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THE AUTHORITY OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TEACHER IN THE PERCEPTION OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS

INTRODUCTION

Human's upbringing in a globalizing world is becoming a big problem of today. Such tools of globalization as the Internet and television have taken over our children's minds, more and more frequently constituting the primary source of information about the world, where, on one hand, healthy, rich, adventurous and successful people are promoted, on the other, however, a world full of wars, violence and aggression. Mass media create particular personal standards and lifestyles, stimulate children's consumption needs, impoverish interpersonal relationships, cause moral values, especially sensitivity to other people, to deteriorate. According to a number of researchers, e.g.: Bałachowicz (2009), Denek (2012), Gajda (2013), Ożóg (2005), Pólturzycki (1997), Rynio (1997), Śliwerski (2010), what seems to be the most significant for contemporary education are values, criteria and their selection, as well as the related problem of the personal pattern of a contemporary and future human.

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Education effectively serves the student's multilateral development only when the entire process of education and upbringing is saturated with values. Shaping the subjective human being – according to the above-mentioned researchers – constitutes the central question of education, and it is the task of school to restore such values as: subjective humanity, sensitivity, responsibility, decent human relations. Neil Postman (2001) also elaborates on the loss of values in education, emphasizing the downfall of the authority of school and teacher and, what is even worse – according to the author – the acceptance of a school deprived of patriotism, ethical and spiritual values. In Postman's opinion, the issues of how to nourish students' souls with art, how to shape their taste, how to develop their sensitivity and goodness are often neglected and perceived as irrelevant in the education of consumers and employees. The contemporary world – according to Zdzisław Chlewiński (1997) – is mainly in need of moral authorities. It is my intention to present the opinions and feelings of students and their parents concerning a teacher's authority.

DEFINITIONS OF AUTHORITY

In order to outline the essence of authority, it is necessary to realize the need for a scientific interpretation of not only the concept itself, but also its synonymous terms. Authority as an extremely broad and comprehensive phenomenon can be considered from the perspective of particular fields of science: sociology, psychology, pedagogy. In Europe, it was D. Diderot who the concept was defined by for the first time and placed in *the Great French Encyclopedia* published in 1751. In Polish, the term has been adopted from the German word *Autorität*, and is understood as mental and moral seriousness (Piprek, Ippoldt, 2001, p. 233). Authority is connected with respect and trust to a person, group of people or content representing outstanding intellectual or moral values treasured in a given society (Kosmala, 1999, p. 10). In general, the concept is considered in three basic meanings, namely: guarantee, authentication, credibility; pattern, example (seriousness, dignity); advice, suggestion, command (Kumaniecki, 2000, p. 59). Authority also constitutes one of the basic synthetic leadership qualities conditioning the effectiveness of leadership in a social group. There are at least two features that a group member's authority consists of: expertise in the field in which they are an authority, and the trust of other group members, convinced that the leader pursues the objectives of common interest (Szewczuk, 1985, p. 30). In philosophical terms, an authority is a person, a group of people or an institution, but also products of human activity (doctrines, opinions, science). The God as the creator is an absolute authority. A human, through participation, can only have a non-absolute and aspect-oriented authority (Krapiec, 2000, pp. 425-428).

Authority is examined in three complementary conceptualizations:^{*} a social phenomenon, an interpersonal relationship and the personal features of an individual who is an authority (Opozda, 2016, p. 133). Authority recognized as a social phenomenon takes into account the regularities of its social functioning and implies issues related to the analysis of its presence in different spaces of human life – in education, culture, politics, social life. The presence manifests itself in respect and recognition towards the person who is an authority. Authority as an interpersonal relationship implies its bilaterality: someone is an authority and there is someone else who recognizes this authority. Authority understood as personal traits indicates manifesting significant qualities and properties of the person referred to as an authority. A person enjoying authority is reliable, influential and trustworthy, others are influenced by their extraordinary inner strength, there is no discrepancy between their words and deeds in their life.

THE FUNCTIONS OF AN AUTHORITY AND ITS ROLE IN EDUCATION AND UPBRINGING

Depending on the values they manifest, an authority can perform various functions (Kosmala, 1999, pp. 18-19). If they are the carrier of values generally approved by the society, then they perform an integrating function. In practice this implies that they focus everyone's attention on one shared priority. Sometimes, however, the situation turns out to be completely opposite – an authority disintegrates the society. Such a situation takes place when the authority is not equally accepted by the society. The recognition of different authorities makes the society split, which results in mutual manifestation of animosity and even hostile attitudes. Another function is selectivity, which consists in demonstrating particular values, both progressive and regressive. In general, it is in the interest of the dominant social group to decide which values should be developed and promoted, and which should be completely excluded.

An authority plays an inspiring role, too, which consists in triggering a creative initiative and independence in an individual. It is worth emphasizing that the functioning of a role model does not always bring positive effects. Authoritarian individuals prove to be the least desirable in the society, as they do not contribute to the proper development of interpersonal relations. Such people act stereotypically, destroying the social balance at the same time. They have excessive faith in authorities, frequently refer to them without having their own opinion. Therefore, such actions can be assumed as a regressive function.

According to Maciej Hłowiecki (1997, p. 66), the functioning of an authority resolves itself to the three metaphors:

* Comp. R. Kruk (2005, p. 56-59) distinguishes two categories of authority: authority as a person's feature resulting from their competences, skills and experience, and authority as a social relation associated with a particular role. These two categories are closely related and complement each other.

- *a sailor*, who opens up new horizons and new paths;
- *a guardian*, or a defender of values, moral principles and righteous life;
- *a witness* who testifies against evil and unrighteousness.

The process of education and upbringing – as emphasized by Roman Kruk (2005, pp. 56-59) – is inseparably connected with the influence of significant people on the behavior and attitudes of pupils, as authorities are carriers of values. Upbringing without values constitutes “an empty bell that will not ring as expected even in spite of moving it strongly” (Chałas, 2003, pp. 41-42). However, some researchers (*Authorytet...*, 2019) argue that an authority does not always go hand in hand with the socially desirable characteristics of a given person, as it might be the leader of a criminal organization, as well as a university professor or a clergyman that can be perceived as an authority. Thus, on one hand, authority is shown as an indispensable element of education, on the other – presented as a source of threats to human development.

A TEACHER'S AUTHORITY

The authority of school and teacher constitutes one of the basic conditions of a well-functioning educational system. From the pedagogical point of view, a teacher's authority is justified and meaningful as long as it is understood as students' recognition and respect, as a result of an internal conviction that teachers' influence on children and adolescents is necessary, rather than resulting from external coercion. Such authority arouses ingenuity, encourages independence and creativity, intellectual inquisitiveness, prepares for self-education, helps to achieve civil courage. As Jan Zimny emphasizes (2006, p. 364), it is the teacher that becomes one of the most significant people in a child's life, especially in the lower grades of elementary school.

A teacher's authority appears generally due to the size of its influence – it can be either narrower or broader. The broader perspective encompasses not only the school premises, but also the local environment. Then, what is dealt with is an environmental authority, which refers to a teacher enjoying some kind of respect among local residents. A narrower approach concerns the influence of a teacher limited to the area of a school, or even a group of students. Building authority consists mainly in developing the relationship between the teacher and the pupils, which will be based on mutual autonomy. The process is closely related to the development of positive judgments, convictions and emotions in a child's consciousness (Kozak, 2002, pp. 24-26).

What determines a teacher's authority are the attitudes of students towards him or her. It should be emphasized that the criteria according to which a teacher is recognized as an authority by children change with age. Young children value people who are cheerful, friendly and communicative, and who can establish relationships and show interest in their problems. School-aged children usually appreciate friendly,

permissive treatment and partnership, whereas adolescents pay attention to a teacher's substantive preparation for classes, his or her professional qualifications and the attractiveness of their teaching methods and the form of work (Kubiczek, 2006, pp. 64-66). Several types of teacher's authority are mentioned in the literature:

- *a liberating (building) authority* – the teacher inspires, creatively influences the students' behavior, shapes their autonomy;
- *a subjugating authority (external)* – the teacher seeks to subdue the students, inhibits their independence and initiatives;
- *an intellectual authority* – a comprehensively educated teacher, having thorough knowledge of the subject they teach, transmitting knowledge in an original and reliable way, arousing admiration and appreciation among pupils;
- *a personal (moral) authority* – a teacher who acts in accordance with moral principles;
- *internal (informal) authority* – a teacher who the students are very fond of, who they voluntarily submit to (Kazimierowicz, 2014, pp. 382-383).

From the pedagogical point of view, the value of the developmental (liberating) authority is immense, as it leads to the transmission of educational influence, is conducive to the good of a child and his or her development, updating their developmental opportunities, triggering their potential and achieving personal maturity. The subjugating authority does not present any pedagogical value (Opozda, 2016, p. 134).

THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH, RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND THE SUBJECTS

The aim of the research was to collect the opinions of 65 third grade primary school students and their parents living in a small town, concerning the subject of authority, with particular emphasis on the notion of a teacher's authority. The group of adults consisted of 58 respondents aged from 29 to 42. Half of them had secondary education, less than 30% –vocational, the least numerous group was constituted by people with a higher level of education – about 20%.

The following research questions were formulated:

1. How do pupils who finish early school education understand the concept of authority and who do they consider to be the authority?
2. What personality traits, behaviors and attitudes – according to both children and parents – should a teacher have to be referred to as an authority?
3. To what extent are modern teachers the authorities for their students?

A diagnostic survey was carried out in the research. Interview and survey questionnaires were used to collect data.

THE WAY OF DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING THE CONCEPT OF AN *AUTHORITY* BY CHILDREN

The results of the research have shown that children are well familiar with the notion of authority, although the interpretations of the term are very diverse. The highest percentage of respondents – 41.5% – considered an authority to be a person important in life, a role model, respected and arousing admiration. For nearly 28% of respondents, authorities are famous and well-known people, and for over 9% – they are idols. A small percentage of respondents – 7.7% – identified authority with characters from cartoons, books and films. For individual respondents, an authority was a kind, good, gifted, wise, cheerful and wealthy person. Over 6% of students were not able to explain the meaning of the word. The children's statements indicate that in the case of over 65% of them, there are people who they refer to as an authority, whereas for about 30% of the respondents the authority is parents, for 12% – teachers, followed by media people, grandparents, siblings, peers and people related to church. The remaining surveyed students – nearly 35% of the respondents – have no authority and do not feel the need to seek or recognize one.

THE MENTAL PICTURE OF A TEACHER AS AN *AUTHORITY* AS PERCEIVED BY CHILDREN

The analysis of research regarding the expectations of nine-year-old children towards the teacher as an authority proves that he or she should display such features as: sense of humor (80%), cheerful disposition (76.9%), justice (73.8%), caring (66.2%), fame and popularity (33.8%), wisdom and intelligence (29.2%), physical fitness (23.1%), original appearance (16.9%). Over 18.5% of respondents were either not able or unwilling to answer this type of question. The children's preferences regarding the behavior and attitudes of teachers as authorities were as follows:

- often tells jokes and smiles, is cheerful (76.9%);
- treats everyone fairly in every situation and does not favor anyone (73.8%);
- is always able to interest in the topic of the class and a lot can be learned (64.6%);
- often organizes trips and other out-of-school activities (58.5%);
- likes his or her job (55.4%);
- gives interesting homework (50.8%);
- is helpful and trustworthy (49.2%);
- is demanding and consistent (35.4%);
- can explain everything (23.1%);

- is fashionable (13.8%);
- stays after classes to talk (12.3%);
- does not shout and is patient (7.7%).

The above-mentioned statements prove that the respondents are generally able to express their feelings and opinions related to the teacher's authority accurately. They perceive many significant features that an authority consists of, which can be divided into such categories as: personality traits, substantive and methodological competences. The respondents clearly prefer the type of teacher's authority that can be referred to as the liberating authority that mobilizes their pupils to take initiatives and take bold, independent decisions and actions. The opposing type of authority is the subjugating one, which is not a consequence of a given person's merits, but results from exorbitant ambition and the desire to rule. According to Władysław Puślecki (1996, p. 152), what depends on the teacher's attitude towards pupils is: creating or blocking the atmosphere of freedom, independence, initiative, criticism or tolerance, compliance (or its lack) with the universal principle of a child's subjectivity in the learning process, either co-deciding on what, why and how they learn or imposing everything on them. Analyzing the children's choices regarding authorities, it can be presumed that, in a majority of cases, the teachers do not meet the respondents' expectations, they are not perceived as role models.

A TEACHER'S AUTHORITY AS PERCEIVED BY PARENTS

The data collected from parents indicates that for them authorities are people who: follow the rules (46.6%), have extraordinary features (41.4%), arouse general admiration and respect (32.8), are role models (29.3%), give a good example (22.4%), help others in difficult situations (15.5%). When asked about the need to have authorities in the modern world, nearly 80% of the respondents answered in the affirmative, the remaining parents claimed that they do not see a place in their children's lives for an authority, it does not seem to be important. For the vast majority of parents, the source of authority should be the family home (over 34%) and school (around 33%), followed by church (13.8%), mass media (8.6%), peer group, literature and politics. (3.4% each).

According to the respondents, the most important qualities that a teacher should possess while being an authority are: honesty, justice, sincerity, resourcefulness, truthfulness, resoluteness, decency, responsibility, goodness, religiosity and wisdom, which – contrary to my expectations – took the last place.

One of the questions the parents were addressed concerned indicating the person who is the authority for their child. Nearly half of the respondents expressed their belief that they themselves are the authority for their children. The remaining answers

were very diversified. The vast majority of the respondents limited themselves only to enumerating some professions – a sportsperson, an actor, a singer, a businessman, a teacher, a volunteer – and not particular people, the children’s authorities. It seems that such statements indicate the parents’ limited knowledge on the subject. Few parents also mentioned: older siblings, Jesus Christ, the Pope and fictitious characters (from fairytales or films). A small percentage of the responses – 8.6% – indicated the lack of a role model, which constitutes a disturbing phenomenon, as the lack of authority may have a negative effect on a child’s functioning in everyday life and the overall development of his or her personality.

The respondents also drew attention to the threats resulting from children having inappropriate authorities. In principle, the following were mentioned: the loss of one’s own personality, self-mutilation, rebellion and contrariness, aggression and violence, drugs, sects, vandalism, volatile value system, “rat race.”

CONCLUSIONS

The conducted research outlined the image of a contemporary teacher and his or her authority. The picture does not prove to be perfect, in line with the expectations and preferences of the respondents. A significant percentage of the group of respondents – both students and parents – wants teachers to be role models, these desires, however, are not satisfied, as they do not find the desirable authorities in the school practice. The observations do not seem to be isolated, as evidenced by Marek Kazimierowicz’s statement (2014, p. 381): “In the pedeutological literature, a teacher’s model is built – an educator who, in many cases, departs from the one we deal with in the school reality. [...] in public perception, some teachers appear as ignorant, using outdated knowledge acquired in the distant times of their studies; unwilling to introduce innovative changes to their pedagogical practice; often tired and bored with their job [...].”

A teacher is not only a profession, but also a social role, the role of a creator in personal, human and spiritual matters. What proves to be important, in addition to scientific knowledge, is the teacher’s personality traits: openness, honesty, justice, humility, empathy and commitment. Hopefully, under certain circumstances concerning mutual interpersonal relations and teachers’ professionalism, there will be a change that will make pupils see a role model worthy of the name of an authority in their teacher.

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THE AUTHORITY OF AN EARLY EDUCATION TEACHER AS PERCEIVED BY CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

Keywords: teacher, pupil, parents, authority, personal example

Abstract: Every person – regardless of place of residence, age, sex, or social status – needs an authority figure, someone they can trust, someone who serves as their source of inspiration and a beacon of hope. However, numerous contemporary researches point out to the existence of a crisis in terms of personal examples, the decline in the quality of education both at home and at school, and the worrisome rise in consumerist and egotistical attitudes which results in pathologies of various shape and form and consequently leads to the general degradation of society. The social life transformations necessitate the introduction of changes to education and the image and authority of a teacher. The purpose of this article is to highlight the role of authority in education, show teacher as a figure of authority as perceived by pupils and their parents, and their expectations and preferences as well as to attempt to define the future of authority in the changing world.

AUTORYTET NAUCZYCIELA EDUKACJI Wczesnoszkolnej W PERCEPCJI DZIECI I RODZICÓW

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciel, uczeń, rodzice, autorytet, wzór osobowy

Streszczenie: Każdy człowiek, bez względu na miejsce zamieszkania, wiek, płeć czy status społeczny, potrzebuje autorytetu – osoby, której może zaufać, która jest dla niego inspiracją i nadzieją. Tymczasem wielu współczesnych badaczy wskazuje na kryzys wzorców osobowych, spadek jakości wychowania w domu i w szkole, na niepokojący wzrost postaw konsumpcyjnych i egoistycznych prowadzących do różnorodnych patologii, a tym samym do degradacji całego społeczeństwa. Dokonujące się w życiu społecznym przeobrażenia wymuszają zmiany w edukacji, obrazie nauczyciela i jego autorytecie. Celem artykułu jest podkreślenie istoty autorytetu w wychowaniu, ukazanie obrazu nauczyciela jako autorytetu w percepcji uczniów i rodziców, ich oczekiwań i preferencji, jak również próba określenia przyszłości autorytetu w zmieniającym się świecie.