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Developing cultural skills in "new" museums.

Museum education – a case study

Education in new museums and culture institutions

Museums are increasingly becoming spaces of social life not only in the field of artistic education, but also in the fields of education about culture, cultural education, and social and cultural animation. The participatory museum paradigm puts the museum public in the centre of attention, making it the target of its influence. The skills possessed by visitors to a contemporary museum are of prime significance. Following other researchers, it seems important to ask about the competences they can equip their museum audience with by offering various educational and entertainment programs. This can be done by choosing specific content for these programs, or by uncovering certain values in the context of research on collections, objects, or exhibitions. Today, museum education is an important area not only of theoretical considerations, but above all of social practices; it is a meeting place for educational entities at various levels of education, from kindergarten to Universities of the Third Age. A museum creates a space for the formation of individual and collective tastes; it is a place of negotiation of meaning, for learning how to conduct discourse and critical reflection. It is also a shared place, like a school, performing unquestionable educational and cultural functions in the local environment, in the structure of city institutions. The development of skills in the self-education process in relation to the cultural heritage of science and art is an important area of research today.

Changing living conditions, globalization, neoliberalism, and spreading consumerism generate certain threats which are offset, among others, by educational activities which offer the humanisation of life

through the values of culture. In the era of the explosion of social media and the global spread of new technologies, cultural education is gaining a new dimension. We learn not only at school, but also through direct contact with teachers, listening to lectures, or reading books. We learn more and more often using electronic tools, through which we have access to texts, films, and photos from all over the world. Practically without leaving home, we can “acquire education” from around the globe. New media enable and enhance the education process, in which self-motivation and self-education play an increasingly important role. Self-education in the context of formal academic schooling as well as informal extracurricular education is increasingly possible in cultural institutions. Museums offer exploration of the world through the wealth of their collections. Their visitors embark on a journey to the past, to distant nooks and corners of the world, but above all to the immediate, local environment. This is done with a view to knowing, experiencing, and understanding the world in order to make use of it to develop one’s own identity and social presence in the world. These purposes are served by cultural education, artistic education, and in particular museum education, which is particularly interesting in this context.

Cultural education

Cultural education is at present a major field of studies carried out not only by pedagogy scholars, but also by culture studies scholars, cultural anthropologists, culture animators, and educators in the context of robust social education and awareness-raising practices developed by cultural institutions. Only in the last century did these institutions start to be considered centres of elite culture – including museums.

The socio-cultural changes of recent decades have contributed to a vast number of changes which can be seen in the operation of museums. It is worth noting the great determination of the community of museum educators, cooperating teachers, and animators, all of whom actively contribute to this shift by engaging in various activities. The social activity of the Forum of Museum Educators in Poland consists, among other things, in intensifying various works in the field of museum education. The Forum has undertaken research on the state-of-the art of Polish museum education and has been involved in the dissemination of good practices by organizing nationwide seminars and conferences, thus bringing together actors involved in the implementation of innovative education in museums of the 21st century.¹

» 1 <http://muzealnictwo.com/2018/06/powstalo-stowarzyszenie-forum-edukatorow-muzealnych/> and <http://edukacjamuzealna.pl/> [access 15.03.2019].

In relevant literature, the term “education about culture” is used interchangeably with the notion of “cultural education”. However, the former is characterised by an anthropological approach to and understanding of culture; it moreover points to cultural anthropology as a way of thinking about culture and the human being which treats culture, in most general terms, as the “way of life of certain people”. Some scholars differentiate between education about culture and cultural education, pointing to the humanist aspect of the latter. Irena Wojnar indicates a certain binding process of “humanising the person, of defending and developing his or her spiritual powers, i.e. all those dispositions of an internal, personal, emotional, and moral nature which are expressed in the way of life”.² The perception of cultural education as humanistic is related to its corrective function; in the spirit of humanistic values, it assumes the formation of a person with an extensively developed and integrated personality. The supporters of this concept refer to the tradition of humanism, classical Platonic philosophy, and the Greek idea of *paideia*, or cultural pedagogy.³ Cultural education is defined in a host of different ways, depending on the meaning it is ascribed with in relevant literature. Providing a list of definitions of terms, Katarzyna Olbrycht indicates that cultural education prepares one for active and knowing participation in culture, understood as symbolic culture (mainly in the field of art and technology). Cultural education is understood as a transmission of cultural values aimed at supporting individual and social development (the details of this interpretation depend on the adopted concept of the human person and his social functioning). Cultural education is defined by the authors of *The Standards of Cultural Education*, e.g. by Krystyna Ferenz, as preparation for a comprehensive reception of art and for creative thinking (mainly via artistic and quasi-artistic means). European documents, such as Eurydice’s, define cultural education as the induction of individuals into the cultural heritage of their own region. Culture studies and education studies scholars Witold Jakubowski and Zbigniew Melosik understand cultural education as a preparation for active participation in culture, without a division into high culture and popular culture, with a focus on the latter⁴. A broader approach to cultural education is proposed by the authors of a report on cultural institutions. They understand it in the context of a critical perception of culture and art: “Cultural education as education

» 2 I. Wojnar, *Edukacja i kultura [Education and culture]*, [in:] *Współczesne dylematy upowszechniania kultury*, ed. J. Gajda, Wyd. Uniwersytet Marii Curii Skłodowskiej, Lublin 1991, p. 20.

» 3 S. Słowińska, *Idee (konceptje) edukacji kulturalnej [Ideas (concepts) of cultural education]*, [in:] *Upowszechnianie, animacja, komercjalizacja kultury*, ed. J. Kargul, Wydawnictwo Naukowe, PWN, Warszawa 2012, p. 221.

» 4 M. Zalewska-Pawlak, *Sztuka i wychowanie w XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2017, p. 173

of conscious and critical recipients of art, creative individuals with a vast imagination and sensitive to art”⁵. Reflecting on the essence of cultural education, Marta Kosińska puts forth the following definition: “Cultural education, in the broadest sense, is a process of preparation for more active, informed and often critical participation in culture. It provides the tools for: 1) independent, critical, in-depth understanding of the senses of individual cultural products; 2) efficient operation in the network of socio-cultural relations. It applies the notion of cultural interpretation as well as critical cultural practice, providing tools for understanding and action: it prepares individuals for meaningful practice”⁶. The adopted understanding of cultural education can be applied to educational activities conducted in cultural institutions, in museums, where the recipients are currently offered the opportunity to learn and acquire cultural skills in the context of the topics and content of proposed exhibitions, educational activities and cultural events.⁷

In the adopted theory of cultures, cultural education is one of the key cultural practices that stimulate the variability and process nature of culture, which in turn leads to socialization and is an inalienable element of democratization processes and broadens the field of civic involvement. What distinguishes cultural education from education about culture is the approach to culture and art, the way culture is defined, and social involvement, not only in the reception and understanding of culture, art, and thus social and cultural relations in the context of political, economic or ideological conditions, but also in the manner of an individual’s formation, his or her cognitive activity, readiness to participate in culture and art, and introducing changes both in the life of a specific community and their own. In these processes an important role is played by artistic education, which through the diversity and complexity of culture shapes a system of values common to people who are under its influence. Artistic education is an element of humanistic education that encourages aesthetic experiences and ethical or aesthetic values, the potential to raise awareness, and assists in obtaining satisfaction and pleasure from participating in situations of artistic expression.

Educating for skills

» 5 *Kadry dla kultury w edukacji i edukacji w kulturze. Raport*; K. Olbrycht, J. Skutnik, E. Konieczna, D. Sieroń-Galusek, B. Dziadzia, wsp. Ł. Dziuba, Ł. Marchewka, A. Lysko, M. Zygmunt, ROK, Katowice 2012, p. 11. .PDF: http://www.wpek.pl/pi/85765_1.pdf; [access: 2.03.2019].

» 6 Definition of cultural education coined by Marta Kosińska: education for culture (*Edukacja kulturowa*). Dictionary: <http://cpe.poznan.pl/dictionary/edukacja-kulturowa/> [access: 11.03.2019].

» 7 H. A. Giroux, *Pedagogy and the Politics of Hope. Theory, Culture and Schooling. A Critical Reader*, Westview Press, Oxford 1997, p. 98.

Competences for active and involved participation in culture are acquired primarily in the family environment, from an early age in the local environment, and in the primary, secondary and higher education systems. School is most often the place where young people initiate contact with cultural institutions. According to contemporary theories of aesthetic education, cultural education should begin at the lowest level of the formal education system, i.e. in kindergarten. Progressive democratization of culture assumes access to cultural goods for all participants of social life, and inclusion in culture should apply to all citizens.

To follow the term “inculturation” that was coined by the social educator Helena Radlińska, we must examine current educational practices, which are no doubt a major element of both social acculturation and change. Over the past decade, new innovative programmes dedicated to various groups of recipients have emerged in Polish cultural institutions. More and more often the necessity of activities of cultural institutions for social inclusion and socialisation is raised. Therefore, institutions offer their premises for acquiring and shaping social, cultural, communication, linguistic, and other competences. The notion of competence in pedagogy is most often defined as knowledge, skills, and attitudes taken up in various areas of life, including social, cultural, and economic aspects. Competences also define human dispositions that are achieved through learning (learning, self-development) throughout one’s life.⁸ According to Maria Czerpaniak-Walczak, “Dispositions are a set of mental and physical characteristics including knowledge, skills, abilities, capacities, motivation, attitudes, values, as well as styles of activity, the possession, development and use of which enables the achievement of life goals and tasks”.⁹ Thus defined, a disposition may be developed and cultivated in the process of activity and creativity. The acquisition of the basic meta-competence of “learning” in various processes of creative development is a subject of interest not only for creative or artistic education, but also for intellectual education. Competences can be developed, improved and used in different ways by means of adapted methods and problem tasks.¹⁰ In this context, we must examine today’s education, which seeks innovation in the development of cognitive processes, makes use of the cognitive capacities of an

» 8 M. Wróblewska, *Kompetencje twórcze w dorosłości*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie Trans Humana, Białystok 2015. p. 25

» 9 M. Czerpaniak-Walczak, *Między dostosowaniem a zmianą. Elementy antycypacyjnej teorii edukacji*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 1994, p. 134; see *idem*, *Podmiotowość jako kategoria pedagogiczna i edukacyjna [The individual as a pedagogical and educational category]*, [in:] *Podmiotowość w wychowaniu, między ideą a rzeczywistością*, ed. E. Kubiak – Szymborska. Wydawnictwo WERS. Bydgoszcz 1999.

» 10 J. Orzechowski, P. Maciaszek, *Rozwiązywanie problemów [Problem solving]*, [in:] *Przewodnik po kognitywistyce*, ed. J. Bremer SJ., WAM, Kraków 2016, p. 639–679.

individual, and teaches young people and also seniors (Universities of the Third Age in Poland) how to solve problems. In a word, it can provide the key to opening up new possibilities, it enhances quality of life and ways of understanding the world, and shows how to acquire a greater awareness of one's personal and social life.

The relatively new educational spaces of the 20th and 21st centuries open up a wide range of opportunities to acquire cultural competences. Numerous emerging museums, art galleries, science centres, and theme parks in Poland are very popular among people of all ages. They offer educational and entertainment programmes that encourage discovery and exploration of the world and oneself in the learning process. The education that takes place here is an example of the broad range of open education as well as edutainment. Education in art galleries, science centres, and interactive exhibitions in museums is conducted holistically through independent, autonomous choices of learning paths, hands-on experience of exhibits and objects, and discovering one's own motivation to learn about phenomena and solve problems. The viewer, depending on his or her own knowledge, skills, and competences, determines their own route according to the principles and requirements of constructivism.¹¹ Cultural institutions – museums – are places and spaces where we can break away from the everyday world to absorb and enjoy beauty and rejuvenate. The power of art according to F. Schiller is about influencing and inspiring new ideas, and developing a fresh, different, and new look at the surrounding reality. One relaxes in beautiful, aesthetic spaces and returns slightly changed from them to the real world. But there is also the aspect of critical reflection, which allows us to experience catharsis, calm down, exchange thoughts, change our attitude, or undergo general transformation, all under the influence of aesthetic sensations or intellectual reflections.¹²

Teaching innovation in museum education

Cultural skills are of prime significance in the contemporary world. They help not only to move freely between different cultures, but also – or per-

» 11 G. Hein, *Edukacja muzealna* [Museum education], trans. P. Szaradowski, [in:] ed. M. Szeląg, J. Skutnik, *Edukacja muzealna. Antologia tłumaczeń*, wyd. Muzeum Narodowe w Poznaniu, Poznań 2010, p. 59–81.

» 12 B. Kwiatkowska – Tybulewicz, *Wychowawcze aspekty sztuki współczesnej. Z perspektywy pedagogiki krytycznej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2016, p. 7–23; R. Pater, *Edukacja estetyczna w permanentnym rozwoju osobowości. Działania edukacyjne muzeów i centrów nauki* [Aesthetic education in permanent personality development. Educational activities of museums and science centres], [in:] „Transdyscyplinarne Studia o Kulturze (i) Edukacji”, *Kultura i sztuka jako przestrzeń aksjologiczna i edukacyjna*, No. 11 /2016, Bydgoszcz, p. 290–307.

haps above all – to promote interpersonal communication by providing tools to understand oneself, one's culture, and one's identity in the context of social and cultural life, and to support and enable human development by supplying tools for intercultural mediation. The support and development of cultural skills is the prime objective of the innovative "Good Practices" museum education project, which is run in collaboration with the Institute of Pedagogy of Jagiellonian University, the National Museum in Krakow, and selected nurseries and primary schools (including junior high schools). The tasks are carried out by students of pedagogy who specialise in socio-cultural animation, teachers and pupils of selected schools and classes, as well as experts, and museum educators who – supporting the work of students as reviewers of lesson plans – also provide their practical experience and knowledge of the collections, the realities, and uniqueness of the institutions' activities.

The classes, which have been conducted since 2010, have evolved on a year-to-year basis. Using the method of research in action, an evaluation was carried out after each class by means of a focus interview with students and pupils. Moreover, a questionnaire and a free interview were used with pupils and teachers/educators, respectively, whereas a focus interview was applied with university students. The main objective of the research was to diagnose the results of classes that bound the theory of teaching (museum education) with the practice of implementing new ideas and solutions in educational activities conducted in schools and museums among pupils and teachers, but first of all among students and museum educators. Each year, the classes were modified and adjusted to the existing possibilities of selecting schools and students of specific classes, the choice of topics, the scope of content, the methods of educational activities, the choice of the place and space of activities, and the selection of exhibitions and objects, which were works of art held in in the Gallery of Twentieth-Century Art in the Cloth Hall and Jan Matejko's Home, both of which are branches of the National Museum in Krakow. The possibility of meeting and agreeing on content and activities, learning about students' interests, education needs, and knowledge of museums was an important criterion for the innovations introduced. The choice was made by students during classes by selecting the target group with whom they wanted to work. With this selected group, they diagnosed their existing knowledge of museums, collections, their own interests, and the current content of the core curriculum. The main subjects taken into account were the Polish Language, History, and Art, but also issues of regional education, aesthetic education, interest in art, culture, and the history of small and large homelands. For this purpose, educational talks and games were conducted with students at school, and interviews were conducted with

teachers. The role of the teacher was to select a group of pupils in line with the students' interests, hold a meeting with teachers of particular subjects and with the class tutor, and map out the framework of cooperation, which was preceded by a relevant letter to the principal of each school.

As many as seven editions of the museum meetings took place within the framework of educational classes in the 2010–2016 period. The activities with students were attended by 132 students, 18 teachers, 360 pupils, and 48 pre-school pupils. Two classes took part in two editions, and one class took part in three of them. In the course of the projects, permanent cooperation with 3 teachers and museum educators was established. Preparation and implementation of joint activities of students and teachers with museum professionals resulted in a new quality of education, corresponding to the real needs of students. The implementation of cultural education aims on the capabilities of the three education entities was undertaken. The conversations and interviews with individual respondents involved in the activities present the following image of the collaboration. The proposed activities were willingly taken up by university students, pupils, and teachers. As testified by the observations made by students, teachers and myself, we could observe a kind of enthusiasm – an inquisitiveness born out of the encounters and challenges accepted. In particular, the students spoke about the thrill of preparing the script for their activities. Equally exciting were the conversations with the pupils and the diagnosis of the needs and expectations of pupils and teachers. The students put a lot of effort into preparing attractive classes. Both university students and pupils were divided into groups of 4–5, which facilitated direct contact as this required working in a group, sharing tasks, and assigning roles and responsibilities. With this approach, it was important for the students to take up group work, face the challenge, jointly choose and determine the scope of the content, as well as choose tasks and adapt to the needs and capabilities of the group. The most difficult part, as the students confided in their evaluation of the classes, was to establish communication between one another, to fulfil their duties on time, to arrange the whole script of the classes, and to prepare appropriate tools and props needed to conduct the classes. In this respect, the students were very resourceful. What they themselves emphasized was that for the first time during their studies they had the opportunity to test their theoretical knowledge in practice – to use their ideas in direct work with others. They said that tackling this task was a big challenge, which however gave them considerable satisfaction. Some issues arose: for example, the tasks prepared were too simple for the pupils and took less time than the students had foreseen. In this situation, it was necessary to improvise or have another task to solve. The direct interaction of students with pupils

enabled reflection in the context of preparing educational activities in the museum space, which has its own characteristics. For example, it turned out that the way the cushions were spread on the floor was important as it not only determined where they could sit, but also how they could look at the works of art safely, move around the gallery without triggering an alarm, or attract the attention of museum wardens. Technical remarks were also important in the context of the content and methods of work in the gallery and in the workshop space of the museum and the summary of the classes in the classroom. This three-stage educational activity (at the university, at school, in the museum) showed the students of pedagogy new animation methods that they could try out in cooperation between the museum and the school in the field of generally understood education about culture and cultural or artistic education. It is not the aim of this paper to present the detailed methodologies used in these activities and studies, but only to show the possibility of holding university classes in a manner that engages students in activities that are both practical and require academic reflection on combining theoretical knowledge with practice, learning to talk, dialogue with others in a group, and in the context of specific content, proposed methods of work, and finally the values that result from such activities. All of the above are uncovered by each individual independently.

Summing up the effects of the teaching work, the conversations conducted with students after the classes and later, in individual meetings, also with museum educators, make one think that such educational activities are an opportunity to develop interest in art and museums, but also a chance for the first professional contact with other specialists, educators, teachers, youths, and children. It is by no means insignificant that many of the students started to cooperate with the museum after the classes: three people were employed in the education department, and teachers included trips to museums in their curricula, themselves inspiring the broadening of the core curriculum of the subjects taught. In one of the schools, after the classes in the museum, pupils organized an exhibition of their own works and took up extracurricular drawing classes themselves.

The cultural skills developed in these classes are hardly quantifiable and were not studied. It is important here to create situations that open up to culture, enable familiarity with it and its experience, internalise values, and create space and time for one's own artistic expression. Such situations will trigger reflection that arises from the possibility of encountering other people, objects of art, and the values of culture. In this area, we deal with the possibility of developing the mother tongue, small motor skills through artistic activities, getting to know other human beings,

experiencing empathy, getting to know other times and people through objects and products of art, but also via potential cooperation. Cultural competences are developed gradually in this type of class and depend on the proposed content, methodologies, organization, duration, and course. Another task would be to measure the initial and end skills acquired in such activities. Undertaking relevant research is a task for the future. Individual activities for students within the framework of classes held for one semester (I have conducted such classes for the past 10 years), however, allow us to conclude that such education makes sense and in some way benefits all the interested parties.

Dialogue in culture and museum education

The eminent contemporary social pedagogy scholar Maria Mendel proposes the pedagogy of the shared place as a theory that should be put into practice, or at least potentially used. While this refers to the position of the school in the local community and beyond, one can also try to apply its principles to the museum institution. In very general terms, the scholar proposes dialogue as a method of developing the democratic creation of a common place. As she points out, “dialogue characterised by the pursuit of justice, by virtue of the fact that the partners involved wish to have equal status, is a form of practising democratic relations and creating a common place”.¹³ The “shared place”, a school or a museum, is understood here as a place of education in the sense of critical pedagogy, where previously established values and those brought into the common space are subject to dialogue and mediation. In the broader sense of this context, both the school and the museum can together develop a new quality: the value of the shared place in the democratic system. The museum as a common place, a space offering a dialogical way of co-creating a location through common activities, creates new opportunities for learning via dialogue and from each other, within a partnership of the opportunities and needs of the stakeholders – in this case in the activities of students, pupils, and teachers. Everyone is involved in the process of learning, exchanging knowledge, and acquiring skills. Still, it seems to be the most important thing to discover the world of culture and the truth about oneself in encounters with other people, cultures, and art. The choice of methods of museum activities, in which both students and pupils are involved, is underpinned by the aim of acquiring cultural competences (in a broad sense here), to get to know concrete reality in a meeting with another person. Acquiring teaching, linguistic, analytical, and learning

» 13 M. Mendel, *Pedagogika miejsca wspólnego. Miasto i szkoła*, Katedra Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Gdańsk 2017, p. 191.

skills, as well as awareness and cultural expression, has become a starting point for educational activities carried out in cooperation between the actors and institutions involved. I can only hope that the Good Practices project, as a joint action, will become an inspiration to take up the academic challenges of museum education in various academic centres and museums in our country. ●