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UPBRINGING AS PREPARATION TO LIFE OR AS LIFE ITSELF? THE QUESTION IS STILL OPEN

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У статті проаналізовано значення дитинства у контексті всього розвитку людини. Життя дитини проходить у певний період часу, у будь-який момент. Сьогодні, з точки зору дитини, є найважливішою перспективою – світ існує «тут і зараз», і діти знайомляться з ним у цей час. Вони дізнаються як розуміти світ, формують власну точку зору на речі, створюють таку версію світу, де вони можуть знайти своє місце. Діти завжди випробовують речі, які відбуваються «зараз», і «я» – завжди в центрі. Діти вчаться через досвід, тому вони не можуть бути готові до життя, не маючи можливості брати участь в цьому житті. Діти є співавторами власного дитинства і суспільства, і, як наслідок, у дорослих є деякі серйозні завдання до виконання – окрім виховання і навчання – вони повинні дбати про збереження дитячого життєвого простору і всіх його якостей.

Ключові слова: дитина, освіта, закон Клапареда, значення дитинства

Childhood is a life period which is related to a quality of upbringing. Upbringing is not only a child's need, but it is the child's right. At present, upbringing is not something understood as planned influence on a pupil's development in order to transform his/her personality towards an accepted educational perfection. The present notion of upbringing places this process in the categories of – using the words of J. Tarnowski (1991, p. 69) – «the entirety of ways and processes which help a human being to make the humanity real, especially through an interaction», or as defined by S. Ruciński (1988, p. 87) – «introduction of a person to a valuable way of life which treats this person as a value, supports his or her self-realization and refers to all social and biological forces in order to express the person in the world, and maybe to fulfill his or her calling», or according to M. Nowak (Cf. S. Ruciński 1988, p. 87) – «a special interpersonal interaction where a person is the subject and the object of educational actions». However, it does not matter which definition of upbringing we accept because in every case it is seen as guiding a human development towards specific goals, values and ways of life. So a person who is brought up «leans» towards the future and towards the human being he or she becomes and may become. In this context, upbringing can be understood as a process which is a preparation to life – in different time perspectives, but it is still a vision of pupils' future, guiding them in order to achieve new and higher levels of development. This way of understanding can result in the conclusions that people are always «an unfinished» being, there are no limits to their development, they can improve themselves any time, and they can achieve transgression beyond their



present existence. However, it can also be a source for an opinion that they are always – especially during childhood – an imperfect and immature being who needs to be shaped, completed with some knowledge, formed towards specific educational ideals and who needs to have some values implemented.

In 1922 during the International Congress on Mental Hygiene in Paris, E. Claparède formulated a significant sentence that «upbringing is life itself, not preparation to life». The basis of an effort to give an answer to this thesis is an analysis of scientific ideas, related to nature and the level of a child's development, and the question: «is a child an «imperfect» person, or is he/she a human being who is functionally autonomous, self-sufficient and independent»? (E. Claparède 1966, p. 88) E. Claparède presented a solution to the discussed problem in the field of a functional concept of upbringing, but the latest challenges for pedagogy result in the necessity to verify these answers and leave the questions open, requiring thorough consideration and pedagogical reflection.

Is a child a self-sufficient and independent person? Definitely not. Children need nursing, they need to have all their biological needs taken care of, and they need formulation of norms and boundaries which make them feel stable and secure in the multidimensional world. A child cannot survive in the world and cannot develop his or her physical and psychological potential without the loving presence of an adult. Children's dependence on adults in relation to satisfying their basic needs is always a typical characteristic of childhood, regardless of culture. Childhood means dependence which can have different forms and intensity – obliging adults to be responsible for children's protection and giving them the right to supervise and control them at the same time. So the society prepares the social space and time for a child who «is immersed in meanings and discourses or is surrounded and imprisoned by them» (M. Karwowska-Struczyk 2007, p. 26). The child is embedded in contexts and regulations defined in a social way, he or she is fixed in different events, situations, thoughts and value systems. So, the child is still placed under the command in relations with adults.

Is a child an autonomous person? Definitely yes. A child is, first of all, a person, so according to the classical philosophy, he or she is substance of rational nature that exists in an independent way. The essence of a person includes an ability of self-awareness and an ability to govern yourself, and not full disclosure of these abilities, which fully refers to the special character of human functioning in childhood. A child is a carrier of the human essence, the nature gifted with reason. Therefore, children are autonomous beings, unlike the things which always «belong» to somebody and cannot not decide for themselves.

Is a child an imperfect being? In the contexts of an adult's functioning, definitely yes. Children are not miniatures of adults, they have their own structure, ways of being, reasons and feelings. Regardless of these differences, children are still people, but – as J. Korczak stated – they have «different range of perception, different experiences, different desires, and different feelings» (J. Korczak 1987, p. 134). Childhood has a specific value, as a period which is not only subordinate in relation to the periods that come next, but also as an important and full form of human existence. It means the period in human life which, as a stadium, explains itself and



defines itself through its present attitude towards the world. So childhood is the reality with its own significance and it is a stadium of human life with its full value because already in this period people update their own, and typical for themselves, valuable life forms that make them see and perceive the reality in their own ways (Cf. M. A. Krąpiec 2001, pp. 17–20). «Being a child» is not the fact resulting from an adult state as its life form which is not fully developed yet, but it is a form which is fully perfect in the reality of a child's world and the way this world is experienced. Besides its «instrumental» value, consisting in preparation to adult life – childhood has its own value, just like any other inimitable periods in human life. It promotes versatile curiosity resulting from astonishment related to the things a child does not know and does not understand, as well as a growing desire for knowledge, spontaneity, sensitivity, imagination and a natural ability to feel empathy and to be creative (Cf. K. Appelt 2001, p. 305). On one hand, a child is perceived as an inimitable and unique person in each aspect, on the other – he or she is a social being, depending on the net of social relations and culture, and in this way the child is helpless because he or she cannot make his/her own choices in the scope of his/her future and identity that is just being shaped.

Consequently, if we are to consider a child as an autonomous being we should consider the question – should we bring the child up to prepare him or her for life or should we do it through life itself? In the light of present pedagogical challenges, it seems it is necessary to find «a golden mean» between instrumental and functional approaches. Since we cannot agree with E. Claparède's opinion that «the presence should not be sacrificed for the future at any moment and at any level» (E. Claparède 1966, p. 91). The present life, «here and now», is – especially in case of a child – the time of adolescence and the time when children learn different skills, gather competences, shape their attitudes, formulate patterns of behaviours, which are a part of a valuable human life. Childhood has its specific significance for «being a man» because this is the time when the ways of behaviour, which belong to the «healthy» human existence, are specially formulated: trust to your own existence, openness to everything that life can bring, readiness to be disposable, going beyond yourself, first patterns of thinking and feeling, imagination, expecting the future, basic sense of reality and fundamental perception what is good and evil (Cf. J. Wilk 2001, p. 195). Thus, a tutor must take a child's further life perspective into consideration, thinking about the child's adult life. However, the tutor must not assume that this perspective is the leading one and it should not decide about the educational form. This could deprive children of their autonomous growth, adolescence and valuable experiencing related to the present time. Looking at children as if there were «not mature» yet, on the basis of who they «are not yet», would lead to unilateral understanding of upbringing as preparation to further, full and real adult life. As J. Korczak emphasised: «we say: a future man, a future employee, a future citizen. We say they will be, they will really start later, they will be serious in future» (J. Korczak 1966, p. 134). The great educationalist was anxious when he asked: «In what way THIS DAY of a child is worse than tomorrow?» and he concluded with sadness: «When tomorrow comes we wait for something new. Because this essential opinion: a child is not but he/she will be, a child does not



know but he/she will know, a child cannot but he/she will be able to – makes us wait all the time. A half of humankind do not exist; their life is a joke, naive aspirations, passing feelings, ridiculous opinions» (J. Korczak 2004, p. 56).

A child, treated as someone who is «half-grown-up», not mature to be a man, to decide about social issues or his/her own matters, is a passive person and his/her way of living and development is determined by a negative selection – the things the child must not do and the ones he/she cannot do are more important than those the child can do. In such a situation, upbringing offers – as B. Śliwerski says – two different roads. One of them is the necessity to practice so that a child can acquire adult skills through exercises. The second road is the road of abstinence – a child must not, in any way, acquire the abilities whose development and practice are reserved for those who have the right to «exist fully in the world». Both roads lead to upbringing understood as «creation of a man from a child» (Cf. B. Śliwerski 2007, p. 102–104).

We require from children to achieve their «readiness» to take actions in future, determined by clearly specified and expected results, making this readiness a prior educational goal – in this situation educational work does not support children's autonomous development but it places them in «a corset of strange and predetermined norms, skills, meanings, and thinking strategies» (M. Karwowska-Struczyk 2012, p. 152), which dampen their natural qualities. Teleology of upbringing always points to a distant goal, pertaining to future competences, final effects, oriented toward «an ideological matrix of being a human». So we entangled a child – using the words of R. Łukaszewicz (1985, p. 69) from nearly 30 years ago but unfortunately still up-to-date – into a fixed net of educational goals which «do not result from people's lives, their troubles and joys, aspirations and responsibilities, from their alliance with prospective reality; a man generates his or her own goals and education generates its own goals».

Whereas M. Łopatkowa indicated that «for a child the subconscious sense of life is the life itself with its wide range of details which have no significance for us, the adults, but which can astonish the child. (...) Childhood has its own autonomous, inimitable and unique value. So we must not destroy a child's present happiness in the name of future, which is often done by adults. Children have the right to be happy here and now. They have also the right to the things that make them happy, instead of the things which adults consider to be the source of happiness» (M. Łopatkowa 1996, pp. 198–199). Going back to E. Claparède's concept, he cited the words of J. Philippe, a French psychologist from the beginning of the 20th century, which seem to be especially valuable: «If it is useful to bring children up considering who they are going to be in future, it is even more necessary and right to bring them up for themselves, for who they are, with their nature and their rights» (E. Claparède 1966, p. 89).

A child's life takes place in the present time, at every moment, every event and experience this child participates in. This present time is, from children's point of view, the most important perspective – the world exists «here and now», and children become familiar with the world at this present time, they learn how to understand it, construct their own meanings and narrations, and create such a



version of the world where they can find their own place. Children always experience the things that take place «now», the place is always «here», and «I» is always in the centre. Children learn through experiences so they cannot be prepared to life without having a possibility to participate in this life. As E. Claparède stated – «one cannot prepare life, one can only experience it. Preparation to life is only a side effect of the life itself. (...) If children want to learn anything, first it must be introduced in their lives» (E. Claparède 1966, p. 91).

Children study the world with themselves, in every situation, by occasions, and not at the time adults want to teach them. Upbringing, and thus the whole education, should be an element of human life and should respect its conditions. It should also be related to this life in a compatible way, it should refer the matters, issues and content that are close to children and their interests so that the knowledge and the skills they currently acquire could be used at present in the process of their actions and in complex relations with things and the society. Everyday people learn something new at the time they take their own actions in the world, when they experience different situations, different conditions and events. It results in the progress of their personal development, their own abilities to react, their adaptive behaviours or their influence on the external world. This progress takes place in a natural way without the feeling «the lesson was given» because the life that is experienced now makes the life richer and better. It is especially important for the future because the acquired knowledge and skills will be used in future struggles with next tasks that can appear in life. However, it is significant that this progress shapes, first of all, the life that takes place in present, existence in the time that just passes by, it enriches the life and improves it. So it influences not only the things that will take place in future but, first of all, it can raise to a higher level the things taking place now and here which is especially important from a child's perspective to perceive reality.

Children's existence in the world does not mean only cognition and learning which should take place through actions. Children's life is also the space for thoughts, feelings and internal experiences, contact with beauty, discovering moral values, questions related to meaning of life, existence of the world and a man, discovering values and perfections, experiencing different feelings and unconditional love for everything and everybody. And first of all, life for a child is the space for experiencing joy. Children can derive it from many sources – from spontaneous activity, experiences related to overcoming difficulties, temporary creative successes, short-term social relations and other relations with people who are close to them, playing with peers or contacts with nature and art. Children's joy is not burdened by fears related to «experts' evaluation», durability or profitability of their actions and a temporary success is as important as a long lasting success – the things which happen «here and now» are the ones of great significance because children measure the time on the basis of intensity of experiences, and not on the basis of the way the time goes by. Children's happiness includes moments of intensive joy derived from delights in the world which surrounds them, and from experiencing their own development.

All the direct and present experiences shape children's personality in the



context of all their future life tasks but, first of all, they decide on the quality of being «here and now» and their feeling and experiencing them in their specific form are not only children's basic rights, but they should also be a fundamental assumption of any upbringing. A tutor's tasks are to make these experiences possible and to organise children's life space in a way that makes this experiencing natural, reach and comprehensive. Natural ways of children's functioning in the world constitute to their real lives and they are a basic condition to make their development comprehensive – so upbringing is the life itself with all its experiences. This «reality is the freedom, the freedom to choose any possibilities, the freedom to be Me. In this way Me is updated, it lively «exists», it experiences its existence, it lives in the world and through all these things it defines its «being»» (B. Śliwerski 2007, p. 118). As E. Claparedé indicates, «making life richer and improving it in this way (...) bringing children up day by day, year by year, without thinking about it and doing it completely naturally, you come to the conclusion that future is being automatically prepared» (E. Claparedé 1966, p. 91). So upbringing must be the life itself if it is to be really fruitful.

Childhood, in case of such understanding, is a development period which is equally important to others – it is the preparation to adulthood, and not an «expectation» phase to become adult, it also has its own autonomous value which should be supported by educational actions and it should not be used to shape «a future adult». Therefore, educational interactions with children should not be directed towards perfection determined by adults and expectation to achieve it because children, as people, are already able to achieve human perfection included in their inborn potential abilities. Upbringing should awaken and disclose its next layers, aiming at maximum preservation (as much as it is possible in the contemporary world and effective life in this world) of the essence of universal values, manifested in specific forms of children's actions, experiences and feelings. Important experiences, which can lead to such results, include «experiencing possibilities which specify the space of your own success and help children to answer the question about who they are, what things are already available to them and what will be available in future» (D. Waloszek 2009, p. 38).

The pedagogical vision, depicted in this way, must aim at discovering in children the things that are best and probably present in every sphere of their functioning – physical, psychological, social and spiritual ones. Children are co-authors of their own childhood and society, and as a consequence, adults have some serious tasks to fulfil – besides upbringing and teaching – they have to take care of preservation of children's life space and all its qualities. For this reason, tutors are expected to respect the right to experience childhood in its natural form and with its special character as it is, on one hand – a special moratorium on being a mature, efficient and competent man, and on the other hand – the period which is characterised by exceptionally beautiful existence. In the presence of these axioms, there can be only one answer to E. Claparedé's question – upbringing is the life which prepares to life.



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