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EDUCATION OF A CHILD OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL CLASSROOM IN THE CONTEXT OF PEDAGOGY OF PLACE

INTRODUCTION

Today no one needs to be convinced that a close contact between the child and the natural environment brings with it wealth of diverse experiences and benefits ranging from physical activity to creativity, mental and physical health, emotional, social and cognitive development, including the development of specific performance skills that are considered to be necessary for a happy childhood and a satisfying life. These skills include the ability to reason, plan, memorize, control and solve problems. As the researchers point out, there is data that indicates that “the level of executive functions is a stronger predictor of school performance than the level of intelligence. The development of executive functions is conditioned both biologically and environmentally” (Brzezińska, Nowotnik, 2012, p. 61). The cited quote sheds new light on the role of the places where the child resides, and thus shows new opportunities for effective learning and development. One of such possibilities is education outside the classroom, in the open space, which consists of places, understood not only in terms of geographical boundaries, but also as areas related to specific social relations and concepts that transcend the boundaries of time and space.

Despite the knowledge of the benefits of being in nature, the pedagogical practice lives its own life, regardless of the reality it refers to. Many researchers point out that modern children are disconnected from direct experience, real problems and places in which they grow, and instead they are condemned to education more and more abstract, unnatural, stripped of the relationship with nature. School teaching: “continues caged upbringing, which today begins in the family home. Huts, hiding places, yards, hedges and caves have been replaced by playgrounds in accordance with all standards, controlled playgrounds, kindergartens and children’s rooms. [...] Learning in schools and colleges takes place in a sitting position; teachers take care of students’ heads for half a day, and other parts of the body are not interesting for them

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and only interfere. The material is absorbed most often through the ears, sometimes through the eyes. As a rule, the teacher transfers the teaching material frontally, in artificial, closed and obliging situations” (Michl, 2011, p. 41-42).

The research results prove that the arrangement of space in pre-school and school buildings, even those richly equipped with teaching aids, in no way equals the environmental diversity that is outside. For example, in England, outdoor education since the mid-1970s has been a recognized form of educational practice, both in formal education and in the community. In the literature on the subject, typically external education has been presented as dealing with the personal and social development of young people in many areas, such as: self-awareness, teamwork, decision-making, responsibility, ecological, spiritual, physical and aesthetic awareness and relations (Gair, 1997, p. 27).

In spite of the knowledge that the magic and miracle of forests, mountains or meadows are something that all children deserve, in Poland there are few educational institutions that conduct the education outside the classroom. There is an urgent need for deeper thought on the nature of the place in the outdoor education, which should be the target and reference point for educational practice.

SPACE AND PLACE

Space and place are seemingly typical, familiar, widely used concepts, but when we try to concretize them, we feel a certain difficulty. It turns out that depending on the perspective adopted by a given person, these terms are variously defined and interpreted. According to the dictionary definition, the space: “is a three-dimensional extension, indeterminate and unlimited, in which all physical phenomena occur” (Szymczak, 1984, p. 1009). In turn, the place means “free space that can be taken up, filled with something where you can fit or put something” (Szymczak, 1984, p. 157). With a place there is also a part of a specific space with which something happens, something that is happening or taking place that matters.

Until recently, space as a subject of research was mainly the domain of geographers, architects, physicists and mathematicians. Its absence in the social sciences probably stemmed from the manner of previous research, which was based on the positivist doctrine, and this proclaimed that social reality, like nature, exists objectively (Zwiernik, 2009, p. 18). Researchers, therefore, did not have a favorable climate to deal with the subjective sense of experiencing the socio-cultural context in which a person lives. Significant, earliest reports showing space as a cultural dimension of human existence can be found in the works of Edward Hall (1987, 2001) and Yi-Fu Tuana (1987). In recent years, in Poland, the issues of space and place began to be addressed by, among others, such educators as: Elżbieta Siarkiewicz (2000), Aleksander Nalaskowski (2002), Maria Mendel (2006), Jolanta Zwiernik (2009), Marzenna Nowicka (2010).

Geographers have long been interested in the concept of space. In particular, geographers of humanities – Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph and David Seamon – adapted the observations of philosophers – Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty – to reveal the nature and quality of the experienced places. They tried to show how people live in subjective worlds that not only influence their experiences, but also guide their actions. Yi-Fu Tuan speaks about space: “Space is a symbol of freedom in the Western world. The space is open; suggests the future and encouragement to act. [...] Closed and humanized space becomes a place. Compared to space, place is a peaceful centre of set values. Both space and place are needed for human beings” (Yi-Fu Tuan, 1987, p. 75). Everyday life of a man goes on between a safe shelter and a risk and adventure, attachment to places and the freedom that space provides for us. For Michel de Certeau, space is a “practical place,” “the crossing of bodies in motion”: it is pedestrians who transform the space into a street geometrically defined by urban planners as a place (de Certeau, 2008, p. 117). In turn, Edward Relph (1992, p. 37) calls a place those fragments of human environments in which meanings, action and landscape are closely related and mutually interpenetrating.

According to Maria Mendel (2006, p. 10), the place is our own space, our world, touched and marked by our presence. Places not only set the framework in which we can recognize the world as ours, but also open ourselves to us, build our identity, are what makes reality real.

According to the socio-cultural paradigm of environmental psychology, the individual is treated “not as a completely autonomous creation, but as an element of a society that in connection (interaction) with other people seeks meanings in the environment and creates them” (Bańka, 2002, p. 97). The fundamental meaning of this paradigm is to treat the environment as a space for the socio-cultural-physical processes taking place in it, which are not only the result but also the cause of specific human behaviours. Assuming the active attitude of the researcher, an individual marks space with his/her presence, which in time becomes a place for him/her.

The places where the man is are his space. We exist in places and through places that exist thanks to us. This co-existence of a place and a human being is made up of many diverse and complex experiences, it has its own internal structure related to the diversity of the world around us. As Yi-Fu Tuan observes: “Open space has no trodden paths and road signs. The usual patterns of human meanings do not apply to it. It is like an empty card whose meaning can only be given. Closed and humanized space becomes a place” (Yi-Fu Tuan, 1987, p. 75). Places as spatial entities are available to us externally – through the senses: sight, touch, hearing, and also internally – through our consciousness or memory.

The process of integrating vast space into a familiar place can cause many problems for children who can recognize specific objects located in space, but poorly associate spatial relations between them. So how much time does it take to get to know the place? The knowledge of the place – according to Yi-Fu Tuana – can be gained quickly, but taking the sense of the place takes more time. “They consist

mostly of ephemeral and drama-free experiences, repeated day after day, for years. It is a unique blend of sounds, sights and smells, a unique harmony of natural and artificial rhythms, such as sunrises and sunsets, work and entertainment times” (Yi-Fu Tuan, 1987, p. 229). Over time, we get to know the place so close that we treat it as obvious. Each place – as Marc Auge (2010, p. 53) notes – can be defined as identity-related, relational and historical. However, in the case of space, which cannot be defined as either identifiable, or as relational or historical, it is defined as a non-place. The contemporary hyper-modern world offers non-places in an aggressive way: air routes, railways, highways, airports, large hotel chains, amusement parks, supermarkets, gas stations, refugee camps, cable or wireless networks operating in the extra-terrestrial space, serving communication (Auge, 2010, p. 53-54). Non-places are fluid, they do not encourage living or rooting, and people feel anonymous, homeless and lonely in them.

Children need more places for harmonious, comprehensive development. “They search for a world closed in a certain area that they get to know, experience, and mark with their actions. It is a world both close to the child, known and distant, mysterious, constantly being discovered; for an adult still unexplored” (Smolińska-Theiss, 1993, p. 12). Although Mendel writes: “open space cries, the world for us is real in places [...]. The fragments of reality closest to us build us the most” (Mendel, 2006, p. 22). In the educational context, a place should be understood as a meeting of the experiences of students, teachers, ideas and ideals of a specific group and culture, and the geophysical reality of a given space in which learning takes place (Wattchow, Brown, 2011, p. 77).

THE ROLE OF A PLACE AS THE PEDAGOGICAL CONCEPT

Many researchers (e.g. Wattchow, Brown, 2011; Louv, 2014; Orr, 1992; Smith, 2010) combine education with staying outdoors, in the environment, outside the school walls, with learning about the world through the integrating lens of the place. Education based on the surrounding environment is by definition place-based education. And regardless of where we are, when we return to the classroom, we bring our place and the history of this place with us. Unfortunately, modern children spend most of their time in educational institutions that are merely collections of buildings in which education takes place. They do not have any special function. A typical school, academy or university is organized around the resources of knowledge connected in disciplines or subjects. When browsing the educational offer of kindergartens and schools, we will not find many classes dealing with ecology, hydrology, geology, economics, politics, energy consumption, principles of nutrition, waste management and architecture related to a given area and its community. The same applies to the activities that can give young people knowledge related to the art

of good life in a given place. A large part of what is considered to be knowledge is only an abstraction built on another abstraction, disconnected from tangible experience, real problems and places in which they reside. Many years ago, John Dewey wrote: “Real experience does not know the division into human matters and the purely mechanical physical world. Man’s house is nature, fulfilment of his intentions and goals depends on natural conditions. Detached from these conditions, they become empty dreams and lazy fantasies. [...] man is a component of the continuity of nature, and is not a stranger, entering into its processes from the outside” (Dewey, 1963, p. 303).

The meaning of the place is largely vague for the pedagogue, because we are delocalized people, for whom the nearest places are no longer a source of food, water, maintenance, energy, materials, friends, entertainment or religious inspiration. We are – as Raymond Desmann wrote – “people of the biosphere,” making most of our surroundings, but more of environments spread all over the world, which are largely unknown to us. We consume a huge amount of time and energy to travel to other, different areas. Our life revolves around the architectural expressions of our delocalization – a shopping centre, neon exhibitions, a fast-moving route, a glass office building – and a unified development. The problem is that they do not arouse in us the sense of rooting, responsibility and belonging (after: Orr, 1992, p 184).

As pointed out by David Orr, education outside the school walls may be an antidote to the belief that learning is a passive activity taking place in a closed room (1992, p. 183). In contrast to the tendency to treat scientific disciplines in a separate way and to separate the intellect from the closest surrounding, the researcher proposes a model of integration of personality, pedagogy and place. In this approach, the pedagogy of the place is opposed to abstraction. It is a natural environment that embodies learning principles including direct observation, research, experimentation and a variety of manual skills. It can be said that in accordance with this concept a place is perceived as a kind of laboratory providing materials for direct learning through experiencing a variety of environments and their own experiences offered by communities. The pedagogy of place puts emphasis on culture, human history, philosophy, social science, political science, geology, biology, ecology as elements that create a complicated mosaic that expands our perception of the possibilities of practical use of these disciplines and deepening the perception of time.

The idea of a place as an important educational tool is evident in the work by John Dewey, *Democracy and Education*. The researcher proposed to extend the scope of education, which he considered to be too highly specialized, one-sided and narrow, outside the school walls, to intensify and strengthen the relations with the wider community and the natural environment. According to Dewey: “Outside the school, students encounter natural facts and principles in connection with various forms of human activity. In all the social activities in which they participate, they must understand the material and the processes it contains. In school, the disruption of

this close relationship interrupts the continuity of thought development and makes the student feel unable to describe the lack of reality in the subjects taught [...]” (Dewey, 1963, p. 304).

In 1940, Lewis Mumford developed the idea of exploring the nearest region, which appealed to a broader concept of the role of a place in education. According to Mumford himself: “Exploration does not have to be added to an already overloaded curriculum. It is rather (potentially) the basis of a drastically renewed teaching method in which all aspects of the exact sciences and humanities are ecologically related at every level and in which they connect directly and constantly in the student’s experiences related to his region and community. The exploration of the nearest region must begin with the infant’s first discovery of his backyard and neighborhood. Then it must expand and deepen, at each subsequent stage of development, until the student becomes able to see and experience, and above all to see the relations between separate parts of the environment, which until now have not been noticed or dispersed, integrate them and operate them” (after: Orr, 1992, p. 185). Such exploration was associated with an intensive study of the local environment by teachers and school-aged children. The study of the region as the focal point of the education process was intended to create the habit of interdisciplinary thinking and to remove the boundaries between facts and values, past and future, and nature and society. In addition, Mumford saw the exploration of the nearest region as a basis for rational coordination and planning and a way to ensure active social participation.

Maria Mendel (2006, p. 22), assuming that the places are pedagogical, gave an overview of the possibilities that education in a close relationship with them creates. Quoted by her, David Gruenewald (after Mendel, 2006, p. 23) notes that places are what people do them, and therefore they should be understood as a primary cultural artefact. Thus: “From a pedagogical point of view, this is about the need to shape closer links of education with the places in which it is going” (Mendel, 2006, p. 23).

The integration of place and education is important for several reasons. First of all, it requires a combination of intellect and experience. A typical classroom is a place of lecture and discussion that is important for intellectual development. The study of the place includes additional dimensions of the intellect: direct observation, insightful analysis, experimentation and the ability to use the knowledge in practice. These additional dimensions are often seen in terms of vocational education. However, for Mumford and Dewey, practical and manual skills were an important aspect of experience, good thinking and translated into the overall development of the person. Both researchers perceived the acquisition of manual skills as important in sharpening the intellect. Dewey wrote: “We cannot ignore the importance of having a close and intimate acquaintance with nature at hand, with real things and materials, with real processes related to their use and knowledge of their special needs and use. There is a constant exercise of observation, ingenuity, constructive imagination, logical thinking and a sense of reality acquired through direct contact with real things. The educational powers dormant in spinning and weaving at home,

in the saw mill, in the grain mill, in the cooperage and smithery were still efficient” (Dewey, 1981, p. 457). Alfred North Whitehead also expressed a similar position: “The action of the senses and thinking are coordinated. Similarly, brain activity and creative activities influence each other. In this reaction, hands play a special role. It is a question of dispute whether these were the human hands that created the human brain or the brain created the hands. Certainly, the relationship between them is close and mutual” (after: Orr, p. 185). In the relationship of reciprocation between thinking and acting, knowledge loses much of its abstractness, becoming applicable to specific places and problems tangible and direct.

Places are laboratories of diversity and complexity that combine social functions and natural processes that have their own history, are part of an ecosystem that contains a variety of microsystems. According to Mumford (after: Orr, p. 186), a place cannot be understood from the perspective of a single discipline or specialization. It can be understood only on its own terms, as a complex mosaic of phenomena and problems. The classroom and the closed laboratory room are ideal environments to narrow down reality and focus on its details. However, the study of the place allows us to broaden the perspective and look at the interrelationships between disciplines and extend our perception of time.

It is important that science does not end at the moment of intellectual understanding. Students should be encouraged to take action on the basis of information gained during the exploration of the nearest region, to create opportunities for interdisciplinary learning through experience, in relation to different disciplines and real problems. If a given place also includes natural areas, forests, streams and agricultural areas, then the possibilities of learning about the natural environment increase accordingly. Places – as Relph notes – are “significant centres of our direct experience of the world” (Relph, 1976, p. 141).

Another reason why a place has pedagogical significance is to educate children in the art of good living where they stay. The distinction between habitation and residence is important here. A resident is a temporary tenant, not admitting too many roots and investing little in the closest place, knowing little about it and not very caring about it. However, a resident is in a relationship with a place where they both take care of each other. Good habitation is an art that requires a thorough knowledge of the place, observation skills and a sense of caring and rooting. The child must therefore have the opportunity to soak up the place in order to feel an inhabitant and not a resident. Therefore, the knowledge about the place – about where you are and where you come from – intertwines with the knowledge about yourself. It can be said that the physical landscape shapes the landscape of the mind. The devastation of the place also devastates in the psychological sense, as it reduces the potential for growth and habitation (Orr, 1992, p. 187). The lack of the sense of place can lead to social and ecological degeneration. In the world where many things are missing, problems that should be investigated are those related to the places where we live, we learn and work.

CONCLUSION

An important pedagogical challenge of the 21st century seems to be thinking about education with the awareness of the place. Despite the dramatic social and environmental changes that our world faces today, the place remains significant, both as a dynamic conceptual structure and an indispensable part of everyday human life.

The pedagogy of place affirms our relationship with nature, helps us understand who we are, how we perceive the places we live in, and what meanings we give them. The idea of the article is to inspire teachers to verify program content – at all levels of education – and to include the potential of a place in educational programs. This place is nature, which should be integrated with as many classes as possible in the classroom, so that learning will be practical, real and more suitable for children who will certainly understand that nature is their school: there are no walls, the sky is a ceiling, but they are still learning. At the same time, it should be remembered that the outdoor spaces used in the learning process must balance the challenge and security, private space with public space and present needs with yet undefined needs that will appear in the future.

Although people are born with a genetic predisposition for direct contact with the natural world, many small children living in the modern world do not benefit from this experience. I hope that the issues raised in the article will encourage teachers and other adults responsible for educating children to reflect on the role of the place in experiencing education outside the classroom.

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Keywords: education, child, nature, space, place, pedagogy of place

Abstract: The aim of the article is to draw attention to the essence and values of learning and teaching children outside the school's walls and to the pedagogy of the place, which refers to an alternative vision of the practice of outdoor education in an open space. The current theory and practice of education outside are influenced by cultural traditions and psychological theories of personal and social development. Taking into account the educational needs of contemporary young people struggling with serious social and ecological problems in a dynamically changing world, there is a need to re-invoke the idea of outdoor education and the idea of places that are the main dimension and problem of our being in the world.

EDUKACJA DZIECKA POZA KLASĄ SZKOLNĄ W KONTEKŚCIE PEDAGOGIKI MIEJSCA

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja, dziecko, natura, przestrzeń, miejsce, pedagogika miejsca

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na istotę oraz wartości uczenia się i nauczania dzieci poza murami szkoły oraz na pedagogikę miejsca, która odnosi się do alternatywnej wizji praktyki kształcenia na zewnątrz, w otwartej przestrzeni. Na obecną teorię i praktykę edukacji na zewnątrz wpływ mają kulturowe tradycje oraz psychologiczne teorie rozwoju osobistego i społecznego. Biorąc pod uwagę potrzeby edukacyjne współczesnych młodych ludzi, zmagających się z poważnymi problemami społecznymi i ekologicznymi w dynamicznie zmieniającym się świecie, zachodzi potrzeba ponownego przywołania idei edukacji na zewnątrz oraz idei miejsc, które stanowią główny wymiar i problem naszego bycia w świecie.