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Postulates of aesthetic education in the concept of art classes in the contemporary educational system based on the analysis of curriculum assumptions for 1999-2024

Postulaty wychowania estetycznego w koncepcji kształcenia w zakresie plastyki we współczesnym systemie oświaty na podstawie analizy założeń programowych w latach 1999-2024

Abstract: The model of aesthetic education developed in Poland, based on Bogdan Suchodolski and Irena Wojnar's assumption of art's developmental potential, was implemented in institutional education in the twentieth century. It found expression in the then-mandatory minimum curriculum for art classes, the content of which was specified in detail in the curriculum. Nowadays, the core curriculum regulates the educational process by defining objectives, content, tasks and learning outcomes. On the other hand, teachers were given the freedom to choose/develop the curriculum, which, by defining the specific educational goals and the procedures for achieving them, determines the actual scope of the theoretical assumptions pursued. These analyses aim to determine the extent to which the postulates of aesthetic education are considered in the educational concept currently pursued. The core curriculum for art classes between 1999 and 2024 was analysed to determine whether postulates of aesthetic education were included in the learning objectives and content.

It was found that the postulates of aesthetic education were woven into the core curricula content but did not entirely make an impact. Their concretisation

occurs in the selected curriculum for art classes, while their actual scope of implementation depends primarily on the teacher's awareness of the educational potential of art and their determination to use this potential optimally in the education process. This reveals the importance of training future art teachers, including making them aware of art's educational potential, which determines the chance of its optimal use in educational practice.

Keywords: aesthetic education, education for the arts, education through the arts, core curriculum, education system.

Introduction

The concept of aesthetic education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century stemmed from the incorporation of statements developed in aesthetics into teaching. Research into the educational potential of art was prompted by studies on the diagnostic aspect of children's creative output (Hornowski, 1982) and by innovative ideas formulated in the context of the „New Education,” which refers to the role of expression and creativity in child development.

Aesthetic education is defined as:

- the process of forming man's aesthetic culture, developing good taste, ability to evaluate and understand aesthetic phenomena and the process of shaping man's personality in the intellectual and moral sphere (Wojnar, 1964, p. 185),
- upbringing and multilateral education using aesthetic and artistic values to deepen the emotional life, to develop the creative activity and self-expression of the pupil and to enable him/her to come into contact with various fields of art (Okoń, 2004, p. 464).

Janina Mortkowicz, Stefan Szuman and Stefan Ossowski introduced the idea of aesthetic education into Polish educational thought. They advocated aesthetic culture education and pointed to the role of artistic expression in child development (Pankowska, 2017). Mortkowicz drew attention to the educational aspects of art, including the coherence of moral and aesthetic goals and the role of aesthetic culture in harmonious human development (see Pankowska, 2017). Ossowski (1949) considered the issues of values, experiences and aesthetic attitudes. Szuman pointed to two contextually distinct goals of education linked to art: the development of the child's creative activity and education through art, i.e. using works of art to present specific content (cognitive, moral, emotional). He understood education through art more broadly than his successors, as a deliberate action by the educator

aimed at sensitising pupils to the beauty of art, learning and understanding its works and experiencing their value (Szuman, 1969; Pankowska, 2017). He assigned aesthetic education the tasks of disseminating art (making it present by providing contact with art) and making it accessible, which includes shaping the ability to understand art, helping in discovering, learning and feeling the aesthetic features and values of artistic works (Szuman, 1962, p. 24). The above-mentioned assumptions set the direction for developing aesthetic education in Poland. Szuman's postulates, e.g. regarding the integrity of artistic disciplines and the two fold nature of art, i.e. taking into account its perceptual and receptive aspects (educating aesthetic culture, shaping the individual's personality through art), are reflected in the concept of aesthetic education pursued in contemporary schools (Boguszewska, Szuścik, 2021; Pankowska, 2017).

Bogdan Suchodolski and Irena Wojnar introduced the above postulates into the Polish educational system. They systematised and developed the knowledge of the educational role of art, resulting in the formation of the Polish school of aesthetic education based on educational sciences and the interdisciplinary theory of a humanistic-social nature (Pankowska, 2017, p. 51).

Assumptions of the Polish aesthetic education

Aesthetic education includes two scopes: a narrower one, *education for art*, and a broader one, *education through art*. *Education for art* involves preparing the individual to understand and consciously receive it. It includes the formation of sensitivity (aesthetic taste) and aesthetic culture, as well as the shaping of authentic aesthetic attitudes, which manifest themselves in the ability to value and understand works and aesthetic phenomena (Szuman, 1962; Suchodolski, 1967; Wojnar, 1976, 1990). The pursuit of the postulates of *education for art* requires that conditions be created for the pupil to acquire knowledge of art theory and history concerning techniques, means of expression, works of art, and manifestations of art in different historical periods. The pupil must also develop the ability to evaluate works of art in relation to the formal values they contain and their location in art movements and trends. An important goal is to develop an interest in art, which, according to Suchodolski (1965), obliges the teacher to consider the pupils' needs and preferences when choosing works of art and to provide direct contact with them.

The assumptions of *education through art* refer to its educational potential, understood as the property of initiating an individual's development. It is understood as the education of the full human personality, intellectually

(enriching knowledge and teaching individual thinking), morally and socially (acquiring the foundations of moral judgement and the ability to understand human situations and thus communicate more fully with others), and in shaping imagination and creative attitudes (Wojnar, 1990, pp. 551–522). Suchodolski emphasised that:

Education through art educates multilaterally because (...) it exercises and develops very diverse functions: not only the richness of mental experience of the world, but also the ability to construct it; not only the ability to feel for people and situations, but also the ability of expression that allows one to relieve certain inner anxieties and to develop attitudes for communicating with people; not only imagination as the power of transcending actual and sensual reality, but also creative needs expressed in invention, in planning, in attempts to give material shape to one's visions; not only the courage to experience a variety of situations and a variety of conduct, but also the ability to pass judgement, especially by identifying with the characters of art or by opposing them; and not only does it develop a sense of freedom, independent of the narrowness of the everyday, but also discipline, the most difficult and strict discipline of the artistic order, to which, by yielding, man only finds his freedom (Suchodolski, 1982, p. 114).

The cognitive aspect of art is expressed in its ability to show the truth about people or events; art is a source of knowledge about the external world and the inner experiences of a person (Suchodolski, 1965, 1997). Emotional development is linked to expressive, communicative and compensatory functions (related to the release/cleansing of emotions) (Suchodolski, 1968). Moral development is facilitated by the experience of perceiving art: art shows contemporary antagonisms as well as struggles for peace and justice (Suchodolski, 1982, p. 114). Suchodolski wrote that education through art requires the organisation of educational work to be so profound that art can affect the whole personality of the pupil, not only its isolated fragment but also its 'aesthetic' side. (Suchodolski, 1967, p. 142). Its assumptions are pursued both during its reception and its independent creation. Wojnar attributed a therapeutic and relaxing effect to it, seeing in it the potential of fuller human self-realisation (Wojnar, 1990, p. 521).

Particular importance in the influence of art on the human being is attributed to the role of aesthetic experiences in organising a person's relationship not only to the autonomous world of art but, first and foremost, to object and social reality, to the world of values, and to every concrete

human being (Wojnar, 1976, p. 224). Following John Dewey, these are seen as complementary processes of experiencing art. Experiencing inspires action, and action determines the fullness of experience. New energies emerge that allow one to feel both the taste of the senses and the emotion of thought (Wojnar, 1990, p. 521). In turn, Katarzyna Olbrycht (1987) emphasises that the full presence of art in educational activities is achieved when it situates the individual in an axiological situation related to the creation, co-creation or discovery of values, thus making it possible to reach them.

To conclude the presentation of the assumptions of the Polish concept of aesthetic education, it is necessary to point out its aspects indicated by Wojnar (1976): 1) education of aesthetic culture, 2) formation of a conscious attitude to aesthetic values contained in art, social and physical reality (material environment), 3) moral and intellectual education, and 4) inspiration of creative attitudes (Wojnar, 1976, p.285).

The solidification of views on education contributed to the inclusion of the theory of aesthetic education into cultural education; hence, in later publications, Wojnar considers the role of art from a broader cultural perspective.

Pankowska (2007, as cited in Zalewska-Pawlak, 2017) points to the necessity of revising and reinterpreting aesthetic education, i.e. broadening it to include cultural phenomena and new media spaces, including the internet, and incorporating the achievements of social, technical,= and media sciences into its scope.

The core curriculum as the education system foundation

The provisions of the core curriculum, a legal act issued by the minister responsible for education, regulate the organisation of education in kindergartens and schools. The concept of core curriculum was introduced in the 1995 amendment to the Act on the Education System (Dz.U. /Journal of Laws/ of 1995, No. 101, item 504) in place of the minimum curriculum for compulsory subjects. Its definition was subject to changes in terms of indicating its necessary components, which was reflected in its amendments. It was defined as:

1. compulsory, at a given stage of education, sets of educational content and skills that are included in the curricula and enable the establishment of school assessment criteria and examination requirements (*Act on the Education System*, Dz.U. of 1995, No. 101, item 504)

2. compulsory, at a given stage of education, sets of educational objectives and content, and skills, as well as the educational tasks of the school, which are taken into account in preschool education programmes and curricula, respectively, and make it possible to establish criteria for school grades and examination requirements (Act on the Education System, Dz.U. of 2004, No. 256, items 2571, 2572)
3. compulsory sets of educational objectives and content, including skills, described in the form of general and specific requirements for knowledge and skills that a pupil should possess after the end of a specific stage of education, as well as educational and preventive tasks of the school, taken into account respectively in preschool education programmes, teaching programmes and during the implementation of classes with a tutor, and enabling the establishment of criteria for school grades and examination requirements, as well as the conditions and manner of implementation of these core curricula (Act on the Education Law, Dz.U. of 2017, item 59).

Research assumptions

The core curricula, including the objectives, content, school tasks and learning outcomes, regulate how education is organised. On the other hand, teachers were given the freedom to choose/develop the curriculum, which, by defining the specific educational goals and the procedures for achieving them, determines the actual scope of the theoretical assumptions pursued.

This study aims to determine the extent to which the postulates of aesthetic education are taken into account in the current educational concept. Its pursuit has been assigned to art education subjects, namely art and music classes. Content analysis was used for investigations. The assumptions were verified by analysing legal acts from 1999 to 2024 regulating school curriculum assumptions, including timetables for individual subjects.

These include:

- Act of 21 July 1995 amending the Act on the Education System and certain other acts,
- Act of 14 December 2016 on the Education Law,
- Notice of the Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 19 November 2004 on the publication of the consolidated text of the Act on the Education System,

- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 15 February 1999 on the core curriculum for general education in six-year primary schools and lower secondary schools
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 26 February 2002 on the core curriculum for preschool education and general education in individual types of schools,
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 23 December 2008 on the core curriculum for preschool education and general education in individual types of schools,
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 14 February 2017 on the core curriculum for preschool education and general education in primary schools, including the pupils with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities, general education in vocational schools (first degree), general education in special preparatory schools and education in postsecondary schools,
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 15 February 1999 on framework teaching plans in public schools,
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education and Sport of 12 February 2002 on framework teaching plans in public schools,
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 7 February 2012 on framework teaching plans in public schools,
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 28 March 2017 on framework teaching plans for public schools.

Amendments to the core curriculum introducing changes to art classes were carried out in 2002, 2009 and 2017, with the 2002 amendment 'translating' the provisions relating to art classes into art and music classes. Accordingly, the final content analysis was carried out on the core curricula for six-year primary schools and lower secondary schools in 2002 and 2008, as well as for primary schools in 2017. The examined period includes two structural educational reforms, i.e. the introduction of a six-year primary school and lower secondary school in 1999, the abolition of lower secondary schools, and the return to an eight-year primary school in 2017.

The highlighted variables and indicators are provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Variables and indicators

Variables	Indicators
Comprehensive personality development	Reference to cognitive, emotional and moral development, artistic expression, including the communicative function of art, formation of attitudes
Formation of aesthetic culture (cultural literacy),	Knowledge of the means of artistic expression, the formation of attitudes towards aesthetic values and art in its various contemporary forms Familiarity with works of art and culture
Making art and culture accessible and available.	Preparation for the reception of works of art Contact with works of art and culture: visits to galleries, museums, cultural institutions

Source: Author’s research

Structure of the core curriculum and delivery of art classes between 1999 and 2024

The analyses require considering the differences in the structure of the text of the core curricula regarding the distinction of the components describing the educational process, i.e. objectives, requirements, educational content, pupil achievements, delivery conditions (Table 2).

Table 2. Changes in the structure of the text of the core curriculum for art classes at school (1999–2024)

1999/2002	2008	2017
Primary school, lower secondary school	Primary school, lower secondary school	Primary school
1. Educational goals	1. Education objectives – general requirements	1. Education objectives – general requirements
2. School tasks		
3. Educational content	2. Educational content – specific requirements	2. Educational content – specific requirements
4. Achievements		3. Conditions and the manner of delivery

Source: Author’s research

The delivery of the educational content of a particular subject is determined, among other things, by the number of hours allocated to it. An analysis of the minimum number of hours for the delivery of art classes, as specified in the framework teaching plans (Table 3), showed that from 1999 to 2011, art classes had a lower number of hours than before the reform: 1 hour of art classes was delivered at each level in grades IV-VIII (a total of 5 hours over a 5-year education period). In 2024, the art classes take 4 hours in the five-year education cycle.

Table 3. Hours of art classes from 1999 to 2024 (based on framework teaching plans)

Framework teaching plan/year of introduction	Name of the subject	Type of school/stage of education	Number of hours for delivery	Estimated number of hours for delivery
1999	Art (art classes, music classes)	6-year primary school/ II	23 hours in total for the following subjects: Polish, history and society, art, at three levels (ie. in grades IV, V, VI)	3
1999	Art (art classes, music classes)	Lower secondary school/ III	3 hours over 3 years of education	1.5
2002	Art classes	6-year primary school/ II	2 hours, with the option of introducing music	2
2002	Art classes	Lower secondary school/ III	A total of 3 hours for art and music classes over a three-year education period	1.5
2012	Art classes	6-year primary school/ II	The minimum number of hours is 95 over a three-year education period	3
2012	Art classes	Lower secondary school/ III	30 hours of art classes, 65 hours of art-related classes over a three-year education period;	1
2017	Art classes	8-year primary school/II	4 hours: one per week in grades IV–VII	4

Source: Author's research

Assumptions of aesthetic education in the curriculum of art classes between 1999 and 2024

An analysis of the core curriculum during the examined period revealed key assumptions of aesthetic education formulated as part of *education for art* and *education through art*. All versions of the core curriculum reflect them, but the scope and degree of concretisation of the postulates vary.

Comprehensive personality development

The postulate of comprehensive development through art was included in the following provisions of the core curriculum for art classes of the year:

- 2002: Education objectives, stage II (primary school):
 1. Stimulating the comprehensive development of pupils, in particular:
 - 1) stimulating a creative attitude towards oneself and the world,
 - 2) developing the child's general sensitivity,
 - 3) developing artistic sensitivity,
 - 4) developing the ability to reflect on things,

- 5) developing artistic interests and passions (...).
- 2. Influencing pupils' habits and culture as well as the school atmosphere through art (Dz.U. of 2002, No. 51, item 458)
 - 2008: No direct reference is made to the impact of the arts on pupils' development
 - 2017: Description of the conditions and methods for the delivery of art classes:

Art classes are primarily intended to develop imagination and creativity, which are essential in developing a young person's personality. They also have cognitive and educational dimensions. Art classes should be seen as an opportunity for integral development, in which pupils not only express their own feelings and emotions through art but also learn patience, discipline and self-control in the creation of works and engage, through art, in social life (Dz.U. of 2017, item 356).

The analysed core curricula include incidental references to the (communicative, expressive, cognitive, compensatory) functions of art. The educational content refers to the various ways of communicating (non-verbal communication – the language of space, colour, body, etc.) (2002 Core Curriculum); expresses feelings and emotions towards reality, as well as those from musical or literary inspirations (impression and expression) in artistic works; draws, paints, illustrates real and imaginary phenomena and events (also in correlation with other subjects) (2017 Core Curriculum).

Shaping aesthetic culture

The postulate of shaping aesthetic culture has been included in each of the analysed core curricula in the objectives, content and/or description of art class achievements in the form of its components, including indications of knowledge of basic means of expression, techniques and art forms, the ability to interpret them and to use them consciously in art activities.

The postulate of visual literacy is included in the general objectives of the core curriculum of art classes:

- 2002: Equipping pupils with basic visual literacy skills (primary school) and equipping pupils with the necessary visual literacy skills, as well as knowledge in this area (lower secondary school). Their concretisation into educational content includes techniques and means of artistic expression, folk art, knowledge of theatre and film. (Dz. U. of 2002, No. 51, item 458).

- 2008 II. Creating expression – expression through art. III. Analysis and Interpretation of cultural texts – reception of art (primary and lower secondary schools). In terms of expression, creative activity using basic techniques and means of expression from art classes and other art disciplines is expected to be broadened in the lower secondary school to include elements of media messages and activities in virtual reality. Preparation for perception includes knowledge of the disciplines of art, recognition of works belonging to the Polish and European cultural heritage, their functions and characteristics; in lower secondary school, it is extended by knowledge of the styles and trends of architecture and the visual arts and placing them in chronological order. (Dz.U. of 2009, No. 4, item. 17)
- 2017: I. Mastery of the language and function of visual art; undertaking creative activities that use knowledge of the form and structure of the work. II. Perfecting visual arts skills – creative expression manifested in individual and group activities. Knowledge of the visual arts: painting, sculpture, printmaking and contemporary forms of artistic expression, understanding their language and function, knowledge of the means of expression (line, stain, texture, composition, colour, contrast, perspective) and techniques and types of representation. Expression involves the conscious use of visual means of expression in creating an intentional message reflecting reality and emotional states. (Dz. U. of 2017, item 356)

Making art/culture accessible and popular

Objectives related to making culture/art accessible and available are included in each of the analysed core curricula: introducing pupils to active participation in culture (2002 Primary School Core Curriculum); shaping artistic culture (the ability to integrate art into one's own life) (2002 Lower Secondary School Core Curriculum); defining one's culture through contact with selected works of art, monuments and traditions in one's local and regional environment and participating in the cultural life of this environment (2008 Primary School Core Curriculum); participation in culture through contact with monuments and works of contemporary art, a sense of connection with the Mediterranean cultural heritage and national tradition (2008 Lower Secondary School Core Curriculum); mastery of basic knowledge of visual culture, its national and all-human cultural heritage (2017 Primary School Core Curriculum). The conditions and objectives for

delivery contained in the 2017 core curriculum also include methodological guidelines for making art/culture accessible and available relating to the use of extracurricular forms of education: museum lessons, trips, visiting exhibitions, creating exhibitions of one's own work, meetings with regional artists and creators, and participation in art competitions.

In addition, in the 1999/2002 and 2007 core curricula, two educational pathways were planned for the lower secondary level: regional education – cultural heritage in the region and Polish culture compared to the Mediterranean civilisation, the content of which was included in the subjects delivered.

Conclusion

This analysis, using art classes as an example, sought to show the extent to which the postulates of aesthetic education have been included in the general education core curriculum since their introduction in 1999. It was found that the main principles of aesthetic education have been reflected to varying degrees in the core curricula. The postulates of aesthetic culture education (cultural literacy) and making art and culture accessible and popular are most fully emphasised. The provisions concerning the knowledge of art, its works, means of expression, techniques, the formation of the ability to use the language of art in the creative process and the description of works are linked to educational outcomes related to the understanding of art: its works and phenomena, and its value in the context of the overall cultural heritage.

All the core curricula include the need for exposure to works of art, learning about cultural heritage, and enabling active participation in culture. There has been a tendency to shift the emphasis from art to culture in successive core curricula, which reflects changes in the theory of aesthetic education, i.e. its location in a broader context. This reflects changes in the theory of aesthetic education, i.e. its location in a broader perspective – cultural education.

The postulate of personality development is represented in the educational content the least. The potential of art to shape attitudes is indicated in particular, while references to learning about the world, acquiring values, and expressing inner states in the creative process or during art reception are incidental.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the postulates of aesthetic education were woven into the content of the core curricula but did not entirely make an impact. Their concretisation occurs in the selected curriculum for art classes, while their actual scope of implementation depends primarily on the teacher's awareness of the educational potential of art and their

determination to use this potential optimally in the education process. Analysing the status of aesthetic education, Mirosława Zalewska-Pawlak (2017) poses an important question about the resistance of 'scientific, teaching communities to recognise the contribution of aesthetic education theory to the development of educational thought in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, noting that perhaps what we have here is a repetitive schematic approach to still niche areas of education (p. 138).

The findings show the importance of educating future art teachers. Its quality, which translates into awareness of the potential of art, determines its optimal use in educational practice, given that the results of the analyses indicate that the role of aesthetic education is underestimated in the concept of education currently delivered in Polish schools.

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