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## Individualization of Valuation as a Process Shaping the Personal Maturity of a Child

### KEY WORDS    ABSTRACT

pedagogy,  
upbringing,  
child, personality,  
values, axiology,  
individualization.

Every human being lives in the world of values. Life itself is a process of recognizing and evaluating specific values. It is a constant valuation that involves establishing a relationship between the emotional feeling of the significance of values, and the rational cognition of their objective functioning in the reality. The article discusses the scheme of valuation processes during the construction of an individual system of values which is formed by two distinct structures derived from the double reference of values to the person and to existence. These structures include personality and meta-values. Personality is a stable element – once formed in childhood, it can only be adjusted to a small extent in adulthood. Meta-values are dynamic elements – they are created, expanded and categorized throughout life in a hierarchical structure of satisfying human needs. In the conclusion, the article presents a brief description of the development of a mature personality based on the discussed scheme of individual valuation (axiological education). The core of these educational activities is to build axiological situations to which the children will react by making choices and thus taking a proactive attitude towards both the world and themselves.

### Introduction

In the process of human development, values are a fundamental category that supports the existence of a human being and helps to define the meaning of his or her existence. Values direct the formation of personality and become the primary motivational force in the pursuit of self-fulfilment. In the common social understanding,

a value is everything that, in the individual's opinion, is valuable and worthy of desire. Wojciech Chudy (2009) similarly defines a value as something that "has a certain power to draw us towards itself". Value, therefore, is a projection of the feeling that an individual (subject) has towards a particular object (Drenda 2016: 40).

The knowledge and acceptance of values usually leads to their internalization as a result of which personality traits of a person that are compliant with these values are consolidated. In this way, the child, and then the adult, develops in a unique, individual way and assumes responsibility for his or her life. Therefore, this fact must be taken into account in the concept of the child's upbringing. It is worth becoming aware of the basic processes of the influence of values on the personality in order to guide and continue the educational process well, while shaping such personality in children.

## The essence of valuing

Within the area of social science, the issue of upbringing is considered in the axiological approach<sup>1</sup>. The basic object of research (both in pedagogy and in the psychology of upbringing) includes values as discovered psycho-pedagogical norms and rules of conduct that enable the child, and later also the adult, to lead their own development and satisfying life (Dziewiecki 1997: 29). This is an approach derived from Viktor Emil Frankl's existential analysis (Wolicki 1989) in which values have a double reference – to the person and to existence, i. e. they serve the person and they serve existence. Thus, a value is what serves the existence of a person (Janiga 2006).

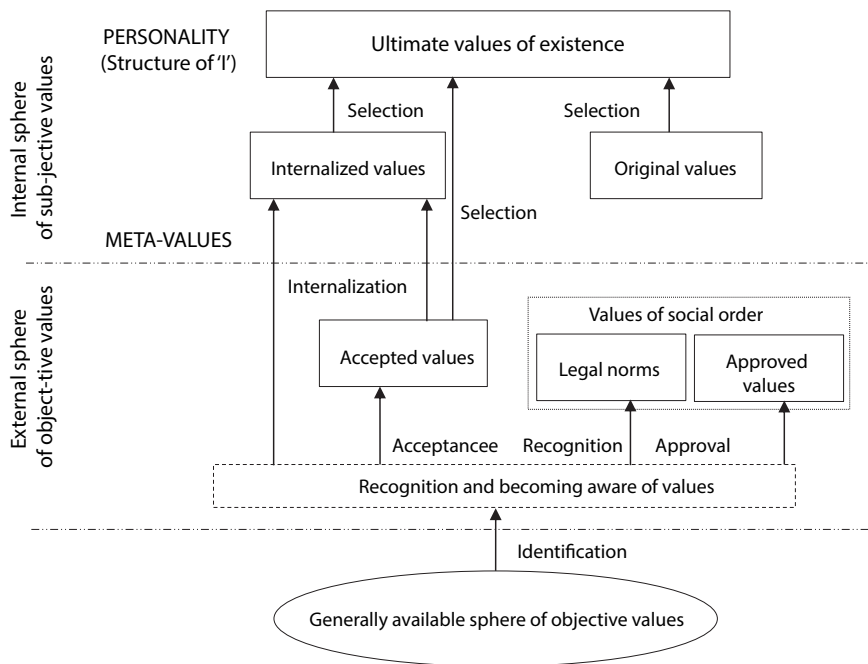
The personal reference of values is expressed in understanding them as a man's experiencing the idea of their validity without reference to real objects. In this approach, they are referred to as abstract universal values. In the second reference, a man understands values as content-filled objects of the surrounding reality. "We deal with them wherever indifference or equal relations between things are broken; wherever one thing is chosen or rated higher than another and is preferred to another" (Zuziak 2012: 103). These are values that are made real and important when experiencing existence. This means that it is only through the combined influence of abstract values and real values that a human life becomes meaningful and complete.

<sup>1</sup> Axiology as an independent science about values and valuing in the humanistic approach, was separated at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The name of the science, derived from Greek *αξιος* (*axios*) – worthy, valuable, and *λογος* (*logos*) – science, reason, was first used by Paul Lapie in *Logique de la volonté* (1902), and then it was popularized by Eduard von Hartmann in *Grundriss der Axiologie* (1908). In Poland, the subject of axiology was first studied by Florian Znaniecki in *Zagadnienie wartości w filozofii* [*The Issue of Values in Philosophy*] (1910). Earlier, up to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term "good" was used.

At the same time, the cognitive experience of a social fact constitutes a value only if it is potentially able to influence a person – to dynamise his or her psychological and physical development (Łobocki 2009: 93). Such influence consists in establishing a reciprocal relationship between the understanding of the emotional feeling of the meaning of a value, and the rational cognition of its objective existence in the surrounding reality. The result of these processes, which are called valuing, is the evaluation of the quality of values.

From the pedagogical point of view, therefore, the rank of values is determined by the course of the valuing process, i. e. the recognition and subjective attitude of an individual to the learned value. Figure 1 shows a diagram of the valuing process through which an individual value system is built up in mental structures. Such an individual process of valuing takes place in two spheres: the external one – concerning objective values remaining outside the personality of the individual, and the internal one – in which, under the influence of subjective values, a relatively constant motivational-emotional structure of 'I' is formed, i. e. the personality giving the individual a unique direction and dynamism of development.

Figure 1. Structure of the processes of valuing of the individual value system



Source: the author's own work.

Values constitute an absolute being in themselves in the sense that they are independent of the existence of a person and of the reality of their life. However, they enter into this reality and validate themselves in it<sup>2</sup>. Thus, a person is surrounded by objective values – an unordered set of views, ideas of behaviour and beliefs that are not subject to evaluation and that are prevalent in a given society. This is an area of objective values that is available for exploration by every individual, but not every individual can recognise the values in question to the same extent as other people.

Through the act of perceiving and identifying, and by means of feeling the quality of values, a man becomes individually aware of their existence and is determined, in the act of cognition, to evaluate them subjectively<sup>3</sup>. In the external sphere of objective values, the state of judgments of values is formed. Such values are supra-personal because they are widespread. For an individual living in a particular community, these supra-personal values represent the area of validity of shared values both as accepted values that concern individual life and as values of the social order resulting from institutional sanctioning that concern life in the society.

Accepted values are those objective values that the individual accepts as forming and supporting the existing social order. They mainly include values that are accepted by an individual as unquestionable and unchangeable basic human values with which the individual basically identifies. However, in the subsequent stages of development, the individual may reject and/or adopt other values. Accepted values provide a free space for valuations to develop, and the collection of such values can be modified and changed. As a result, a plurality of values develops in the society. Thus, in this case, the activity of an individual becomes a source of tolerance which is itself a fundamental value of the system of order in an open society.

A separate group in the individual's external system of objective values are the values of the social order comprising legal norms and approved values. These are only relevant to the social life of an individual. These are the values that are subject to orders and prohibitions. This applies to the valuing of relationships and modes of behaviour in the society, where "value judgments (assessments) must be guided by that measure which has its justification in the social order of values" (Kość 1998: 113). As this is an unavoidable necessity, these values, which are important for social life,

<sup>2</sup> These theses result from the material theory of values represented by Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann. It assumes the autonomy of values which are independent of their recognition by the individual, and are even independent of whether the individual is aware of their existence. Values are therefore not attributed to any objects. Instead, they exist as obviously as the objects themselves.

<sup>3</sup> This reflects a philosophical position applicable to pedagogy, called relationalism, in which, while preserving the objective nature of values, they are supplemented by subjective threads. According to this, it is assumed that a human being has individual needs that need to be satisfied, and that values are what makes it possible to satisfy those needs.

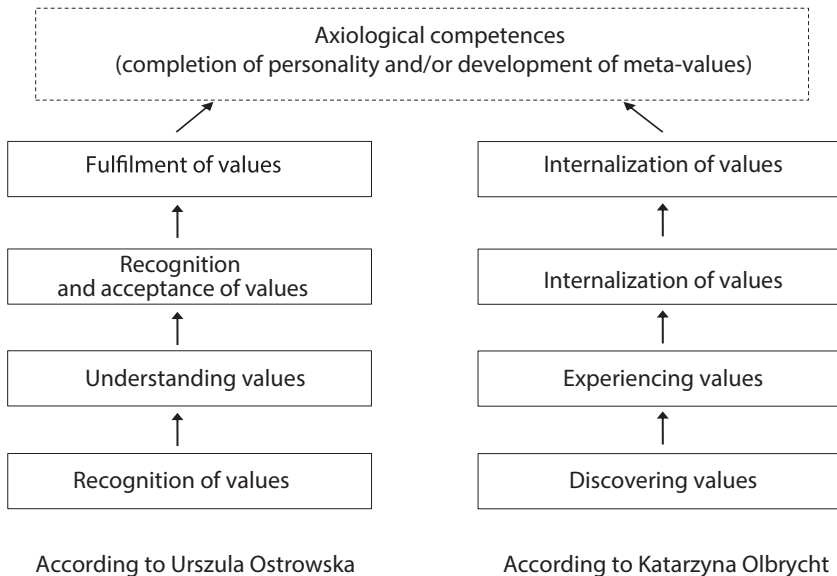
are equipped by this society with universally binding power, i. e. with the power that is normatively sanctioned by state or social coercion. In this group of values we can distinguish legal norms the recognition of which mainly results from the individual's fear of institutional sanctions, and values approved by the individual which, although not sanctioned but only subject to imposed standards of behaviour, are a condition for being at least tolerated in a given community.

Within the internal sphere of subjective values, the process of valuing already occurs in a young child. A characteristic feature of this process is that the source of the valuing is located within the child himself (it takes place in the internal sphere), it concerns his/her physical well-being and initially does not depend on the environment. A small child is not yet aware of the values he or she experiences, but if they are in line with his/her internal biological feelings, they become a personal component called primary (basic) values. Then, the child's development expands the range of values to include psychological and aesthetic experiences. However, the value system developed in this way is characterised by rigidity and insusceptibility to changes. As development continues, the child, feeling the need for the approval of caregivers, begins to become aware of the existence of values preferred by other people who are significant for him/her. Later, there is also a spontaneous identification with other objective values. When objective values, chosen in a conscious and free manner, turn out to be compatible with subjective internal feelings, they are internalised by the individual, and thus accepted as his/her own, and become components of his or her personality. Similarly, certain external values, previously accepted by the individual and accumulated in the external sphere, can be internalised. Only the ongoing hierarchical ordering of internalised objective values, carried out throughout the individual's life, forms a value system that determines the individual motivational-emotional and subjective structure of personality. However, since, as Abraham Harold Maslow demonstrates, a human being is equipped with a natural pressure towards higher values of self-acceptance (Oleś 1981: 152), in the conditions of satisfaction of basic values there is a further individualisation of the system of internal values and the formation of the ultimate (autotelic) values of existence in a mature personality. "They can become the ultimate goals of development because values are those qualities of personal existence that suggest something, make us involved in something, refer us to something, and orient us towards something" (Janiga 2006: 228). The person who fulfils such values feels that he/she discovers and fulfils his/her vocation in life. Such personal maturity is related to the awareness of the meaning of life which, in turn, is strictly connected with the man's natural orientation towards the fulfilment of values existing outside the area of "I" and entering the dimension of 'a need-giving'.

## Individualization of valuing

Values are mentally specified on a micro scale on the axis of human years of life. Figure 2 presents a diagram of two concepts of the fulfilment of values in the mental system. Each of the two suggestions presented distinguishes four levels of valuing which are named differently in these concepts but are uniform components of the value acquisition process. Each successive level is characterised by an increasing cognitive difficulty. The first level (recognition/discovering of values) is accomplished through direct contact with value carriers (e.g. role models) and consists of the cognition and understanding of the value under study. The second level (understanding/experiencing values) requires knowledge of values and the ability to think logically, and results in the emotional interest in the value in question. The third level (recognition-acceptance/interiorization of values) leads to the externalisation of values. It makes the individual involved in the direct fulfilment of the desired value. Entering the fourth level (fulfilment/internalization) involves voluntary and conscious incorporation of a given value into the system of personal values, and then using it to supplement and expand axiological competences. As can be seen, there are elements of individualisation of valuing at each of the levels described.

Figure 2. Stages of the fulfilment of values in the process of acquiring axiological competences in upbringing



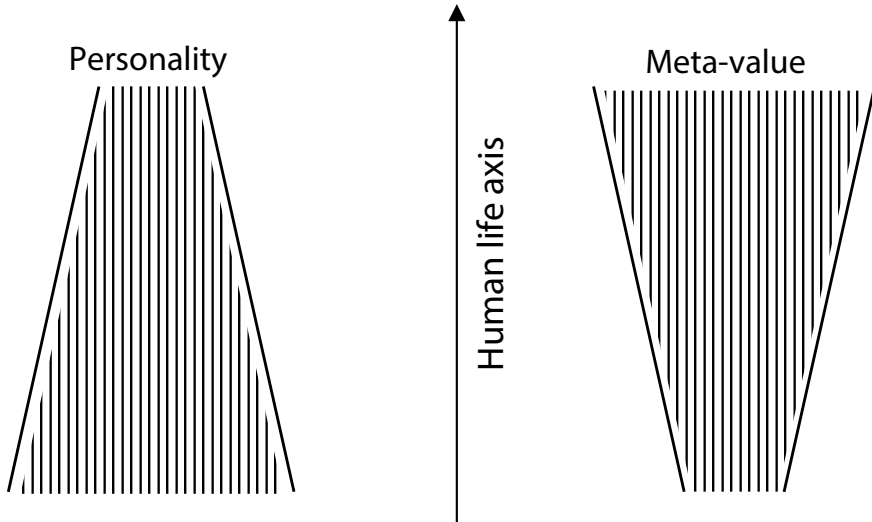
Source: The author's own work based on Ostrowska 2006, Olbrycht 2012.

The effect of the individualization of valuing is shaping two distinct elements of mental states: personality (stable element) and the system of meta-values (dynamic element), which remain components of a theory of mind<sup>4</sup> that ensures development of an individual through the construction of naive theories regarding various elements of the surrounding reality (Haman 2002). These activities lead to a change in a person's attitude towards cognition and values over a lifetime of exposure to values, and provide a field for the individualization of the formation of personality and the system of meta-values. Figure 3 shows how trends in the construction of these elements of the mental system are shaped over the course of a person's life. Personality does not change significantly over the course of life. During childhood, personality traits become more and more stable to become fixed after the age of 7. Robert R. McCrae and Paul T. Costa (2005: 19–20) confirmed this unusual degree of stability of the personality core. Over the course of adult life, one's proficiency in interacting with values and the environment increases, and this contributes to the strengthening of the personality content (Neckar 2005: 14–15). The stability of personality gradually increases until at least the age of 30, which can be attributed to a person's accumulation of life experiences. The perceptible modifications only consist of its detailing, i. e. narrowing it down by eliminating unnecessary details and thus obtaining a crystallization of views. At the same time, features of extreme intensity lose their power. And the meta-values initiated in childhood are extended throughout life – they are expanded with new, previously unknown values and social experiences. Tomasz Ożóg (2004: 62) defines the axiological dynamics of adulthood as conscious axiological activity, which significantly influences the continuous development of the individual's system of meta-values.

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<sup>4</sup> Although the term “theory of mind” has been present in psychology and pedagogy for several decades, it remains relatively difficult to analyse (Smogorzewska 2016: 17). It is most often assumed that theory of mind (interchangeably referred to as mentalization) is the specific ability to explain and predict one's own behaviour and the behaviour of others by attributing independent mental states, such as desire, emotions, beliefs or intentions to them (Baranowska 2020: 51). The construction of theory of mind takes place through the child's continuous interaction with values and through communication with the social environment. Central to the development of personality is, therefore, the activity undertaken by the child. A detailed discussion of this issue goes beyond the scope of this article. For more information on this issue, see: Smogorzewska 2016.

Figure 3. Structure of the processes of valuing the individual system of values



Source: the author's own work.

Thanks to the structures of thought built up in this way, a man is able to preserve his inherent personal freedom to act consciously in accordance with his adopted individual hierarchy of values.

## Personality

“Personality is a set of closely related, significant, relatively constant and permanent intellectual, temperament, emotional and volitional traits, developed and formed under specific conditions of a person’s life” (Panasiuk-Chodnicka, Panasiuk 2008: 49)<sup>5</sup>. Thus, considering the issue of personality is always linked to the axiological context of human activity. On the one hand, values define personality, while, on the other hand, different personality types are characterised by a specific image of values (Gasiul 1987: 42–43). The main period of personality shaping is childhood. During this time, the child adopts an absolutist attitude. This is the expression of cognitive self-confidence, which results in the temporary adoption of multiple values within a single reference to

<sup>5</sup> There is no uniform theory of personality presented by most psychologists. This means that a concise, unambiguous and comprehensive explanation of personality is an almost impossible task. The definition cited, formulated by Anna Panasiuk-Chodnicka and Bazyli Panasiuk, seems to have cognitive and didactic value, which allows for the indication of the relationship between values and personality.



reality. Personality is constructed as a broad set of values, which is defended with perseverance by children as the only truth in thinking. This set of values and experiences is slowly subject to narrowing as individual doubts begin to emerge and develop into a generalised doubt during adolescence. This period is full of new behaviours, hence the impression that the traits underlying the personality sharpen during this time. The personality then crystallizes, becomes structured, refined and stabilised during adulthood, when it is no longer subject to change. It remains static in a format that was nevertheless shaped mainly during childhood and adolescence (McCrae, Costa 2005).

## Meta-values

In the scientific discourse, the prefix “meta” means a higher cognitive reflection which involves looking at a selected issue from the external perspective in order to build a consistent system of ideas and experiences related to this issue. In the case of meta-values, these include such axiological goals as freedom, knowledge, power, religion, tradition, progressivism, equality, health, and life.

A meta-value is a set of values and experiences ordered according to their degree of importance for a given individual, forming a permanent and hierarchical mental structure which is formed gradually as something that is continuously refined and expanded as one grows up (Figure 3). In the personalist-phenomenological philosophy, an unveiling of the entity structure of value systems occurs. For example, according to Max Scheler (2008), values are learned through intuition which is emotional in nature, i. e. its source does not only include acts of reason. At the same time, he believes that it is possible to establish the system of values (we call them meta-values) and its order independently of the world of goods in which they manifest themselves. The development of meta-values is purely receptive. It takes place on the macro scale on a man's axis of the years of life, and it lasts for the whole life.

The objectively existing order of meta-values is determined by the perception of values. Human beings become aware of values through their contemplation, i. e. the act of intuitive perception through the subjective feeling of values. As Scheler (2008: 68) argues, the cognition of values is a kind of feeling of values, but this does not entitle one to conclude that objective values do not exist. It merely reflects a relative approach to values through which they become subjective mental entities of an individual. However, it is the perception of values that captures the individual through values, not the other way around (Kość 1998: 107). Thus, the formation of meta-values takes place, in a way, outside the human being, and it is closely connected with the subjective sense of the meaning of life as the basis of cognitive dynamism. This dynamism is based on the fact that individual systems of meta-values, as well

as meta-values themselves, are constantly changing. Changes in the structures of meta-values depend on changes in the social environment and they are conditioned by the human life cycle (processes of maturation, adolescence and ageing) as well as psychological changes resulting from new experiences. This is due to the processes of gathering experiences in the social sphere, taking place within two categories: the idea of values (the domain of the existence of values) and the value of objects (the domain of the fulfilment of values).

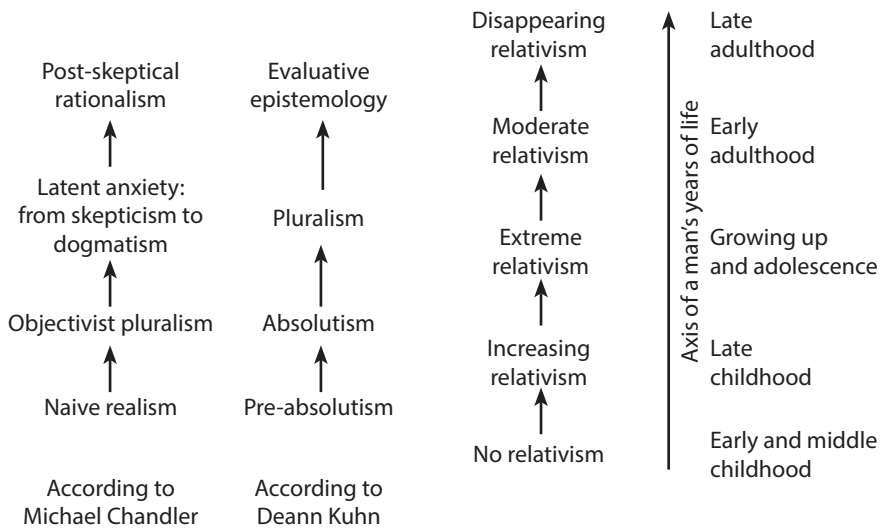
Ultimately, meta-values are related to the most important goals of an individual's life and they are both personal and social. They constitute the basis for the creation of an individual lifestyle to which specific forms of fulfilment of meta-values correspond. In order to ensure the comprehensive development of a personality, all models of life should be taken into account in upbringing children<sup>6</sup> (Janiga 2006: 235).

A diagram of the lifelong construction of meta-values is shown in Figure 4. Human life is traditionally divided into five periods that differ in the attitude of epistemic engagement: early and late childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, and late adulthood. In a broad perspective, the description of the development of cognition concerns relativism, which means the attitude towards values that emerges with the development of thinking (theory of mind). It develops from an absolutist attitude in childhood, through extreme relativism in adolescence, to a moderate relativist attitude that develops in early adulthood and leads to the disappearance of relativism in late adulthood. More elaborate conceptual descriptions do not focus exclusively on the problem of relativism, but they try to formulate more detailed developmental sequences of valuing. Figure 4 shows two of such models (Białecka-Pikul 2005).

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<sup>6</sup> Maria Gołaszewska (1990), for example, presents three lifestyle models to which specific forms of human axiological development correspond. The first one consists of giving meaning to one's existence through the fulfilment of the existing values. In the second model, a man tries to upgrade values in his personality and acquired meta-values through which he gives meaning to his own life. The third lifestyle is related to a man's involvement in the intentional co-creation of new values and thereby enriching both the world and his own life.

Figure 4. Stages of development of human cognition (forming meta-values) in particular periods of life



Source: the author's own work based on Białecka-Pikul 2005.

The formation of meta-values begins in the child at around three years of age, at the time when the construction of core values is already completed. Using a philosophical analogy, this first stage in the development of meta-values at the pre-school level can be called naive realism. It is the child's objectivist belief that the world is as it is, so one can get to know it directly. The child believes that the reality is a mosaic of values, a kind of a kaleidoscope, and that meta-values are a consequence of existing in this reality. As the child grows up, he or she gradually realizes that differences in values result from interests, i. e. from subjective attitudes, and not from the reality of the world (the period of pre-absolutism). In late childhood, the first doubts about the truthfulness of values emerge, revealing themselves as latent anxiety (skepticism) leading to pluralism with regard to values. Significant changes in thinking about values only occur during adolescence: doubt arises from the understanding that there is no absolute value and no objective criteria for the truthfulness of values. In adulthood, a mature solution to this problem rarely emerges immediately. Most often there is a fluctuation between skepticism and dogmatism until an increasingly more mature view of values from multiple perspectives is shaped. There is a willingness to give up searching for the nature of the world, and, at the same time, a readiness to evaluate general human values appears. This period is called post-skeptical rationalism or evaluative epistemology.

Understanding these three issues: the evolution of human cognition, the reference to values and cognitive capacities, should be a guideline to facilitate the acceptance of the diversity of inner mental states, beliefs and desires, and thus it should lead to the construction of individual educational processes.

## Axiological education

The process of education is extensively and deeply rooted in the world of values. Outside this world, education of a young person cannot be truly fulfilled. Theorists of education draw our attention to the stages of axiological education which is, in a way, a transition from a state of unconscious movement in the world of values to a mature attitude in this respect. At the same time, certain regularities in human development are pointed out, which, as Karol Kotłowski (1968: 73) suggests, determine one's upbringing which is a process of integration around values. Also, Józef Tischner postulates experiencing values in upbringing from the perspective of the axiological view of the world. He writes: "To behave properly in this little world of ours, we must be able to 'read values'. [...] Our present world is undoubtedly a world of some kind of values, and we are beings who read values" (Tischner 2011: 483). A world without values is no longer a human world, so axiological education seems to be the key to understanding the world and the meaning of human life.

As it has already been shown, according to the phases of the child's psychological development and the peculiarities of the individual axiological system, upbringing proceeds from absolutism, through pluralism to skepticism. Thus, it is a process perceived as a phenomenon of human existence; as a phenomenon of participation in the world of values. "The phenomenon of upbringing is always 'some' experience, and, at the same time, an understanding that claims and requires further interpretations" (Ablewicz 2003: 45). In an in-depth interpretation and reflection on the axiological aspects of the upbringing process, Władysław Cichoń (1996) identifies the role of emotional understanding of values in the personal development of the child. His research culminates in the attempt to develop an axiological concept of a human being which has its deeper justification in anthropology, the philosophy of being and the theory of values. Under these conditions, the path to values is an extremely difficult task for teachers and students to be performed in the real world, since school is oriented towards the fulfilment of useful (mainly didactic) objectives, eliminating activities that motivate children to the individualization of values in various dimensions of self-fulfilment (as such activities are considered unproductive).

The task of axiological education is to fill this gap by focusing activity around the triad: values – goals – fulfilment (Żuk 2016: 131–143) and generating axiological

situations that encourage the student to take up specific valuing actions. In this way, there may be potential prospects for achieving a state that motivates the child to act and focus his/her activity on values, setting goals and pursuing them.

## Summary

In social sciences, values are considered as cognitive representations referring to preferred target states related to an individual's choices. They are created as individual thought products that are an internal source of valuing external experiences of participation in the world. The process of valuing, which is carried out on the basis of the information thus obtained, is more complex in adults than in young children, as it is fulfilled over the vast areas of past memories as well as ideas concerning the future. Axiological education is, of course, of greatest importance in the preschool and early school years, and it should support the processes of individualization of concluding especially in those periods of human life. They shape the child's personality and focus on the initiation of meta-values which are developed and expanded later in life. For example, Krystyna Chałas (2017) locates values directly in the educational curriculum of a school. By stimulating the pupil's contact with values and helping him/her to experience them as deeply as possible, the school's educational activities aim to raise a person who seeks, acquires and fulfils values. Training the ability to see values in different ways and to build one's own meta-systems of valuing plays an important role in achieving such educational results.

Valuing, which permeates the entirety of human life, equips a person with axiological competences which, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, are as important as having proper knowledge and skills.

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