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Dimensions of the teacher – pupil relation. The role of the dialogue in counteracting social marginalization of the youth

Abstract

The text is an attempt at an analysis of the multidimensional teacher-pupil relation, basing on principles of selected contemporary pedagogical trends. This basis constitutes the background for the reflection over dialogue as a tool and a method of counteracting the social marginalization of the youth.

key words: *teacher-pupil relation, dialogue, marginalization of the youth.*

The basic definition assumes that teaching is an intentional activity, the aim of which is to bring about particular changes in the way of thinking and behaving of schoolchildren. According to its assumptions the teacher is the person who organizes or even guides the process of the child's transformation. One of the most fundamental principles of the reforms introduced in schools in 1999 was the elimination of the educational system that would be aimed strictly at teaching. The person coordinating the project of this reform the then Minister of National Education Mirosław Handke declared in 1998: 'School should, above all, bring up then provide with knowledge and exercise given skills that are needed while using it. The teacher becomes therefore committed to forming the patriotic as well as civil attitude, and the one towards the family and culture' (from the conference devoted to plans of educational reform held on 17.04.1998 at the Jagiellonian University – quoted from UJ Bulletin www3.uj.edu.pl/acta/9804/7.html).

After 9 years from the moment of initiating the above-mentioned changes in the educational system, it is clear that nowadays school as the place of 'teaching art' should impose on teachers not only the duty of broadening the knowledge of their pupils, but the necessity of supporting them during the way of developing their

identity as well. Therefore, the teacher performs two roles before schoolchildren – the role of the teacher who is fulfilling specific aims of the subject taught, and the role of the educator who is developing attitudes, interests, character, etc of the pupil being under his/her care. Nevertheless, the public discussion on what school education should comprise, what the most desired features of the teacher are and what the teacher – pupil relation should be like, still does not stop.

The most fundamental assumption of the teacher – pupil relation is that the former one ‘has certain pre-understanding in the process of upbringing and educating’ (Sawicki, 1996). This pre-understanding that has arisen from existential experiences of an adult implies asymmetry in the teacher – pupil relation. It may be thus concluded that school is not a kind of sphere in which the idea of equality would be carried out, for equality is not necessary and is even inadvisable in a community where the above-mentioned metamorphosis of the child is to be happening.

‘Traditional’ pedagogy bases its assumptions on the behavioural concept of an individual’s development. According to the metaphor suggested within the range of this theory man is a ‘machine’ that passively responds to stimuli from outside. It is therefore necessary for the right development of a child to create for them not only adequate living conditions, but to guarantee care as well, which is sometimes understood as interference of parental authority, or authority of another kind, in their life. Without such external stimulation the development would not be possible. The aim of upbringing carried out in such a way is adaptation of the child to the reality faced by them and to the world that functions in a particular way according to an already established definition. The desired personal standards, acquired by an individual during their way of transformation, are fairly rigorously defined. It is essential to use also ‘traditional’ methods of instrumental conditioning to achieve the given purposes. The essence of educating understood in this way assumes then a complete subordination of the pupil to the will of their educator who efficiently operates such measures as punishment and reward. R. Kwaśnica calls this kind of pedagogy the rationality of adaptation (Kwaśnica, 2007).

Also genetic psychology postulates that psychological maturity of an individual is a process which always takes place in a concrete social context – first in family environment, then in school – among peers and teachers. The correct development of a child is not possible in isolation from social environment.

The beginning of school education is a special moment in shaping the child’s personality. During this time it meets a wider group or “others” who will play the key role in receiving answers to such fundamental questions as: who am I and where do I go.

Creating a vision of the future and, first of all, a vision of my own ‘I’, is always in connection with relation towards ‘others’. Ch. H. Cooley introduced the notion of

‘reflected ego’ into social science, which is self-knowledge of an individual, shaped through the interpretation of the reaction of others towards themselves. One of the most important mirrors in which a growing up human is looking at himself/herself is the teacher. The attitude of the teacher towards the pupil influences to a high extent the child’s self-evaluation and process of identity shaping. The next categories of the desired features of the teacher are thus being created. Their aim is to optimize the process of achieving mature personality by the pupil and to guarantee full success at this point. The reflection on the role of the teacher in the process of upbringing results in a specific revolution of basic assumptions of pedagogy. In this field new trends and tendencies are opposing the ‘classical’ points of the theory of education.

Affirmation of a human being as a person, entity, was initiated in philosophy by modern personalism already in the 30s of the 20th century. Soon such a recognition of uniqueness of an individual, its autonomy understood as the right to self-determination prevails also in educational theories. In pedagogic discourse appears, *inter alia*, a concept of non-directive or non-authoritary pedagogy that, according to Kwaśnica, originates from rationality of emancipation (Kwaśnica 2007). The postulates are being brought into practice first of all by stressing the inter-activeness of impact of entities who take part in the process of upbringing (educator, pupil). In conformity with such an approach the authority of the educator is being invalidated by the fact of calling him/her to perform such a role that is to appoint him/her a teacher. The role model becomes a self-improving educator who is also able to understand a child entrusted to his/her care. The questioning of the previous ‘traditional’ approach towards upbringing results in promoting the teacher’s new attitude. The essence of it is not to develop the only right personal ideal, but to support the child on their way to realize the individual concept of themselves. It is also fundamental to emphasize the permanence of man’s development. The consequence is the fact that educating cannot be limited to a particular phase of life, but it is the need which never disappears. Realization of the messages of the above-mentioned results in breaking up with the tradition of ‘pedagogy of lords, strategists and the knowing better’ (quoted from Śliwowski 2005). The aim is to educate free, autonomous individuals, able to make decisions themselves. In spite of there being quite clear differences between pedagogy that bases its assumptions on rationality of adaptation and the one that bases its assumptions on rationality of emancipation, both of them jointly grant the status of intentional activity to education. They are both absorbed in seeking ways of improvement of its procedures. There is a question beyond it: Does anybody need education at all?

Socio-cultural transformations, the effect of which is the advent of a value crisis, stimulated the attempt at answering the question about the validity of pedagogy.

In the 70s not only new thinking about upbringing appeared but a social movement as well – anti-pedagogy. It questions the prevailing thesis about the necessity of interference in the development of children and young people. Its main aim is the contestation of the definitions of upbringing that are fixed in science and in practice. Anti-pedagogies regard all pedagogical influence as attacks on an individual's freedom. Each educational activity is evaluated by them in a pejorative manner and called 'small murder', 'psychological tortures' or 'brainwashing' (quoted from Śliwerski 2005). This theoretical reflection of anti-pedagogy refers to slogans of freedom, equality and brotherhood, which were found on flags carried by liberation movements at the turn of the 19th century. For anti-pedagogy the liberation of a child from difficulties connected with programmatic socializing influences is becoming a priority, and their subjectivity becomes a starting point in interpersonal relations.

What role then, should, the one who is becoming a witness of a child's growing up fulfill? Perhaps the answer can be found in the words of the leading founder of anti-pedagogy H. v. Schoenebecker: 'A new world, a world of people deciding about themselves is opened to those who treat a young person in the way that is free of educational intentions, to those who respect their 'humanum' and to those who show their friendship to them (Schoenebeck 1990, quoted from Śliwerski 2005). Admitting by anti-pedagogues that an individual is a conscious, fully responsible for themselves and independently existing being results in the necessity of ensuring such a person freedom of learning, or even enabling them to arouse their developmental potentials.

At the time of general emphasizing of individualism and independence it is hard not to come under the influence of controversial but often right views of anti-pedagogies concerning the nature of an individual. But will eliminating the notion of upbringing from the general use bring about its disappearance also from social experiences? What about social order that requires some kind of consensus, resignation from part of individual freedom in favour of common good? Is there a possibility for 'I' to exist without some resistance which gives a proper shape to a formless material?

If we were to attach such a great value, as anti-pedagogy postulates, to the respect of an individual's freedom, we should also take into account the words of the American psychologist and psychotherapist Carl R. Rogers: 'It does not seem reasonable for me to impose freedom on somebody who does not want it. If a group is offered freedom to learn on their own, then with a logical consequence, if it is possible at all, one should take care of those who do not want it and do not aim at that kind of freedom as they prefer to be instructed and guided (quoted from Śliwerski 2005).

According to the theory suggested by Maslow, self-realization is possible only when the basic necessities such as physiological needs, a need for safety, esteem, recognition, etc. are satisfied. Self-realization is secondary to affiliation. How to reconcile these two instincts which seem to be leading in two different directions? To paraphrase Rogers' words: discussing the sense of upbringing one should think what to do with those who are not ready for freedom or independence. The current pedagogical debate does not concern the search for an optimal style of upbringing. Yet, questions still remain: what kind of function does education fulfill or should education fulfill in contemporary society and what kind of purpose does the educator – pupil interaction serve? The dilemma – to bring up or not gains special importance in the educator – pupil relation, especially for one who is endangered by social exclusion. What are the consequences of authoritarianism, liberalism or complete lack of interference in the process of creating one's own personality by young people unfavoured by society? These young people seem to be lost to the most extent in the world where the cult of being a free and independent individual prevails. Living in their enclaves they lead a gregarious life, duplicate their fathers' biographies and thus are doomed to seek or even appeal for help and support from others. What should, then, education look like from their perspective?

Exclusion is one of the origins of social inequality. In sociology this means a situation in which some individuals are deprived of the possibility of full participation in social life (Giddens, 2004). The exclusion may be of different kinds – beginning with economic exclusion that results, among other things, in unemployment and poverty, through depriving particular groups of people of the right to engage into political life, ending with restriction of a social relations net, the consequence of which is isolation of certain groups. There are also different reasons for marginalization of certain societies. It happens that individuals are excluded by themselves from different aspects of life – e. g. they decide to give up education, to quit work, not to take the floor in public debates, etc. But one should remember of those who are socially excluded because of actions that are irrespective of them – these are above all victims of stereotyping and prejudices. As Bauman said: 'production of 'waste – people', 'reject – people', or 'people for grinding' ('surplus people', 'useless' – the presence of which one could not or did not want to accept) is an unavoidable result of modernization and inseparable part of modernity, inevitable side effect of establishing order (in each order part of present people has to be rejected as it is 'out of place', 'does not fit the rest' or is 'an undesirable element') and achieving economic progress (that cannot last without destroying and depriving people of effectiveness of ways of maintaining themselves that have been used up to now and, thus, without taking away livelihood from people using it)' (Bauman, 2005).

People that are in danger of exclusion or have been already excluded from particular social reality are in the public opinion often identified with pathological groups. This associates pejoratively with deviations such as delinquency, alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution. Individuals like these often evoke negative feelings, e. g. contempt, disgust, etc. The consequence of such perception of the excluded ones is their discrimination, objectivity that is depriving them of subjectivity and the right of deciding about their life. An inevitable result is that they become the subject of others' influences, and that they have their freedom restricted in comparison with those who dominate, called 'normals' by Goffman (Goffman 2005). From the social perspective the excluded ones bear the stigma that distinguishes them but within their group is an important integrating element. Finding oneself in a marginalized group is often accompanied by feelings of deprivation, frustration and pessimism. These emotional states often imply the increase of tensions and aggressive behaviours among people that are socially discriminated. Hence these individuals are exposed to collisions with the law which may result in restriction of freedom, i.e. imprisonment.

For 'normals' those with stigma who follow their own system of values are a kind of danger. That is why the dominating groups are establishing institutions to control and supervise the excluded ones sometimes under the cover of providing help and support.

An important problem in recent years is the phenomenon of young people's marginalization. Children and youth are generally treated as though they did not have their own status. Their life situation is always a result of their parents' lot. Thus, despite attempts at integrating them with society they inherit the stigma of exclusion, which becomes an inseparable attribute of their identity. On that ground one may say that in the future children excluded nowadays will become adults deprived of chances for full participation in social life.

According to Erikson's concept (1950) identity is the feeling of being an independent individual, integrated with society which is an important set of reference. The identity of an individual is thus two-dimensional: personal, the one that gives the feeling of exceptionality, uniqueness, and social which is an effect of 'embedding' of a person in a given society, and which is also the feeling of being similar to others. Regularity in the process of creating new personality is a fact whose individual dimension is secondary to the social one. Initially a person is defining themselves with the help of 'we' category. Malrieu (1980) says: 'a child forms part of their identity through participation in social life. It is their surname, their class in school, their nationality, their team'. Our existence is not restricted only to social roles. At the time of the glorification of an individual's autonomy it is becoming a necessity to create individual identity which is a distinction of an individual story

of life from the background understood as a social context, which means being similar to 'others'. The condition of forming individual identity is to keep distance from socially assigned roles. Lack of reflection on belonging to a given group implies problems in the realization of one's own 'I'. The ability of keeping such a distance is not always only a result of having competence. It happens that some circumstances render it impossible to keep distance from social dependence. A person abandons forming individual identity. Instead of it there appears a compulsion of loyalty to the group. Such a person takes the status of conveyed identity – does not take any effort to look for another alternative but agrees to accept a standard of life that was given to them by their parents or other significant person even in their late childhood (Rostowski, 2005, p. 14). It is quite common among people socially 'stigmatized'. The reason for strong identification of these young people with their parents is lack of understanding and loneliness beyond their own group. During the time of growing up and forming their subjectivity they often become convinced that they have no right to freedom of choice as nowadays school is a place of differentiating pupils. 'Tone is set by strong and wealthy ones while weak and poor ones cannot approach them – they are excluded from interpersonal relations or used in shady business and then rejected (Trempała 2005, p. 51). In school like that the scenario of hope for acceptance and normalization of relations between the dominating group and the marginalized one becomes brutally verified. Young people suffering from deprivation of various kinds learn that their descent is an undeniable stigma. This stigma is the most important element in the process of forming an individual's identity. As Goffman said (2005, p. 53): 'Among people a stigmatized individual may treat their disability as a basis to organize their life'. Krystyna Szafraniec describes two ways of adaptation that are used by young people in threat of marginalization. The first one involves passive adaptation and consent to exclusion, the second one aggressive contestation and desperate protest. Both of these ways inevitably lead to the life that stands no chances for success. In this manner the range of excluded people is widened, according to Bauman's 'people for grinding', people who do not fit the contemporary world where individuality and independence is approved. What role should school perform in counteracting this phenomenon? School that according to the above-mentioned reform should not only teach but above all bring up and equalize opportunities of pupils? The main question is what way should be pointed out so that it could lead to forming one's own vision of the future, without duplicating the life of others involved in social dependences. To what extent is it allowed to interfere in the young person's world, 'who has no opportunities and does not stand chances, which means that they are eliminated from the way of career' (quoted from Słupska 2005, p. 173). Should the teacher, who encourages pupils to strain to make their own life, respect the right

of each of them to self – determination? Or would it be better to acknowledge that young people descending from dysfunctional families are not able to release themselves from the burden of their parentage and that is why one should mark out their way of life? A lot of teachers, who consciously and responsibly treat the task of bringing up young people, face dilemmas like that.

These educators, who are reflecting on their role in forming the identity of teenagers from marginalized communities, may draw their inspiration from the basic assumptions of the philosophy of dialogue. One of the most significant authors of this theory – Martin Buber – claims, that a human being ‘becomes I in contact with you’ (Buber 1992, p. 39). Therefore, the nature of a human being fulfills in a relation. But it does not apply to a relation were a person is treated as a subject, object of studies. Only when I am able to feel somebody’s feelings and understand him/her, a specific response appears and ‘I’ starts opening for ‘you’. Then a deeper understanding of myself is possible. The link that connects people together is a meeting that according to the followers of the philosophy of the dialogue is being realized in conversation. A good conversation is the one when only those words are uttered which contribute to developing of a relation, for excess of words causes destruction of the I – you relation. An authentic meeting and dialogue is possible only when each conversation partner is treated as unique and exceptional existence. It is thus necessary to accept the otherness of every individual so that the dialogue would not be an attempt at dominating others. A real conversation, according to Buber, and thus realization of relations between people means acceptance of otherness (Buber 1992, p. 135). Buber’s thesis was developed by father Józef Tischner, who claimed that it is necessary to be responsible for those with whom we really want to be, instead of being near them. Tischner was also reflecting on the conditions that should be fulfilled so that the meeting would be possible. He borrowed from Levinas the concept of the face and assumed that a real meeting with other person is possible only “face to face”. It is essential then ‘to uncover the face’ so that there would be no veil or mask that would enable hiding anything or lying. Being opened to other person is precisely ‘uncovering of the face’, which according to Tischner means ‘taking responsibility for another person paying the price of helplessness, consent to a blow that can be delivered (quoted from Kłoczkowski 2005, p. 121). Helplessness is the important issue here. It is not only the helplessness towards other person but my way of perceiving others as well, i.e. noticing in others their helplessness. The helplessness of both partners results in an authentic, disinterested relation, and is simultaneously an invitation to reciprocation.

According to the philosophers of the dialogue each of us despite being an independent individual needs ‘others’ for the nature of the humans is in relation, it realizes in the contact with other person. Only other’ allows for becoming oneself. There is a symmetric system in the dialogue for each of the sides: I exist thanks to the meeting with you, you exist thanks to the meeting with I. There is no appropriating, assessing, dominating, stigmatizing, which enables forming the identity becoming an individual. Willing to meet the requirements made by postmodern world school should become a place of a dialogue. The space of the teacher – pupil relation, especially a pupil with a social stigma, should be a true meeting-dialogue. Thus, conversation aimed at sincerity and trust becomes a key to education. Still it is essential for the sense of utterance to be free of domination, prejudices, or slogans. Communication between partners should be used to exchange information. Above all it should contribute to getting to know each other and thus – continuous understanding. Therefore, a bond should be formed between the educator and their pupil. The result, containing the risk of taking up a strike, is building individuality, so affirmed in the present times. The individuality of the teacher and the pupil. It seems that it is worth risking trustfully uncovering oneself, taking responsibility for another person at the cost of becoming human.

It is not necessary to convince anybody that it pays to talk. Lack of conversation explains many social problems such as family disintegration, or youth’s demoralization. It is appreciated, among other things, by psychotherapy and politics. Skills of leading a discussion are required also from journalists, candidates for university or a job. It also has a wide range of applications in pedagogy. ‘It is possible to combine in it the teacher’s knowledge, experience and communication skills with activity, knowledge and communication skills of a pupil’ (Bochno 2004, p. 57). In the educational process it is vital to make the dialogue the basis of mutual understanding. It should create conditions in which a person’s freedom would develop and should also give opportunities to discover one’s own potential. Only participation in a meeting where the dialogue exists gives an individual an opportunity to achieve personal dignity which is the milestone in the independent formation of identity.

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