



Cultural education of children and teenagers and the challenges ahead of cultural institutions

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Abstract: Development of talents and competence in the contemporary culture and aesthetic education of children and adolescents occupy a special place in the educational research of the twenty-first century. Recommendations for how to best shape these competence from early childhood have become a driving force behind the designing and implementation of various educational initiatives at schools and in non-formal educational settings. In the difficult time of the new pandemic (2020), activities aimed at developing social skills in young audiences have become particularly relevant. Even though, due to spreading restrictions, these were mostly transferred to the Internet, many cultural institutions have tried to re-establish and maintain effective relationship with their audiences. Recent years have shown how important it has become to build relationship and develop social skills in direct contact with culture, art and other people. In their research analyses, the authors of this paper have focused primarily on the programs of leisure activities addressed to children and adolescents. The research involved the analysis of the websites of selected cultural institutions (programs), educational websites (reviews) and community portals (comments), with a particular emphasis on the competition for the most development-enhancing initiative for children. Data were also obtained via interviews with program organizers. Analysis of cultural institutions' programs show their involvement in the cultural education of children and youth. Non-formal education in cultural institutions is focused on the development of creativity and cultural and social competence.

Keywords: cultural institutions, cultural competence, children and youth, children creativity, cultural education, challenges, leisure time, museum education, theatre pedagogy

1. Contemporary cultural education of children and young people

Cultural education can be defined as all-purpose humanistic education, teaching and learning in the contexts of diverse environments, changing the conditions of life and of entire cultures dominated by new technologies. Accelerated civilizational progress and the associated rapid information flow enable human-to-human contact in a network of communities dispersed across the real or virtual world. Cultural education supports the development of children's and young people's creativity (Cropley, 2001; Lewartowicz, 2019). Cultural education as a "common good" leads to actions taken by cultural and educational institutions, among others, in the spirit of synergy, addressing children and youth but also adults and seniors for the "common good", understood as a cognitive experience that mobilises and activates human activity (J. Galkowski, S. Galkowski, 2019; Olbrycht, 2019).

Culture and art are interpreted as spaces for learning and maturation into full participation in social life by some Polish pedagogues and researchers, among them Bogdan Nawroczyński (1947), Sergiusz Hessen (1973), Stefan Szuman (1961), Irena Wojnar (1984) and Katarzyna Olbrycht (2019), who study the relationship between pedagogy and culture/art in the development of spirituality, aesthetics and holistically understood personality. Education through art and culture, as broadly defined by these authors, determines the main ideas and methodology of pedagogical interventions addressed at children, adolescents and adults alike. The holistic views represented by these authors, who of course vary in their theories and practice, still emphasise education and the quality of its impact – in fact, what they share is an interest in the ways in which "quality

of life” is created, whether on the individual or community level, in and through culture, art and science (Olbrycht, 2018).

The flourishing of various initiatives in cultural education in Poland post-1989 is clear evidence that it stemmed not only from the systemic changes that took place at that time but is also due to the new possibilities and new determining factors that appeared and had to be faced.

In the context of theoretical deliberations, the practical dimension of formal and non-formal education through “lifelong learning”, the development of multiple intelligences and the formation of various competences play a crucial role. Contemporary cognitive science points to the individual capabilities and capacities of the human mind (Gardner, 2009; Bonar, 2019).

Cultural education is defined by researchers as education for cultural participation, as a process of communication-literacy through which to negotiate webs of meanings and connections (Pasikowska-Schnass, 2017). Culture is understood in its symbolic, material and non-material (spiritual) dimensions, which influence individual creativity (Bielecka-Prus, 2010; Lewartowicz, 2019). It is through various areas of art, such as theatre, music, dance or the visual arts that culture stimulates the formation of attitudes, lifestyle choices (through choice of values) and creative development of personality (Olbrycht, 2018; Szuman, 1990). The personalistic approach in cultural education is reflected in thinking and acting, which translate into the working methods proposed as being adequate to content. Values and the interaction between them are manifested in qualitative actions (Denek, 2011; Pater, 2017).

When researching and conveying her theoretical account of cultural education, Katarzyna Olbrycht points to the category of ‘finding delight’ as a natural need that gives shape to the process of human growth and development (Olbrycht, 2019).

2. Leisure and non-formal education in cultural institutions

When analysing the issue of aesthetic and cultural education in the social development of children and young people, it is necessary to mention the leisure culture that had developed throughout the previous century.

The notion of time is linked to purposeful activity and all kinds of doings performed “in time” and “on time”. One can say that time determines our lives. By performing various activities in time we create reality, and at the same time exert influence on ourselves by shaping our selves “in time” and “through time”. The quality of how we spend our time is reflected in the “quality of life” and “lifeworld” of generations; it is reflected in everyday life and in our culture of leisure time (Łukaszewski, 2020; Mroczkowska, 2020; Pater, 2015; Siwiński, 2010). The cultural activity of a child realized in leisure time is gradually transposed to the professional and social domain of adult life, still impacting the quality of life in its many dimensions. Nowadays, the activities of cultural institutions ensure the quality of participation in culture by disabled and socially excluded people (Gaweł, Opozda-Suder, 2020; Pluszyńska, Kopeć, Laberschek, 2022).

Today, the various forms of leisure and the ways in which children spend their free time are similar across the European countries, particularly against the background of fast-growing new technologies and their use by the young. An important role in engaging in leisure time is played by extracurricular activities which develop and support children’s abilities, as part of extra-curricular programmes, groups and sports clubs (Cynoweth, Lynch, Petersen, Smed, 2020; Holden, 2008). Various initiatives are undertaken in cooperation with NGOs, community centres and other recreational, educational or sporting institutions and facilities (Pater, 2015; Pufal-Struzik 2018).

Cultural institutions currently play an important role in the education of children and youth. In Poland, among the institutions focused on realizing objectives in leisure-time culture an important place is occupied by the culture of youth centres, the role of which is to disseminate culture and make

culture and art accessible to all (Skowron, 2019; Świętochowska, Dobiasz-Krysiak, 2019). These are usually the institutions that introduce the youngest children to the world of creativity and inspiration (Kosno, Spodaryk, 2021). For various political and financial reasons, these community-based centres have undergone a considerable metamorphosis since the political transformation of 1989 (Pater, Karamanov, 2020; Szeląg, 2015). In fact, in the new reality that followed Poland's accession to the European Union structures, the financing of various programs in culture and leisure has changed, being now partially funded from the various EU funds. Many new organisational units and initiatives working for the cultural involvement of the youngest audiences have come into being. Innovative projects are initiated in various cultural institutions including museums, theatres and philharmonic halls, which, by following the demands of the market and the growing need for an increasingly democratised public for social and cultural education, have also targeted the youngest children (Grajewska, 2019).

3. Cultural institutions and their educational activities

The message of finding delight in beauty as an inspiration for work” and the need for work as a reviving force seems particularly relevant since the beginning of 2020, when we were first faced with the new global pandemic. After 12 March 2020 when the decision was made in Poland to close the culture sector to the public. As a result of numerous lockdowns, many people lost their jobs, and formal education was diverted into the digital space. Employees of cultural institutions tried to maintain relationships with their audiences. The need for social distancing has resulted in severed links with loved ones, while the traumatic experiences of strenuous situations has produced social effects whose consequences will be felt for a long time to come. “The Great Standstill” has not only shaken the world in its social and economic aspects,

but has also caused a turn in social attitudes. Social life has been moved to the Internet, which generated new needs for formal and informal educational content. Cultural institutions had to re-establish contact with their audiences by offering work that would meet the new needs and take advantage of new possibilities (Górajec, Pasternak-Zabielska, 2021; Kamińska, 2021; Wiśniewski, Pol, Płaska, Bąk, 2021).

As our research analysis shows, despite the ongoing constraints many institutions did not cease their work but mobilised their forces to establish an effective relationship with the public. They reflected on the need to open up to local communities which were isolated and deprived of opportunities of contact (Kamińska, 2021). New rules of participation were introduced through applications for young audiences available through the Internet. In Poland, especially in large cities, cultural institutions took action to support parents and teachers in home education.¹ Many of these initiatives were highly professional, setting new standards for cultural and educational work. At the time cultural education of children and young people took place primarily in the family and at school, while “leisure time” also opened up as the main space for new educational activities and *outdoor education* (Wiśniewski, Pol, Płaska, Bąk, 2021).

Theatre commands a pivotal role within the framework of leisure institutions, serving for centuries as an efficacious means of fulfilling both individual and communal needs. It stands as an integral component of social life and a distinct tool for interpersonal communication, emphasising a human perspective, which is enacted in man (expressed via the actor's performance) and towards man (realised through the audience's perception).

Polish teatrologist, Andrzej Hausbrandt, in his contemplations on the societal functions of theatre, identifies four principal categories: educational-cognitive, cathartic (purifying), entertainment, and ceremonial functions (Hausbrandt, 1983). These roles are notably crucial for the lifelong development of an individual, wherein, through engagement with the arts, one may not only augment knowledge, cultivate

¹ <https://www.polin.pl/pl/aktualnosci/2021/07/19/emocje-i-edukacja-o-pandemii-muzeum-i-idei-uwaznej-szkoly-diskusja-online>, (access: 09.10.2023); <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRPLH00uINQ> (access: 09.10.2023).

skills, interests, and talents, but also sustain mental health and internal equilibrium, thereby enhancing quality of life.

Despite temporal changes, the expressive potency and syncretic nature of theatrical art ensure its continued relevance and significant role in education through the arts in its most expansive sense (Miller, 2017). This process, bifurcated in nature, encompasses two distinct paradigms: education through art and education for art. It primarily aims to utilise art in the formation of a comprehensive, integral human personality, enriching one's worldview, instilling moral norms, fostering imagination, liberating creative ambitions, and cultivating the aesthetic culture of individuals, i.e., the knowledge and sensitivity requisite for engaging with art, experiencing aesthetic impressions, and appreciating the value of artistic works. Such perceived education simultaneously embodies education through theatre and education for the reception of theatrical art (Olszewska-Gniadek, 2017; Szulborska-Łukaszewicz, 2017). A third facet of upbringing through theatre is discerned by another Polish theatre educator, Józef Górniewicz. In addition to educating to and through theatre, he delineates "upbringing in a theatre team". He posits, "these are spontaneous, and sometimes deliberately organised processes of integrated artistic, social, and moral education in a small social group" (Górniewicz, 1990, p. 8). To underline the coherence of these three approaches towards theatre, Górniewicz introduces the collective term "theatrical education". This process culminates in an augmentation of an individual's understanding of theatre's complexities, an appreciation of its language, a deepening of aesthetic and moral sensitivity, and an amplification in the level of involvement in the creation and reception of theatrical art's values.

Notably, after two years of lockdown engendered by the Covid-19 pandemic, theatres have sought to reconstruct relationships with children

and adolescents. In addition to resuming performances for youthful audiences, numerous theatres have reintroduced workshops. Daniel Arbaczewski, a theatre educator from Krakow, highlights the current acute deficit in students' social skills: "After the pandemic, we entered a ploughed field where immediate sowing is impossible. (...) When a group was assigned a task requiring collective action and thinking, they were either paralysed or an immediate conflict ensued. Consequently, we quickly shifted from 'knowledge' workshops to 'skills' workshops, employing paratheatrical, performative tools."² As observed, the deleterious effects of children's social isolation predominantly impacted interpersonal relationships – communication difficulties directly translated into an absence of team cooperation, further intensifying the individual's sense of solitude within the group. This scenario demands swift remedial measures, wherein theatre – as a secure place to acquire and practice these deficient skills – can perform a pivotal role (Denkowicz, 2022; Sanecka, 2022; Szczepska-Pustkowska, 2020).

In response to these challenges, the Theatre Institute for Young People (TIM) was inaugurated in the newest district of Krakow – Nowa Huta, providing a fresh space of the Teatr Ludowy (People's Theatre) dedicated to engaging with a youthful audience. In a contemporary setting and under expert supervision, various theatrical and educational activities are conducted, targeting children, adolescents, and their parents and teachers alike. The organisers express, "We aspire to accompany the young audience in their natural quest to explore and comprehend the world, thus we intend to persistently investigate new artistic spaces, alter perspectives on theatre, and remain perpetually open to new experiences. We will fabricate modern performances for young audiences, utilising new technologies and divergent forms of narration."³

2 Daniel Arbaczewski – theatre pedagogue, conducting workshop activities for children and youth at the Old Theatre (Stary Teatr) in Krakow.

3 *Theatre pedagogy after the pandemic*, Marta Bryś converses with Daniel Arbaczewski and Łukasz Zaleski, "Didaskalia. Gazeta Teatralna", 2022, no. 172: <https://didaskalia.pl/pl/artykul/pedagogika-teatralna-po-pandemii> (access: 09.10.2023).

4. Aesthetic education in leisure and culture institutions

Aesthetic education is linked to artistic education, and in a special way to culture institution and musical education. Polish artist and educator Irena Popiołek in text *Aesthetic Education and Education Through Art*, looking at the past, explained their value and function in creating human identity, in human pursuit to God and exploring the sense of one's own life, emphasizing the necessity of bigger share of art in pedagogical practice (Popiołek, 2014).

The social and cultural skills of children and young people are developed in the context of institutional activities (museum, theatre, opera and the philharmonic, etc.). Social competence are a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes considered essential for personal fulfilment and development. The formation of key competence as a result of cooperation between different learning structures is recommended, as is the promotion of multiple and diverse approaches to learning (Brzezińska, 2019; Cropley, 2001; Pitts, 2018). Initiated by cultural institutions, innovative programs addressing children and young people provide much-needed support to school education, offer ways of spending free time in their locality and in the global space of the Internet. Institutions of high culture, along with NGO organisations, offer artistic education and education through art, in this way encouraging the development of social and cultural skills of children and young people. Today's emphasis rests on the learner's ability to activate (Laurent, 2010; Pater, Olszewska-Gniadek, 2021; Robinson, 2021).

When analysing educational activities in the light of the theory of aesthetic education, and the concept of cultural education as the forming of social skills, one must certainly look into museology. The museum as an institution of culture that has existed for over two hundred years is now undergoing dynamic development and transformation, particularly in the sphere of its social involvement and educational role (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007; Meier, 2000; Macdon-

ald, 2016). In the twenty-first century, and especially in recent years, education in the museum, from the museum and through the museum has become particularly vigorous. The engagement of museum educators in the particular deserves a mention as they initiated many research and educational projects in cooperation with numerous institutions of formal and informal education (Robinson, 2021; Szeląg, 2015).

In recent years has shown how fast museum educators are capable of responding to critical situations by proposing programs in support of communities, addressing the public with much kindness and an invitation to cooperate, which has resulted in new proposals for innovative projects involving children and adolescents but also, via the Internet, entire families (Kamińska, 2021).

Simultaneously, the digitisation process of many Polish museum collections, which began in the twenty-first century, was accelerated in the last years (Jagodzińska, 2021; Pater, Karamanov, 2020). With the appropriate software and tools, museums were capable of responding even faster to the situation of lockdowns and truncated chances for on-site educational work. The need for online museum education proved to be helpful and relevant both to parents in home-education and to teachers implementing curricula in cultural education and education through art (Buchner, Urbańska, Wierzbicka, Janus, Cetera, 2021). Analysing the websites of Polish museums, it is notable that their programmes have been strongly oriented towards addressing socially relevant and topical issues, including ecology, local environment, climate change, the need for communication and the development of social and cultural skills (Kamińska, 2021).⁴

Various methods have been used to engage diverse groups emotionally and intellectually, and in this way affect their quality of life. The "Accessible Museum" programme has proven helpful to people with visual or hearing impairments. It has resulted in audio podcasts, films with sign language interpreters, and audio-descriptions, which make it possible for new social groups, which were absent from this space before, to become

4 The Art of Education: <https://sztukaedukacji.zacheta.art.pl/#konferencja2018> (access: 09.10.2023).

involved in education.⁵ Cultural education is one of the important pillars of cultural involvement for the benefit of cultural heritage and of the social function of the institution and its environment as reflected in intergenerational and intercultural communication.⁶

In modern pedagogical concepts, education through theatre is considered in the process of forming a full, integral personality, expanding on our knowledge of the world, shaping moral norms, developing imagination and releasing creative ambitions as well as moulding our aesthetic culture, which amounts to the knowledge and sensitivity necessary for contact with art, experiences of an aesthetic nature and appreciation of the value of artistic work and reception of theatrical art (Rochowska, 2019).

5. Participatory activities in cultural institutions

Cultural initiatives of a participatory nature involving children and young people deserve special analysis. Workshops that develop creativity and introduce children to culture and art (local, regional, national and multicultural) contribute to the formation of their cultural identity from an early age. These cultural provisions also support parents, guardians and educators in the cultural education of children about and in culture, and in the development of their aesthetic potential. Participation in culture influence human well-being, reduce stress, counteract loneliness, serve socialization and enculturation, shape identity, promote integral human development in the variable quality of life (Lipińska-Grobelny, Ozga, 2023; Ryś, 2020).

Among the socially recognised forms of evaluating the quality of work in aesthetic and cultural education are competitions and plebiscites, which

are among the most important events in the cultural calendar and development of cultural education (Świętochowska, Dobiasz-Krysiak, 2019).

A good example is the “Sunflowers” competition, founded in 2011 in Krakow by the *Czas Dzieci* Foundation, which stands out among the cultural initiatives for children and teenagers, having consistently enjoyed high reputation. The plebiscite is held every year in Krakow, Warsaw and Silesia.⁷

In Warsaw, for example, the Syrena Theatre has been very successful in working with young audiences during the pandemic. Particularly appreciated by the jury were the “Summer dubbing workshops” (Statuette 2021 in the language category) which provided an opportunity for individual voice work, but also teamwork (joint creation of a radio play). Among the prize-winners we also find the “Online meloconcert for children and babies”. (Organiser: Impresariat Barbara Jagodzińska-Habisiak) involving musical classes and concerts based on Edwin Elias Gordon’s theory. In Silesia, there were classes that developed language competences, such as “It’s easy with Tosia! Fun ways with speech therapy” (organised by the Jan Dorman Zagłębie Children’s Theatre in Będzin). The project was designed to provide the youngest children with a continuation of their work on speech development in an interesting and encouraging artistic setting, e.g. using puppets. The “Baytel on-line” project was also awarded by the jury (Zabrze Philharmonic). This was a cycle of weekly mini-music shows aimed at inspiring musical sensitivity in school-age children. The “Tiny Festival” (Teatr Mały Tychy) was awarded for an interdisciplinary programme of theatre, visual arts, music and movement addressed to families with young children (0-5 years old). As the jury stressed in the nomination, the initiative has successfully encouraged whole families to explore new

5 The Museum of Engineering and Technology is a cultural institution of the City of Cracow, and started the adventure with podcasts: <https://www.mim.krakow.pl/aktualnosci/podcasty> (access: 5.10.2023). Mimcast. Miasto i my: <https://mimcast.pl/>, <https://www.mit.krakow.pl/> (access: 09.10.2023).

6 In 2019, 97.8% of museums had educational activities and the median attendance was 10,359. NIMOZ Museum Statistics, Museums in 2019: <https://nimoz.pl/dzialalnosc/projekty/statystyka-muzeow> (access: 09.10.2023).

7 The competition is organised by the Czas Dzieci Foundation, the owner of the czasdzieci.pl website.

artistic experiences, but above all, to consolidate the parent-child relationship through theatre and artistic activities of an interdisciplinary nature.⁸

Among the winners of the 2022 and 2023 competition we also find museums with programs full of well-received educational activities, many of which have been awarded more than once. The pandemic period has been a challenge for museum educators, who had to focus their work on digital space and also outdoors, in the space around the museum. The activities submitted to the competition are an example of the multi-directional development of cultural education of children and young people carried out in cultural institutions, such as museums, theatres, philharmonic orchestras, public libraries, community centres, and NGOs.⁹

The growing interest of parents in educational forms of spending leisure time with their children shows how necessary such projects are to support the considered selection of the highest quality offers. Parents' see the value of these types of initiative and show appreciation of the organizing institutions on a national forum. The organisers of the "Sunflowers" competitions encourage the support of local governments and state funds in order to encourage the education provided and to appreciate the organisers who ensure the high quality of the events and the competitions (Pater, Olszewska-Gniadek, 2022).

6. New challenges in cultural education and cultural Institution

Our analyses of the work done by the cultural animators and educators discussed in this paper allow for the conclusion that art has proven to be an excellent educational tool when employed through processes facilitating real, authentic encounter with human beings. In fact, team activities spontaneously activate in children the natural processes of competence acquisition, such as learning content from different spheres of knowledge and acquiring skills (including communication, teamwork, logical thinking, creativity, negotiation and decision-making). Participation in various classes also helps children identify with their system of values, which often translates into empathy and tolerance in the various dimensions of social life. Besides cultural education of children and adolescents is only the beginning of the process which extends across one's adult life, both in its professional and leisure dimensions.

The activities initiated by various institutions and organizations for cultural education not only support parents and educators but, even more so, target development and growth in the environment of meanings and symbols inherent in the world of art and culture. Developing cultural competence requires not only space and material resources, but also the close relationships necessary to enable growth in safe surroundings, people's sharing of each other's admiration for the world, exploring the beauty of nature and art, finding pleasure and delight in artistic endeavours and daily participation in culture.

8 In Warsaw 2023: https://sloneczniki.czasdzieci.pl/aktualnosci/id,185-sloneczniki_2023_rozdane.html; In Silesia: https://sloneczniki.czasdzieci.pl/aktualnosci/id,191-sloneczniki_2023_rozdane.html (access: 09.10.2023).

9 In Krakow: <https://sloneczniki.czasdzieci.pl/>; https://sloneczniki.czasdzieci.pl/aktualnosci/id,190-sloneczniki_2023_rozdane.html (access: 09.10.2023).

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