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AXIOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF CHILDREN'S ARTISTIC CREATIVITY

**Formulation and justification of the relevance of the problem.** The analysis of children's artistic creativity allows us to see how much the world of art is a world carrying universal values, because although the process of artistic creation in the early, middle and late childhood has special features, and the creative power of a child masters the existing reality differently than it happens in artistic activities undertaken by young people or mature artists, in each case we are dealing with a peculiar form of human freedom. The creative process is conducive to the discover of new dimensions of one's own activity, the individual becomes more capable of transcending personal and social boundaries of one's own existence – the possibilities of experiences are expanded, internal needs are growing and enriched, including the need to express and seek community with others. No less important is also the search for such forms and contents of artistic activity which constitute a catharsis for the creative artist.

**Symptoms of axiological dimensions of artistic creativity.**

Even the simplest reflection on values reveals that they belong to the human world when the individual gives meaning to things. The source of values is therefore both the found reality and the human being. The human being, by giving meaning to things, reveals his or her superiority over them, but this superiority is apparent, because when this meaning has been given to them, when the objects are valuable, the

situation changes radically: they impose new ways of acting and behaving. M. Gołaszewska emphasizes that «Man begins to live in the service of values, for values, because of values, values become an aim for him», and Rickert's statement that things simply exist, while values are important in the world of man is consistent with common intentions [5, p. 338].

A manifestation of human intellectual activity concerning values, which shows commitment to the world of values, is common evaluation. The appearing judgments (this drawing is pretty), statements suggesting judgment (I like to look at this image), or specific behaviours (e.g., turning away from the image with reluctance, long staring at it) also affect the relationship between the child and the image, and the intersubjective manifestation of judgment gives rise to a situation where the child is involved in the creation of value by participating in this process.

In the analysis of aesthetic values, several questions arise – how does an aesthetic value exist, how is it cognisable – whether it reaches a human being on the basis of pre-reflective, non-intellectual cognition, through intuition, feelings, and whether it is known in a rational and intellectual way, in accordance with the principle of logical cognition.

There is also a question whether the value that one wants to realize in the work is consciously chosen (e.g. whether one can assume originality, naivety). Perhaps it is real when the creator is characterized by high self-awareness,

but in the case of children it is not a necessary condition. Perhaps it is so that the artist is not fully aware of the value of what he or she has created.

The analysis of various approaches to the categories of values reveals that among the categories most frequently mentioned in aesthetics and those that exist most strongly in the consciousness of the contemporary recipient, the following can be mentioned:

1) beauty, which denotes a value that includes moderation, balance, wealth, harmony, simplicity (but not poverty);

2) ugliness, which breaks patterns and stereotypes, destroys inner peace, provokes and excites, which is considered the opposite of beauty, although at the same time it is stressed that ugliness can also be understood as one of the varieties of beauty, because being the opposite of order, peace, symmetry, distance, perfection is more the opposite of what is pretty and not what is beautiful;

3) sublimity, which must be distinguished from its substitutes, such as excessive, insincere pathetism, flatness, or pretentiousness because sublimity is the pinnacle of expression, it delights, because its source lies in the sincerity of feelings; what is sublime can be contrary to what we imagine it should be. Sublimity is not to be found in nature, but in ideas; in order to experience it, one must be sensitive to an idea, know how to direct one's mind and imagination towards absolute grandeurs;

4) tragedy connected with the world which threatens human being, hostile to him or her, which destroys his/her intentions, plans, desires, is a value that is also close to heroism (Kagan calls it «optimistic tragedy») and drama;

5) comedy, in which certain formulas can be distinguished: the explication of a negative attribute of an object (e.g. ugliness which, however, does not cause suffering), the degradation of an object, the showing of the contrast of certain characteristics in a phenomenon (it can be a momentary, transient contrast) (it is the contrast which surprises the observer), the showing of contradictions; unreasonable and ridiculous deviation from the norm (clothing not adapted to the figure).

Apart from the categories listed above, there are also other categories in the creations, which include, for example, grace, poetry, naivety, brutality and originality.

Consequently, everything that concerns the human psyche and the external world seems to be encoded in art. The axiological dimensions of artistic creativity are manifested both in the process of creation, the artistic proficiency of the creator and the artistic structure of the product, and their value is mutually conditioned.

The notion of value in artistic creation should be assessed according to certain criteria, some of which also refer to the value of creativity in general. These are:

(1) subjective and objective criteria – we look for values here both in the experiences of the creator and in the products. When we speak about values, we have in mind not only certain features or relations between these features, e.g. in an artistic product (line – colour – arrangement), which have a certain resonance in the recipient depending on his or her perceptual abilities, but first of all, subjective evaluation by the individual (or group) – this value is relative, what is recognized by some, does not have to be confirmed by other recipients (the dilemma concerning the child's creation is, for example, the still valid question about the child's artistic values recognized by some, denied by other adult recipients);

(2) reflective and pre-reflective criteria related to the experience of value taking place in the process of creation, direct contact with the product and its cognitive evaluation;

(3) artistic and non-artistic criteria related to the artistic structure and ideological content – it seems important to remember that particular groups of ideological content, i.e. cognitive, creative and emotional content may occur in various variants (to a greater or lesser extent) not only in individual products, but also in a form fixed in specific artistic directions. In the latter form they are the easiest to evaluate;

(4) external and internal artistic criteria, where the internal artistic value is sought in the intensive pursuit of the unity of the creation through its artistic structure; the compatibility of the product with its artistic function and its intended purpose, which it should fulfil in relation to the recipients, becomes an external criterion. Artistic values are often important in themselves, as they become the object of communication. Often, too, by following the principle of «art for art» (e.g. in Dadaism) they generally communicate such values as: discoverability, efficiency, or authentic artistic mastery connected with the formation of a work of art. However, if they become the subject of an artistic message, they obtain the status of aesthetic values. Achieving artistic value would be one of the most important human needs – striving for unity and internal and social balance, while maintaining the striving for development. Order and unity, however, would not be found directly, but through fiction, overcoming inertia and resolving conflicts;

(5) Historical and timeless criteria relate to the evaluation of art in its historical aspect and to those values of art that have been abstracted from the criteria of all historical epochs that are

also based on the fundamental structure of the human world. And although these criteria are often discussed, they indicate the existence of unchangeable features in art, including «the art of a child», although, as H. Hohensee-Ciszewska emphasizes, some of the criteria valid at the time, resulting from certain social conditions, may hinder the development of art if they become established in the form of norms and canons [6, p. 42].

With reference to the criteria of the value of artistic creativity, there is also an aesthetic-artistic measure in literature (bad and good art)<sup>1</sup>. It is emphasized that there is a possibility of a lack of intentional incompatibility with realization in the products, lack of internal unity of the work, equilibrium, novelty (these inconsistencies may occur due to a certain ineptitude of the creator), but the impact of the product due to its internal richness achieved by revealing internal conflicts may carry with it the intensity of experience.

Because creativity, if it is only an authentic expression of the artist's personality, turns to the recipient and, as Tchórzewski emphasized, it is difficult to agree with the views promoting the argument that «(...) painting is supposed to provide only the satisfaction of the eye. Painting is not for the eye, but through the eye simply for the human being (...)» [8, p. 98].

In the light of the outlined criteria, it is also worth referring to positions related to aesthetic values, because the dispute over these values concerns, as in the case of other values, also the creativity of children. Without analyzing more widely such well-known approaches as subjectivism, objectivism and rationalism<sup>2</sup>, it is worth pointing to the theory of panestheticism proposed by T. Pawłowski [9]. Its concept of values is based on panestheticism, objectivity, pluralism and empirical attitude. The author draws attention to the far-reaching identity of the procedures used to interpret a given product (including artistic activities such as happening or performance) and to capture aesthetic values in them. A characteristic feature of this concept, called panestheticism, is the belief that both the product (work of art) and aesthetic values are composed of stimuli of sensual and intellectual

experience. Lines, colours, light, sound, rhythms, signs and their arrangements, constituting the simplest components, being partial values, constitute the aesthetic value of the whole. Thus, all property is a potential aesthetic value, which, in appropriate social conditions, can turn into a socially recognized value - art plays an important role here. The author also emphasizes the existence of many aesthetic values, whose concept is open, definable in part, and achieving a reasonable, expressed assessment of the object is not a one-off act. We approach such an evaluation as a result of a long cultural process, in which evaluations are subject to modification or more precise justifications. In this process, the recipient (recognition of evaluation as a result of a cultural process should be synonymous with recognition understood as an individual act) develops its sensual and intellectual sensitivity, perfects taste, and expands knowledge about art, gradually «reaching» the accuracy of evaluation. And, as it seems, this discussion is very necessary, although N. Goodman taking a negative stance in the dispute over the essence of aesthetic values, puts forward an argument about the sterility of these considerations, and M. Weitz, relying on certain arguments of L. Wittgenstein, points out that defining art, values and other concepts related to art is completely impossible, as new forms and directions are still appearing, which would require a decision on whether or not to extend the scope of the notion of aesthetic values [8, p. 100]. Pawłowski's concept of panestheticism provoking a new question about aesthetic values, however, solves some of the difficult issues of the axiology of artistic creativity, encouraging a discussion about aesthetic values visible also in children's art.

#### **Psychological and aesthetic values of child art.**

The artistic value of children's art, which most often does not lead to the creation of perfect and socially valued works, is still a matter of discussion, although it does not emphasize the extremely important phenomenon, pointing to it as a form of personal maturity through expression. Certain forms of children's art are a specific manifestation and expression of their experiences, and their aspiration to self-realization in action. Their art is an activity that makes sense in itself as an expression of personality, which constantly develops in new contacts with the world. A particularly spectacular departure from the traditional understanding of creativity is to define it as a child's artistic activity. This concept, formulated and used by pedagogues and psychologists, although not always accepted in an undisputed way, has nowadays become a common practice and has been used in a variety of contexts.

<sup>1</sup> The artistic concept refers here to creativity, because it is related to the creation of a product; the aesthetic concept refers to the perception of art, but it is broader in the sense that it can refer not only to art, but also to an activity that is not intended to be permanent in time. And although there is no full agreement in the literature on the use of these two terms, the term «artistic» has been used to refer to art as a subject matter, bearing in mind that it also includes aesthetic experience.

<sup>2</sup> Detailed critical analysis of the above mentioned positions can be found, among others, in T. Pawłowski's «Concept Formation in the Humanities and the Social Sciences» [1980], «Begriffsbildung und Definition» [1980]; M. Wallis' «Przeżycie i wartość (Experience and value)» [1986].

The value of this kind of creativity is expressed through personality qualities (self-realization or self-regulation of needs and development), performing an expressive, psychotherapeutic, educational, motivational and cognitive functions – we are dealing here with the projection of personality and development of the cognitive sphere (perception, memory). The aesthetic value is expressed in a set of specific properties defined as beauty, charm, harmony, which in this case would require considerable precision, because in relation to the child's product they seem to be too general and not very strict, although it is precisely because of them that C. Ricci introduced the term «the art of the child» in «L'arte dei Bambini» [1887]; and the Italian aesthetician B. Croce [2] was the first to conduct a comparative analysis of «the art of the child» with modern art, describing both as «the expression of intuition». In Poland, similar views were presented by S. Szuman [11], who, while distinguishing the independent art of children from dilettante art, emphasized the value of artistic expression of a small artist, the beauty of shaping forms and colours, the arrangement of the product, the impeccable freshness and sincerity of expression. He also gave children's painting and drawing products the rank of a specific art, emphasizing that it is art in the full sense of the word, different, but it does not mean that it is worse than the art created by professionals.

It is therefore impossible to omit the issue of aesthetic and artistic values connected with the creativity of a child.

A category that appears very often in relation to this creativity is the notion of «naivety», which in the intellectual sphere often gains a pejorative character, but in artistic creativity is understood as a contrast between «too much» professionalism, moral indifference, lack of emotional involvement (a perfect example of such «naivety» are Nikifor's paintings). And although it is difficult to precisely define the very concept of naivety, it is applied not only to folk art or the art of primitive artists, but first of all to the art of a child. By making an attempt at a certain typology with an indication of naturalness, authenticity, a certain non-reflective character and its particular case – uncriticism, one can assume the version that the child's creativity, whose character is not subject to the mechanism of imitation, is naive.

Naive art is non-taught art, based on a certain artistic intuition, expressing direct preferences, thoughts and feelings. It is art in which neither the artistic style, nor the binding fashion, nor the expectations of the recipient count. Authentic creation of a child preserves what is most important in naivety - freedom from

inner compulsion, conformity with real tastes and beliefs, emotional, intuitive, often irrational attitude. However, this has nothing to do with the low intellectual level. Although the relationship between naivety and intellect seems obvious, one can assume that naivety in a child's art is unambiguously aintellectual. The question arises here, of course, whether every product of a child can be described as «naive». When we analyze the child's scribble as a graphic expression of the child's activity when the child is not able to create a graphic image presenting some kind of conceptual content or orderly arrangement of elements, we are struck by the simplicity and naturalness of the image. The motif of a pendulum zigzag corresponds to the movement of the palm and hand that the child moves back and forth, developing the possibility of blurring planes and creating a serrated line. There are also spiral zigzags, semi-spatial creations (small or larger spots, knots, etc.) and, thanks to the rotating direction which takes the movement of the hand, spirals consisting of many circumferences of circles, both connected and superimposed on one another, as well as forms resulting from characteristic layers of zigzags. Thus, the elements of doodle are created primarily as a reflection of the movements of the arm and hand, so all the work of this period should be treated as a process dependent on movement impulses. The very concept of doodle excludes the thought of any planned structure of childish doodle because it is a reflection of various disordered, chaos-filled impulses of a child, which in effect creates multilayered, opaque forms, which, however, are a source of great satisfaction. Similarly, both Hans Hartung and Joan Miró created doodles, and these are not naive works in any way, but created with a specific artistic vision and complicated motivation.

In the same way one can look at the products created at a later preschematic and schematic stage (6-8 years of age) - their artistic replicas appear in Jean Dubuffet's works, in Krystyna Wróblewska's woodcuts, the convention of representing faces in a way similar to a child's drawing is also adopted by Paul Klee. In the human pattern, the frontal and profiled arrangements are mixed, the essential elements are accentuated and the basic elements are omitted. Also, the spatial organization in landscapes, for example, differs significantly from what is considered correct - expressed by means of striped, topographical or repoussoir flat layouts, however, creates the impression that preserves the real authenticity. The structures of arrangements found in children's drawings are based on very simple modules: rhythmic repetitions, contrasts balanced by similarities,

characteristic accents placed in intuitively felt strong points of the image (e.g. the central axis). However, when a child crosses the threshold of creating a scheme available to him or her, when what he or she wants to present is beyond the reach of his or her skills (in various spheres), the images become amorphous.

Although the sum and type of experiences are limited, at the same time the child, for whom imaginative combinatorics is characteristic, develops the activity of abstract imagination, imagination of pure possibilities, unhindered by reminders [5, p. 193].

Thus, despite the fact that children's creations may show an infinite variety of variants of the layout, they create it in a way that is above all a need for clear communication of observations, feelings and imaginations through visual means, and one of the important attributes of these values is the rhythm and the way the child treats space.

The phenomenon of childish naivety, in which we can see not only the naturalness and freshness of a look at reality, but sometimes even artistry (despite technical imperfections), is therefore connected with three factors modifying and modelling the result of this work: the pursuit of expression, spontaneous imagination and certain proficiency problems. This is the aesthetic value which, when one wants to understand and accept it, one has to be able to appreciate the value of sincerity, authenticity, optimistic attitude towards the world. Therefore, this category cannot be treated in any way as proper only for the lower stage of development, because, for example, many of Breughel's paintings present this value. It should be treated as one of the most important values also in the world of adults.

A certain vision of the world communicated within the framework of children's art and its constitutive elements are therefore a specifically artistic exponent of aesthetic values, but one can notice that each act of artistic creation brings with it above all those values that are contained in the relationship between artistic creation and personality. Thus, they are not so much a category of values in themselves (in a product) as values that make up the whole process of the act of creation.

A child creates not by focusing on the execution of a «work» that can have an objective value (aesthetic, artistic), but by the need to give an external expression to what was previously internalized. As H. Read [10] notes, creativity is to some extent a freedom from something, from norms, from algorithms, and that is why it leads to the affirmation of one's own «I». Research also shows that creativity, which is one of the basic needs of childhood makes it easier to

satisfy cognitive interests [7]. It is a chance for the development of emotions, feelings, motivation and willingness to act, thus obtaining a general developmental and self-regulatory value in the relation «I – the world». The value of this work is also manifested in the therapeutic and cathartic functions of the creative process. This aspect was raised by Aristotle, J. Ruskin, H. Read, V. Lowenfeld, C. Freinet, M. Debesse, J. Boutonier, S. Szuman and these hopes were included in the definition of expression as a natural need and necessity ensuring the full development of the child. It is an externalisation of the child's internal experiences, a form of objectification of what is subjective, a constant dialogue between the child and the world. When reality sometimes forces the child to block the inner life, to suppress the natural need of self-expression, destructive forces accumulate which may manifest as indifference, aggression, apathy, escape from reality. Artistic creation gives the possibility to objectify the subjective, to manifest individual experiences (successfully or not), and to establish a dialogue between the Self and the world. Unfortunately, this value of artistic expression is sometimes endangered, because the child too often adapts to it under the influence of external pressure and environmental influences. As research shows, the family focuses too much pressure [7] on controlling external behaviours – too little orientation is given to the development of cognitive, emotional and social values. Parents' requirements beyond formal control of the child's freedom are minimal, encouragement to various forms of expression is rare. Although expression cannot be taught, as H. Read [10] emphasized, the most important thing is to create an atmosphere that stimulates authentic activity. These processes were thoroughly described by E. Fromm [3] who defined them as «an escape from freedom». The danger of losing one's identity causes the individual, even though he or she moves away from the outside world, not to find the expected sense of security, and the experienced fears and helplessness often lead to conformism, which becomes a pure denial of the value of expression (similarly to extreme individualism). The sincerity and spontaneity of a child's expression, which was noticed when analyzing naivety as the value of his or her work, may also be endangered, because they are connected with the reaction of the people who evaluate the work, their sensitivity in evaluating the child's creation and, above all, with the way they perceive its expression. These aspects result from the structure of expression whose act or process belongs to the subjective world, but the result or symptom is objectified. Artistic creativity, in which a child seeks to express his or her experiences in a specific form, is

connected with the child's experiences, and a set of artistic or cognitive signs is created on the basis of them. Experience enriches the value of expression; therefore it does not seem advisable to juxtapose the values associated with creative activity, within which a specific product is created, with the reception of that product (this assumption can be seen in many publications – cf. Gloton and Clero [4]). A child who is distinguished by a lack of distance from his or her own creation (both its content and form) identifies with it, has no sense of fictionality of the presented world – treats it with considerable power and richness of emotions, and the more information he or she receives through cognitive structures (analyzing his or her own or his colleagues' creation), the more he or she can give of himself or herself.

In this way, expression will become an open attempt to establish a dialogue with the world and other people, an attempt to show constantly new possibilities, an «expression and understanding» for the child<sup>3</sup>.

The undeniable artistic value of a child's expression seems to be the fact that it is contained more in the action itself than in a concrete success, it constitutes a trace of the child's individuality, it is a confirmation of its authenticity, allowing at the same time to cross the borders of its own individuality by establishing relations with the world.

Such an understanding of artistic expression also allows us to see the projective, associative and cathartic values of the child's work. The externalization of feelings, images, and desires, the externalization of the primitive subjectively, as well as the attribution of one's own thoughts, wishes, behaviours, objects and people filling up products, is the essence of personality projection. And although the specific, projective character of the image is not realized by the child making the projection, because the child is not aware of the fact that he or she gives it content itself, the projection of content closely correlates with some aspects of personality, e.g. needs. The personality traits expressed in the projection are primarily the product of past experiences, child experiences, and the projection processes are most often triggered by the images, external objects or characters associated with these experiences. Of course, in a child's fantasy images, past

experiences are often processed, exaggerated and deformed, but as Campbell stresses, although projection is usually defined as the result of a relationship between personality and false perception, it also implies a link between false perception of present external objects and a realistic perception of persons and objects important to the child in the past. Thus, projection corresponds to both transfer and generalization (transfer and generalization processes) in learning and transference phenomena in a psychotherapeutic situation [1, p. 3].

In «The Treaty of Painting» Leonardo da Vinci wrote: «Show me your work and I will tell you who you are». Analyzing a child's graphic creations (who starts drawing before writing) one can see that they are an expression of his or her personality – a specific message that is an expression of the child's will, interests, observations, thoughts or desires. In this form, just like in dreams, the child's conflicts and emotional tensions are also revealed, often by a child who is not aware of them. The child's psyche and activity are aimed not only at mastering what surrounds them, but also at creating a new reality through their own activity. Literature often emphasizes that the developmental task of childhood is to build and create one's own developmental perspective, which always requires an appropriate building block in the form of experiences enriching the individual and cultural stimulation. By creating, the child gains not only a chance to multiply his/her experiences, but also to free himself/herself from the pressure of the laws and requirements of the surrounding world. It is valuable for him/her not only to remain in the «traditional» world, but also to enter a different and unusual world.

A brief analysis of the problem of aesthetic and non-aesthetic values allows us to draw attention to two aspects emerging from the above considerations. The first would concern the personal value, the second the cognitive and emotional-volitional processes. The process of creation always enhances the ability of multi-level and multi-planar development, and its result is an opening to another human being. Authentic creation allows to solve the problems of the child's inner world and allows him/her to properly contact the outside world if we assume that the essence of creativity is «(...) not the creation itself, but the activity of creation, updating the forces exceeding with its destiny the created world, because it is used to express the Unperceivable and understand the Inconceivable» [12, p. 429].

**Conclusions and prospects for further researches of direction.** The issue of axiology

<sup>3</sup> In practice, we are most often faced with the coexistence of two tendencies: being with oneself and being with others, and expression understood as an existential value enables one to live in these dimensions. However, it is neither easy nor simple, since a constant feeling of imperfection of the results of one's own expression, internal and external obstacles may be an encouragement to one's own efforts, but they may also lead to resignation or search for substitute forms of action (cf. A. Nalaskowski, *Spoleczne uwarunkowania twórczego rozwoju jednostki*. Warszawa, WSiP, 1998).

of children's artistic creativity seems to be one of the most important problems, but also the most difficult problem to analyze and solve in the psychology of creativity, aesthetics and education. The importance of this issue is related to the fact that it cannot be avoided in contact with art (its creation, reception), so this problem also applies to the child's creativity. As many authors point out, we evaluate the values of artistic creation, often without thinking about them or exposing their role. And yet they cannot be omitted or eliminated. Each theoretical reflection, including that connected with the artistic work of a child, contains implicitly or explicitly presented specific beliefs about values. This is so despite the fact that in many scientific theories attempts are made to separate evaluation from description and interpretation.

There are many questions related to the axiology of children's art, and some of the works dealing with this issue are persuasive and postulative in nature and are entangled in specific philosophical assumptions. Due to this aspect, for example, it is difficult to compare different theories, as they use different terminology. Another kind of difficulty concerns the possibility of empirical solution and application of specific axiological theories, and the transition from considerations of a high degree of generality to concrete practical solutions creates many difficulties.

Therefore, in relation to the child's creativity, we often have to do with the actions of adults (most often teachers and parents) who express their opinions without realizing the theoretical foundations of their actions (or do not want to realize them). They also do not pay attention to high subjectivity and lack of consistency in assessing the child's creativity. The theory is also lost in the meanders of general issues, and reflection on the values of creativity takes many points of view.

There are also attempts to define aesthetic values contained in artistic creativity. T. Pawłowski not only draws attention to their essence and importance, but by systematizing his earlier theories he puts forward his own concept, which also allows for a new way of looking at the values of children's creativity. Unfortunately, there are still many uncertainties concerning the value of various fields of children's activity, especially when we point to the relations between the artistic work of a child and the values it can bring to the process of education.

There are many reasons for this. It seems that in order to get to know and understand them, one has to look at the issues of values from the point of view of an individual. It means simply paying attention to what happens in a particular

child and how it happens. The right path is only discovered when we ourselves experience certain values and their meaning for our lives.

For a child who stands a chance of accomplishment through artistic creation, the most important thing is to locate these values within himself or herself. Having the ability to listen to himself/herself, the child doesn't need words to say «I like it», «it's important», «it's interesting». The point is that in education, activities and experiences that the child evaluates as valuable are not interrupted, that the values received from the outside are consistent with them and do not differ from experience, but serve the authentic discovery of one's own self.

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