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Author: Beata Pituła

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Beata Piłula

Poland

Disputable Issues in Teacher Education

Abstract

The text constitutes an attempt to show a synthesis of still unsolved but essential issues concerning devising/reforming teacher education. The first part is devoted to the arguments of long tradition, the second one to the disputable issues induced by contemporary reality.

Key words: *teacher education.*

Introduction

Teacher education is a question which might be qualified as important and difficult to solve due to its complexity, the sources of which derive from first and foremost the violent social changes and galloping scientific and technical development, thus being a basis for the atmosphere of confusion and disorganization, exploration and a sense of temporariness. Secondly, the educational system is under a powerful influence and pressure of the general public accompanied by the criticism of the previous educational patterns as well as the rising expectations and claims. Thirdly, there is a need for efficient protection from the unilateral signs of scientism and support of the “renaissance” attitude, the existence of which is realized to a different extent¹. Lastly, in this age of information explosion, education cannot be a single and finite act².

¹ S. Mc. Kerry (1996). Training of teachers at the End of the 20th Century, *American Science*, Vol. XVII, No. 5, pp. 372–391. L. Ries (2002). Společnost-škola-povolání učitele, [in:] H. Lukášová-Kantorková (ed.), *Profesionalizace vzdělávání učitelů a vychovatelů*, (pp. 67–68) Ostrava: Pedagogická Fakulta Ostravské Univerzity.

² C. Roger (2006). *The mankind in the modern World*, (p. 117). New York: Titanic-House.

The presented issue entails an open question **whether it is possible and necessary to work out an optimum model or pattern of teacher education which would be free from positivist and ideological “bonds”, simultaneously being an answer to the mass and generally accessible education demand.** This question makes it clearly visible how many difficult and controversial matters are connected with bringing up the dispute over teacher education.

“Classic” disputes over teacher education

The polemics on teacher education has a very long history. **The question how to educate teachers is still valid and has not been answered even in an at least satisfactory way.** Still, the most crucial problems which constitute the core of the disputes are, just to mention a few, as follows:

- the level of teachers education
- the dominant type of the cognitive process in teacher education
- the mono – or multi-specialized education (unilateral or multilateral)
- the unified or differential education³.

The level of teacher education

The dispute does not concern the so-called formal teacher education, i.e. the level of secondary school or bachelor and master studies and university courses. In this area consensus has been reached. It is assumed that the teacher should be a university graduate. Yet, there are various opinions on the quality of such an education.

The basis for the dispute over the quality of a certain phenomenon is an agreed on and accepted point of departure. In humanities this basis is formed by criteria whereas the quality and contents of the criteria in the realm of teacher education are dependent on the accepted concept of teacher education. Thus, in the tradition of pedeutology, which concentrates on the person of the teacher, the quality of their influence is conditioned, on the one hand, by their personal properties, and on the other, by their results of didactic and educational work as well as the quality of their education. Therefore, educating teachers aimed at pedagogical mastery was opted

³ H. Kwiatkowska (1997). *Edukacja nauczycieli. Konteksty-kategorie-praktyki* (p. 91). Warszawa: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych.

for⁴ and nowadays this particular way of educating teachers is promoted by numerous supporters. However, this idea is contrasted with the competitive notions, i.e. "dialogical" and "interpersonal", where the "master pedagogue" is replaced by an "interpreter teacher", "creator" and "animator," which is a point of departure for the assessment of teachers' actions⁵. Actually, the dispute referring to the quality of education might be limited to preferring different teacher skills, competences and abilities as the ones vital for reaching the highest skillfulness and efficiency in the implementation of the attributed tasks and functions. Still, Allen Pearson's point of view on the "level" of teacher education, which is a bit different one, is worth mentioning here, as according to him "the principal problem is hidden in the relation between the conviction and action"⁶. Thus, the assessment of teachers' efficiency is dependent on their subjective conviction that it is the right one and, in this particular situation, the best one.

Dispute over the dominant cognitive model in teacher education

The most visible divergence of the standpoints represented by scientists/researchers may be observed while trying to answer the question which cognitive model, theoretical or practical, should be the dominant one. The axis of this dispute is defined by the issue of the cognitive quality of theoretical and practical education of the future teacher. In this respect two clear views are very distinct. The supporters of the standpoint favouring the dominance of the theoretical education over the practical one, or the interpenetration of each other, opt for the humanistic or progressive concept of teacher education (just to mention a few Polish representatives, experts on pedeutology: H. Kwiatkowska, B. Kwiatkowska-Kowal, T. Lewowicki and S. Wołoszyn or the Western European ones: A.W. Combs, P. Adams and R. Rogers).

The main argument of this group is based on the principle that this type of education includes a kind of universalism which would allow the teacher to adjust

⁴ H. Kwiatkowska (2008). *Pedeutologia* (p. 41). Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne.

⁵ R. Farson (2000). *Introduction to modern education* (p. 21). Cambridge: Cambridge University.

⁶ A.T. Pearson (1994). *Nauczyciel-teoria i praktyka w kształceniu nauczycieli* (p. 11). Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WSiP.

to any change or transformation of educational or curricular nature⁷. It constitutes a solid basis for forming and developing teachers' skills. It refers to the best models and examples of humanism, thus creating the foundation of "being" a teacher.⁸ Theoretical education equips the teacher not only with knowledge and skills but rather with a certain kind of "readiness" to perform this profession.⁹

H. Broeckman, D. Fish, P. Holmes, A.T. Pearson present an opposite point of view. The kernel of their argumentation are the ideas originating from the tradition of pragmatism or philosophical utilitarianism giving superiority to the practical knowledge over the theoretical knowledge in teacher education. The representatives of this standpoint perceive the process of teacher education in terms of professionalism and above all the efficiency of pedagogical actions. According to them only practice and training show decisively and ultimately if a candidate will make a good teacher or not.¹⁰

The point of the dispute is not the fact whether any of the cognitive types is better, more proper or required in teacher education but it is about proportions in the contents as well as about the initiation of theoretical or practical education. The divergence concerns the question of "what is more important in that profession: being equipped with theory or practice? Which educational model guarantees 'being a good teacher' socially?"¹¹

It should be noted at this point that the concept of reflexive practice advocated by D. Schoen¹² is an attempt to overcome this dichotomy in the teacher education area. The essence of this concept is constituted by a hidden principle of "the necessity of progress in educational systems by means of an emancipated teacher who would consciously introduce the changes [...] and indirectly participate in the reorganization of the whole educational system"¹³. Thus, the teacher is expected to play two roles simultaneously: a practitioner/expert and an explorer/researcher,

⁷ P. Adams (1996). On Today's Education of Teacher, [in:] P. Adams (Ed.), *Teacher Training* (p. 176.) Vol. XVII, Boston.

⁸ S. Wołoszyn (1992). *Teoretyczne podstawy systemów kształcenia nauczycieli*, [in:] H. Kwiatkowska, A.A. Kotusiewicz (Eds.). *Nauczyciele nauczycieli* (p. 73). Warszawa–Łódź.

⁹ H.R. Flanders (1984). *Essential Ideas of Teachers Education* (p. 26). New York–Princeton: ED.

¹⁰ D. Fish, H. Broeckman (1993). Nowe podejście do kształcenia nauczycieli, *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny* suplement *Kształcenie Nauczycieli*, 1–2.

¹¹ B. Pituła (1999). *Postrzeganie nauczyciela w wybranych koncepcjach jego kształcenia* (p. 16). Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.

¹² D.A. Schön (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner*, New York: Basic Books.

¹³ B. Żechowska (1995). *O poznawaniu nauczyciela* (p. 63). Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.

and to reflect regularly upon their doings made on the point of them happening and after their coming into existence¹⁴. Unfortunately, this sublime idea of thinking about the anticipated research and emancipation abilities of the teacher stumbles upon numerous difficulties while implementing it. The assumption that creating legal regulations making the autonomy of teachers' actions possible as well as making teachers realize that they are entitled to explore and valorize their educational practice are going to imply that the implementation of the *action research* concept has turned out to be erroneous.

Unilateral or multilateral education?

In the polemics over teacher education the question that constantly arises is: to educate the teacher thoroughly, thus unilaterally (mono-specialization) or generally, multilaterally (multi-specialization)? It seems that nowadays at the time of information explosion and expansion the standpoint promoting multilateral teacher education prevails.

In the circles of Polish specialists on the matter the most favoured viewpoint is the one elaborating on the necessity of humanistic teacher education (H. Kwiatkowska, T. Lewowicki, W. Komar and many others). According to the consolidated and dominant attitude the specificity of the profession is directed towards a human being, and what follows the teacher should possess versatile general knowledge and should be equipped with various means of implementation, and these requirements can be met only by multilateral education and multi-specialization¹⁵. The concept of multilateral education, assuming the necessity of education adequate to a person as an acting, recognizing and valorizing individual is presumably the closest to the model of ideal education, but at the same time it is the most difficult one in terms of implementation¹⁶. An opposite view is promoted by the representatives of the West, deeply rooted in pragmatism. P. Holms, A. Pearson and M. Nielsen advocate the necessity of unilateral teacher education which would be highly specialized. According to them: "the times of universalism, the epoch of enlightenment and

¹⁴ B. Kasáčová, P. Tabačová (2010). *Profesia a profesiografia učiteľa v primárnom vzdelávaní*, (pp. 20–23). Univerzita Mateja Bela Pedagogická Fakulta, Banská Bystrica.

¹⁵ T. Lewowicki (2007). *Problemy kształcenia i pracy nauczycieli* (pp. 57–77). Warszawa–Radom: Instytut Technologii Eksploatacji – Państwowy Instytut Badawczy.

¹⁶ T. Lewowicki (2004). Modele kształcenia nauczycieli, a współczesne potrzeby edukacji i rynku pracy, [in:] Z. Kruszewski (Eds.), *Nauczyciel wobec współczesnych wyzwań edukacyjnych*, Warszawa–Płock: Senat RP i SW im. P. Włodkowica.

omniscience are gone. A teacher is required to be in possession of thorough professional knowledge and full professional competence”¹⁷. In the times of advanced specialization only this option of unilateral specialization (mono-specialization) seems to be proper and socially justified. Still, the analysis of the rich references of the subject induces the conclusion of the unsolved argument at this point.

Uniformity or diversity in teacher education

In the discourse over teacher education there is a constantly returning question which cannot be omitted, namely whether teacher education should be uniformed or a diversified model of education should be improved. At this stage it is necessary to emphasize the fact that uniformity means here scientific agreement concerning the principles, directives, contents, forms and methods of teacher education. The supporters of uniformity in teacher education claim that it brings together and unites eliminating national, regional, cultural and religious barriers and allowing for internationalization of the teaching profession¹⁸, (in Poland this standpoint is represented by H. Kwiatkowska, W. Komar, T. Lewowicki and in the West by R. Anderson, S. Morgan and A. Stevens). The opponents of the introduction of the uniformed teacher education model, i.e. R. Grzybowski, T. Gomuła and S. Majewski, indicate that there is a danger of uncritical and non-reflexive adaptation of Western patterns without any insights into cultural and mental contexts, theoretical origin and without taking into account the rich tradition and experience of the indigenous teacher education.¹⁹ O. Anweiller and D. Owen share this opinion maintaining that uniformity stands in opposition to the indigenous culture, annihilating it in a sense.²⁰ Also P. Hess and A. Evans are against the introduction of the standardized “norms” in teacher education, i.e. the same for all. They argue that the educational process should be synchronized with the indigenous culture, customs and tradition. According to them only differential education will allow for keeping full autonomy and precious “distinct character” of the educational reality of a given country. O. Harrit is a supporter of differential teacher education, too. He claims that uniformed education is shallow, superficial and encyclopaedic, thus it is not in a position to guarantee efficient preparation of the teacher for professional

¹⁷ M. Nielsen (1992). The Whole School. Holism and Learning, *Ducation*, 13.

¹⁸ M. Pears (2007). Modern education, *American Science Review*, 3.

¹⁹ R. Grzybowski (2003). O studiach nauczycielskich inaczej. *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny suplement Kształcenie Nauczycieli*, 2.

²⁰ Quoted in: P. Hess, A Evans (2005). *Modern Education* (p. 63). Belfast: Belfast University,

functioning, but still it might deprive the teacher of “individual features” and in that sense such a way of education is not only improper but simply destructive.²¹

The essence of the disputes and arguments on the unified and differential models of teacher education are the issues of the culture, pedagogy and sociology of knowledge. Resolving this debate is difficult due to the fact that it is performed only in theory as there is a lack of full applications of the selected models for educational practice.

New areas of polemics on teacher education

The above-mentioned disagreements and disputes might be called classic, still contemporary reality brings new ones. In this part I would include the ones concerning incommensurability present in the process of education, the axiological dimension of teacher education and teachers’ competences.

Disproportion in the process of teacher education

One of these disproportions is highlighted by K. Holzmann. The basic disproportion in teacher education refers to mutual proportions between historical and contemporary knowledge, with the advantage of the former. He stresses that such a situation is very unfavourable because not only does it deform the process of teacher education but it also encourages caustic and repetitive attitudes in teachers.²² “It is true,” says Holzmann, “that every lengthy field of knowledge has its own rich history and short modernity, but in the process of education the historical knowledge cannot overshadow the contemporary knowledge, as then the teacher is neither adequately prepared to fulfil the professional tasks which are presented by today’s reality nor ready to face the challenges of the future”.²³ A similar standpoint is represented by W. Komar, who propagates favouring the current knowledge, empirically validated through teacher education.²⁴ For teachers

²¹ O. Harrit (1992). *From Teachers – Tradition and Renewal* (p. 85 and the following ones). In *Teacher Education, Duction*.

²² K. Holzmann (1994). *Mißverhältnis der Ausbildung* (p. 7). Freiburg,

²³ Quoted in: B. Piwała (1999). *Postrzeganie nauczyciela w wybranych koncepcjach jego kształcenia* (p. 22). Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.

²⁴ W. Komar (2000). *Współczesność i nauczycieli – perspektywy edukacji bez dogmatów?*,

only this constitutes a basis for forming independent and critical judgments about the world and a basis for bringing up emancipated students.

The analysis of the disproportion in the structure of teacher education would not be complete without noting the structural incommensurability visible in the lack of balance between educating and bringing up. Those two pillars of education determine the quality, form and durability. The contemporary educational practice is characterized by a clear imbalance with reference to the favoured specialized knowledge and the marginal treatment of general, humanistic knowledge. This may lead not only to erroneous interpretation of reality but also to dehumanization of teacher education entailing only negative outcomes for the potential recipient of these actions.²⁵ That is the reason why the questions of the contents, the teacher preparation curriculum, the methods applied, the percentage of theory and practice, the proportion between the pedagogical and psychological component and the specialized one in the curriculum are widely discussed as far as teacher education is concerned.

Debate on the philosophical option in teacher education

Contemporary pedagogues in search of new educational solutions generally try to situate their “ideas” in wider philosophical contexts. In the past they referred to Marxism (in Poland in the post-war period), and after the transformation of 1989 to phenomenology, neo-Thomism, existentialism or hermeneutics. Basing on these philosophical systems they made attempts to define (by means of eidetic phenomenological reduction) the so-called constitutive features of the teacher “the implication of which is the concentration of the educational process practice around the question of self-cognition, self-awareness of the teacher; exposing the moral aspect of teacher education (personalism according to P. Foucault)²⁶ or making efforts to reconcile the opposites of the objective-subjective through the hermeneutical method where the teacher should be educated in a versatile way, but still within the frames of their specialization.

Many suggested changes in teacher education were put forward in compliance with existential philosophy. First and foremost the emphasis was put on the

Którędy do wykształcenia świątłych oraz niezależnie myślących nauczycieli: blokady i szanse?, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie “Żak”.

²⁵ S.J. Niedersen (2003). *The Future existing of human race* (p. 98). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

²⁶ Quoted in: S. Ball (1996). *Foucault i edukacja* (p. 23). Warszawa: PWN.

dihedral relation of the subject to the rest of the world as a person functions in two beings; the recognizing I and the existing I which are autonomous, but in the process of education man endeavors to unite them. Thus, according to K. Jaspers, education is not a mere act of acquisition of the knowledge of the world, but an act or art of improving human existence.²⁷ The debate is the most aptly illustrated by the words of A. Folkierska: “the subject of my considerations is the question of arguments justifying the sensibleness of today’s philosophical teacher education as well as the ones denying this sensibleness [...] I hope to answer the question if the contemporary teacher [...] needs philosophy at all”.²⁸ However, pedagogues are in accord as to the necessity of philosophical teacher education, they are not unanimous in terms of the choice of the “kind” of the proper philosophy.

Debate on the axiological aspect in teacher education

The increase in the interest in Socratic philosophy is the growing sense of helplessness towards the accumulating menaces of the contemporary civilization, which according to J. Lipiec breeds the need to reread the values in life, and particularly in education.²⁹ Basically in teacher education the phenomenological system of values, set out by M. Scheler, R. Ingarden and M. Gołaszewska, is preferred, which highlights mainly the constitutive values deciding about the human being.³⁰ Still, due to the attempts at application of various systems in reference with the practice of teacher education many new arguments arise. Their source is a different understanding of the world of values and different criteria of putting them in a hierarchy. The argument is about the range of axiosphere (R. Ingarden, A. Stróżewski, J. Lipiec). Accepting various axiological perspectives allows for creating instrumental ethics, e.g. Christian ethics, medical ethics, etc. There arises a question whether combining ethics with different attributes is appropriate or ethics should remain impartial, which entails another issue, still open, if the teacher should be educated ethically and universally or ethically and in a teacher-oriented way.

²⁷ Quoted in: A. Folkierska (1992). *Filozofia w kształceniu nauczycieli*, [in:] J. Rutkowiak (Eds.), *Pytanie – dialog-wychowanie* (p. 296). Warszawa.

²⁸ A. Folkierska, *Filozofia...* p. 295.

²⁹ J. Lipiec, *W przestrzeni wartości* (p. 6), Kraków 1995.

³⁰ M. Gołaszewska (1990). *Istota i istnienie wartości*, Warszawa. R. Ingarden (1989), *Wykłady z etyki*, Warszawa.

Axis of the dispute vs. teachers' competences

The essentials of the dispute over teachers' competences is well illustrated by the comment made by R. Kwaśnica: "[...] the complexity of the teaching profession and the multitude of teaching specializations (as there are kindergarten teachers, early school education teachers, subject teachers and vocation teachers differentiated due to the type of school and the level of education) make it impossible to describe profoundly and in an exhaustive way the outline of the competences of this profession".³¹ A similar standpoint is represented by H. Kwiatkowska, who situates the dispute over the competences in the area of two different directions in education: technological and humanistic. The first one limits the process of teacher education to training technical and methodological skills, whereas the other emphasizes the personal aspect of teachers' qualifications. In both of them one can isolate numerous minor streams. If the two educational systems organized according to the mentioned directions were analyzed, it would become clear that the main dispute is set upon the opposition of technical and humanistic issues. In the countries where teacher education is directed pragmatically (the USA, Denmark, Sweden and Germany), the need for changing the way of thinking in forming teachers' professional preparation is stressed more and more frequently (A Report of the Holms Group).³² It emphasizes the need for academic issues and the importance of the teacher's broad intellectual horizons. While in other countries, e.g. in Poland where teachers' educational practice is based on academic traditions, the aspirations for its pragmatism are more and more overt. Despite the distinct tendencies one can observe the constancy of the arguments for two reasons: firstly, the cognitive output does not disturb extensively the imprinted and deeply rooted models of teacher education; secondly, the complete characteristics of teachers' professional actions/functions have not been worked out yet and thus the process of teacher education is programmed in such a way that these aspects are omitted.

The dispute refers then to what teachers' competences are, which should be recognized as a priority. Therefore "the supporters of the critical and hermeneutical direction in pedagogy prefer stimulating parallel development (in a mutual relation) of the competences going beyond technology, i.e. communicative, interpretive, moral and auto-creative, as they adequately "adhere to" the specificity of the

³¹ R. Kwaśnica (1993). *Dokształcanie nauczycieli w perspektywie wybranych pytań decyzyjnych* [in:] R. Kwaśnica (ed.), *Pytanie o nauczyciela* (p. 91). Wrocław,

³² Quoted in: H. Kwiatkowska, *Pedeutologia...* p. 137.

teaching profession [...]. On the other hand, the supporters of the technical and instrumental direction [...] are bound to overestimate the technical competences [...] because they ensure the implementation of the assumed goals, thus, the efficiency of teaching. However, this direction postulates innovative actions, mainly in terms of methods and means of teaching aimed at the improvement of the development of the didactic and educational process³³

Conclusions

The outlined map of the controversial issues of teacher education, which is by necessity shortened and incomplete, suggests questions concerning the possibilities of solving the disagreement. Assisted by the knowledge of the science methodology, which finds the problem inconclusive when it lacks positive and sensible solutions or when it is not sufficiently defined,³⁴ it has to be assumed that the presented polemics are impossible to settle and so they remain inconclusive and all the actions aimed at settling them will be limited to arbitrary adjustments. In my opinion, one clear answer cannot be given to the following questions on:

- the single or the most appropriate philosophical foundation of teacher education;
- the cultural properties which are constitutive for creating the concept of teacher education
- the only one or the most appropriate axiological system in teacher education.

It also seems to be worth bearing in mind that the truth makes sense in terms of being “current” not of the “universalism” nature. Thus, there is no absolute knowledge which is settled “once and forever”. Such a state enforces a kind of temporariness in education, especially in teacher education. The only certain thing is that each answer referring to the issue of the shape of teacher education will generate consecutive, controversial and difficult questions.

³³ B. Żechowska, quoted in B. Pitula, *Postrzeganie nauczyciela ...* pp. 34–35.

³⁴ J. Kmita (1982). *Interpretacja metodologiczna wiedzy humanistycznej* (p. 29). Poznań.

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