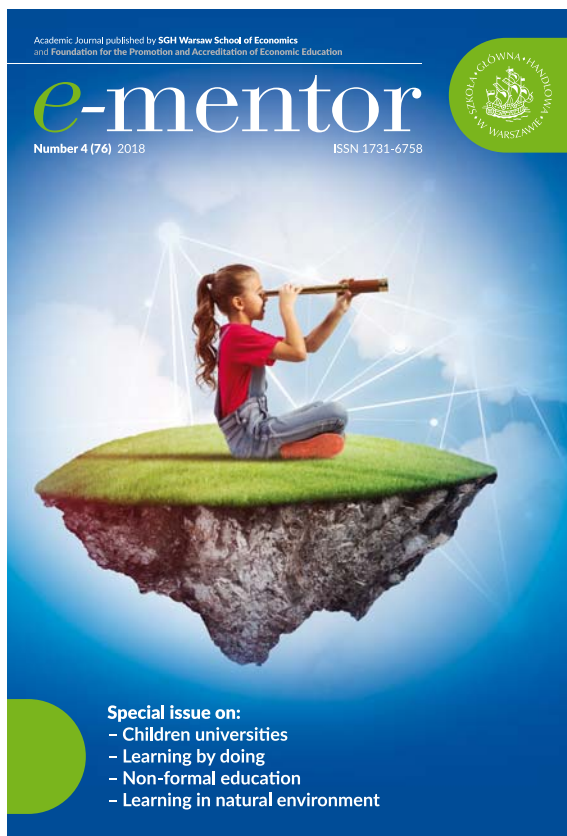


# e-mentor

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## The meetings with the world of science and art – the activity of the University of Children and Parents at the Pedagogical University of Cracow

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*Education – learning, teaching, and upbringing – is an inseparable part of individual and social life. It co-creates every form of human activity through learning (Kojcs, 2012, p. 22), (...) it is a total of intergenerational interactions exploited to formulate the entire life abilities of an individual (...). These actions make a human become a mature creature, consciously realizing his/her goals, 'settled' in a given culture. The person is therefore capable of constructive criticism and reflective affirmation, (...) not limited only to the transmission of messages (let alone knowledge that the learner is actively constructing, building), education should be treated as an interaction between the participants of the process of education (Milerski, Śliwerski, 2000, p. 55). It is conducted not only in educational centers but more and more often in extracurricular institutions, the activities of which support children in developing their interests, cognitive curiosity, creativity as well as in broadening their horizons. These institutions already introduce the youngest children into the secrets of knowledge, the world of science, shape their fascination with the world around them and strengthen their natural need to explore the world. These are certainly children's universities, enjoying increasing popularity in Europe and around the world.*

### Introduction

The first university for children was created in the German city Tübingen in 2002, and it gained recognition among children and their caregivers from the very beginning. Children listened with great interest to lectures on the secrets of the world of science, conducted by university professors (Warchała, 2016). The initiative started in Germany was also undertaken by other countries, including Poland, where children's universities have been established since 2007, operating as extra-curricular forms of education, the basis of which were often created by universities (Łapot-Dzierwa, Szarota, 2017). The first universities were founded in Cracow, Warsaw, Poznan, and Lodz.

### The University of Children and Parents – the goals and principles of the activity

The University of Children and Parents (pol. UDiR) operating at the Pedagogical University of Cracow was established in order to disseminate knowledge in various fields of science, culture, art and technology among children aged 6 to 12 and to conduct broadly understood parental education. The first promotional meeting took place in April 2011 and regular classes with its students began in October of the same year. The first dean of the university was Professor Danuta Waloszek, the next one, since 2013, Professor Kinga Łapot-Dzierwa.

UDiR is a university-wide entity operating within the university's structure. The Programme Council supervises its substantive principles and organization of activities for children whereas the dean supervises the on-going tasks. The Pedagogical University's academics conduct the meetings for children and their parents at UDiR. The offering includes mainly the classes, workshops, and lectures, tailored to the needs and capabilities of the students. Volunteers recruited among the students of pedagogical faculties are also involved. All educational activities undertaken at UDiR are focused on the development of general public knowledge about upbringing, which requires continual extension and updating, and which in consequence may lead to the rise in the general level of culture in intergenerational relations (Łapot-Dzierwa, Szarota, 2017, pp. 73–74).

The learning processes shape every person and every society, especially the knowledge-based society. Therefore, the task of all its members and institutions should be to implement the idea of lifelong-learning (Kojcs, 2012, p. 27). Education is the key to transforming today's society into the knowledge society (Zemło, 2008, p. 61). The activity of the University of Children and Parents goes very clearly in line with the pan-European idea of the knowledge society. In accomplishing its tasks, the university aims to instill in young students

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a passion for learning, the desire to obtain knowledge and the ability to use it to pursue further educational tasks or to solve problems. In every action the university undertakes, it focuses on developing children's creativity, indispensable for functioning in today's world and for creating reality in one's chosen way. It also concentrates on propagating scientific and cultural thought, giving inspiration for creative thinking and acting, familiarizing with the academic environment, but above all on social integration through the involvement of the following groups: an academic teacher – a child – a parent – a grandparent – a volunteer/student (Łapot-Dzierwa, Szarota, 2017, p. 77).

Since 2015 the meetings at the University of Children and Parents takes place twice a month and are delivered in two age groups (younger children: aged 4–7 and older children: aged 8–12). Previously, the classes were conducted with all children simultaneously.

While the youngest participate in the classes, their parents and caregivers can take part in lectures specially designed for them. The topics of the talks are prepared following the participants' suggestions and proposals, collected at the beginning of each academic year. These are issues of both pedagogical and educational nature, in the scope of which parents express a desire to deepen their knowledge and meet a team of specialists, to supplement their frequently common knowledge with its scientific background.

The classes for children are always prepared by the didactic team. They aim at discovering and making the scientific thought comprehensible in the academic space. They are often delivered in specialized laboratories appropriate to the subject, which gives children an opportunity to familiarize with the specificity of scientific and technical work, as well as to acquire the basic concepts of the selected areas, fields and disciplines (Łapot-Dzierwa, Szarota, 2017). The children's high involvement in the given tasks shows that the chosen topics are exciting and inspiring for them. The classes are conducted by specialists in various fields: physicists, chemists, mathematicians, Polish language teachers, librarians, musicians, and artists. Each specialist tries to communicate the difficult scientific content in an accessible way and thus make the children involved in the discussed issues.

The content of the proposed classes with children and parents clearly shows that the creators of the University of Children and Parents and all persons involved in the work, *knowing the children's passion for learning about the world, take them on a trip around different subjects and topics and at the same time offer their parents a tour around various issues of upbringing* (Łapot-Dzierwa, Szarota, 2017, p. 77) and education to support their children with cognitive, social or emotional development.

The classes for children usually have a form of workshops and are organized in a very accessible way to trigger a spontaneous activity of the participants as much as possible. It is common knowledge that the youngest are much more willing to engage in activities that not only arouse their cognitive curiosity, relate to

their interests, are rich in a variety of stimuli but also encourage them to get involved. When the activities take the form of a play, they provide an opportunity to acquire knowledge independently and better experience the surrounding world.

In addition to regular classes, the students of the University of Children and Parents can also take advantage of additional sports activities organized specially for them (conducted by the staff of the Sports and Recreation Center) at the swimming pool and in the gym, as well as art and ceramics workshops. Children's works created during the workshops mentioned above are always presented at exhibitions in the main building of the Pedagogical University of Cracow.

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### **The involvement of UDiR students in the 'Artists in the world of pedagogy' project**

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In 2017 and 2018 a group of 25 volunteering children from the University of Children and Parents participated in the project 'Artists in the world of pedagogy. The meetings in the field of art, art as a space for shaping cultural and artistic competences of children and youth – educational implications,' implemented by the Department of Artistic Education of the Pedagogical University of Cracow (in cooperation with the selected staff from the Institute of Pre-school and School Pedagogy of the Pedagogical University as well as some external stakeholders). The project is a part of the task No. 589/P-DUN/2017, financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education earmarked for science promoting activities.

One of the objectives of the project was to help children to build their cultural identity through their contact with tradition and pieces of art, assuming that this should be mostly carried out in educational establishments – both formal and informal. Indirect goals were the promotion and dissemination of activities of both staff and students of the Pedagogical University, and the University of Children and Parents. The project also proved the effectiveness of the 'Education through art' approach (developed by the staff of the Department of Artistic Education of the Pedagogical University of Cracow). The indicated concept assumes, among other things, that art *has extraordinary qualities, enhancing the recognition of the facts and events always in new and different arrangements and contexts. The recipient (in this case a child/a student) discovers new areas for himself/herself and gains knowledge about the surrounding world. In this way, each meeting with the art transforms into an effective and professional activity, leaving a lasting mark not only in the form of a product but in the processes of internal changes* (Łapot-Dzierwa, Małoszowski, Baś, in print).

The project was also aimed at shaping children's sensitivity and respect for culture and art in general, referring to its continuity and tradition; using what the development of civilization brings, including technologies and new media. By combining tradition with the future, perceiving the phenomena of culture and art as a continuous process, open to the constant

search for values, it referred to basic human needs in a practical dimension.

The authors and the implementers of the project, through their actions, wanted to show that stimulation, animation and finally co-participation of a pedagogue-artist in the creative process of a child leads to the formation of the child's attitudes, which in itself has all the appearances of creation, and at the same time allows the pedagogue to improve his/her creative competence. What is particularly important in the cooperation between a child and an artist is the fact that the child can get support from the person with both the substantive and 'technical' experience as well as become aware of being involved in the creation process with all its consequences.

A vital part of the project was the Small Academy of Arts created for children from the University of Children and Parents. The artistic and educational initiatives carried out by the Academy were aimed, inter alia, at learning about the richness of Polish culture and art,

promoting children's creativity and popularizing the 'Education through art' concept. Kinga Łapot-Dzierwa, the professor of the Pedagogical University, an artist, a teacher, an educator, an employee of the Institute of Pre-school and School Pedagogy at the Pedagogical University of Cracow was the supervisor of the group.

The activities of the Academy were carried out regularly and had a form of the workshops, preceded by content presentations that formed the educational basis for these workshops. They were inspired by the works of eminent Polish artists and conducted by professionals dealing with painting, graphic design and new media.

Table 1. presents a list of the selected issues implemented within the framework of the Small Academy of Arts in the academic year 2017/2018.

Although the children who attended the workshops were of different ages (5–12 years), they worked together, integrated well and communicated with one another successfully. Frequently, the older children

**Table 1. A list of the selected topics covered within the framework of the Small Academy of Arts in the academic year 2017/2018 and their key objectives**

The subject of the class	Main goals
1. <i>Painted with flowers</i> (pol. <i>Kwieciem malowane</i> ) – the inspiration of Stanisław Wyspiański's painting and the folk painting of Zalipie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– developing imagination and perception through observation of the natural environment and the surroundings (Polish flowers characteristic of the Malopolska region);</li> <li>– analyzing the selected works of art with particular emphasis on the specificity of Stanisław Wyspiański's work (Polish flowers) and the specificity of Zalipie painting;</li> <li>– making a piece of art work referring to the content discussed (a combined technique – painting with tissue paper, drawing with markers).</li> </ul>
2. <i>Beast or no beast</i> (pol. <i>Zwierz nie zwierz</i> ) – the inspiration by Józef Wilkoń art and the texts of Polish legends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– developing imagination through observation of the natural environment;</li> <li>– analyzing the selected works of art with particular emphasis on the characteristic features (fantasy and uniqueness, originality of the visual message) of the works of Józef Wilkoń;</li> <li>– analyzing the selected texts – Polish legends including animal elements (fantastic);</li> <li>– creating an artistic work that reflects the content described (a colorful scratch).</li> </ul>
3. <i>Autumn impressions</i> (pol. <i>Jesienne impresje</i> ) – the inspiration by Jan Stanisławski's painting and the texts of Polish poets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– developing perception and imagination through observation of the natural environment and the surroundings (autumn landscape);</li> <li>– analyzing the selected works of art with particular emphasis on the characteristic features of autumn landscape using the works of Jan Stanisławski;</li> <li>– analyzing the selected texts – poems by Polish poets in which one can find the descriptions of the autumn landscape;</li> <li>– making an art work about autumn (a combined art technique – painting with watercolors + drawing).</li> </ul>
4. <i>A house on a head</i> (pol. <i>Dom na głowie</i> ) – the inspiration of Jacek Yerka's painting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– developing imagination – unusual and untypical phenomena found in the natural and a child's environment;</li> <li>– analyzing the selected works of art with particular emphasis on the specificity of Jacek Yerka's creativity (<i>Two Snails</i>/pol. <i>Dwa ślimaki</i>, <i>Ace Tee</i>, <i>Express Shipping</i>/pol. <i>Przesyłka ekspresowa</i>) with particular emphasis on interesting and untypical artistic solutions, unreality and fantasy;</li> <li>– creating an art work referring to the discussed issues (a drawing collage).</li> </ul>
5. <i>Is the snow white?</i> – the inspiration of the works of Ferdynand Ruszczyc and Julian Fałat, the texts of Polish poets and music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– developing imagination by observing the natural environment, the immediate surrounding and changes occurring in nature;</li> <li>– analyzing the selected works of art with particular emphasis on the specificity of the works of Ferdynand Ruszczyc (<i>A Winter Fairytale</i>/pol. <i>Bajka zimowa</i>) and Julian Fałat (<i>Snow</i>/pol. <i>Śnieg</i>, <i>A Winter Landscape</i>/pol. <i>Krajobraz zimowy</i>), including the issues related to the characteristics of the colors appearing in a winter landscape;</li> <li>– analyzing the selected excerpts of literary texts and music concerning the topic of the classes;</li> <li>– creating an art work referring to winter and landscape (flat paper technique – creating a picture from gray colored paper using a paper tearing method).</li> </ul>

Source: Author's own study.

helped the younger ones, who therefore were motivated to work with double effort and commitment. The children's knowledge of the tackled topics and artworks presented during the classes is also worth noting. The experience was remarkable, and according to the participants' opinions, it has been obtained during the joint trips with parents to various galleries and museums. Even the works of the artists who were less known to children generated their great interest followed by the multitude of questions about the creators and their lives, children's attitude to the smallest details of the artworks, interest in color, composition and their subject matter. Creating their own pieces of art was a source of great joy for children, which in turn increased their commitment to work. Also, the artistic techniques which were previously unknown to them made the job even more attractive.

It must be stressed that all the workshops conducted as part of the Small Academy of Art triggered amazing creative expression and joy of creation in children. That resulted in great artistic works, that will constitute material for the catalog to be published at the end of the project.

The workshops for students of the Pedagogical University, whose role was to assist children during the creative classes were another vital part of the described project. That was an excellent occasion for the students to deepen their methodological knowledge and to design their educational activities. The acquired knowledge and skills could be used during several workshops with children from the Small Academy of Arts, in which they had an opportunity to take part looking at the work of children and participating in the creative process.

The authors intend to continue the project 'Artists in the world of pedagogy' in 2019, which will undoubtedly open up new opportunities for children from the University of Children and Parents. It would allow involving a higher number of children and students in the project activities and introducing them into the rich world of not only the Polish but also the world art and culture.

## Abstract

*The text presents the activity of the University of Children and Parents established by the Pedagogical University of Cracow. The primary aim of the study is to show examples of practices that can become an inspiration for other educational institutions of this type.*

*The first part of the article presents the main goals and principles of the university's activities and describes the types of meetings for children and their parents, as the means of broadly understood extra-curricular and parental education.*

*In the second part, the author of the paper presents the general idea of the project 'Artists in the world of pedagogy. The meetings in the field of art, art as a space for shaping cultural and artistic competences of children and youth – educational implications,' with particular emphasis on the Small Academy of Art, which was created as a part of the project. Students of the University of Children and Parents have an opportunity to participate in the Academy and learn about the richness of Polish culture and art and pursue their creative passions.*

**Key words:** University of Children and Parents; extracurricular activities; workshops for children; lectures for parents; creativity; creation

## Conclusions

The University of Children and Parents operating at the Pedagogical University of Cracow is very popular among children and their parents. It gives them an opportunity to spend their free time in an interesting and creative way. It introduces them to the world of science in an accessible way, adapted to the participants' needs and possibilities. It attempts to instill in young people the eagerness to learn, to explore the surrounding world and acquire knowledge independently. The UDiR also tries to contribute to intergenerational education, based on the dialogue, integration, mutual learning, and exchange of experiences. Additionally, in 2017 and 2018, the UDiR students had an opportunity to participate voluntarily in the Small Academy of Art, a part of the project 'Artists in the world of pedagogy.' It aims to promote the Polish artists' art and culture among young learners.

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