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Implementation of the Educational Function in the Context of Remote Education – Ethical and Pedagogical Aspect

Realizacja funkcji wychowawczej w kontekście edukacji zdalnej – aspekt etyczno-pedagogiczny

Abstract: Upbringing is an aid in overcoming weaknesses and striving for the fullness of humanity. It consists, in its deepest nature, in valuing the individual, which is infinite, and, thus, in considering formation as a process that is never finished, a work that is subject to failure, unpredictable, yet concrete and alive. The article outlines issues concerning the implementation of the educational function, with particular reference to the period of remote education in relation to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, as well as basic issues concerning the so-called ethical sensitivity in the pedagogical profession. It points out, among other things, the problem of the ethics of the teaching profession, the importance of the educational function in the era of hurried culture, the pursuit of diplomas and qualifications – not infrequently at the expense of moral values. Education has been portrayed as a kind of call to assist the student in integral development, but also in the face of unforeseen, exceptional situations, which undoubtedly include the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: educational function; teacher; student; COVID-19 pandemic

Abstrakt: Wychowanie stanowi pomoc w pokonywaniu słabości i w dążeniu do pełni człowieczeństwa. Polega ono w swej najgłębszej naturze na docenieniu jednostki, która jest nieskończona, a tym samym na uznaniu formacji za proces nigdy niedokończony, za dzieło narażone na niepowodzenie, nieprzewidywalne, a jednocześnie konkretne i żywe. W artykule znajduje się zarys zagadnień dotyczących realizacji funkcji wychowawczej, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem okresu edukacji zdalnej w związku z pandemią COVID-19, a także wskazano na podstawowe kwestie dotyczące tzw. wrażliwości etycznej w profesji pedagoga, m.in. na problem etyki zawodu pedagoga, rangę funkcji wychowawczej w dobie kultury pośpiechu oraz dążenia do osiągnięcia dyplomów i kwalifikacji, nierzadko kosztem wartości moralnych. Wychowanie zostało ukazane jako swoiste wezwanie do służenia pomocą uczniowi nie tylko w integralnym rozwoju, lecz także w obliczu sytuacji nieprzewidzianych, wyjątkowych, do których niewątpliwie zalicza się pandemia COVID-19.

Słowa kluczowe: funkcja wychowawcza; nauczyciel; uczeń; pandemia COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected people's lives in virtually every sphere. The health and financial problems, problems in terms of interpersonal relations, but also problems of an educational nature occurred. While children and adolescents were the group with the lowest risk of severe coronavirus disease, it was this group that was most strongly affected by the psychological, emotional and developmental consequences of isolation. On the other hand, the question arises as to how to perform the pedagogic function in the conditions of remote education? Is it possible? How to introduce students to the world of values? Especially since online lessons are associated with additional pedagogic challenges, such as: dependence on the Internet, the risk of frequent browsing of illicit websites and, above all, the danger of cyberbullying. At this point, there is a very important role of a pedagogue, teacher, educator. The profession of pedagogue is closely related to entering the intersubjective space, which, in turn, is filled with moral values. It is the educator who is particularly responsible for the integral development of young people, especially in the moral sphere.

The main objective of the article is to undertake an ethical and pedagogical theoretical analysis on the implementation of the pedagogic function in the exceptional time of the pandemic. The undertaken research problems are: What is the ethical sensitivity in the profession of pedagogue? What are the challenges faced by the teacher in the implementation of the pedagogic function, with particular emphasis on the so-called remote learning? In which areas is the assistance of a pedagogue particularly needed?

ETHICAL SENSITIVITY IN THE PROFESSION OF PEDAGOGUE

In the era of great progress, social and political changes, the world of values is shaken. Some, in pursuit of material values, forget about the basic principles of coexistence, they do not notice the other person and his needs. In addition, we are increasingly dealing with the emergence of various unpredictable situations, which undoubtedly include the pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2.

In the face of dynamic changes, constantly emerging difficult or dramatic situations (pandemic, armed conflict in Ukraine), young people need an educator who will be their guide – knowing the way, clearly seeing the purpose. Therefore, someone ruthless to himself, understanding to others, disciplined, and, above all, committed to youth. All this causes that the work of a pedagogue is called “mission, vocation, profession of social trust. The teacher is sometimes referred to primarily as a professional, expert, but also as a missionary, guardian of values or, a reliable guardian, companion and, finally, as an official – a representative of the state” (Radziwiłł et al., 2004, p. 112).

The measure of ethics in the process of upbringing is the responsibility of the educator, which takes on a double dimension. On the one hand, I am responsible “for” – the student, the course of the teaching and upbringing process, for its integral development, but, at the same time, I am responsible “to” – the management, parents, and above all – myself and my conscience (Tarnowska, 2002).

The ethics of the profession of pedagogue is a specific refinement of general ethical norms towards specific problem situations in the profession of pedagogue. It concerns both pedagogue’s attitude, personal culture, responsibility, sensitivity, self-criticism, honesty, hierarchy of values, worldview, knowledge and competence. Moral issues take on a special significance in professions that affect the fate of individual people, entire groups and societies. A special effect of the pedagogue’s ethics is the ability to perceive in specific situations the moral value of the act and the person, but also the values of the judgments and criteria concerning these opinions (Szudra-Barszcz, 2012, p. 57). A pedagogue is a person under constant control, which was almost tangibly visible during remote learning. In addition to the children, other household members (parents, grandparents) could watch and listen to the work of the teacher, the judgments he preached, and the opinions he expressed. Therefore, he must be very careful, because he can easily lose the respect and trust of his students, but also of their parents.

Ethical sensitivity is the ability to recognize the ethical dimension of each situation, i.e. its impact on the welfare of the individual. It consists in:

- the ability to interpret a person’s words and behaviour,
- recognizing his/her wishes and needs,
- the right answer to them.

Ethical sensitivity characterizes each teacher in a specific way and affects their behaviour, decision-making or attitude towards the student. Knowledge of codes and ethical standards in professional practice of teachers, learning about ethical concepts and shaping values help them to develop ethical sensitivity and a way of reasoning in accordance with moral standards and combine these abilities with the ability to solve educational problems.

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN THE ERA OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The pedagogical field is shaped primarily by a specific personal relationship between an educator and a student. This relationship is not one of superiority or subordination. Nor is it a simple exchange of information or a relationship based on its acquisition (student) and execution (teacher). In its deepest nature, education consists in valuing the individual, who is infinite, and, thus, in consider-

ing formation as a process that is never finished, a work that is subject to failure, unpredictable, yet concrete and alive (Pesci, 2006, p. 37). The primary value of educational work on the student-person is its integral development. So, how do we take care of development in every dimension in the face of pandemics and virtual relationships?

The period of isolation and forced, remote education revealed numerous deficiencies in the implementation of the pedagogic function (Koludo, 2020, pp. 43–44). On the one hand, it undoubtedly related to the collision with a completely new reality: remote contacts (students were reluctant to turn on cameras or did not have them, they avoided confrontation), technical difficulties, learning how to use individual applications (Skype, Microsoft Teams, Microsoft Office and Open Board, Zoom, Google Classroom), developing electronic materials, tests, ways to verify students' knowledge, etc. On the other hand, teachers prioritised the fulfilment of their teaching commitments. Remote learning requires the rejection of existing teaching habits (mostly caused by routine and following a pattern) and forces “to design a remote learning process that would produce satisfactory results” (p. 43).

The tendency that has existed for years to favour the educational function to the detriment of the pedagogic function has certainly not been conducive to the fulfillment of the pedagogic function. Other difficulties (which also occur in traditional teaching) were: overloaded curricula, adherence to traditional teaching methods, the use of outdated forms of organization of the teaching and learning process itself (Łobocki, 2004, pp. 123–125). The source of neglect of upbringing at school is also the shift of accents from educational goals to teaching and upbringing methods.

When considering the implementation of the pedagogic function during the pandemic, special attention should be paid to the attitudes of teachers characterized by convenience and disrespectful attitude towards their educational mission. The research conducted in 2020 by a team from the Pedagogical University of Kraków (Łukasik et al., 2020, p. 37) shows that pedagogues felt relieved from various educational duties. Examples are the statements of teachers expressing their satisfaction related to the reduction of educational activities, e.g. during remote education there was no “duty in the corridor, which is often associated with stress” (p. 37) they also did not have to “deal with students causing educational difficulties” (p. 41).

Meanwhile, upbringing should help in “merging” of a person, in her maturation and overcoming human imperfection. In the educational work of the educator, the metaphysics of help – a kind of service – should be revealed over the student. The educator is endowed with a vocation to help the student.

Only a true master, who is patient, persistent and hard-working in his search for the fullness and harmony of his student, can help to bring him up in an au-

thentic way, to grow as a person. A meeting with such a teacher takes place only on the grounds of love. Only then does he have the power to change the student's life. In such an encounter, contact is made "with a real person, who will indicate the purpose of life, drag one into the path of endeavour, show the sense of working on oneself" (Kunowski, 1981, p. 198). If man does not encounter love, he will remain an incomprehensible being to himself, he will not experience the joy of giving himself to others, and his life will be devoid of meaning.

From the research on remote education during the pandemic, it can be concluded that many teachers were aware of the importance of upbringing (not only teaching) at this extremely difficult time.

Addressing the issue of the realization of the educational function in the conditions of online classes from the perspective of opportunities, it is worth noting that this form of classes allowed the teachers, in a way, to "enter" the homes of children, to get to know their environmental conditions. Individual conversations with students also provided an insight into the needs of students, which was reflected in the conducted research: "When teaching in the virtual classroom, I looked very closely at the needs of the children during the epidemic and tried to respond to them as much as possible. I got a lot of feedback from students and parents (...). Some of the feedback was downright touching, especially as you could see in the photos or videos how the children change and »grow up«" (Łukasik et al., 2020, p. 37).

On the other hand, some teachers see remote education as an opportunity for the development of their students, especially those who are shy and have difficulty speaking in class. Activity from the perspective of a safe place, such as the comfort of home, which gives a sense of individual, anonymous contact, for shy students was less of a challenge, as the teachers themselves noticed: "virtual classes give more freedom and openness to shy children. They have greater ease in expressing or signalling their emotions" (p. 37).

Undoubtedly, among the possibilities of fulfilling the educational function in the conditions of remote education, there is a form period. Research carried out at the request of the Ministry of Education and Science by Grzelak and Żyro (2020) shows that there are many arguments for the great importance of form period during remote learning. Form classes:

– are currently the basic channel of communication between the educator and his class,

– allow to monitor group and individual atmosphere and assess the prevalence of problems reported by students,

– are a place for the development of more informal interactions between students and between students and a teacher,

– they create the possibility of using time for preventive actions carried out by: educators and school specialists" (Grzelak, Żyro, 2020, p. 64).

The students themselves – as confirmed by the research results – feel the need to talk “about »themselves« and their own well-being, as well as about class, relationships, school and education”, “about the current situation in the world and the problems that plague the world” (p. 68). Among the pupils’ answers there were postulates to address the problem of loneliness, lack of courage, problems of isolation, the value of education, the ability to cope with difficult situations, and helping those in need (p. 68).

Younger children also communicate parenting needs, particularly emphasising the value of spending time together, talking to the teacher “about the class, relationships, school and education, (...) about the current situation in the world, (...) coping with difficult situations, (...) for the teacher to show more interest in the class” (p. 68).

These free statements by students are thought-provoking and should inspire and stimulate educators to think about the topics of their lessons, the importance of ordinary conversation and their interest in the problems and experiences of their students. The researchers noted a lower demand for form classes among those “undertaking more risky behaviour (harmful websites on the Internet) and those who are more depressive” (p. 69), i.e. students who are most in need of support from educators in terms of supportive, educational and preventive activities. The cited research confirms the need for an educational function. The difficult time of the pandemic has strongly exposed this need.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

The educational function of the teacher is, alongside the teaching and caring functions, an integral part of the teacher’s work at school. The school is considered to be the second – after the family – basic educational environment. The definition of school emphasises that it is “an educational institution dealing with the education and upbringing of children, young people and adults, in accordance with the purposes and tasks and educational concepts adopted in a given society” (Okoń, 2007, p. 402).

The educational mission of the school is widely discussed in the pedagogical literature. It is also mentioned in the legal documents of the Polish education system. The core curriculum for each type of public school speaks about the upbringing and system of values underlying it and suggests ways of implementing this upbringing (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 roku). Schools are required to provide educational and preventive programmes that are subject to formal control. The regulations on pedagogical supervision

define standards in the field of education, care and prevention (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 25 sierpnia 2017 roku). In the event of shortcomings and difficulties, corrective programmes are required. The Regulation on the conditions and manner of assessment specifies precisely what is to be assessed in the student's behaviour (Pielachowski, 2007, pp. 233–262).

Observing the specific reality of school life, however, it can be stated that the theory emphasizing the educational function of the school is not always sufficiently implemented or noticeable in school practice. The regulatory dimension and the rich pedagogical reflection do not seem to be sufficient. By definition, school seems to exist in order to teach, transfer knowledge, promote to the next level of education, prepare for obtaining diplomas and qualifications. The pandemic strongly emphasized this situation. Too much focus on didactics, pushing upbringing to the background, made children and young people feel lonely, eager for conversations and people who could become a guide, an authority and a role model. Upbringing goes beyond the area of knowledge, as it is more about efficiency, attitudes and values. Even if the educational role of school is emphasised, education often seems to be somewhat glued to didactics, it is sometimes treated “incidentally”. The didactic function of school resonates much more strongly when looking at the reality of schooling.

Education and upbringing cannot be reduced to cramming a young person with the required compendium of knowledge and training them to communicate, operate equipment and participate in the process of production and consumption of material goods. A human being is a person. It is someone with roots in the past and the future. This is why he needs reference points, moral norms, great ideas and personal models with which to confront his life, so as not to get lost. Łobocki emphasises that it is extremely important for effective upbringing that teachers perform a *strictly* educational function, especially when it comes to shaping the social and moral attitudes of students, and not focus exclusively on performing the teaching function, i.e. mainly on imparting knowledge to them, developing their abilities and enforcing the school knowledge they have acquired within the scope of individual teaching subjects (Łobocki, 2009, pp. 11–12).

Increasingly, both the authorities supervising education and parents focus more on the knowledge and skills of the child than on their comportments, attitude towards themselves and others. The effectiveness of the teacher's work is measured by the students' achievements in competency tests and final exams. The annual school rankings, which in their criteria mention only didactic and not educational achievements, also confirm the importance given to education. A similar mindset is seen among parents who want their children to be smart, to have high grades and to get into fields of study ensuring high standards of future adult life. It seems, therefore, that educational issues, although they are not negated, and what

is more, they are even considered important in theory, but in the practice of life they give way to the importance of knowledge and intellectual achievements of the student (Osial, 2012, p. 148).

Operating in conditions of isolation from peers, teachers (educators/guides), society all the more generates the needs of educational, preventive and supportive aid. The requirements of social quarantine and the sanitary regime significantly reduced the scale and availability of activities in this area, and parents and educators themselves were in a crisis situation, which additionally hindered the implementation of the educational function.

In school education, the cooperation of family and school is very important. It is not uncommon for parents to place the responsibility for raising their children on the school. In turn, teachers often feel helpless in the face of neglect originating in the family. Many teachers do not feel the support of parents in educating students. It happens that parents blame teachers for problems in learning and upbringing and stand up for their children without engaging in constructive cooperation with teachers. There is also a lack of extension of certain educational activities undertaken by the school in the family environment (p. 148).

Another problem is that parents limit themselves to the proper “formation” of their children; the Germans refer to this type of upbringing as *Bildung*. This type of pedagogical activity is oriented towards the sphere of practical benefit, life pragmatism, benefit and even pleasure, which man strives for and which society approves of. This pedagogical concept is usually referred to values such as: communicativeness, honesty, kindness, respect for others and politeness, but also: material security, good education, correct social relations. Parents mould their children to be happy. Moulding a human being can be a kind of training. Someone brought up in this way can reach a high level in terms of personal dignity, while remaining illiterate in terms of the real personal value of human beings (Chudy, 2009, pp. 57–58).

This, in turn, is associated with the contemporary phenomenon of a specific “rat race from the cradle”. Increasingly, there is a race, a desire to be at the forefront, the best, at all costs. This race starts already in primary school, and sometimes even earlier. The knowledge, skills, feistiness, cleverness in life, pursuit of (sometimes selfish) goals come first – at the expense of real values, i.e. health, fundamental values, respect for oneself and others.

The ignition here is often the high demands first made by parents, other carers or by some important people in general. Teachers then join the ranks of those expecting success and victories from their student. As a result, the students look at themselves only through the prism of achievements. The bar is constantly rising.

Making demands is an important part of upbringing. However, expectations must be appropriate to the age and abilities of the child, student or any other per-

son. Children should not be set with unrealistic goals and burden with duties or classes. This leads to perfectionism, to feeling the constant need to be the best. Mutual ridicule, loss or lack of success can even lead to an extreme crisis.

The strive for being on top is initiated by a culture that regards success as a priority value, a culture of hurry and rush. The activities organised at school are also part of this culture, as it also perpetuates the existing world order. An example of this is undoubtedly the proportion of group work and individual work in lessons. If students in the class work in groups, they are still accounted for individually. Instead of cooperation, competition is valued, which is why subconsciously young people learn to follow its rules. Everyone acts on their own account. It is also common to hold up other students as a model and compare others, which contributes to a constant need to catch up, to be better, to be the best (www1).

A good school is one that supports its students in recognizing, developing and protecting what is noble in them. Such a school helps its students not to limit themselves to the knowledge imparted in the various school subjects, but to understand themselves and the meaning of life more maturely. Furthermore, the school is required to introduce its students to bonds and values that protect their development and lead to lasting happiness. Educators should explain to their students that spontaneous self-realisation, stripped of all morality, is not possible, and that knowledge is not yet wisdom. They should teach that life is connected with hardship and only by making wise and tough demands on oneself do they have a chance to realise their humanity (Dziewiecki, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

The teacher, professor, educator, in serving his students, imparting wisdom and knowledge, generating growth in others, grows as a pedagogue himself. Only when he teaches – and because he teaches – does he become a better and better pedagogue. He matures to put the good of the student above his own good. In his pedagogical profession a special place should be occupied by the content of personalistic philosophy, such as: realization as a person, his axiological maturation and the perception of the value of each human person. The educator – master and guide – should help the pupils also develop pro-social attitudes, far from loving themselves only and gaining everything exclusively for themselves, they should finally lead their pupils to the existential and experiential border, for which they themselves will discover the value of every human being. Without education and self-education toil, the human person becomes only a fragile and unpredictable being, subject to external determinants. In turn, each choice towards good and overcoming one's own weaknesses determine the development

of a person as a person. The teacher's unique mission was revealed in a special way during the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought additional challenges in the implementation of the educational function. The present time, after a period of isolation, calls for renewed reflection on the challenges of education. To these pre-existing ones (connected, among others, with the so-called culture of hurry, preference for the didactic function, emphasis on results in tests and place in rankings, striving to be on top, selfish attitudes, "moulding" children) problems resulting from quarantine, in relations with others, connected with loneliness of children and young people and resulting from excessive use of the Internet have been added. This, in turn, directs the attention of both theoreticians and practitioners of education to reflect on the educational function, but also on the mission of the educator-teacher.

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