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## HUMANISTIC APPROACH IN IRENA WOJNAR'S PEDAGOGICAL IDEAS (IN THE CONTEXT OF “WEAVING THE HUMAN FABRIC”)\*

**Introduction:** The guiding idea of the analysed writings of Professor Irena Wojnar is the belief that the paramount challenges of today include: strengthening of the role of man as an agent determining objective processes, inspiration of various activities in order to restore the proper significance of the universal values, implementation of humanistic education. Analyses of arguments in favour of up-to-dateness and mission of humanistic education, in consideration of present-day reality, have identified diversified global threats, aggravating crisis of growth and affluence, decline of the hierarchy of values, shortcomings of educational activities, contemporary changes in philosophy, reconstruction of human identity and other challenges of the coming years.

**Research Aim:** This paper is intended to briefly present the humanistic aspects of pedagogy pursued by Professor Wojnar, to present inspirations and assumptions of this approach to pedagogy, and to discuss its specificity, as well as its growing significance in the consolidation of the humanistic countenance of contemporary world. It was based on the analysis of texts, educational achievements and initiatives in which the scholar was engaged, as well as her statements given in the published interviews.

**Evidence-based facts:** The first part of the paper, using traditional research methodology, highlights the underlying theses and concepts of the theory of aesthetic education/education through art, inspired by the assumptions of culture pedagogy and supported by the humanistic learning theory. The second part attempts to outline selected elements of the concept of humanistic education, viewed as an instrument used in fighting in the defence of humanism and condition of the humankind, and creating educational conditions to ensure a better future.

**Summary:** Professor Wojnar elevated the significance of humanistic education in the creation of the vision of the world, as well as intentions of humanism as a philosophy and world view; she outlines person-centred perspectives of education in the complex reality which is not transparent and full of diverse threats of growth and affluence.

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\* Suggested citation: Żardecki, W. (2025). Humanistic Approach in Irena Wojnar's Pedagogical Ideas (in the Context of “Weaving the Human Fabric”). *Lubelski Rocznik Pedagogiczny*, 44(2), 25–35. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17951/lrp.2025.44.2.25-35>

**Keywords:** Irena Wojnar, education through art, theory of aesthetic education, humanistic education, “weaving of the human fabric”

## INTRODUCTION

The text presented below attempts to analyse the selected pedagogical ideas of Professor Irena Wojnar (1924–2021), the paramount figure of Polish pedagogy representing culture-centred approach to education, belonging to the mainstream trends in contemporary pedagogy pursued for more than a century by the European humanists. The scholar was the author of a considerable body of scientific papers in the field of general pedagogy and aesthetic education, the founder of the Polish school of education through art grounded in an interdisciplinary humanistic theory; she was the world expert addressing issues related to educational aspects of art; she was a highly respected scholar and a role model for many generations of university students. Professor Wojnar was commonly regarded as an outstanding humanist of our times, which means she had both an extensive knowledge in social science, a specific type of sensitivity and approach to humans, as well as the way of thinking and acting guided by the values; she had the urge to take life as it comes, that reflected the centuries-old focus on humanity (Fijałkowski & Wojnar, 2021). Her humanistic stance, in philosophical and existential terms, involving serving the mankind in the first place and engaging in subject-oriented activities, became her programme for defending the inner life, feelings and morality of man, which is reflected in the way in which he exists in the world, in public life situations and personal affairs.

As an international representative of humanistic education, she viewed the values presented by culture/the arts, accumulated across history, as the primary environment for the integral development of personality of contemporary man, and she was searching in his rapidly unfolding potential for relevant drivers of effective educational activities, liberating the immense human creativity. In her pedagogical pursuits, Professor Wojnar followed the ideas of the great movement of European humanism and categories of education serving the noblest of the human values, which she subsequently enriched with her original approaches presenting the duties of humanistic education in the face of challenges and threats related to the aggravating crisis of growth and affluence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, the research conducted by the scholar built on and continued the vital and current international traditions of “human spirituality pedagogy”, highlighting the interplay between culture and prerequisites for development, as well as education and human quality; or culture viewed as an educating device and education enabling access to culture.

## RESEARCH AIM AND QUESTION

The main aim of the presented paper is to seek an answer to the question about the humanistic quality of Professor Irena Wojnar's pedagogical ideas, in particular her view on general pedagogy referred to as integrated pedagogy, and its components: theory of aesthetic education and education through art. The main objective of the analyses on the other hand, is to outline the selected pedagogical ideas of the scholar pertaining to the humanistic quality of the general pedagogy and aesthetic education, as a commitment and as a value in the complex and non-transparent reality. Scientific grounds for the brief characterisation of the scholar's selected pedagogical ideas are provided by her scientific papers and educational initiatives in which the scholar was engaged, as well as her statements given in the published interviews and conversations with her colleagues, related to her output. The term "pedagogical idea" used in the paper refers primarily to individual views, opinions and beliefs concerning education in a given historical period, reflected in the pedagogical awareness and educational practice (and not to the reconstruction of the state of knowledge on education in the discussed period) (Sztobryn, 1996). In subsequent sections of the paper, I shall attempt to briefly reconstruct the principal message of humanistic education and the theory of aesthetic education forming a part thereof, which occupied a special place in Professor Wojnar's scientific writings, and which she made, in a variety of ways, the foundations of her views on education.

## EVIDENCE-BASED FACTS

### **Theory of aesthetic education in view of its humanistic mission**

It is safe to say that Professor Irena Wojnar has been instinctively associated with the theory of aesthetic education which she developed and continued to expand with new ideas, and for many years advocated its strong position in the sciences focused on human development and creative achievement. This theory posits that works of art, or more broadly cultural texts and artistic activities pursued by man, carry an invaluable potential of educational value, offering a possibility to enrich the whole personality from many sides, therefore not only the aesthetic sensitivity, but, by stimulating this sensitivity, to impact the intellectual and moral and social dimension, as well as imagination and creative disposition. According to Wojnar (1995), "viewing the message communicated by the artworks of all time through the lens of today's »educational commission«, development and enrichment of man, and seeing educational processes in the light of art's educational potential, is an intention of thus designed theory which today can be surely referred to as the Polish theory of aesthetic education" (p. 11). Thus, it can be regarded as an important attempt to justify the sense and content of educational and self-education processes pursued by man in order to reach the fundamental goal, that is harmonious

development of potentialities embedded in all spheres of person's life, and their integration on the way to unfolding their humanity to the fullest and following the ideals of humanism.

Inspiration to thinking about aesthetic education in view of its humanistic mission should be sought in educational concepts of developing human personality (the spiritual dimension) through the cultural objects (assets) of the past centuries, concepts dating back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but deeply rooted in slogans propagated since ancient times about putting trust in the arts and their role in the life and education of individuals and communities subject to specific transformation processes. Theoretical assumptions clearly grounded in the value theory, refer to philosophical aspects of pedagogy, pedagogy of culture to be more exact, in particular to the humanistic vision of man, person and subject of various influences, a creative and active being in the world of cultural values, making the most of their capabilities owing to the interactions with the world, comprising the vibrant source of subsequent enrichments (Wojnar, 2000). Studies on theoretical underpinnings of the built concept of aesthetic education were deeply pervaded by the belief about the correlation and mutual permeation of the humanistic offer of the arts, that is the incorporated educational potential of humanistic values and the most important demand of our times, demand for humanistic education, "weaving of the human fabric" (term coined by Wojnar) successfully damaged by technology and consumerism.

Aesthetic education, the theory of which has been discussed herein, is broadly viewed by Wojnar as an integral part of general pedagogy and an important component of the entire process of education of contemporary man; but also as a significant component of culture *per se*, associated with the heritage of artistic achievements of humanity, as well as with moral values, the way of life, and the quality of human activities. It involves two correlated and interdependent scopes: 1) education viewed more narrowly (education for the arts), that is development of culture and sensitivity necessary to engage in aesthetic experiences, learn about and evaluate the arts; 2) education viewed more broadly (through perception of the works of art and through one's own creations), that is educating "the whole man" including the moral and cognitive sphere, as well as overall stimulation of man's personality, that is inspiring creativity, fostering expression and stirring imagination. Obviously, the prerequisite for the arts to influence human spirituality is the emergence of a personal experience in receiving an artistic phenomenon, aptly referred to by John Dewey as "aesthetic experience", as this term reflects the person-specific nature of the experiences and their diversity, possible links with different types of stimuli and different kinds of activities: imagination, emotions, intellect (Wojnar, 1995).

When using the term "arts" on the other hand, Wojnar has the general, trans-disciplinary meaning in mind, but also its particularization in the form of



specific fields of art treated both as artistic creations, as well as creative or expression-related activities, confirming creative capabilities of each human being. At the same time, the scholar shares the belief that art can create the world of humanistic values; that art, being essentially human, cannot be detached from humanism; that art is an inseparable determinant of humanistic culture that has the highest educational quality, that is, unfolds humanity (which today is a considerably worn-out term) to the fullest extent. By referring to various philosophical and aesthetic concepts, she indicates that art, as a direct reflection of human life experiences, is where humanity is manifested, a significant device making one's life more humane, the educational factor each man should be continually exposed to due to being subject to dehumanizing processes.

In her numerous papers, the scholar emphasizes the interdisciplinary nature of the theory of aesthetic education rooted in pedagogical sciences, however inter-related with different scientific disciplines addressing the issues of human development and human achievements, and presenting different aspects of interaction between man as a creative genius and the universe of artistic values, from the historic and contemporary perspective. The interdisciplinary but primarily focused on educational objectives theory of aesthetic education through art structured by Wojnar, was outlined in consideration of educational sciences, art sciences and social sciences, in particular underpinned by the mentioned trend of humanistic philosophy, sociology of art, psychology of art and, of course, pedagogy, as well as reflected by extensive and diversified innovative educational, school and out-of-school practice. It should be stressed that the programme she formulated at the end of the 1960s, fostering considerable opening of the theory of aesthetic education through art to scientific contexts derived from multiple academic disciplines, responded to the later efforts to remodel educational sciences in order to eliminate limitations and theoretical stereotypes, and confront pedagogical knowledge with numerous disciplines of the humanities.

Although the theory she formulated, as acknowledged by Professor Wojnar herself, "was not a brand new original theory of aesthetic education" (Wojnar, 2017, p. 29), yet she endowed it with a specific countenance, making references to the European tradition of the universe of aesthetic values and the Polish tradition of thinking about the arts as serving the society and nation (the moral and social mission of the arts). What is more, the Polish concept of aesthetic education/education through art in its broadest (general pedagogy) sense, since its inception was treated as "education for the future" proposal of sorts, intended to open an opportunity for creative initiatives of man and for putting the humanistic vision of the world into practice. A particularly clear manifestation of the fecundity of this theory were its field-specific outcomes, that is the guiding concepts of aesthetic education grounded in this theory, as well as their embodiments in the curricula, especially in the field of visual arts, music, theatre and film.

Professor Wojnar's concept is most comprehensively described in her book *Teoria wychowania estetycznego – zarys problematyki* [*The Overview of Theory of Aesthetic Education*] already regarded as a classic (1976, second edition 1980, third edition 1984, fourth edition 1995), it was also presented in other significant publications, such as: *Estetyka i wychowanie* [*Aesthetics and Education*], 1964; *Perspektywy wychowawcze sztuki* [*Arts' Educational Perspectives*], 1966; *Estetyczna samowiedza człowieka* [*Aesthetic Self-Knowledge of Man*], 1982; *Sztuka jako „podręcznik życia”* [*Art As a “Textbook of Life”*], 1984; it was also well-received by international scholars and disseminated via publications of her numerous lectures given during international conferences she would regularly attend, which were translated into foreign languages. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it gained considerable social resonance in Poland, becoming the most widely disseminated concept strongly established in the educational practice, as well as a significant component of contemporary pedagogy of culture and cultural education, and of issues related to development of the humane countenance of the world.

#### HUMANISTIC MESSAGE OF GENERAL/INTEGRATED PEDAGOGY

Years of political transformations in Poland brought about a considerable body of her research on general pedagogy, which Professor Wojnar referred to as integrated pedagogy or humanistic education, and viewed it as one of the many integrated humanities “exploring the timeless »essence« of man, embodied in infinitely varied modes of existence” (Wojnar, 2000, p. 28). Therefore, the research focus of humanistic education viewed in this manner is man, especially the integral man, entangled in the existing reality and conditions of his development and creative activity, as well as man's chances for “what he may be” or “what he becomes” owing to harmonious development of all spheres of his personality and his immense potential of sensitivity, imagination and activity (Wojnar, 2000, p. 18). What should be stressed however, is that the scholar regarded the educational processes as devices for “opening” and enriching the man, focusing on the system of values and developing his multi-faceted existence and gaining the increasingly profound self-knowledge and complete self-realization, that is translation of the needs, self-creation of personality or self-realization of an individual's subjectivity. She viewed integrated pedagogy as one of the basic fields of pedagogy (besides general teaching, theory of education, history of education and pedagogical ideas/reflection) and treated it as a philosophy of education of sorts that shapes self-awareness of its representatives, as well as a significant component determining the identity of pedagogy situated as a field of the social studies. She derived the above-presented idea of pedagogy, outlined in line with her intuition supported by the literature, from the belief about the basic roots of education lying in the Eu-



ropean and universal culture, as well as in great, timeless and transnational ideals appealing to human creative capabilities and stimulating creative activity.

In her output devoted to this subject area, special attention should be paid to four books, namely: *Humanistyczne intencje edukacji* [*Humanistic Intentions of Education*], 2000a; *Idee edukacyjne na rozdrożach XX wieku* [*Educational Ideas at the Crossroads of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*], 2008; *Humanistyczne przesłanki niepokoju* [*Humanistic Premises of Anxiety*], 2016 and *Humanistyczne alternatywy pedagogów* [*Humanistic Alternatives for Educators*], 2021 (the last book was co-authored by Adam Fijałkowski). The span of topics and problems addressed in these learned books is so extensive and they pertain to such specific and complex issues, which are very meticulously explained indeed, that discussion of all longer or shorter texts included in these books would require drawing up of quite an extensive monograph. The issue undoubtedly prevailing, discussed the most broadly and in the most original manner across all the books is reflection on the strategies of defending and developing humanistic education taking into account the ongoing turbulence of values, revaluation of life patterns, contemporary slump in humanity and existential estrangement of an individual.

While analysing issues addressed by humanistic education and related to the creation of a brave vision of the world, Professor Wojnar also deliberated on its future, especially in the context of ethics and its priority, i.e. “developing the culture of peace” or “creative designing of peace”, as a particularly significant imperative of education in the turbulent world, being the most important educational commitment of this century. She would recall, enrich and develop earlier traditional ideas of pedagogy of peace or education for peace in the Polish (reflections by S. Szuman, J. Korczak, B. Suchodolski) and international academia (theses by J. Dewey, H. Read, M. Montessori, A. Schweitzer, H. Röhrs), as well as new, prospective theoretical findings and practical solutions related to building of the peaceful coexistence of people globally as the basic determinant of educational ethos in the 21st century (Wojnar, 2000b, 2000c). They are particularly pertinent in view of the ongoing war in Ukraine and growing global threats, being perhaps the most frightening in the history of mankind, primarily because they apply strictly to humans, and they do not pertain to individuals only but to entire societies, if not to annihilation of the life on earth and extermination of the entire *homo sapiens* species.

It is to Professor Wojnar's activity that we owe one of the major achievements of the Polish pedagogical reflection of the last fifty years, that is research conducted by Zespół Edukacji i Kultury “Polska 2000 Plus” Komitetu Prognoz [Education and Culture Team of the Forecasts Committee] operating at the Board of the Polish Academy of Sciences, focused on futures studies, viewed alternatively as the aftermath of creative human activity (Wojnar, 2006). It brought together the outstanding Polish humanists, associating, besides a circle of acknowledged educators, also prominent representatives of other disciplines in the humanities (but also fields

of science seemingly distant from the humanities) whose meetings became the source of (socially important) new ideas and concepts providing inspiration for alternative pedagogical ideas. Team members often referred to the documents prepared by UNESCO and the Club of Rome developed by distinguished authorities of the global thought, scarcely known or hardly available in Poland, as well as to materials seemingly not addressing educational or cultural issues, but in fact highly significant thereto. While participating in sessions of these conferences, Wojnar many a time made references to the “great narratives” pertaining to education; she would analyse the question of human quality according to evaluative criteria; she would call for restoring the proper role of humanistic way of thinking in creating the vision of the world, and for recovery of the subjective significance of man in developmental processes (Fijałkowski & Wojnar, 2021). A future bibliographer or biographer of Professor Irena Wojnar’s life will surely not only present her enormous scientific and writing achievements, but also organise her output, distinguishing other items not included herein, such as, e.g. on aesthetic self-knowledge, alternative thinking, culture of peace, condition of museum, universal ethics or ambivalent universalism.

## SUMMARY

The aim of the presented paper was to analyse the humanistic aspect of pedagogical ideas of Irena Wojnar – an expert in humanistic education and aesthetic education, the founder of the Polish school of humanistic education through art, who also addressed issues in the field of education for peace and shaping of the culture of peace. This brief overview of Irena Wojnar’s ideas could by no means embrace the extensive body of scientific writings she left as her legacy, nor engulf all significant issues to which, for various reasons, she paid her attention as a researcher, or determine the most important notions she would use in her scientific pursuits. This could, to some extent, be justified by a huge volume of the finite scientific output of the paramount figure of Polish pedagogy that reflected her uncommon talent combined with great diligence, that brought her fame in Poland and abroad, and established her position not only in Polish pedagogy; it also earned her numerous scientific honours (the catalogue of Professor Wojnar’s works spans across dozen or so pages including about 300 items). Therefore, the above overview does not present the entire pedagogical views of Irena Wojnar, for she had never straightforwardly put forward her concept of alternative humanistic education; in my opinion, the main reason for this might have been the fact that she was an educator, thinker and humanist that went against the system.

Works analysed herein are the expression of Wojnar’s consistent thinking in accordance with humanistic values and although years have passed bringing about



historic events and transformations, her writings remain up-to-date and make an original contribution to the development of humanistic education which has been facing multiple threats. The scholar firmly emphasized the significance of alternative educational strategies pervaded by the concern for the so-called human factor, human quality, subjective uniqueness of an individual to which he or she may recourse while attempting to save their humanity threatened by alienated outcomes of activities pursued by social beings. The paramount figure of Polish pedagogy views the educational process through the miracle of man determined by what man would or could be, or what he or she may become, that is she accentuates the reality revealed primarily in a specific human being. She emphasizes that the humanistic interpretation of the current educational reality requires interdisciplinary research, involving different fields of study capable of extracting the complexities and spiritual riches of an individual, the subjective human potential in a man, both the already existing one and the one barely glowing, the development of which may turn out to be the beginning of one's individual way of life or mode of existence.

## CONCLUSION

In accordance with the above findings, Professor Wojnar's idea of pedagogy places human and his responsibilities towards the world as the main focus; it is pervaded by great concern for his comprehensive development leading to lifetime pursuit of humanity; strongly linked to cultural heritage of the European values and culture-centred shape of education of society. It makes references to the ideals of humanism, it prioritizes values and the quality of life, and therefore "culture within people"; it emphasizes the autonomy of spiritual life of man as a creative being; the subjective nature of education in the process of self-realization of an individual; the cultural aspect of development where man comes as the ultimate objective. It also presents such qualities, as enabling thinking about values and ideals of humanism in philosophical terms (including ethics and value theory); able of being theorized about or described (that is opposition to practical activities); autonomy, which means it cannot be reduced to any other academic discipline (in particular, to psychology and humanistic sociology); and a broad interdisciplinary dimension of deliberations on the human condition in the world. One could also indicate other manifestations of pedagogy pursued using methodology typical of the humanities which we encounter in her inspirational papers and chapters in collective works co-authored by the scholar; it is always, however, pedagogy applied to some analytical material, having a specific task, almost never straightforward, almost never detached from examined topic.

Briefly listed characteristics of the humanistic approach found in Irena Wojnar's pedagogy may serve as the reference point for further studies, cognitive ex-

plorations, but also empirical studies; the reference point meaning a set of theses and hypotheses that may be drawn from, but also argued with in a creative manner. Thus, for example, critics of Wojnar's ideas would notice that by putting trust in education as the "factor mending the world" professor Wojnar was an incurable optimist, whereas her pedagogy standing in defence of inner values, ethical sensitivity, humanistic imagination, human creativity – a humanistic utopia clashing with pragmatic focus of education guided by measurability of immediate benefits or successes. It is beyond any doubt however, that this human-oriented way of thinking, widely important, takes on a special meaning in humanistic education; it becomes the device for knowing the man and the means for creating the vision of the world at the same time; it enriches man's creative presence in different areas of choices, decisions he makes and actions he takes. The leading role of humanistic education is therefore obvious, just like the huge scale of cognitive, ethical and value-related responsibilities emerging before and taken by it.

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## HUMANISTYCZNY CHARAKTER PEDAGOGIKI IRENY WOJNAR (W KONTEKŚCIE „ROZWIJANIA TKANKI LUDZKIEJ”)

**Wprowadzenie:** Ideę przewodnią analizowanych publikacji profesor Ireny Wojnar stanowi przekonanie, że jednym z naczelných problemów współczesności jest wzmocnienie roli człowieka jako podmiotu sprawczego wyznaczającego procesy obiektywne; mobilizowanie różnorodnych działań na rzecz przywrócenia należnej rangi wartościom uniwersalnym; realizacja pedagogiki humanistycznej. Analizując argumenty przemawiające za aktualnością i posłannictwem pedagogiki zorientowanej humanistycznie, w powiązaniu z realiami życia w świecie „tu i teraz”, wskazuje się na wielorakie zagrożenia globalne, na głęboki kryzys cywilizacyjny, na upadek struktur wartości, na niedomogi oddziaływań edukacyjnych, na współczesne przemiany filozoficzne, na odbudowę tożsamości człowieka i inne wyzwania nadchodzących czasów.

**Cel badań:** Celem prezentowanego artykułu jest ukazanie w sposób syntetyczny humanistycznych aspektów pedagogiki uprawianej przez Wojnar, przedstawienie inspiracji i założeń tej pedagogiki oraz postawienie kwestii jej specyfiki, a także rosnącego znaczenia w umacnianiu humanistycznego oblicza świata współczesnego. Podstawą analizy są teksty i dokonania pedagogiczne oraz inicjatywy, w które zaangażowana była Uczona, a także jej wypowiedzi zawarte w opublikowanych wywiadach.

**Stan wiedzy:** W pierwszej części artykułu, odwołując się do tradycji badawczej, wyeksponowano podstawowe tezy i kategorie pojęciowe teorii wychowania estetycznego/wychowania przez sztukę, inspirowane założeniami pedagogiki kultury i poparte humanistycznym ideałem kształcenia. Natomiast w drugiej części podjęto próbę syntetycznej prezentacji wybranych elementów koncepcji pedagogiki humanistycznej, traktowanej jako swoisty instrument w walce o obronę humanizmu i kondycję rodzaju ludzkiego oraz tworzenie warunków wychowania dla lepszej przyszłości świata.

**Podsumowanie:** Profesor Wojnar do wysokich wymiarów podnosi znaczenie humanistycznej pedagogiki w kreowaniu wizji świata, a także intencje humanizmu jako filozofii i światopoglądu; na wielu obszarach zarysowuje humanistyczne horyzonty edukacji człowieka w skomplikowanej współczesności z jej nieprzejrzyłą rzeczywistością, pełną wielorakich zagrożeń cywilizacyjnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Irena Wojnar, wychowanie przez sztukę, teoria wychowania estetycznego, pedagogika humanistyczna, „rozwijanie tkanki ludzkiej”

