I w o n a   J a z u k i e w i c z
ORCID: 0000-0002-1562-6845
University of Szczecin

Sensitivity as a Subject of Pedagogical Reflection

ABSTRACT

The goal of the article is to dwell upon sensitivity and its comprehension, and on the meaning of shaping sensitivity for the quality of everyday functioning. The research issue is to answer the question: what is human sensitivity like? The structure of the article contains three parts: theoretical and empirical characteristics of sensitivity, and the practical aspect of its shaping in the upbringing process.

The theory of sensitivity is interdisciplinary. In the full meaning of sensitivity, four components are pointed out: cognitive, emotional, acting and moral one. The function of integrating particular aspects of understanding sensitivity is ascribed to pedagogical theory. The empirical research considering sensitivity is heading towards diagnosing it and searching for its relationships with other phenomena. The scales of sensitivity levels are constructed for children, adolescents and adults. The examples of studies of Polish and foreign scientists are provided. The empirical characteristics of sensitivity reveals it as a phenomenon which may be treated as a resource that facilitates human functioning in everyday life. The conclusions from the theoretical and empirical characteristics of sensitivity have been treated as an important premise for shaping sensitivity in the processes of education and upbringing. Those conclusions constitute the third part of the article and they can be used for creating and adjusting the upbringing practice.

In the article, sensitivity is treated as a strong side of a human being (a virtue) which can and needs to be shaped in the process of upbringing. It is necessary for creating positive intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. Diminishing the meaning of sensitivity can be perceived as an indicator of the regress of humanity.

Introduction

Sensitivity is a beautiful feature of human emotionality. Such beauty is shaped by the value of sensitive being due to which we can be for others and not just for ourselves. Sensitivity is present in many creative activities, starting from the state called inspiration, through the development of creativity, and ending with motivation and releasing power to act. As a matter of fact, ending should not be indicated here, because the joy of creation has no limits (Koberda 2005).

The beauty of sensitivity has another face. It can be destructive if it is left on its own. It reveals a person in front of others, making him/her exposed to hurting; it makes one tired with its depth and multitude of perceived and experiences stimuli; it introduces hesitance while considering various dilemmas and making decisions, which hinders or prevents a person's efficient action. In the common perception, sensitivity is mistaken for psychological weakness, emotional instability, or even a form of immaturity. Sensitivity includes the necessity to be exposed to suffering (Baczko 1964: 328). However, Ryszard Kapuściński, a great journalist, considered it to be an important element of the axiological order of the world. Here is what he wrote in *Lapidaria*: "I fear the world without values, without sensitivity, without thinking. The world in which everything is possible. Because then, evil is what becomes the most possible" (Kapuściński 2007: 323). Thus, our research problem is the following question: What is human sensitivity like?

The reflection on the category of sensitivity hardly ever occurs in the pedagogical discourse although upbringing and self-upbringing are the processes in which there is a place for shaping sensitivity. A wise approach to sensitivity is necessary for a person's holistic development. Improper approach to it results in losing one's inner balance, which causes external disharmony in social relationships. It is a person who decides about the place and meaning of sensitivity in his/her psycho-physical condition, so they should be prepared for this.

The author of this article shares the fear of the world without values. The subject of this text is sensitivity treated as a person's strong point which may and should be shaped in the process of upbringing. What is more, it is necessary for shaping good intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships. Devaluing it may be treated as an indicator of the regress of humanity. The objective of the article is dwelling on the perception of a person's sensitivity and on the meaning of shaping it for the quality of everyday functioning. In order to fulfil this objective, we will analyse books on this subject in which we can find the power of the theory that inspires interpretation and the depth of empirical experience which creates and corrects practice. They determine the structure of the article, with the indication of the theoretical and empirical characteristics of sensitivity and the practical dimension of shaping it in the process of education.

Theoretical characteristics of sensitivity

Theory of sensitivity is interdisciplinary. In the interpretation of the perception and value of sensitivity, the premises of humanist and social sciences were taken into account, although other fields of science, such as medicine or art, are also interested in sensitivity. Taking into account theoretical premises of various sciences contributes to the full understanding of the concept of sensitivity in which several components can be distinguished: the philosophical theory emphasizes the meaning of the cognitive component of sensitivity; the psychological theory emphasizes its emotional component; and the sociological theory—the component related to acting. These components permeate one another, which is why the pedagogical theory was given the function of integrating particular aspects of understanding sensitivity, with special emphasis on the moral component.

The cognitive component

Without sensitivity it is impossible to understand a person. It is philosophy that gives such an important meaning to the explanation of sensitivity. Denis Diderot, a French philosopher of the Enlightenment period, believed that sensitivity is the mother of humanity and that it makes sensitive people "exist more" (cf. Markowski 2013: 222).

This existential description clearly correlates with the statement of Barbara Skarga, a modern philosopher, according to which sensitivity constitutes an immanent part of identity which deepens human existence (Skarga 1997: 152). Anna Kamińska considers sensitivity as a source of reason, justifying this thesis with the utterances of well-known philosophers:

> Thus, we may conclude that human consciousness, which includes thinking and understanding, is a form of sensitivity. That is why Pascal may speak about "the unreason of indifferent people" (Pascal 2008: 115), and Jaspers "about the experience of understanding and misunderstanding another person" (Jaspers 1993: 122) or "about experiencing co-thinking" (Jaspers 1993: 129). Z. Cackowski calls this kind of cognitive sensitivity "fearful vigilance" because, in his opinion, real consciousness is and must be burdened with pain, a sense of danger and fear. At the same time, he emphasizes the meaning of the French word *appréhension*—fear, anxiety, but also—capturing, seizure, the ability to capture or understand something. The word indicates the principal connection between fear and consciousness, perception and seizure. Understanding (consciousness) of the world, life and people is rooted in fear as its negation and overcoming. Fearful sensitivity turns out to be the source of the effort aimed at cognition—the drive of transcending activities, and in this sense, it is the source of human reason. Also, such sensitivity is the necessary condition for lasting and surviving in the world, especially in the "pain-generating" world of "liquid modernity" which requires particularly intensive vigilance (Kamińska 2006/2007: 45–46).

On the basis of the above-mentioned quotation, we could state that it is the specific aspect of sensitivity, i.e. negative sensitivity, which is the source of human reason. However, such conclusion is questioned by further considerations:

> The origin of human reasonableness also has its positive aspect. It leads through pleasure, delight, satisfaction, happiness and hope, as well as the expectation that these experiences will be repeated. Consciousness includes awaiting pain and fear, but also joy and hope. Human reasonableness cannot exist neither where there is a certainty of success, nor where there is total helplessness and despair (Kamińska 2006/2007: 46).

Thus, sensitivity is a specific cognitive disposition of a human being and its meaning increases in the age of overwhelming technology and information. This age is also characterized by the fact that people base their relationships of love and friendship on egoistic pleasure instead of on mutual, selfless fulfilment in those relationships. The

philosophical interpretation of sensitivity emphasizes one of its important components, i.e. the cognitive component, which eliminates the typical oppositional quality of traditional thinking according to which something is either rational or emotional. This alternative is adequately expressed by the words of Blaise Pascal:

> People who are used to judging things with emotions do not understand the process of reasoning; they want to capture a thing at once with one look, and they are not used to looking for principles. The other type, on the contrary, are used to reason on the basis of principles, and they fail to understand the issues of emotions (Pascal 2008: 30).

However, rationality does not have to exclude emotions. They are one of the motivational elements of action. Thus, sensitivity is the source of human reason and the factor of cognitive motivation.

The emotional component

The emotional aspect of sensitivity is emphasized by psychology. The ability to experience various stimuli is the basic definition of sensitivity (cf. Chojnacka 2018: 114). We can distinguish simple sensual sensitivity, which is the body's response to stimuli from the outside world, and "higher" sensitivity related to thinking and emotional processes (Przybylski 1978: 48). Kazimierz Dąbrowski emphasized that particular people react to external and internal stimulation in different ways (Dąbrowski 1975), which indicates individual diversity of sensitivity. Thus, it can be expressed in the category of a subjective feature of varied intensity. Marta Rakoczy, a culture expert, emphasized the ambiguity of perceiving this feature as passive or active:

> The lexicon of Polish language hesitates between treating sensitivity as a positive quality, related to "the ability to experience impressions and emotions; tenderness, emotionality," and understanding it as "vulnerability to something; the lack of resistance to something" (*Uniwersalny słownik języka polskiego PWN* 2003: 508). In the former meaning, the lexicon presents it either as an innate feature of an organism or as an intentional opportunity which cannot be reduced to what has been given in a natural manner. That semantic ambiguity results in the fact that sensitivity may be understood in two different ways. In accordance with the first definition, sensitivity consists in passive exposure to particular impulses from outside. The second meaning defines it as an active skill connected not only with feeling but also with searching for stimuli; with

a creative (and not reactive) attitude towards a given experience. (…) The above-mentioned ambiguity in perceiving sensitivity (as a passive or active feature), and related cultural conceptualizations of a sensitive subject, accompanies numerous modern projects which, in my opinion, have a fundamental influence on the Western, including Polish, modernity (Rakoczy 2018: 141).

The perception of sensitivity as a subjective feature is sometimes narrowed because of sex. It is claimed that sensitivity is one of "typically feminine" qualities, along with tenderness, protectiveness or changeability. In this case, "women's sensitivity does not constitute (…) their virtue, but a desirable property without which their femininity becomes doubtful" (Szpunar 2017: 130). However, not every modern woman accepts the traditional perception of feminine attributes, modifying them through the adoption of documents typical of a masculine lifestyle, which may be connected with conscious loss of sensitivity. It is worth mentioning that the consequences of this choice are not only related to external signs of womanhood since it is claimed that sensitivity "determines the quality of interpersonal contacts and confirms a person's full development" (Błaszczyk 2010: 95). Thus, losing it is equal to destroying one's humanity. This conclusion refers to a human being irrespective of his/her sex.

A person lives in the world. He/she receives external and internal stimuli, and responds to them in different ways, making relationships with the world and shaping his/her lifestyle. One of such stimuli includes values. A person's opinion on them makes him/her "specified" in their thinking and acting. Also, lifestyle includes sensitivity as the ability to feel what reaches a person as a stimulus. In a relationship with another person, sensitivity gains special dimension as co-understanding and co-feeling of who I am for the other person and who he/she is for me. Thus, we may assume that sensitivity is related to the co-existence of people. It means a specific way of opening to another person, through which we can get to know ourselves and another person. Sensitivity is preceded with cognition: "First there is sensitivity, then cognition comes which must refer to sensitivity. If sensitivity is excluded, cognition has nothing it can be based on" (Markowski 2010: 104). Such opening to another person is characterized by radicalism and riskiness. It is full of sincerity and trust, but a person may also experience suffering (Jędraszewski 1994: 154).

However, "the longer I know someone, the more sensitive to him/her I become" (Chojnacka 2018: 123). The longer we know someone, the better we know his/her behaviours. We can even anticipate such behaviours thanks to our sensitivity. However, even if our sensitivity is high, we cannot "permeate" a person to such an extent that he/she stops being a mystery to us. If love is a selfless concern for another person, sensitivity is the necessary ability to shape this relationship. Love is a "relationship that consists in being with one another, caring and sympathizing with one another" (cf. Chojnacka 2018: 123). The development of mutual sensitivity is building the common space based on concern. Perhaps this form of common vigilance is what Heraclitus of Ephesus meant when he wrote: "The vigilant ones have a common world; the sleeping ones are turned towards their separate worlds" (Heraclitus 1992: 9).

The psychological theory of sensitivity confirms the ambiguous nature of the phenomenon. On the one hand, it provides the basic, the simplest explanation of sensitivity as the response to a stimulus. However, if we stop at this level of understanding, we will conclude that the state of the lack of sensitivity (apart from the status of a disease) is impossible because a person is so deeply connected with the reality that he/she always receives some stimuli. On the other hand, watching social life proves that people's sensitivity (or insensitivity) to the same situation is different. Thus, the basic definition of sensitivity requires development, because creating and correcting the world of relations, especially intrapersonal and interpersonal ones, requires various ways of being: feeling and sympathizing, experiencing and co-experiencing, concern and love. Sensitivity, which is naturally given as a feature, may also be perceived as a skill the content and intensity of which may be shaped through upbringing and self-upbringing.

The acting component

Theodor Adorno, a sociologist, claimed that high sensitivity "clarifies" each social phenomenon (Adorno 1984: 5). In sociology, sensitivity gains a discursive nature, which means that this concept is shaped by the cultural and social context. Such a nature is reflected in the ways of using language, transmitted ideas and

social interactions (Stoch 2016: 131). In this approach, sensitivity is a s o c i a l - c u l t u r a l competence which shapes social imagination and manifests its own presence or absence through specific actions in cultural spaces: "Sensitivity is a social and cultural competence, and not the essential feature ascribed to a person *a priori*. We learn sensitivity in the processes of socialization. Individuals who are deprived of this 'training of sensitivity' cannot adjust themselves to the existing social norms" (Stoch 2016: 131). According to the quoted author, the concept of sensitivity refers to the relationship between majority-minority, strong-weak, dominance-submission (Stoch 2016: 131). Thus, the sociological theory of sensitivity situates the phenomenon on the continuum of intensity which is determined by many factors.

The aspect of relationality and action is also specified in perceiving sensitivity as the a t t i t u d e towards intentions, feelings and actions of ourselves and other people. This attitude is based on responsibility, honesty and justice, and following these values is based on empathy, concern and kindness (cf. Klimaszewska 2008: 70). The attitude and action of a sensitive person may be compared to leaving a safe hiding place, using the images presented by Antoni Kępiński and Józef Tischner. Antoni Kępiński, a scientist and a doctor of axiological psychiatry, wrote:

> Modern conditions of our civilization make it difficult for us to accept the responsibility for ourselves and for our environment. Also, they hinder the release of creative tendencies. The consumer attitude clearly dominates the creative attitude, and the (sometimes) negative emotional attitude towards the surrounding world causes that "I take" dominates "I give." A person is not willing to give good emotions to the world which is indifferent or even hostile to him/her (Kępiński 1977: 155).

Józef Tischner noticed that the world, with its wars and crimes, has always been the source of fear for a rational person. The problem is how we can overcome this fear, and it is this suggestion of the modern civilization that is frequently unclear:

> The method of improving one's power over a person questions his/her freedom, faithfulness and sense of dignity. A person who is "owned," is already lost. His/her closeness does not give us happiness, but makes us bitter and helpless. We do have someone around, but can we say why we have him/her? The more we own a person, the thicker the wall between the owner and the owned one is (Tischner 2011: 464).

The main sociological question is whether modern culture gives us any suggestions concerning the solution. It is difficult to give an unequivocal answer to this question, and after reading the above-quoted two works we can conclude that modern culture may be the source of such hope provided that we experience some changes in the way we perceive values and ourselves, and this task first of all refers to those who creates culture. It is because the way a person experiences values is "the place in which roads cross that lead either to a hiding place or to a space open with hope. Depending on the choice made, a person will either walk through life along the path of creation, or he/she will stick to the certainty of a hiding place" (Tischner 2011: 456). A hiding place is the place of "fearful freedom; freedom concerned about the need to protect itself. An open space of hope is the space of freedom concerned for the need to fulfill values" (Tischner 2011: 456–457). A hiding place is safe inside, but it is surrounded by the space of possible relationships with other people. People "from hiding places" refer to being with others in a specific manner:

> Whoever had a contact with a person from a hiding place, felt uncertain ground under his/her feet: something is expected of them, but nobody knows what it is. The deeper a person is in their hiding place, the more important meetings with others are for him/her, and the more fossilized and difficult to change the form of such meetings is. Sometimes the one who hides aims at befriending people; at other times, he/she keeps them at a distance. Sometimes he/she accuses people of various things without any reason; sometimes he/she accuses himself/herself, as if they wanted to provoke acquittal. All of this has a specific objective: the person is trying to keep another person at a safe distance from his/her hiding place. That is why, the hiding person plays a kind of a game with others—a game of seizure. For the hiding person, seizure is the basic form of becoming familiar with other people and the world (Tischner 2011: 457).

The change expected in the way of experiencing values and oneself refers to going out of the hiding place and finding a different way of "becoming familiar" with the world. This is facilitated by the attitude which is understanding and not fearful. A person feels well among those whom he/she met and understood, and those who met and understood him/her. Such a meeting and understanding was preceded with sensitivity. For sensitive people the world that surrounds them is a mystery which attracts them and invites them to a meeting and friendship.

The age of terror, violence, unemployment, and hunger, makes the world hostile and generates fearful attitudes that force us to fight or escape in order to protect ourselves. The choice: either I will destroy or I will be destroyed, forces us to become insensitive to the stimuli we experience. Fearful people are unable to act in a sensitive manner (Szpunar 2018: 21).

The acting component is more probable to occur if the cognitive and emotional sensitivity exist together. Sometimes a person with high cognitive sensitivity lacks the emotional component, or the other way round. The functions of those components are different. Due to cognitive sensitivity, "we can notice and separate elements which others cannot see; elements that most people ignore" (Pleszczyński 2018: 96). Along with curiosity and the ability to feel surprised, with which cognitive sensitivity coexists, such sensitivity breaks the monotony of what seems to be unimportant or uninteresting to less sensitive ones. Emotional sensitivity, in turn, is related to decisions concerning closeness or rejection: "Emotional adequacy consists in the ability to properly assess one's own attitude towards another person and towards people in general, and *vice versa*—to assess the attitude of other individuals and the society as a whole to oneself" (Pleszczyński 2018: 96). Cognitive sensitivity "requires sensual activity oriented outwards, because it is comprised of cognition and knowledge. Emotional sensitivity is oriented inwards; it aims at creating bonds and feeling the uniqueness of a given situation" (Pleszczyński 2018: 97). Shaping sensitivity requires taking into account each component in order not to reinforce the stereotypical contradiction of rationality and emotionality of life. Nowadays, emotional sensitivity requires particular attention in this respect. As it has been noticed, "cognitive values dictated by the intellect defend themselves through being true, which is why they are, in a way, easy. Values related to emotional sensitivity are more difficult because their importance cannot be proved through the reference to truth" (Pleszczyński 2018: 98).

Mutual permeation of cognitive and emotional processes makes it easier for us to adopt a sensitive attitude and specific behaviour. Due to the sociological interpretation, we can perceive sensitivity as a kind of activity of life.

The moral component

The above-mentioned French philosopher, Denis Diderot, introduced an interesting approach to sensitivity, saying that "it is a tender and delicate disposition of a soul which makes the soul easily moved and touched (…). Sensitive souls exist more than others: good and bad things multiply in their eyes. A reflection may make a person reliable, but sensitivity makes a person virtuous" (quoted in: Markowski 2013: 221–222). This thought emphasizes another component of sensitivity: the moral component. Not only does sensitivity make a person virtuous; sensitivity itself can be considered a virtue. This task can be given to the pedagogical theory which performs the function that integrates knowledge of a person's education (cf. Chodkowska 2008: 47).

Considering sensitivity in the category of a virtue has clear moral connotations, because virtue is always good from the moral point of view, and its expression is a morally good action. Virtue expresses the righteousness of a person and his/her action because it is the consequence of making intellect and will good, and the inclination to perform morally good deeds (Jazukiewicz 2012: 174). Particular dimensions of sensitivity may theoretically be separated and analysed as separate components, but, in reality, they constitute a whole that specifies a person in his/her attitude towards themselves and other people. The category of a virtue connects the harmonious realization of these dimensions.

On the basis of the presented philosophical, psychological and sociological premises, we may assume that the virtue of sensitivity increases a person's cognitive ability to experience and understand the world, life and people. Also, it reinforces a person in a volitional and emotional manner in the individual feeling of what is experienced, including feeling the uniqueness of a given situation. Sensitivity is reflected in behaviour which is not indifferent to what is felt and experienced, and which is oriented at creating a cognitive and emotional bond. Shaping such a bond confirms a person's openness and positive attitude, understanding and co-understanding, feeling and sympathizing, experiencing and co-experiencing, i.e. a specific way of being which excludes seizure and possession, but introduces

concern for building the common space. It is a way of being which is characterized by:

- an attitude which is understanding and co-understanding, experiencing and co-experiencing, and not fearful;
- openness, meeting and friendship instead of fighting or escaping;
- focusing on learning about oneself, others and the world and letting others meet oneself instead of "protecting" oneself; this specific making oneself "familiar" with the world results in the certainty of being;
- curiosity and surprise instead of monotony and indifference;
- attention and noticing instead of insignificance and "losing" things; noticing uniqueness instead of commonness and ordinariness;
- adequacy of the assessment of one's own plans, feelings and behaviours towards other people, and the attitude of others towards oneself;
- closeness instead of rejection;
- joy and affirmation instead of sadness and negation; hope and creation instead of pessimism and tiredness.

Sensitivity, as a virtue, seems to be a person's strength. Its power results from the conducive way of living. Such a lifestyle includes being kind to others and allowing them to remain and fulfill themselves. Conducive approach facilitates experiencing the joy of life. Its opposite is "inconducive" way of living as a result of which a person experiences existential sadness instead of development. The conducive power of virtue excludes fear and anxiety which are typical of the attitude of seizure and possession.

Interpreting sensitivity in the category of a virtue reduces the ambiguity of perceiving sensitivity and its results. Such ambiguity includes, on the one hand, seeing sensitivity as a creative attitude towards what is being experienced, and, on the other hand, as a form of a person's weakness and immaturity. Virtue is a category that has its value. This is moral goodness as an attribute of virtue. That is why, virtue is the beauty of being. Because of virtue, a person not only exists, but, in a specific way, he/she can refer to his/her being. This reference is characterized by the person's constant orientation at the fulfilment of moral goodness (Jazukiewicz 2012: 163–164). It

is possible due to improving human intellect in recognizing moral goodness, improving our will in selecting what is good, and improving human emotionality so that it makes it possible to emotionally refer to indicating the intellect and choosing the will. The unity of the action of the reason, will and the complex structure of emotionality is the basis for practicing each virtue (Jazukiewicz 2012: 177). Also, it is the subject of upbringing which, as a social process, refers to a person's improvement in humanity through the fulfilment of his/her developmental potential:

> A person becomes better, in accordance with his/her abilities, through good deeds. He/she chooses doing good which is adequate to their rational nature. Such adequacy is expressed in the fact that, through the fulfilment of goodness, a person becomes morally improved: "goodness perfects existence" (Wojtyła 1957: 307). Our own moral perfection is secondary to the good we do (Jazukiewicz 2012: 186).

In order to shape values, harmony is needed as harmony expresses moral internal order (rationality, freedom and emotionality) and external order as a kind of a person's orderliness of actions. Due to this, a person and his/her action gains power as existence which does not have to change.

Shaping the virtue of sensitivity requires taking into account all its components. Thus, this category of sensitivity analysis is properly ascribed to the pedagogical theory, because it integrates the knowledge of a person's education using theoretical and empirical premises from other disciplines. Sensitivity should be understood properly and shaped in practice, so that it could constitute a person's strong point in shaping the relationships with the world and his/her own way of being. The category of a virtue determines the positive image of sensitivity. Then, we begin to understand the utterances concerning sensitivity as the mother of humanity and a skill that is necessary in shaping the relationship of love. We also understand the fear of the world without sensitivity, because such a world becomes a space open to evil. The category of virtue enriches interpretation with the ethical dimension, making it connected with the goodness of a person and his/her action. The process of education is always the process of ethical involvement. It is carried out for another person, for his/her good and in the sense of responsibility for him/her. Upbringing activities are focused on the student's individual good, and on the social good.

Sensitivity is not just a skill and reflection turned towards itself. If it was so, it could take fearful forms and other forms that are destructive for a person. As a virtue, sensitivity is an intra- and interpersonal skill: noticing, feeling, understanding and experiencing has two directions: it refers to ourselves and to other people. It is because virtue is not a person's decoration, but a valuable way of referring to the world, to other people and to himself/herself.

Virtue is situated between two extremes. One of them is the excess, and the other one is the insufficiency of virtue. For example, the excess of courage is impudence, and its insufficiency is cowardice. The virtue of sensitivity is also located between two extremes. Its excess is o v e r s e n s i t i v i t y . In the books on the subject, we can also come across definitions of a highly sensitive person, a hypersensitive person, a mentally over-efficient person, or a person with increased reactivity (cf. Zeff 2008; Sand 2016; Kabzińska 2017; Aron 2018; Petitcollin 2019). On the basis of studies carried out for many years, Elain N. Aron, who is both a scientist and a psychotherapist, provided a scientific basis for this phenomenon. She presented her theory in the book: *The Highly Sensitive Person: How to Thrive When the World Overwhelms You* (1996). In her opinion, highly sensitive people notice many details that are ignored by others. This is accompanied by the sensitive ones' carefulness, withdrawal and the need to spend additional time alone. Because of this, they are perceived as shy, fearful, weak, or even unsociable. In order to avoid these labels, they try to be like others which results in overstimulation and tiredness. This, in turn, results in the fact that other people perceive them as neurotic and "abnormal." In time, highly sensitive people start to think the same about themselves. These experiences are very stressful, which is really difficult because high sensitivity makes people respond to the same stimuli in a more intensive manner. If a person believes that such a response is a weakness, he/she feels hopeless and worthless (Aron 2018: 56–58). High sensitivity leads to overstimulation and it is definitely troublesome. A highly sensitive person feels that he/she loses control of themselves, which makes optimum action impossible (Aron 2018: 67). It is difficult for him/her to distinguish what is important from what is unimportant. However, it is possible to learn to live with high sensitivity, because therapists indicate its strong forms and ways of dealing with overstimulation.

Thus, this form of oversensitivity cannot be perceived as a flaw, especially because of the fact that it is sometimes called a virtue: "it is a strange virtue; nonetheless, it is a gift. Anyway, high sensitivity gives one the opportunity to have a deeper look at the reality" (https://pieknoumyslu.com/cytaty-dla-osob-wrazliwych/ [access: 4.06.2020]). We cannot say the same about other forms of the excess of sensitivity: oversensitivity and irritability. Their connotations are only negative. Oversensitivity may be the consequence of thoughtlessness, but more often it is a proof of selfishness; it can be related to a person's look, skills, knowledge, or material things. The person is too sensitive to criticism which he/she cannot accept and which makes him/her feel offended. Such criticism is treated as an unjustified attack, arrogance or insolence. The reason for this is the fact that criticism is related to something the person wants to hide. Paradoxically, his/her inadequate reaction emphasizes what he/she would like to keep secret. Such a reaction reveals all carefully masked imperfections which are often a fact. Oversensitivity reveals imperfections. A mother can complain about her child's behaviour while talking to a friend, but no one else can criticize her child. Irritability, in turn, may be mistaken for sadness. However, if a person is often angry and responds with fury and frustration to trifles, we are more willing to associate him/her with gloominess. Because of irritability, each behaviour of such a person becomes a negative experience for him/her and for everyone with whom he/she lives. The person's impulsiveness, intolerance, vicious comments, impatience and open disturbance exert a destructive influence on others (cf. https://pieknoumyslu.com/depresja-smutek-drazliwosc/ [access: 4.06.2020]). Zbigniew Drozdowicz (2018) presented an interesting study of cases of sensitivity and irritability based on the example of the scientific environment. Oversensitivity becomes pathological when it distorts a person's life and hinders his/her functioning in the personal and social area. Virtue, i.e. the location between the extremes, makes it possible to notice one's uniqueness and, at the same time, be aware of one's limitations in order not to become a narcissist. If we become too proud of ourselves, any criticism is perceived as punishment and humiliation. Sensitivity is a person's strength, but oversensitivity and irritability are the signs of his/her weakness.

The insufficiency of sensitivity is i n s e n s i t i v i t y. In the books concerning the subject, there is a reference to the phenomenon of emotional illiteracy, alexithymia and anaesthesia (cf. Maruszewski, Ścigała 1998; Klimaszewska 2008; Kozak 2012; Szpunar 2017, 2018; Tomczok 2018). An emotional illiterate is a person (a child, adolescent or adult) whose emotional skills are not shaped enough to get to know, understand and cope with his/her own emotions and emotions of other people. He/she has no empathy, sensitivity to other people's suffering, or willingness to help them. The lack of sensitivity limits his/her social competences, i.a. closeness necessary to create the bonds of love and friendship. The results of emotional illiteracy include extreme opinions, harassment, racism, sexism, narcissism, and the obsessive need to be always right. The low ability (or inability) to cope with sadness, anger and fear or disappointment results in higher inclination to emotional and mental disorders such as depression or chronic anxiety (https://pieknoumyslu.com/analfabetyzm-emocjonalny/ [access: 8.06.2020]). Insensitivity is also noticeable in modern culture. A German philosopher, Wolfgang Welsch, calls this phenomenon anaesthesia, i.e. the inability to feel, experience and internalize meanings on all levels: from physical numbness to spiritual blindness (Welsch 1998: 522). It is about the avoidance of undesired experiences in the complicated and too complex reality against which a person protects himself/herself using defensive mechanisms. Experiencing too many stimuli exceeds the ability to process them to such an extent that a person becomes apathetic and his/her empathy burns out: "Thus, anaesthesia becomes a cultural adaptation to the conditions of the modern society" (Tomczok 2018: 188). Therefore, anaesthesia may have positive connotations in the area in which the qualitative and quantitative excess of experiences is destructive for a person's functioning. However, the consequence is coolness that refers to personality. Welsch indicates *coolness* as a new virtue of 1980s which is the sign of the new anaesthesia: "it is indifference, the lack of experiences on the narcotically high level of stimulation" (Welsch 1998: 525). Naming the disappearance of sensitivity, a virtue should arouse our suspicion. Even if it plays the role of a defence mechanism, the result is a limited access to one's own interior and, in particular, into one's emotional life (Maruszewski, Ścigała 1998: 134). Empirical research confirms the correlation of the lack of sensitivity

or its low level with the properties that are assessed negatively in the society (cf. Maruszewski, Ścigała 1998: 140), and even with crime and psychopathic behaviours (cf. Klimaszewska 2008: 69). Coolness and emotional emptiness are an obstacle in understanding oneself and others, leading to pathological forms of development, such as selfishness and narcissism.

A person's virtues are connected with one another because possessing certain virtues facilitates shaping others (Jazukiewicz 2012: 170–171). For example, sensitivity increases the sense of responsibility for one's own acts, while oversensitivity and moral coolness limit its scope (Jazukiewicz 2012: 181–182). Based on the theoretical characteristics of sensitivity, we can conclude that the virtues that accompany sensitivity include honesty, trust, care, empathy, kindness, justice, curiosity and astonishment (cf. also Klimaszewska 2008: 70).

Empirical characteristics of sensitivity

Empirical studies concerning sensitivity are focused on diagnosing it and searching for its relationships with other phenomena. Scales for measuring sensitivity are constructed. An example includes the Empathic Sensitivity Scale that is a paraphrase of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index by Mark H. Davis (1999). The Empathic Sensitivity Scale was prepared by Polish psychologists (Kaźmierczak, Plopa, Retowski 2007). The test includes three elements: empathic concern and personal anxiety (the emotional aspect of empathy), as well as taking a perspective (the cognitive aspect of empathy) (Kaźmierczak, Plopa, Retowski 2007: 14). This is a suggestion for analyzing sensitivity as one of important empathic abilities due to which a person improves the quality of his/her interpersonal relationships. The tool may be used for analysing social interactions, e.g. in the area of family and professional life.

The empirical research on sensitivity brings interesting results, especially because of the fact that they are not always compliant with the standard image of the phenomenon. Joanna Klimaszewska (2008), a psychologist, confirmed that there is a connection between moral sensitivity and hedonist values, increase in narcissistic tendencies and alexithymia. However, the hypothesis concerning the relationship between satisfaction from life and moral sensitivity has not

been confirmed. Thus, it turned out that, in order to feel satisfied with life, it is not necessary to follow the values related to moral sensitivity. Nevertheless, taking into account the negative correlation between moral sensitivity and the fulfilment of hedonist values, the researcher concluded that modern people search for happiness in life by aiming at pleasure derived from comfortable and wealthy living conditions:

> Turning away from moral norms and values, and turning towards pleasure, seems to be quite a dangerous path leading to satisfaction with life. Not only it is a path full of temptations, but it is also connected with a childish system of values in which egocentric reasons determine our priorities. This may be confirmed by the negative correlation between the intensity of narcissistic features and moral sensitivity [...]. Similarly to the increase in narcissistic features, alexithymia makes it difficult to fulfil moral values. It is because without experiencing and understanding emotions it is impossible to express empathy, compassion and concern for another person (Klimaszewska 2008: 75).

Scientific analyses proved that people with high intelligence are characterized by, i.a. high sensitivity to stimulation (Limont 2014: 13–14). Gifted people notice, feel and understand more than people with average intellectual abilities (cf. Szpunar 2017: 131). It is easier for strongly emotional people to sympathize with others, express their compassion and tenderness in relationships, but it is difficult for them to adapt to new conditions, and their subjective sense of solitude is stronger. They create stronger bonds with other people. The number of their social relationships is smaller, but these relationships are deep. It is believed that the indicators of strong emotionality include shyness and timidity, but also excitement, the tendency to feel euphoria and to remember emotions for a long time (cf. Szpunar 2017: 131). German psychologists (Kroneisen, Heck 2020) have indicated that the emotionality of the respondents was proportional to their sensitivity to moral values. Also, there was a connection between such sensitivity and the respondents' honesty and humility.

The medical environment is often subject to various analyses because of the obvious importance of sensitivity in understanding the patient's situation. For example, some scientists prepared a research tool for the assessment of ethical sensitivity and diagnosing it among the students of medicine at the University of Toronto. They analysed students of four different years of studies (Hébert, Meslin,

Dunn 1992). According to the research, ethical sensitivity was not connected with the age or grades of the students. It increased between the first and the second year, and then it dropped during the course of studies, as a result of which students of the fourth year identified less moral problems than people who were just beginning their medical studies. The students who declared that they want to make careers in family medicine expressed a higher sensitivity than their peers. The research carried out in Spain (Yuguero, Esquerda, Viñas, Soler-Gonzalez, Pifarré 2019), among the students of medicine at the University of Lleida, confirmed the increase in ethical sensitivity between the first and the third year of studies, without the increase in further years (students of five consecutive years of studies were analysed). No significant differences were found between male and female students. However, this research confirmed the correlation between ethical sensitivity, and moral reasoning and empathy. The knowledge of this correlation may be helpful in preparing a better programme of education that includes ethical and empathic development, and in preventing professional burnout which is popular among the employees of medical care and strongly related to empathy. In Japan, most medical universities introduced obligatory courses in medical ethics (Akabayashi, Slingsby, Kai, Nishimura, Yamagishi 2004: 1). Their objective is increasing students' awareness of ethical norms and the ability to solve ethical problems while providing medical care services. Unfortunately, the research that was carried out in this country also showed the decrease of students' moral sensitivity during the last years of studies (the 6th year of medical studies) (Akabayashi, Slingsby, Kai, Nishimura, Yamagishi 2004). This fact, which is empirically confirmed in different countries, may prove that traditional strategies of teaching tend to overlook the key competencies related to identifying moral aspects in ambiguous medical situations. Swiss scientists emphasized that ethical behaviour is not only reflected in the knowledge of ethics, but also through focusing attention on psychological competences. Both aspects should be taken into account in education, including medical education. The above-mentioned authors, using the current knowledge in social and moral psychology, prepared a research tool that evaluates sensitivity to values in the context of medical care, taking into account psychological competences (Ineichen, Christen, Tanner 2017). Also, the

influence of the form of education on ethical sensitivity and moral judgment was analysed: ethical education based on a debate and in the form of a lecture was taken into account; the research was carried out among the students of nursing in the Republic of Korea (Kim, Park 2019). Ethical education based on a debate was more effective in shaping moral judgment and in improving the ability to make ethical decisions. However, there was no significant difference between the two forms of education in terms of moral sensitivity.

Scales for evaluating moral sensitivity among children and youth are constructed. The Thai Scale of Moral Sensitivity is an example of such a tool (Tongsuebsai, Sujiva, Lawthong 2015). During the course of studies on such sensitivity, the following elements have been distinguished: (1) reading and expressing emotions, (2) looking from the perspective of other people, (3) caring for relationships with others, (4) work in case of interpersonal and group differences, (5) preventing social prejudice, (6) generating interpretations and options, and (7) specifying the consequences of actions and options (Tongsuebsai, Sujiva, Lawthong 2015: 721).

The psychometric properties of the scale were tested in the analysis of students from classes VII–IX; and the analysis of Swedish teenagers aged 15–20 provided the situation that is hardly ever the subject of empirical research. The objective of the researchers (Thornberg, Jungert 2013) was to check the way in which moral sensitivity in bullying, ethical withdrawal in bullying, and self-protection of the defender, were connected with various behaviours of the watcher in bullying. According to the results, moral sensitivity in bullying was negatively connected with the behaviours of those who were provoking the situation, and it was positively connected with the behaviours of outsiders and defenders mediated through moral withdrawal from bullying, which, in turn, was positively connected with bullying behaviours and negatively connected with the behaviours of watchers and defenders. Comparing to boys, girls had a higher moral sensitivity in bullying. Polish researchers: Marzenna Magda-Adamowicz and Jacek Szmalec (2003) compared the moral sensitivity of healthy children and children with slight intellectual disability. All the children were at an early school age. Two components of moral sensitivity were distinguished: (1) the cognitive one—noticing moral problems, i.e. understanding the situation, communicativeness and reacting to

others, and (2) the emotional one—feeling the need to solve moral problems, i.e. an internal intention to solve them, the motif of moral reactions, the attitude to moral problems and to the environment (contacts with peers, reactions to others and to the classes, cooperation) (Magda-Adamowicz, Szmalec 2003: 110). The presented research results indicate that among the children with slight intellectual disabilities the emotional component dominates the cognitive one in the development of moral sensitivity. It is the other way round among healthy children: the cognitive component of moral sensitivity dominates the emotional one. Conclusions which are precious for the educational practice result from the research carried out among abused children. The analysis was conducted in a group of Chinese children to check the connection between childhood abuse and moral sensitivity (Xiang, Cao, Dong 2020). It was concluded that childhood abuse may lead to immoral behaviours and the occurrence of immoral behaviours is mainly caused by low moral sensitivity. The research results may be helpful in understanding individual moral behaviours and they may be the basis for preparing interventions and reducing the negative consequences of childhood abuse.

Spiritual sensitivity is quite a new scientific concept. It is defined as follows:

> The concept of spiritual sensitivity refers to humanist/existential assumptions, but also to cognitive theories of personality which emphasize that a person is an intentional and rational creature involved in the fulfilment of personal, important objectives. Such an approach extends the idea of spirituality, makes it possible to approach it in a scientific manner, and places it within the existing, acceptable frames of psychology. Due to the fact that spiritual sensitivity includes various interconnected skills, a person can achieve his/her objectives in a more efficient manner; also, he/she can refer his/her everyday life to the context of universal values and generate the solutions of problems and tasks through making them meaningful (Kapała 2017: 11).

The research concerning the nature, structure and role of spiritual sensitivity in a person's life, with the simultaneous process of constructing the tool for measuring such sensitivity: the Spiritual Sensitivity Inventory, was carried out by a Polish psychologist, Magdalena Kapała (2017). Spiritual sensitivity was treated as an attribute of each person; a potential which can be developed although it is not always revealed. This is another example of the empirical research

which proves that sensitivity is a hierarchical and multidimensional construct, which confirms the need to specify its constituents. The following constituents were distinguished: (1) holism and harmony, (2) wisdom, consciousness, meaning, (3) religiousness and faith, (4) ethical-moral sensitivity, (5) openness to another person, (6) spiritual involvement, (7) aesthetical sensitivity (Kapała 2017: 17–18). The research results revealed a varied level of spiritual sensitivity with reference to age. The eldest group of the analysed people (aged 60 and more) had the highest level of spiritual sensitivity. The sex factor also influenced the level of spiritual sensitivity and its constituents: women's results were much higher than men's results. However, it turned out that, as people grow old, the differences between sexes become smaller. Also, the research offers us a conclusion that is important for the practice of upbringing and development: developed spiritual sensitivity is connected with a high sense of the quality of life and, probably, with a person's sense of being a subject. It is worth mentioning that the above-mentioned research by Klimaszewska (2008) did not confirm the connection between satisfaction with life and moral sensitivity. The category of spiritual sensitivity is broader: moral sensitivity constitutes one of its components. Thus, the high sense of quality of life requires holistic actions related to education, upbringing and self-upbringing, which facilitate a person's integral development the objective of which is fully mature personality.

The empirical characteristics of sensitivity shows it as a phenomenon which may be treated as a resource used for a person's proper functioning in everyday life. Therefore, the conclusions from empirical research should be treated as an important premise for shaping sensitivity in the process of education and upbringing. Together with theoretical premises, the conclusions may be used to create and correct the educational practice.

Conclusions for the practice of shaping sensitivity in the process of upbringing

Nowadays, sensitivity should be treated as a pedagogical challenge in two aspects: on the one hand, it should be shaped; on the other hand, it should be protected against what can destroy a sensitive

person. Sensitivity seems to be a potential that should not be used as a source of weakness, but as a source of strength for an individual and the society (Rakoczy 2018: 143–144). Detailed knowledge (both theoretical and empirical) of particular disciplines of science is useful in working out different practices of everyday life that facilitate shaping and protecting sensitivity. This knowledge is the basis for the following recommendations:

1. Sensitivity is one of the most valuable human resources. Thus, it should be taken into account in educational/upbringing curricula and in the process of self-upbringing. This seems necessary in the age of globalization, technologization and informatization of life, when the excess of information makes people dangerously indifferent and paralysed, as a result of which they fail to increase their knowledge, and not to mention wisdom (cf. Kamińska 2006/2007: 40).

2. A child is a particularly sensitive person because he/she is naturally helpless and subject to all kinds of stimuli from the environment. Children's sensitivity should be the subject of interest of the environments and institutions involved in education: the family, preschool and school. However, we should remember that sensitivity is to be a part of a child's experience, and not just an educational or therapeutic task.

3. Sensitivity is something that can and should be shaped. All kinds of research definitely confirm the significant role of education and upbringing in shaping sensitivity. Children who are encouraged to rival their peers have a much lower level of empathy than others. Also, the regress or even elimination of empathy is influenced by various neglects in childhood and/or physical and psychological violence (Szpunar 2018: 18). Sensitivity coexists with empathy.

4. In the discourse concerning the perception and development of sensitivity, the emotional component dominates. The cognitive and acting components also appear, and the ethical component is ignored. A child's socialization and education are the processes of progressing individualization: building one's self-esteem, sense of causativeness and uniqueness, but without the reference to moral experience (Rakoczy 2018: 153). Shaping sensitivity should take into account the mutual

permeation of all its components so that it can fully match a person's development.

5. Sensitivity plays an important role in getting to know oneself: "Self-knowledge requires sensitivity: allowing oneself to experience emotions and accessing the external world, which, in turn, leads to understanding oneself" (Cyrek 2018: 107).

6. Sensitivity is a direct stimulator of creativity, and the more intensive it is, the more important role the stimulator plays. It coexists with creative imagination (Szpunar 2017: 125). The research on artistic creativity and skills shows that a creative personality is revealed as early as in childhood. Artistic children are usually characterized by "a high level of intelligence, rich imagination, high permanence and absorptivity of attention, but also a high level of emotional sensitivity" (Szpunar 2017: 130). For the considerations concerning upbringing, it is important to know that these children "tend to reveal traumas and complexes more often than average children. They are often stigmatized for nonconformist behaviours that result from their need for independence and separateness, which is sometimes perceived by adults as a sign of arrogance" (Szpunar 2017: 130).

7. The concept related to social aspects of digital technologies is interesting. This concept can be used in the practical shaping of sensitivity. According to the concept, sensitivity may not only be measured on various scales, but it can also be supported by new technologies:

It gives us hope (today we do not know if it is illusionary or not) that, due to those measures and support, we will be able to manage our sensitivity better. It turns out that, depending on the shape of the chosen algorithm, information technologies may result in a larger or smaller diversity of the affective states we experience. The customized interface adjusts to our emotions. Such an algorithm may recognize our emotions even better than our human partners. Technologies become more and more "able to feel." Increasingly better techniques of registering our affective states (…) make it possible to record emotions and interpret our feelings (…). Software detectors can discover human sarcasm, irony and other psychological states due to increasingly better programs of processing the natural language (Krzysztofek 2018: 37).

Using this concept as a premise for the practice of education requires a teacher's special wisdom. It is because, in the technological world, it is possible to make a user more sensitive, but also insensitive. Technological rules, in which empathy is absent, systematically push out cultural rules that promote sensitivity (Pleszczyński 2018: 98). Sensitivity is the attribute of what is specified as human (Cyrek 2018: 109). We can program machines to be more sensitive, but we can never make them fully human.

We can conclude that we have two solutions. First, we can be insensitive, i.e. poorer, but deprived of difficult choices and suffering, which can make us better adjusted to the requirements of the contemporary life. Second, we can be sensitive, but this will make us vulnerable to suffering in the psycho-social dimension (cf. Koberda 2005). The pedagogical reflection introduces the third solution: we can be sensitive, but we should work on ourselves to make our sensitivity a strong point. This requires shaping our intellect, will and emotions. Upbringing is the space of the whole community, so it should also be the space for shaping and protecting sensitivity.

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ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Iwona Jazukiewicz
University of Szczecin
Institute of Pedagogy
e-mail: i.jazukiewicz@gmail.com