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DETERMINANTS OF AN ACADEMIC TEACHER'S AUTHORITY

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The paper analyses the essence and the determinants of an academic teacher's authority, the types of skills, which it consists of. It outlines the main aspects of teacher and student sufficient mutual partnership by means of dialogue, empathic feeling, autonomic actions and independent thought. It substantiates the concept of an expert in education as a leader and a guide, describes the steps of moving from the expert to being an actual authority.

Key words: formal and actual authority, teacher's personality, teacher's psychosocial ability, multi-competence, subjectivity of student-teacher relations, empathetic understanding, unselfishness, autonomy, dialogue in education, ambivalence, partnership, professional artistic skill, educational expertise.

Much can be gained from what is said
Even more from what is done
The most – from what you are.
(Seneca)

Introduction

A discussion about authority is necessary. This can be explained by the fact that we live in a time when many people are considering the sense of its existence, rejecting, forecasting its outdatedness, or its downfall, justifying their way of thinking as “modern” logic post-modernistic comprehension of the world.

We should investigate the question of authority because, despite earlier theses, even those who are the most bitter opponents of authority “listen to authority, a different one to that they fight against, but still authority. If we want it or not, we live in a period of authority” [2, s. 187]. Therefore we should try to follow its principles and define the criteria for its determinants setting the fields for the semantic category that is authority.

A particularly important plane of reference is the context of education. It is not sufficient to base on the conviction that authority is naturally a social role performed by teachers, who, utilising available tools, attempt to execute it with pupils. This aspect which is present in its general understanding refers more closely to formal authority, which has very little in common with actual authority. B. Wolniewicz states accurately, although offensively, that “there is no upbringing

without authority. Although, until recently, they were fashionable in our educational world, dreams about upbringing »without authority« are the same kind of nonsense as a »car without an engine« in the auto-mobile world” [17, s. 266].

The teacher, even academic, teaches and tutors. The teacher as a person, not the ideas and theories which are used, not the institutions in which the teacher works, not the guiding rules which are used, realises. Assessments, opinions, the ability to react in defined ways to the words, behaviour and attitude of others - this is the influence of the individual.

What is Authority?

The dictionary definitions of the idea “authority” vary. They define “authority” as prestige, courage, man, institutions with influence, significance, recognized [8, s. 45].

A more developed concept [14, s. 92] takes such forms as: [...] “3. To have authority somewhere, among others. 4. To win, gain, maintain, ensure, consider, undermine, unsettle, lose authority. 5. To enjoy authority, [...] 8. To surrender or submit to someone's authority [...]

In the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* [1] we can read: “Authority. It is said that people, institutions or organisations have authority when its power is considered to be rightful, and so when it is legitimised by the system of norms on which it is based (...). There is no universal agreement as to what the basis of authority is. One explanation creates the question of a social contract; another directs us towards the easily-observed usefulness of a system governed with the help of rules, and though we often behave sceptically in light of particular pretences to the possession of authority, the idea that human co-operation (and even understanding) could take place without authority is seldom treated seriously”. Regardless of which aspect of the concept of “authority” we consider, it is considered as a feature, relation or social appearance [5, s. 100].

What is a Teacher's Authority?

Certainly, what many teachers are unaware of is the value given. This is the value gained during and because of interaction between teachers and pupils/students. It is based on the quality of mutual relations – direct contact, observations and the assessment of values based on them. These values appear in three forms: emotional, as positive and negative reactions to the teacher and various forms of behaviour, practical, reactions dependent on assessments made, entering into contact, close proximity or escape, and verbal, formulation of positive or negative opinions [11, s. 56].

Many humanists of our time (D. Schön, H. Giroux, W.B. Stanley and J.Kincheloe) have created a well-developed theory concerning the functioning of the modern teacher, including a combination of characteristics considered as optimal: from the concept of practical reflection, through intellectual transformation, to post-positivism practice. The French education specialist Andre

Berge created a short, but theoretically rich view that “the teacher works in order to stop being necessary”. Some say that the teacher works and is a craftsman, others that the teacher fulfils a mission, and another group believe that a teacher's work is art, the teacher is therefore an artist.

Whatever you may say about teachers, especially academic teachers, it is important to be aware that the teacher functions on many dimensions simultaneously. The most reasonable seems to be the ordering of these dimensions through a horizontal perspective and not a vertical one, because this kind of interpretation enables the definition of the importance of each one, while a hierarchy would suggest superiority over others.

How can we Measure Authority?

One of the most obvious measures of authority is *subjectivity* – a category extremely important not only in the general sense, but also, and perhaps especially important, in an educational context. Knowledge of this fact means that an even greater number of attempts to answer this question can be observed. In the Polish example, this is connected with, from one side, the changes in social order: from totalitarian-freedom restrictive units, destroying its autonomy, to democratic, which affirms its freedom and non-transferable values of individuality, deprived of directives concerning what should be regarded as right. From the other side, the development tendency in the modern world with its integrative character and, at the same time, the developing trend of globalisation, which caused a change of direction both in humanistic pedagogy and psychology. From its assumptions, it seems that subjectivity derives from the fact that a person is somebody with a defined identity which distinguishes that person from others and that the actions of a person depend, above all, on the decision he/she makes.

Subjectivity in education is realised when both of the two main participants in the situation (teacher and pupil/student) are able to co-operate with others, constantly develop their personalities, realise by themselves individual targets in an atmosphere of tolerance for others and respect for the law from those participating in the process of education. J. Legowicz stated aptly: “(...) students want to think, jointly think and gain independent thought (...) not only blindly learn a set programme of knowledge, but also create it, experience it and find sense in its procedure (...) they want to see in their teacher a guide (...) who comes out of himself and is open to his students, to meet them in joint discussions, to think, doubt, hesitate and make decisions together” [10, s. 81].

M. Dudzikowa [5] wrote that pupils miss teachers who would stand on the same side as them. Changing these words, we can say that teachers also miss pupils who would stand on the same side as them.

One of the ways of fulfilling this longing is the acceptance and appearance of a *partnership attitude*, appearing in the observation of relations in the category of dialogue. After all, they provide the opportunity to gain such an understanding

that co-operation and not only confrontation is possible. Who is a partner? A person who is open, helpful, kind-hearted, who does not try to monopolise knowledge and is fair when making axiological choices. A person whose restlessness creates, who respects alternative styles of thinking, views or lifestyle.

When discussing subjectivity, we are obliged to refer to Martin Buber, the creator of the classic concept of dialogue based on “opening oneself” to others, the “I-you” relation in which the “you” becomes a condition for the existence of the “I”.

According to Buber, dialogue is discussion, however different forms exist in which words are unnecessary, when context, gestures, facial expressions or silence say more than words. Among the conditions of good discussions, as understood by those which provide the opportunity “to empathetically fathom the partner”, Buber indicates the necessity to observe in the other person a partner as well as to agree to his differences, and to be honest when expressing your thoughts and to resign from the desire to impress or show off. Discussion is a way of existence, creating a field such as “inter-person”. This is called by Hans-Georg Gadamer “the existence of truth in discussion”, in which each word has its “before” and “after”, thanks to which the discussion has no end and can constantly take place.

Free discussion between partners assumes that each side expects and desires to mutually learn something [18, s. 43], in an atmosphere where the equality and values of each person are recognised and respected.

Thanks to such an attitude towards mutual contacts, it will be possible to not only think together, but also to create and find together the values which are significant for the realisation of designated goals.

The specific type of dialogue which is known as *educational dialogue*, was expertly defined by M. Czermińska: “conducting dialogue is not a technique, nor a method, nor a competence (although it requires it). **It is the acceptance of the attitude of one person towards another** (highlighted–A.K.)” [4, s. 268–269]. Attitudes which allow criticism, a range of interpreted perceptions, and disagreement of presented arguments, as well as various forms of counter-argument resulting from different points of view. Attitudes which are ready to accept that others are right, constant agreement on mutual standpoints or agreement based on different beliefs.

The subjectivity of academic teachers appearing in aims designated by themselves, taking decisions, realising targets, checking the values of their own achievements and confronting those achievements with other similar activities - is not an aim in itself. It is a factor in the subjectivity of students. In order to exist in educational relations it is necessary to have a partnership, which appears when the student and teacher work together, often realising their projected duties together, simultaneously having mutual respect, resulting from the generally accepted form of society, knowingly limiting their subjectivity–objectivity of the other person.

Without temptation occupying a privileged position with regard to the other person as well as respect for the individuality of the partner.

The difficulty of satisfying the demands of an academic teacher's roles often results from *ambivalence*, which is part of these roles. Ambivalence, occurring in educational practice in the context of such determinants of contemporary culture as ambiguity, instability, the chaos of changing offers and complexity. Ambivalence, which should be understood as the necessity to constantly change between various values, which mutually intermingle, between attitude and behavioural extremes, between empathy and distance, the pressure for discipline and the freedom of thought [12, s. 61].

This ambivalent attitude of a teacher, who must constantly redefine himself due to continuously changing conditions of his own functioning, creates the necessity for teachers to accept various roles.

M. Dudzikowa, interpreting “four aesthetic educational situations” by L. Witkowski, speaks about the roles: “*spokesperson* of important points and guardian of some canon or legislation; *partner* spiritually, emotionally and intellectually; *translator and mediator*; *empathetic helper and promoter* of various abilities and competencies in pupils” [5, s. 136].

J. Radziejewicz, in turn, focuses on the role played by the teacher's *pedagogical knowledge* [13, s. 50–60], which is the basis of his self-control and self-evaluation of the effectiveness of his work. “Reviewing oneself” in the eyes of the students allows the teacher to avoid mistakes in future conduct, to modify and increase the effectiveness of his actions. This is connected to the necessity to follow and define *dual-subjectivity* in mutual relations, whose immanent feature is the asymmetry of the teacher and student (in the level of knowledge, life experience, professional and social competence), which should not be seen as an obstacle in the realisation of the idea of subjectivity. This assumes a union of aims to which it reaches regardless of various factors. It takes into consideration the rights of self-determination and self-realisation [7, s. 79], in the sphere of freedom about which J. Tischner wrote that it is not the point that a person can choose. “Freedom also means that a person can assimilate. (...) Only then a person really is” [15, s. 12–13].

This dual-subjectivity is also realised in openness to others, sometimes opposing one's own view of the world, which leads to acceptance of a partner's perspective, so that, as M. Buber taught, one is able to “squat or stand on one's toes” in relations with partners.

Also significant is *empathetic understanding* of the emotional states of partners, which leads to the acceptance of other points of view concerning reality. The result of this is joint-perception, not just an emotionless evaluation of the situation, based on subjective reasons. Understanding, based on rational or intuitive

criteria, resulting from predictions which come from words and actions, undertaken towards the other person.

This skill may positively affect the appearance of the attitude of *unselfishness*, based on the voluntary care for the good of others and the willingness to be useful.

This type of partnership is also determined through the speed at which the changes enter into the new type of work professionalism requiring openness, co-operation with individuals and groups, as well as *autonomy*, which in the eyes of the law is internal independence and responsibility for one's own decisions and actions, and also the ability to decide for and control oneself.

It is also important for young people to think and act reflectively, supported by their teachers, to be able to listen to others who are more experienced in the world, to be mentally independent of the authorities which surround them, and to not give in to peer pressure without first considering the consequences of their actions. Only then will their subjectivity allow them to oppose restrictions, resulting from factors they can not influence, when they acquire the capability to evaluate their own actions, understood as “varying views of values, the observation of changes and stability in particular value systems and the ability to read universal values” [18, s. 70].

Such relations help to build a *feeling of the strength of subjectivity*, being an internal power allowing the teacher and student to not only adapt to the world, but also to adapt the world to their needs, capabilities and expectations.

The standard functioning of subjectivity seems to be difficult to realise due to the fact that it shifts a considerable part of the educational institutions responsibility onto the teacher. This, in turn, is connected with the necessity to initiate, for some, a completely new style of activity, replacing objectivity with subjectivity.

This creates a question which may prove to be problematic. How can we utilise the principles of partnership yet protect against the dangers connected with over-familiarity in relations with students? How will an academic teacher, from whom a high standard of behaviour and functioning is required, find himself in such a complicated psychological situation?

The key to finding the right path may turn out to be the acceptance of the “golden middle” principle, which is located halfway between the relation of partners and familiarity, understood as the negative comprehension of comradeship, which could become a barrier in the achievement of goals set by the teacher.

This may take place when the fall in the feeling of duty and the relaxation of discipline turn out to be a hindrance in the execution of requirements previously set by the teacher. In such cases, there is not only a danger of a fall in the effectiveness

of the teaching, but also a disregard of the teacher and, as a result, of the subject matter being taught.

Partnership? Yes, but with maintenance of a minimum *distance*, which ensures both teachers and students have space to fully realise their roles.

Such an approach is also appropriate when it is necessary to find a place between excessive strictness and liberalism in teacher-student relations.

Only then, often after a long period of trial and error, confrontation with various situations and giving them new sense, do some succeed in reaching the level which is called *educational expertise*.

An expert is usually defined as, on one hand – possessing excellent capabilities in a given field, on the other hand – having an extremely positive influence on those with whom the expert comes into contact.

In summary, the expert does not refer to his personality, does not restrict individuality and is the opposite of dogmatic teaching.

The expert becomes a leader and not a controller, he becomes a guide on the path of knowledge, and not only its executor, combining rich knowledge with personality, thanks to which he is able to build positive inter-personal relations, motivate, inspire, support, provide opportunities to gain success and develop understanding of progress.

It is just a step from expert to being an *actual authority*.

No – a formal one, which a person becomes when presented with his degree, with the title of his role, the lessons conducted in his position, or from a position of authority. Not the one whose aim is subordination as a result of fear or subjugation, but a *liberating authority*, which is gained “by chance”, without any special efforts. The kind which is based on values of the individual and intellectual multicompetencies: meritorical, methodical, communication, co-operation, creative, and also moral competencies, connected with the quality of teacher-student relations, taking into consideration their personal basis of co-operation, allowing both lecturer and student to maintain in full their human dignity.

Irrespective of the current role they fulfil, especially teachers, they should fully understand the consequences of the undertaking or non-undertaking of the defined activities, behaviour and approaches.

This knowledge in the case of academic teachers should mean that the road to perfection will be intensified as much as possible.

Conclusion

The setting of all types of determinants creating the category of authority, and in particular regarding their demanding character, does not necessarily mean, as many are inclined to state, a removal from reality. On the contrary, it may become a theoretical point defining the positive direction of endeavours, possible

practices, not *thanks to* favourable conditions, but *despite* unfavourable ones. As the famous sentence says, "people rise to the task they are given".

*Ten mi najmiłszy nauczyciel bywa,
który jako naucza – tak sam wykonywa.
(The best teacher for me,
does as he teaches.)
(Jan Kochanowski)*

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ДЕТЕРМІНАНТИ АВТОРИТЕТУ ВИКЛАДАЧА ВИЩОЇ ШКОЛИ

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Розглянуто суть, детермінанти авторитету викладача вищої школи, типи педагогічних умінь, що його визначають. Виокремлено педагогічні умови ефективної організації партнерських взаємин засобами діалогу, емпатії, автономних дій та вияву незалежної думки. Розглянуто особливості експертної ролі викладача як лідера й керівника процесу, описано шляхи набуття дійсного авторитету.

Ключові слова: формальний й дійсний авторитет, особистість викладача, психо-соціальна здібність, полікомпетентність, суб'єктивність взаємин викладача і студентів, емпатичне розуміння, безкорисливість, автономія, діалог в освіті, амбівалентність, партнерство, уміння професійного артистизму, освітня експертиза.

ДЕТЕРМИНАНТЫ АВТОРИТЕТА ПРЕПОДАВАТЕЛЯ ВЫСШЕЙ ШКОЛЫ

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Рассмотрена сущность, детерминанты авторитета преподавателя высшей школы, типы педагогических умений, которые его определяют. Выделены педагогические условия эффективной организации партнерских взаимоотношений средствами диалога, эмпатии, автономных действий и выявления независимого мнения. Рассмотрены особенности экспертной роли преподавателя как лидера и руководителя процесса, описаны пути приобретения авторитета.

Ключевые слова: формальный и действительный авторитет, личность преподавателя, психо-социальная способность, поли-компетентность, субъективность взаимодействия преподавателя и студентов, эмпатического понимание, бескорыстность, автономия, диалог в образовании, амбивалентность, партнерство, умения профессионального артистизма, образовательная экспертиза.

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