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Teachers' participation in cultivating and forming regional traditions (on the basis of the arts workshop conducted by Anna Donder)*

Abstract: The article is a kind of reportage and gives an account of the activities of the teacher implemented within the scope of art workshops designed to familiarize students with the native traditions of their region. The author focuses on the possibilities offered to teachers in terms of initiating and organizing students' activities in order to cultivate regional traditions.

Keywords: regional traditions, plastic workshops

Creating beautiful things involves many acts, that is, looking for something worth immortalizing, writing down something that we do not want to lose. Teachers are among people who are able to rescue from oblivion patterns of behavior, rituals and customs important for particular regions. If pedagogues are willing to make an attempt to work on both themselves and students, they are able to arouse interest among children and adolescents in the place they live. Properly stimulated interest paves the way for the formation of positive attitude towards one's own tradition, generation change, heritage handed down by past generations, which in this way create an image of reality. Properly excited and maintained interest in days gone and days to come can ignite responsibility for

* All the information comes from the conversation with Anna Donder to whom I would like to give special thanks. Grateful thanks also go to Joanna Gacka who have taken and processed the photos. The photos were taken on 1 January 2015 and have been exhibited in the Educational Center in Bytom (Juliusz Słowacki SOW no. 2 in Bytom).

the way we think and act now, and thus make people treat other people and nature with due respect. The earlier children have the opportunity to treat the world as the common good, the better for the people who work hard to improve the quality of life. However, the role of the pedagogue cannot be overestimated, as he or she learns to recognize creative skills in every child in the classroom, both healthy children and those with disabilities. The teacher is the one who wholeheartedly supports pupils in their development and tries to attract their attention to the surrounding world, people, places, objects, and nature. The teacher makes them familiar with real life, by providing them with information about history, places and epochs, inhabitants and their occupations, as well as the atmosphere of the bygone eras. The arts, the plastic arts included, can significantly influence emotions, offering people esthetic experience and making them more sensitive to beauty. By esthetic education, the pedagogue who conducts art workshops, stimulates pupils' work, activities and self-realization, and also excites their cognitive interest as well as willingness to transform their experience into an artistic work. An idea of the creator can be turned into a piece of art, which can be a source of joy, and, what is more, pieces of art can be presented on exhibitions, admired, and approved by the viewers. One's own work can bring joy and delight, but words of approval provide satisfaction and build the artists' self-esteem as they can even give them a deeper sense in life. Pictures, visual arts in general, evocatively appeal to young viewers and their imagination, they make them think and search for the sense in their life, humanity, and actions (Phot. 1).



Phot. 1. Mateusz Renka (aged 14): *A gagging treasure*

Work with children and adolescents can abound in positive effects, for example in the creation of works of astonishingly good quality, freshness, and original approach to the topic. Aside from these, it always is excellent fun both for the participants and for their families. A project entitled "Customs and rituals in children's interpretation," prepared by a group of 28 children aged 12—18, realized in the years 2004 and 2005 can serve as a good example. Over the school year second-year primary school pupils, and second- and third-year junior high school students (both schools are within the School Complex no. 4 in Bytom) were asked to prepare an exhibition of artistic works. Over several times, they visited the Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom to see the following exhibitions, "The life of the Silesian people in the 19th and 20th centuries" and "Christmas traditions of the Żywiec Country." They went for an excursion to Mały Gościec in the Żywiec Beskids (*Węgierska Górką*), where they visited the Private Museum "Ocalenie" (Rescue) established by Jan Talik. Over the years, he has managed to collect many utilitarian articles from the past, musical instruments (e.g. *heligonka* "a musical instrument similar to the melodeon"), masks, folk clothing, pictures, sculptures, and cribs, which are valuable souvenirs of the past folk customs and rituals of the Żywiec Country.

Participating in exhibitions and excursions, the pupils and students got prepared for the plastic workshop during which they created works illustrating old customs of the region. They gained the opportunity to learn about their own creative abilities; they developed their artistic skills, stirred their imagination and awoke their creative thinking skills; they exercised their perception, perseverance, and discipline; they learned how to look around, perceive objects and people; they improved dexterity of their hands, discipline by repetition of some acts, and concentration required in such work. From a purely technical point of view, they learned selected plastic techniques, such as pencil, watercolor, gouache, acrylic, and learnt how to work with painting tools. This arduous work created the desired effects — that is, responsibility for one's workplace, respect for other children's works, willingness to participate in the activities and to come by to the meeting room, not only during regular school classes, but also in their free time.

Owing to the fact that during these outings to the museum children could listen to museum guides who provided them with necessary information about traditions and customs of the region. In this way, the participants were able to describe the selected traditions and place them beside their works. The selection of relevant information was their own choice. In consequence, children created valuable teaching aids that presented a selection of Polish customs, including photos of the paintings accompanied by the texts. It was then handed out to guests (Polish teachers, plastic arts teachers and historians) during the vernissage of the exhibition. The leaflet is now available in some school libraries and libraries of culture centers in the district (Phot. 2).



Phot. 2. Andrzej Malinowski (aged 18): *Cabbage pickling*

Meetings of the Plastic Arts Group in the care of Anna Donder turned into an exhibition of children's works that represented various folk customs and rituals, among others (1) the *Lajkonik* (a bearded man, resembling a Tatar, wearing a pointed hat and dress, with a wooden horse round his waist, also called the *Zwierzyniec* horse); (2) the drowning of *Marzanna* (burning and drowning an effigy of *Marzanna* to celebrate the end of winter); (3) *Śmieciucha* in the village; (4) the *Dożynki* procession (a procession during the harvest festival); (5) *Kupala* Night (midsummer night, the celebration of the summer solstice); (6) wreaths floating in water; (7) Ash Wednesday jokes; (8) Ash Wednesday with a ceremony of marking people's foreheads with ash; (9) Maundy Thursday as the Day of the Passion; (10) blessing of green twigs; (11) going with the cockerel (an Easter Monday procession of boys); (12) Easter foods; (13) Winter festivals; (14) Christmas carols; (15) cutting down a Christmas tree; (16) old Christmas-tree decoration; (17) a group of men in hairy disguise; (18) going to the midnight Mass (on Christmas Eve); and (18) *Angelus*. Apart from the above-mentioned themes, the children's works also depicted scenes of everyday life, under the following titles (1) cabbage pickling; (2) I will be a housewife; (3) a beggar; (4) *kierpce* (shoes traditionally worn by Polish highlanders), alpenstocks and strings of beads; (5) village fashion; (6) farmyard decoration; (7) autumn works on the farm; (8) here come the wedding guests; and (9) a grave.

The exhibition was presented, among others, in Miasteczko Śląskie, Lubliniec, Radzionków, Boguszów, Gorce, Bytom, and Częstochowa. Thanks to the workshops on customs and rituals, the youth from many schools in the

towns where the picture exhibition was displayed, could learn about regional traditions and rites. The exhibition was attended by children and adolescents at different age groups, from primary, junior high, to high schools (Phot. 3).



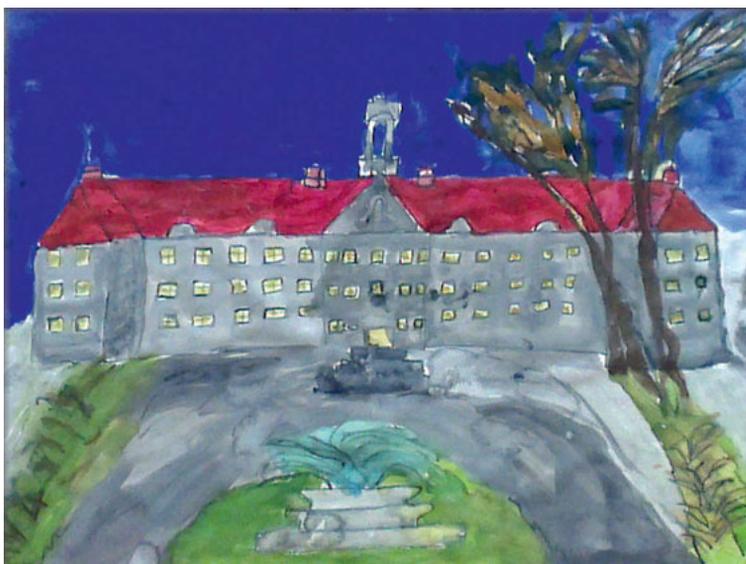
Phot. 3. Andrzej Malinowski (aged 18):
The beggar

Anna Donder, apart from customs, everyday routine activities, and celebrations, teaches her pupils how to look at the surrounding world, be perceptive, and notice beauty. That is how the 2004 exhibition "Bytom in children's eyes" was created, which depicted Bytom and its architecture. However, it was preceded by elaborate preparations, as the students were taught the history of Bytom. Anna Donder took them for walks along the old streets to see architectural monuments; moreover, they visited the Guido mine, the Upper Silesia Museum, necropoles, and cemeteries as well. They learned about old professions specific for Silesia, such as miner, steel worker, blacksmith, cooper, shoemaker, and clockmaker. The participants were given the opportunity to observe the work and see the tools at the shoemaker's and the clockmaker's. Also, they observed work of the furrier and the tailor, and visited an old post office. The children met with Marcin Halaś, a member of the Society of Bytom Admirers, who was very helpful. During the plastic arts workshops, they found a favorable opportunity to talk to Witold Prandzioch, a methodologist of plastic arts education.



Phot. 4. Łukasz Markiewicz (aged 16):
*The chemist's "Under the Crown" on
 Gliwicka street*

Getting to know Bytom and its sights, being able to see for themselves history preserved in architecture, learning about the historical context of the construction of buildings important for the city, its development and change, and later their own artistic interpretation of what they saw — these are the effects of the exhibition, which was part of the celebration of the 750th anniversary of Bytom. The vernissage and the exhibitions were the best reward for their hard work. Many places hosted the exhibition, for example, Silesia City Center in Katowice (during its official opening); the Culture Center in Miasteczko Śląskie; the art gallery “Na bruku” in Bytom; the Municipal Community Center in Lubliniec; the Bytom Promotion Bureau; and churches: the Holy Cross, St. Wojciech, the Holy Trinity, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The paintings were sold at auctions, among others, during *Jarmark Cechu Rzemiosł Różnych* (the Fair of Various Craft Guilds), thanks to which they collected money for purchasing plastic arts materials for the workshops (Phot. 5).



Phot. 5. Dawid Podstawny (aged 11): *The building of the Municipal Council*

Another city which became the topic of the workshop was Kraków, a city shrouded in legends. The former capital of Poland was a good topic to excite children's interest in the country's history and invoke national feelings. First, children of the 4th and 6th forms of the primary school and junior high school students were told some legends, afterwards they prepared plastic works which formed the thematic exhibition "The Kraków legends in the years 2006—2007." The participants of the workshops made use of various plastic techniques — that is, clay, papier-mâché, self-hardening plasticine, glue, watercolor, egg tempera, oil pastels, crayons, and paints. The size of some of the low reliefs was impressive as it reached 70 × 110 cm (Phot. 6).

Furthermore, children and adolescents can draw much of their inspiration from fairy tales and legends, due to the elements of folk wisdom as the lesson which can be drawn from fables can be seen as a warning, and thus provokes reflection. Colorful and incredible stories make both the listeners and readers arrive at the solutions to many questions. The workshops, apart from developing their esthetic sensitivity, formed their morale, encouraged to work, developed their self-confidence and excited their interest in culture, arts and also in the national heritage. Moreover, they created an opportunity to spend their time in a useful yet joyful way (Phot. 7).



Phot. 6. Paweł Górski: *About Mr. Twardowski*



Phot. 7. Jakub Koj, Anna Kopel, Zofia Klais, Klaudia and Agnieszka Sosnowska, Magdalena Hasek: *About the Wawel dragon and a wise shoemaker*

The work during the workshops, organization of the exhibitions, preparatory studies on the topics and organization of the artistic work certainly help create a bond between participants. Moreover, it teaches them respect for their work and the work of others; shows differences and similarities in the reception of the topic and problem solving; it renders possible individual interpretation of reality, free self-expression, as well as it makes favorable opportunities to exhibit the work to the general audience.

The less skilled a student is, the more necessary it is to build his or her self-esteem. A vernissage or an exhibition is a situation in which students with disabilities may improve their self-esteem, feel appreciated, and their families may take pride in their children's achievements and celebrate their success.

Authors of exhibited works can feel like artists; their works may be provided with passe-partout and then professionally framed, thanks to the befriended owner of the painters' shop, Jan Gut, who appreciates their artistic efforts.

Apart from the above-mentioned plastic workshops, Anna Donder also conducted other projects, namely, her students Aleksandra Walczak and Samanta Jeż got qualified for the International Art Competition, entitled "People brought this fate upon people," which was organized in 2007, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the State Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim. The official partners of the Competition were the Society of Nazi Concentration Camp Child Prisoners and the Foundation for Polish-German Reconciliation. The winners visited the Camp and met persons who survived Auschwitz and those who saved them and helped.

Children that attended the plastic arts studio in the School Complex no. 4 in Bytom were of different age and from different classes. By engaging in artistic activity they won prizes and distinctions for their work in many competitions. Their works were exhibited in Poland and abroad. The topics of the works were mainly related to the students' region, its traditions and festivals. For example, Katarzyna Dunaj was awarded the 3rd prize in the 8th Competition organized by the Museum in Tarnowskie Góry for the most beautiful Nativity scene of the year 2006. The junior high school student, Monika Polak won the 2nd prize for her Christmas postcard of the year 2005, in the 12th District Plastic Competition organized by the Municipal Community Center in Lubliniec, and the Regional Cultural Center and Municipal Art Gallery in Częstochowa. Another student Małgorzata Korelli won the Grand Prix in 2002 and her Christmas postcard was professionally printed and sent to many galleries and community centers in the Silesian Province. Among the awarded for a Nativity scene, in the Competition "Small, smaller, the smallest," organized by Pałac Młodzieży (the youth's education center) in Katowice, were Przemek Krzyżak, Sebastian Kowalski, Marcin Gałuszka, Izabela Smarzyńska, Ewelina Gorel, and Damian Solarczyk. Prizes and distinctions won in several editions of the Nationwide Festival of Children's Expression and the Silesian Review of the Works of

Children's Plastic Arts Groups (e.g. the 1st prize in the 20th Review in 2007), or distinctions awarded in the 28th Nationwide Competition of Children and Adolescents' Plastic Arts, entitled "Polish Landscape — Traditions, Modernity, Future" in 2005, show that plastic arts groups offer an attractive way of spending free time for both children and adolescents. Searching for one's roots and local traditions related with the place of birth has been continued, as the tutors Anna Donder and Katarzyna Krzysińska together with girl-students from The Young Offenders Institution no. 2 in Bytom took part in the program "Ethnographics" in 2013. About 70 children were able to participate in classes given by staff members of the Upper Silesia Museum, on Silesian dialect, cuisine, regional dresses, rituals, festivals, and customs related to seasons of the year and local traditions. Their discussions concerned customs and regionalisms. Thanks to the contract with the museum, the institution is an actively participating partner in the "Ethnographics" project. An interesting thing here is that children engaged in the program created a research tool — questionnaire, used later in interviews with Ormontowice inhabitants (Phot. 8).



Phot. 8. Andrzej Malinowski (aged 18): *The Holly Family*

Education involves introduction to history; showing places, times and people; socialization and telling how to live in the society, a community of people, who are similar yet different; developing a sense of affiliation; teaching respect for others and tolerance for otherness; and explaining that agreement is the best solution when people differ. Art is an ideal means of building one's self-esteem and acquiring problem-solving skills in conflict situations, because it helps people deal with emotions, build bonds with others and develop a sense of relationship. It paves the way for one's independence and self-reliance, and aside from these, it makes people more sensitive and considerate towards others. It grants an opportunity to overcome their weaknesses and to find possible means of expression. In addition, it gives time for self-reflection and endows their life with meaning. Thanks to art, one can feel approved of and rewarded. A teacher who is aware of the art-related potential and is able to use it for the students' benefit and for their psychosocial development is a good tutor. By his or her commitment to the work this person stimulates students' activity and creativity, and makes the dialogue between generations possible (Phot. 9).



Phot. 9. Andrzej Malinowski: *Maria Grzegorzewska among her pupils*

Using drawing, painting, modeling, and sculpture as a children activation method, the teacher makes use of their natural predilection for play. These are activities which stimulate thinking, inspire imagination and communication as well as relax and provide children with positive encouragement. In this simple way children are encouraged to work and express their emotions, which enables them to achieve success that certainly leads to an increase of their self-esteem, as well as their peers' acceptance.

Trying to inspire young people, the teacher encourages them to experience esthetic values, express their emotions, look for beauty, search for authorities and topics which would allow them to broaden their knowledge. Furthermore, the teacher stimulates their development and helps them to become versatile human beings in a spirit of humanism. All of this leads to respect, tolerance, and a feeling of affiliation and communion. The better prepared and conducted introductory classes are, the greater achievements students gain. Apart from the topic, the students have to choose a plastic technique matching their temperament. This increases their commitment to the work they are doing and makes them more open to emotions. Stimulation of children's activity makes them more spontaneous, attracts their attention and helps discover innate talents and abilities. It certainly makes hyperactive children more tranquil, and for the anxious individuals it is a fresh experience. Art activities are to bring joy and tranquility, they encourage creativity and eliminate boredom, depression, and anxiety.

An appropriate choice of topics can help cultivate traditions and introduce elements of local and national patriotism. It can help teach that one should not neglect native traditions and turn to foreign customs, such as for example St. Valentine's Day, but perhaps should look deeper into our native customs, such as Kupala night and search for the fern flower. On St. John's Day people spend time sitting and dancing by the fire, and requests addressed to St. John bring them luck in love. The custom of greeting spring with *Marzanna* (*Morena*, *Marzaniok*, *Śmieciucha*) is a way of bidding goodbye to winter and death, giving hope for a new beginning and a positive change. Christmas is *Gody* or *Kolaska*, the festive season from Christmas Eve to the Epiphany. It is the time when carol singers and boys in disguise (near Sierpiec, Płock, in Kujawy and Śląsk) walk from house to house and bring people abundance and good luck.

It is worth encouraging students to get to know their own history as well as the history of others, show them differences resulting from living in a given region, Kaszuby, Silesia or the mountain region and similarities resulting from being born in one country, Poland (Phot. 10).



Phot. 10. Dawid Podstawny (aged 13): *A group of men in hairy disguise*