetic education and its ethic-cultural influence is superfluous. (...) our society as a whole does not properly appreciate the moral and material benefits of aesthetic education" (Ciot-Mazowiecka 1909, pp. 563–564). A very important voice turned out to be the specific curriculum for aesthetic education drawn up by the graphic artist Władysław Skoczylas, published in the fortnightly magazine on pedagogical subjects, "Szkoła Polska" ["Polish School"], in September 1917. The study *O drogach wychowania estetycznego* [*On the Methods of Aesthetic Upbringing*], by Władysław Skoczylas, outlined the way in which artistic culture was to be promoted and the universality of aesthetic upbringing realised in the period of regained independence.

In many aspects it has remained relevant to the present day, for example, the statement "the acquisition of schools for aesthetic education is the only way leading to aesthetic education of the whole society and the development of art" (Skoczylas 1917, p. 1).

## THE INTERWAR PERIOD

In the interwar period, following the example of Skoczylas, artists of the fine arts, such as Antoni Brozkiewicz, Karol Homolacs, Antoni Gawiński, Ludwik Misky, Feliks Roliński, Mikołaj Wiszniewski and many others, spoke out on the subject of aesthetic education in the pedagogical press addressed to teachers.

In the period of independent Poland, there was a dynamic development of the pedagogy of culture, which had a significant impact on the popularity of aesthetic education. Already in the 1920s, the pedagogical-aesthetic movement found a clear reflection in Polish periodicals: "Muzeum" ["Museum"], "Przegląd Tygodniowy" ["Weekly Review"], "Przegląd Filozoficzny" ["Philosophical Review"], "Przegląd Pedagogiczny" ["Pedagogical Review"], "Szkoła" ["School"], "Szkoła Polska" ["Polish School"], "Kształt i Barwa" ["Shape and Color"]. At that time, Stanisław Ossowski and Sergiusz Hessen published their works. In 1937, Suchodolski published a collection of treatises entitled *Uspołecznienie kultury* [*The Socialisation of Culture*], which constituted the basis for the works of the pre-Marxist period. The foundations of

the theory of aesthetic education developed by Szuman after 1945 were laid. The concepts of aesthetic upbringing are slowly infiltrating school practice. The subject of Drawings is taught in public schools. An interesting example of the adaptation of new trends in aesthetic education can be found in the publication of Ludwika Jeleńska, *Metodyka pierwszych lat nauczania* [*Methods of the First Years of Teaching*] (1927). The author devotes Chapter IV to “Artistic Exercises”, setting out the conditions for their implementation, describing the effect of beauty. She justifies the need to awake aesthetic interests and takes into account the development of artistic creativity of the child. At the end of the study, addressing teachers, she strongly emphasizes “Whoever deprives their pupils of full development and neglects a subject, considering it to be »less important« in their short-sightedness, makes it difficult for themselves to achieve results (...)” (Jeleńska 1927, p. 341).

## AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The war and the German and Soviet occupation annihilated the organizational and curricular achievements of the Polish school, destroyed the possibility of developing Polish science and culture. After 1945, Polish society found itself in a new geopolitical situation.

Jeleńska transfers the pre-war experiences to the didactic process also in the aspect of aesthetic education. She writes: “An aesthetic sense, the development of an aesthetic sense in children is the basis for later aesthetic interests. Providing experiences connected with discovering the beauty of the world, man and his products shapes sensitivity to beauty or its lack. The child should be made aware of the existence of these values” (Jeleńska 1945, p. 112).

For the needs of socialist education, the thought about art of Herbert Read and his book *Education Through Art* from 1943, which became the basis for the concept of shaping an integrated human being, due to the interaction of works of art and one’s own creative activity, was adopted (Read 1976). The concept of aesthetic education as an element of comprehensive upbringing was introduced by Suchodolski (1959). In this approach aesthetic upbringing means organizing meetings with art, stimulating activity, expression and imagination, inspiring children to creative activities, encouraging individual contacts with art, important in the process of permanent education, “upbringing for the future”, upbringing “of an open mind”, shaping the comprehensive personality of the pupil.

In the 1960s, the concept of aesthetic education was fully formed by Wojnar (1965, 1970). Aesthetic education in the Polish, post-war concept outlined by Wojnar includes the formation of aesthetic sensitivity and aesthetic culture, necessary for the cognition and experience of the value of art and “the formation of a complete human personality, also in the intellectual sphere (enrichment of knowledge and teaching of

personal thinking), moral-social sphere (gaining the basis of moral judgement and the ability to understand human situations, and thus to communicate better with other people) and in the sphere of the shaping of imagination and creative attitudes” (Wojnar 1984, p. 13). Wojnar adopts and transfers to the Polish ground the concept of Herbert Read, Étienne Souriau, Victor Lowenfeld, Celestin Frenet and continues the experiences of Szuman and Suchodolski.

The author remains creative to this day, the wealth of her publications as a pedagogue and humanist is a great potential for inspiration in pedagogical theory and practice. Her introductory words to the collection of writings published in 2016 read as follows:

Reflections under the common title *Humanistyczne przesłanki niepokoju* [*Humanistic Premises of Anxiety*] are intended in their basic intention to encourage co-thinking about the world created and experienced by people, not so much to enhance the well-being, but to strengthen the aspirations to repair what is possible although difficult, starting from ourselves. Today we are trying to outline the concept of “subjective dimension of education”, humanistic education dealing with both the human being in the world and the human being constituting an individualised microworld. (Wojnar 2016, p. 9)

It is also worth paying attention to the fact that Stefan Szuman, an eminent psychologist and philosopher, the author of a Polish, humanistic and original theory that makes full use of the assumptions of education through art, is not included in the concept of aesthetic education. Four key features of this concept were identified, indicating that it is universal, axiological, personalistic and realistic (Tytka 2013).

In the idea of aesthetic education of Szuman, two planes of influence are important. One of them involves stimulating, cultivating and developing the activity of the pupils, often of a creative character, as well as shaping their skills: artistic, musical, theatrical or literary. The second plane refers to upbringing and education of the recipients of art, who could thoroughly use the goods of culture, possessing the skills of watching, perceiving, understanding and experiencing the work of artists. Szuman in all activities in the field of aesthetic education distinguishes three stages: *making art available*, *making it accessible*, which only on a large scale leads to its *popularization* (Szuman 1975, p. 114 et seq.). The first of them is understood as the activity of making the products of art present to the pupil. Direct contact with the work is the condition of learning about it and experiencing it. The process of making art present must be repeated in order for it to lead to the thorough recognition of art, to feeling and realizing its beauty and value. Making art accessible, on the other hand, involves helping inexperienced young people to discover, learn about and experience the aesthetic qualities and values of artistic creations. The function of an intermediary between a work of art and the recipient in the process of education is fulfilled by the “aesthetic educator” (Szuman 1975, p. 119). Their task is to suggest to students how

to look at paintings or other works of visual arts, how to listen to music, what to pay attention to when reading literary works in order to discover their artistic shape and the truth expressed in their content. The popularization of art is the general reception of a work of art by society. It should be preceded by processes of making artistic products available and accessible. The extent of this process determines the aesthetic culture of a given society (Szuman 1975, pp. 10–105 et seq.).

According to Szuman, education through the values of art is one of the elements of shaping human spirituality, creating sensitivity to a wide range of values. As the author of the theory writes:

In the process of getting to know and experiencing a work of art and acquainting itself with its aesthetic quality and value – it becomes a factor endowing the recipients with itself. The recipient (viewer, listener, reader), on the other hand, as the gifted one, should be able to take advantage of what the work of art actually, although only potentially, has to offer, and what is revealed and concretised in the consciousness of the recipient only when he or she has properly responded to the work with their whole being in terms of perception, cognition and emotion. (...) A work of art must, somehow, win over the recipient and prevail in him exclusively and indivisibly provided that it is to reveal to him all its latent values and become for him aesthetically alluring, charming and beautiful. (Szuman 1975, p. 53)

The second half of the 1990s brought a significant decline in the importance of aesthetic education especially in school activities (Wojnar, Pielasińska 1990). The concepts of aesthetic education slowly penetrate into educational practice.

Among other things, an original programme was developed by Urszula Szuścik (1999a) to improve children's perception of *visual arts*, enriching the methodology of teaching in primary classes with new content. The programme was approved for school use as a result of a competition announced by the Ministry of National Education in January 1999 (1999b, 2000). It was inspired by the concept of visual arts education of Stefan Kościelecki (1975).

Many social structures and organized forms of education, upbringing and care are involved in the process of aesthetic education of children and young people. The general developmental role of aesthetic education, which builds up the psychological, social and emotional sphere of the human personality, developing the human being cognitively and physically, is currently recognised. Aesthetic education appears to be directed towards the shaping of attitudes, especially within cultural identity, and less towards practical activities and the cognitive development of the individual (see Nikitorowicz 2005).

Nowadays the visual influence of the world seems to be particularly dominant in experiencing reality – hence the interest in visual arts education – which has become the domain of aesthetic education. The language of visual arts is a language that integrates word and image (see *Standardy* 2008).



## THE CONTEXT OF AESTHETIC EDUCATION. FROM “THE ART OF A CHILD” TO “THE CREATIVITY OF CHILDREN”

A specific context for the development of pedagogical thought about aesthetic education is the development of research on children's creativity, originally called “the art of a child”. The first research on children's drawings in Poland was conducted in 1913 by Anna Grudzińska. She gathered a collection of 10,000 drawings by Polish children. The Polish research into children's and young people's drawing art thus initiated was continued in the interwar period by Szuman. Significant contribution to this field of research was also made in the 1930s by Władysław Lam and Karol Brzychczy. On the pages of specialist magazines and pedagogical periodicals in the interwar period, issues of popularization of this new field of pedagogical-psychological knowledge were undertaken.

In Poland after the Second World War, the research was continued by Lam (1960, 1967) and Szuman (1969). Then this issue was taken up by, among others: Irena Borzym (1979), Bolesław Hornowski (1982), Andrzej Ligocki (1962), Stanisław Poppek (1978, 1999, 2010), Anna Trojanowska-Kaczmarek (1971, 1988). The research concepts showed the structure and determinants of children's drawing development, their artistic talents, brought many important clarifications concerning the creative process, however, they did not cover the earliest period of children's creativity.

In the 1990s, interesting research was initiated by Bernadeta Didkowska, demonstrating the influence of media on the structure of children's drawings (2005, 2015), Hanna Krauze-Sikorska (1998), Maria P. Stasiakiewicz (2000) and Urszula Szuścik (1999a). The consequence of the continuity of Szuścik's research was another publication entitled *Znak werbalny a znak plastyczny w twórczości rysunkowej dziecka* [A Verbal Sign and an Artistic Sign in a Child's Drawing Creativity] (2006). The author, studying the development of children's artistic creativity at the preschool age, refers to psychological and linguistic contexts.

As a natural consequence of research inquiries, analyses and interpretations, Szuścik took up the issue of children's scribbling (2019). So far, in Poland, apart from the precedent of research by Maria Parnowska-Kwiatowska, this area has not been thoroughly studied. The period of scribbling in the development of children's drawing is very poorly represented in previous studies, often neglected and underestimated.

### SUMMARY. THE MATTER OF ART IN AESTHETIC EDUCATION

The turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century initiated an important stage in the dissemination of the idea of aesthetic education in Polish pedagogical thought. An important aspect that allowed aesthetic education to be included in the general principles of the upbringing of Polish children was the possibility of

inscribing its aims in patriotic and national upbringing. Psychological and pedagogical contexts of research on “the art of a child”, understood nowadays as children’s creativity, were translated into the didactic process of children’s artistic education.

Analysing the key assumptions of Szuman’s concept of aesthetic upbringing in relation to contemporary early school education in the field of aesthetic upbringing, it should be emphasised that it is up-to-date for didactic and educational purposes. This theory is complete and fully sufficient to be applied in the 21<sup>st</sup> century to early school students, the more so because it includes in its scope: literature, theatre, film, and fine arts in the sense of visual arts. The analysed concept proposes an integral treatment of artistic disciplines. It is regarded as valuable to educate the recipient of art, without simultaneously giving up artistic creation. The translation of this concept for pedagogical practice can be found in the assumptions of the *Standardy edukacji kulturalnej* [*Standards of Cultural Education*] (2008). The scope of the concept of *visual arts*, which is the content of aesthetic education, forms the basis of educational interactions with children.

Contemporary culture, which is at the same time characterised by multiculturalism and globalisation of the approach to social and artistic events, as well as by diversity and rapidity of changes, imposes questions about the legitimacy of aesthetic education, about its character, so that it is possible to fulfil the educational assumptions, upbringing to values (see Pankowska 2013, p. 171). Another question also appears: how to prepare the early education teacher to fulfil the task of guiding the child in learning about the world of culture in the present cultural landscape? A thorough analysis of the historical and axiological aspects of aesthetic education can provide the basis for the search for answers.

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