THE DEVELOPMENT PATHS OF HERMENEUTIC COMPETENCES:
THE END OF AN ALIBI, THE BEGINNING OF A “SUNNY ADVENTURE”

DROGI ROZWOJU KOMPETENCYJNYCH: KONIE ALIBI, POCZĄtek „SŁONECZNEJ PRZYGODY”

Abstract: Hermeneutic competences are assigned to human nature, they are related to the substance of humanity and they are the core of the functioning of man in the world as they are distinguished by responsibility and the ability to understand, read and shape oneself and the surrounding environment of life as significant entireties constituted by senses. And their

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development is conditioned by the vertical and horizontal combination of various biological and cultural factors. In this context, academic education preparing for social professions in the areas such as pedagogy or social work should create proper conditions for the acquisition and improvement of the ability to refer professional and methodological knowledge to individual situations and people experiencing them and for understanding them. The article \textit{par exemple} analyses and interprets methods of developing hermeneutic competences, and also outlines a new proposal of basing this process on the dynamisms of human existence.

**Keywords:** social professions, hermeneutic competences, academic education, education, self-improvement

**Streszczenie:** Kompetencje hermeneutyczne przypisane są naturze człowieka, wiążą się z istotą człowieczeństwa oraz stanowią trzon funkcjonowania człowieka w świecie. Odznaczają się bowiem odpowiedzialnością i umiejętnością rozumienia, odczytywania i kształtowania siebie i do-okólnego środowiska życia jako znaczących, konstytuowanych przez sensy całości. Ich rozwój zaś determinowany jest przez wertykalno-horyzontalny spoił rozmaitych czynników biologiczno-kulturowych. W tym kontekście edukacja akademicka przygotowująca do profesji społecznych w obszarach, takich jak pedagogika czy praca socjalna, powinna stwarzać właściwe warunki nabyteń oraz doskonalenia umiejętności odniesienia wiedzy fachowej i metodycznej do indywidualnych sytuacji i ludzi w nich znajdujących się oraz ich zrozumienia. W artykule \textit{par exemple} poddano analizie i interpretacji sposoby rozwijania kompetencji hermeneutycznych, zarysowano także nową propozycję oparcia tegoż procesu na dynami zmach egzystencji ludzkiej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** profesje społeczne, kompetencje hermeneutyczne, edukacja akademicka, kształcenie, samodoskonalenie

**INTRODUCTION**

The primary thesis justifying the need and necessity of developing hermeneutic competences can be considered to be the one saying that they are given to an individual \textit{a priori}, since an individual always understands himself and the world surrounding him somehow. However, this thesis is complemented substantially by another one, namely, the competences are of biological and cultural character, thus, both internal and external factors determine their possession and development (Urbaniak, 2017).

Thus, hermeneutic competences can be regarded as assigned both to the nature of man and culture, moreover, they are extremely important not only in the course of the lifelong individual development, but also in the process of upbringing-education and care – they perform numerous functions and can become particularly useful just today, in the era of thorough socio-cultural transformations, or even lead towards the “sunny side of education”. A well-known maxim, \textit{non scholae, sed vitae disciscmum}, seems to indicate explicitly that both at school and in life not only and not chiefly (encyclopedic) knowledge and information are important, but also so-called commonsensical, practical knowledge, acquired in action, based on experience, but first
of all related to values. Is it not the ill of contemporary school on different levels of education that it educates “patho-intelligentsia”, “corpokids”? Is it not also a principal rhetorical question of contemporary higher school preparing to social professions – pedagogy, social work, that a future pedagogue, teacher, educator, carer should bear witness himself and in consequence teach understanding and explaining, as well as interpreting and solving the complex and difficult world and human problems in such a way? (cf. Day, 2017). The more so because one can choose from a great variety of methods and manners of acquiring and deepening such abilities. However, what is needed is a lot of awareness, as well as subjective and joint engagement instead of procrastination and other explanations, e.g. in the face of the invasion of instrumental mind, the cult of efficiency, consumption society, cultural neo-liberalism, mediotism, corporeism, spiritual suicide, social orphanage, or many other aporias and dualisms of contemporary society and education (of the following types: socialisation – individualism, authoritariarism and anti-authoritarinism, scientific knowledge – informal knowledge, closeness – distance, certainty – uncertainty, dialogue – discussion) (cf. Back, Lau, 2005).

Thus, the justification for the utterance on hermeneutic competences are social, pedagogical and methodological/tool-related considerations. And the aim of this paper boils down not only to an insight into the essence of those competences, as what is in the feedback with it is the verification and discovery of new paths and methods of their acquisition and modelling. In the Polish literature of the subject such competences are still not recognized and described sufficiently for the needs of the pedagogical theory and practice and social work.

HERMENEUTIC COPMETENCES AS SCALA NATURAE AND A “CREEPER” OF SPECIFIC ABILLITIES TO UNDERSTAND, READ AND SHAPE ONESELF AND THE WORLD

“Hermeneutics is «in fashion» today – there is no doubt about it. And we are not only talking about the level of what we sometimes call «science», as the fashion for hermeneutics is seen in practically every dimension of individual and social existence. Everything seems to be hermeneutics or worth hermeneutic interest, which [...] results in the semantic inflation of the term of hermeneutics. Hermeneutic thinking, along with the central character of such categories as understanding, historicalness, interpretation, language, experience, constitute an unquestionable contribution to the ideological and cultural heritage of mankind” (Plóciennik, 2013, pp. 196–197). What is undisputed is the fact that the above categories are extremely useful in pedagogy, and the reason for this is that they are the condition of education understood

as a kind of the implementation of humanity. Therefore, the object of education thus understood are not only measurable competences, but also hermeneutic ones, that is ones related to responsibility and the ability to understand, read and shape oneself and the world as substantial entireties constituted by senses (Milerski, 2011). In spite of this, the notion of hermeneutic competences in the Polish pedagogical literature is among new and pioneer notions, both in theory and in educational practice. They are not characterised from their name yet, they are not spoken about or written about directly, although they function and are assigned to different groups of skills and abilities. The term itself glimmers here and there as obviousness, usually in informal understanding, e.g. in a few papers related to philosophy, translatology and computer games (Piecychna, 2014; Bukowski, 2012). Only in a cognitive paper in the field of natural philosophy we can find their in-depth description, really servient to education sciences, in which their specificity is determined by the group of basic predispositions and abilities characteristic for a broad spectrum of biological subjects in living and cognitive terms. It is mainly about the practice of creating notions and representations, using different forms of experience; the “movement of thoughts” constantly going beyond themselves in order to acquire and process new information and meanings; the ability to adopt and coordinate different cognitive perspectives to one’s own and external physical or mental objects; the ability to interpret along with the communication of significant mental contents. A “hermeneutically developed and competent” individual is distinguished by an understanding attitude towards both one’s environment and oneself, self-activating and independently controlled ability to constitute or search for meanings, capture and transmit what is given, in some context and from a specific perspective (Urbaniak, 2017, p. 25).

For the purpose of pedagogy and social work only, hermeneutic competences can be presented as a number of behaviours of professional care-givers, focused on the pupil in the centre and interactive procedures towards him. Such behaviours are characterised by a broad spectrum of knowledge concerning the interpretation of situations in the area of tension between certainty and uncertainty and between scientific knowledge and experience-based knowledge and practical professional skills. These are specific capabilities of in-depth reflection, both with reference to protective and educational activities and the period following them, as well as immunity consisting in the acceptance of reality, also when it is not fully transparent and cannot be planned, the ability to endure uncertainty and the ability to live in it, as well as not taking attempts to talk into oneself and others that everything is under control. Moreover, hermeneutic competences boil down not only to single, aforementioned elements (Schierz, Thiele, 2002; Schwarz, 2009; Zimmermann, 2005), but also to their vertical and horizontal arrangement. Their essence lies in reflective and not only routine application of knowledge, oscillating between knowledge but often ignorance, too, manifested in the awareness of ambivalence in the area of the knowledge possessed and the awareness of the existence of paradoxes and life and professional ambivalences, however contributing to permanent updating one’s professional
knowledge. The competences should lead to an in-depth ability and readiness for self-reflection, understanding oneself as an acting individual, the ability to feel empathy and empathic understanding of the situation of Another Person. To a greater extent they should also favour the subjective concentration on the pupil and understanding upbringing and care as reciprocal activity, as well as a dialogue and hermeneutic understanding of the educational situation. To put it briefly, it is about referring professional and methodological knowledge, already accessible in various formulations, to special, or even exceptional situations and people in those situations, as well as their understanding (Koller, 2006).

**SCIO ME NIHIL SCIRE? – STAGES AND “EXPLOSIVE MOMENTS” IN DEVELOPING HERMENEUTIC COMPETENCES**

It should be clearly emphasized that hermeneutic competences mature slowly in stages during an individual’s development under the influence of the combination of various biological and cultural factors (Urbaniak, 2017). Secondly, no competence can be acquired once and for all, that is, without a necessity to modify and improve it, as it is closely connected with reflective thinking, it must be learnt non-stop – for all one’s life (Ashworth, Saxton, 1990). Thirdly, in the process of shaping competences a synergy occurs and the simultaneous improvement of such components of competences as knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, as well as personality (Le Deist, Winterton, 2005).

Reaching the highest level of hermeneutic competences can be, for an example, divided into the initial stage, then the intermediate stage, the stage of competences, the stage of expertise and the master stage (Piecychna, 2014). What is more popular and a bit more broadly characterised is, however, the periodisation of the development of competences, including: 1) the unaware incompetence stage; 2) the aware incompetence stage; 3) the aware competence stage; 4) the unaware competence stage (Szempruch, 2013).

At the unaware incompetence stage an individual does not realise that he lacks competence in some respect. He lives quietly, or even in the heavenly conviction about his comprehensive knowledge and wisdom, whereas this is not the case, until the person himself or somebody else, or specific circumstances and situations force him or present him with new opportunities. At the aware incompetence stage the feeling of the possessed competence gaps comes, an individual realizes that he cannot do many things and does not know many things. It is so-called “explosive moment”, a result of the discovery when we just realise that we still cannot do something but we already know and we can define quite precisely what it is. Noticing the shortages
opens a path to new cognition – understanding, analysing, interpreting, deepening and extending one’s knowledge and skills, its internalisation, as well as using not only in the job but also (in the reciprocal relationship) in personal life. At the next stage, the aware competence stage, an individual knows that he is able to perform some tasks, however it still requires maximum effort and concentration from him. It is the stage of practising and improving skills. *Practice makes perfect*, as the saying goes. The unaware competence stage is characterised by a high level of experience and knowledge. Solving typical and atypical problems comes easily (Szempruch, 2013). Thus, a hermeneutically competent person is able to undertake a reflection in action and upon action, at the same time use reliable, scientific knowledge and popular knowledge, life experience, and all this becomes the motor of further progress and bigger and bigger, deeper and broader subjective intellectual, emotional, socio-moral, organisational involvement in undertaken actions and tasks. He successfully moves between certainty and uncertainty in action, between closeness and separation, using effectively those bipolarities and dualisms in professional functioning. The stage is often an initial stage for new, unfamiliar at all or familiar only a bit areas and fields of skills, abilities and competences. However, one should be careful as life and work, as well as education place an individual on a still new runway! New, unpredictable situations occur. Therefore, alertness to challenges, the ability to listen carefully, the skill of participating observation and the capability of lifelong (self-) education are becoming so important.

The development of competences, however, does not always progresses harmoniously, in addition to desired stages of their maturing there may also occur stages of stagnation and regression. What is substantial in this situation are time proportions between subsequent stages and the duration of the stages at which development cannot be observed. For example, long professional stagnation, and the more so, (deep) regression require the ability to resume activity – deep reflection, power, resilience and motivation to overcome such a state of affairs (Kwiatkowski, 2016).

Moreover, the development of competences can be linear or incremental. Linear development is a result of the systematic increment of knowledge, skills and competences and as a rule it is determined internally. It requires a diagnosis of individual abilities considering current and predictable future professional tasks and, based on it, planning educational activities. On the other hand, incremental development takes place after the period of the accumulation of integrally discussed knowledge, skills and competences or after dynamic increment of one of those components, usually it is strongly determined by external factors (Kwiatkowski, 2016).
Competences can be transmitted not only within institutionalised teaching processes, they are created and extended also within life and professional experiences (Schwarz, 2009). However, it is a truism to claim that only organised educational influences give valuable education, since an individual often learns more, more willingly and at the same time more effectively outside the institutional education system (Le Deist, Winterton, 2005). Moreover, formal education is always accompanied by the context of informal learning (to illustrate it, in addition to a classroom there is always a corridor, a locker room, a playground, a yard), moreover, institutions of formal education have their own context of informal learning. In addition to it, knowledge and everyday experience may show in formal and extra-formal education and interact with official contents of education (Jeruszka, 2016).

Generally, competences can be acquired via three qualitatively different paths of education – via formal education (from the lowest level school, for example, to the PhD level, but also the next levels of career), extra-formal (e.g. courses – including vocational ones, workshops, training courses, postgraduate studies, seminars, conferences, internships, practical training) and informal education (via the Internet, when doing everyday activities through gaining experience, by means of the market, library and mass media, in the family, neighbourhood, while working and playing) (Jeruszka, 2016).

The variety of methods and possibilities to shape competences is great. Among the ideas for deepening and extending them, for example, an important role is played by cooperation and the exchange of experiences with co-workers and colleagues, learning in the workplace, substantive, methodological, technical counselling, conferences, lectures, presentations, courses, training courses, longer and comprehensive forms of education (training cycles), studies, postgraduate studies, self-development with the use of readership (professional books and journals), learning with the use of IT, short courses, seminars, coaching, mentoring, regulations, procedures and decrees (Filipowicz, 2004), mutual observation, exploration in action, joint projects, joint workshops, examples of good practice, study visits, lessons observations, professional discussions, benchmarking (Szempruch, 2013). The acquisition of competences is also favoured by the simulation of real situations, an analysis of individual cases which role plays or drama also serve. Still another proposal is an analysis of group behaviours, shows and demonstrations, diagnostic questionnaires useful in getting to know oneself, worksheets, self-reflection, final group discussion (Madalińska-Michalak, Góralska, 2012).

Therefore, it is rather easy to notice (even just by calculation itself) that the set of methods of shaping competences is rich and varied, however, in the case of hermeneutic competences it requires to be significantly supplemented. What is inherent to
their improvement is observation, constant practice, experience and training – both 
natural (everyday interpersonal experiences, e.g. at a college or university, at work), 
and stationary (traditional training conducted by a trainer, usually in a group), how-
ever, it should be taken into consideration that a great majority of people develop 
this type of competences in the course of natural training, therefore every stationary 
training should be based on it (Osiński, 2010). The process can be supported and 
reinforced during tutoring, coaching (of one of the following types: Joint Experi-
mentation, “Follow me”, Hall of Mirrors), and mentoring (Gołębniak, 1998, p. 123).

What is also extremely important in the development of hermeneutic compe-
tences is the fact that first their genetic and environmental determinants should be 
investigated because if we educate people who have no proper predispositions and 
experience in a given field, they should be created by being included in a standard 
curriculum or through programmes which deal with the development of such com-
petences (Madalińska-Michalak, Góralska, 2012). Educational process should start 
with life experiences of learners, base on methods of multilevel teaching and learning, 
activity, personal contact, reciprocal learning of learners – students and teachers, and 
the launch of self-assessment (Duraj-Nowakowa, 2006; Gołębniak, 1998).

However, what seems particularly worth attention and extremely promising is 
basing the development of hermeneutic competences on three initiation existential 
dynamisms – Experience, Awakening and Transformation, derived from the prose by 
Herman Hesse (Jaworska, Witkowski, 2007). Therefore, the superior role in Expe-
rience can be played, for example, conventionally, by properly arranged individual 
skills and tools at work and school in which especially the ability to study the litera-
ture of the subject and the competence not only in reading but also in “intercepting” 
texts of culture and still other peculiarities of educational reading, such as reading 
which is seeking and searching, reading for what is not written but inscribed in 
the text, not reading for what is written, reading which is responsible, resisting, 
not biased, residing versus guest reading “for pearl fishery, that is idiosyncratic co-
gnition on the islands of desire” (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2009, p. 489). We should 
opt for life-giving reading, in the concern for enriching our own instruments, our 
own sensitivity and imagination (Witkowski, 2007). Also other and deeper self-edu-
cational skills should serve Awakening, and first of all it should be the ability to write 
(e.g. writing an essay, text patchwork), communication (dialogue, philosophising), 
as well as the ability to use communication tools other than the language. It is about 
different possibilities to pursue knowledge and understand the world though the 
analysis and interpretation of scientific, philosophical, literary and journalistic texts 
with the use of tools provided by culture – the image, shape, colour, owing to in-
tersemiotical translation and one’s own creative work (which includes, for example, 
text interpretation by means of Lego blocks, with the use of collage, photograph

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* This is where the subtitle of this paper is derived from, in the original version reading as: koniec alibi, początek przygody [English: the end of an alibi, the beginning of an adventure] (Cf. Jaworska, Witkowski, 2007).
interpretation, intersemiotical translation from the text into the picture, decoding adverts). The above expedients should be a nucleus of Transformation, metanoia, whose characteristic feature is the development of thinking, readiness to accept what is righteous, true, thus better, and leaving what is not righteous and is wicked. What is more, metanoia combines with humanism, which is “an effect of the activities of a human being, his loyalty to the truth and good, and therefore efforts for the endurance of personal relations among people, love, faith and hope, supported by the existence of an individual” (Pełka, 2006, p. 93).

Ending the deliberations on the paths to and possibilities of improving hermeneutic competences, it should be also added and strongly emphasized that new solutions can and should be also used – there is no contradiction between even intense use of media and information and communication technology for didactic purposes and humanities dealing with man as a social being and its products (language, art, literature, philosophy, ethics, history, customs, religions). The Internet and new technologies facilitate greatly the formation of competences via providing various opportunities and tools to be used (education through action), enable to acquire knowledge or, for example, to prepare one’s own websites, or run a blog. In this way one can more efficiently support and form a contemporary individual in all dimensions of his life and personality – the spiritual, moral, intellectual and social ones (Musiał, 2018; Osiński, 2010), and moreover in the vertical and horizontal arrangement.

CONCLUSIONS

In the context of the conducted deliberations, it is also worth remembering adverbently that “what we achieve in the process of understanding is never a pure repetition but a new quality, a new event, which is creative in its essence and which is basically forced to develop further, which improves it” (Ablewicz, 1994, p. 52). Moreover, “education should lead to using one’s own mind without the intermediation of others and to the ability to act responsibly” (Michalski, 2004, p. 212).

The basis of hermeneutic competences is primarily the understanding of man and the world, which is the basis for triggering an interactive attitude in an individual (I – the world, I – Another Person), the development of the skill of in-depth reflection and the ability to liberate oneself from the predominance of technical and instrumental thinking only for the sake of hermeneutic thinking, or even better – thinking which is coherent vertically and horizontally (cf. Duraj-Nowakowa, 2017). Only interpretation, understanding, searching for and discovering new senses creates a chance not only to understand oneself, the surrounding world but it is also a chance for hermeneutic understanding and realisation of the educational process, social sense and specific character of the chosen profession, gives an opportunity to make conscious changes in one’s actions (reflection upon the action and in action), verify one’s conduct and improve one’s practice in accordance with the hermeneutic wheel rule.
Therefore, to conclude – is it not true that hermeneutic competences lead towards “the sunny side of education”? They mean the “return to things themselves”, to the world of people, nature and culture based on timeless and eternal values, social service to Another (every) Person, closeness to another person, deep care about his welfare and development. Therefore, this is the end of an alibi – undoubtedly, they deserve special care. The problems should be interlaced more widely and deeply into the curricula and syllabuses of academic education in two majors – pedagogy and social work. There are a lot of possibilities and opportunities. Starting from well-known methods of shaping competences and ending with new ones – based on the dynamisms of human existence. However, to make them bring intended effects in the form of mature hermeneutic competences, we should remember about harmonising both of them vertically and horizontally.

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