

Piotr Plichta, Ph. D.
University of Lodz

The least important is what you say, more important - what you do and the most important – who you are (Seneca).

On Values in Education

Special educators' personal values system is the most important tool they have in their pedagogical work¹. But how to discuss something that is hard to define, to touch and hard to measure? How to organize knowledge on values? How to explain their role in life, in teaching, bringing up and the methods of transmitting them? What are the values? Do they really exist? Do they exist objectively or their existence has subjective character?

Problems which occur in education are particularly strongly related to such school subjects in which the question of value plays special role² like: Religion, Sexual education but also in History or Native language. It is often told that values have significant role in education but many people aren't able to explain it clearly. "The meaning, range and the results of fulfilling by teachers their professional duties depends on their understanding of professional ethics. And if their work ethics will be based on the universal values"³.

According to a chosen approach, values may have different meaning e.g.:

- Something valuable;
- Something which is in line with nature;
- Something that we want,
- The object of current or potential desire;
- Something that is the aim;

¹ E. Tomasiak E., Wybrane zagadnienia z pedagogiki specjalnej, Warszawa, 1997, s. 8.

² D. Tuohy, Dusza szkoły. Warszawa, 2002.

³ T. Lewowicki, Przemiany oświaty, Warszawa, 1997, s. 23-25.

- Something that satisfies somebody's needs and interests;
- Something that provides satisfaction and pleasure;
- Something that exists and at the same time should exist;
- Something that is in force, what appeals to people;
- Something that demands realization;

Values are described as factors that play different functions:

- Values are the most important factors explaining people's behavior;
- Values have influence on process of undertaking decisions,
- Values are strongly connected to quality of helping in people-oriented professions,
- Values are essential, often underestimated, factors influencing attitudes;
- Values can organize people's life, especially they play the main role in creating or diminishing feeling of life's meaning
- Values define the attitudes toward the reality, different social phenomena;
- Values influence the cognitive perception of different objects.

The results of some studies confirmed also the thesis, that values determinate man's behavior. The results showed that influence e.g. occupational choices, political behaviors, religion, cheating during the exams as well as choice of leisure activities⁴. Relationship between system of educators' personal values and with their professional and private functioning, has been also confirmed.

The next question which emerges - what is the method of disseminating the values? Is it the kind of "infection" or we learn them in some way? How to teach the values? If the first hypothesis is true, then we have to put attention on the teacher as the model, on his perception of the world, on his job and on declared and realized values. Is it possible to teach the values or only teach about the values? If we can teach the others the values, what are the methods? How to teach someone meaningful way of life? Do any special methods for this task exist? According to Tuohy⁵ there are six methods used by teachers in shaping values in students. This classification includes modeling, rewarding and the punishing, arrangement of values, explaining the consequences, nagging as well as manipulation.

Meirieu compares the transfer of values to infection by the virus. "Virus can develop if it will come across on living organism, in which he could nest (...). In the school system just the way teaching is organized can become the alive organism in which occurs process of

⁴ A. Olszak, Psychopedagogiczne kompetencje nauczycieli szkół specjalnych, Lublin, 2001.

⁵ D. Tuohy, op. cit.

dissemination the values can take place. This comparison taken from medicine has also its limitations. A virus enters organism using violence but values transmission is organized without violence”⁶. One can only proof values through their behavior. The question of transfer of values seems to be important for the teachers. They act "without recipe" - they have to create and update the values.

Education is often subject to the policy changes. Each minister of education after the elections says “The set of the values which schools approved in the past, has to be changed or corrected”. It causes the next issue to appear - what may be an instrument of such changes? Answer seems to be obvious - teacher is the “tool” to do that. Let us look at teachers’ situation in realizing new ideas and changes. If they did not do earlier (what is required now), they have to learn or have to disguise. If they adopted the new approaches, they can feel that they are nothing new, everything they do - they were doing before - but now it has only a new label.

Some teachers protect themselves from changes. This defense has logical explanation. Such kind of conservatism hasn’t unambiguously negative character. Whether they react or not and how they meet the expectations (often conflicting) is the teachers’ choice, their way of understanding the freedom. If teachers adopted their way of working to changing reality so quickly, school would change quickly also but there is not. In particular way school is the place of storage of tradition, history, customs etc. Teachers posses kind of “safety device” protecting them before overloading caused by often conflicting expectations.

What if proposed changes do not go in good direction? Then it seems, that teacher's resistance against changes guarantees the kind of continuity of school as one of the most important institutions in people’s life. It does not mean obviously, that schools should not change. To make the good changes, we should focus on cooperation with pupils’ families, good level of communication with teachers’ occupational group, proper professional training, skills improvement and emphasis on pedagogical development.

Maybe teachers’ values system is something like, mentioned earlier, the feature which leads them to keep the relative internal stability in changing conditions and in external instable situation. But sometimes that mechanism fails. Such situation may be defined as the professional burn-out syndrome, or a process of losing illusions.

⁶ P. Meirieu, *Moralne wybory nauczycieli. Etyka i pedagogika*. Warszawa, 2003 s. 100.

The research conducted on the sample of 316 special educators showed statistically significant correlations between level of perceived value crises and the level of professional burn-out⁷. The value crisis concerned: difficulties of building own hierarchy of values, significant changes in values, lack of integration of cognitive, emotional and motivational processes concerning values assessment and inability to fulfill values in real life⁸. The higher was the level of crisis, the higher experience of emotional exhaustion and negative attitudes toward their students called depersonalization. The higher were the difficulties related to their values systems, the lower feeling of achievements in pedagogical work. Another interesting outcomes showed strong relationship between process of burn-out and feeling of meaning of life. All dimensions of burn-out, according to Maslach, grew with decreasing of feeling of meaning of life and the meaning of own pedagogical work⁹.

Another aspect related to validation process is assessment of the pupils' achievements by the teachers. One of many roles which teachers fulfill, in their work is assessment, which is the kind of valuing. When we assess somebody's achievements, skills or competences, we often don't have the reliable measuring tools. In situations of choice, especially in undertaking unobvious moral decisions, role of own system of educators' values seem to be crucial. Therefore the teachers should take responsibility for recognizing their values that influence their choices and decisions.

According to Frankl, assessment is only possible from the highest perspective. Any maximum and the optimum of values is always the basis of validation. In the situation of assessment the maximum value level should be treated as the standard.¹⁰ It could support the need to confirm the hypothetic, objective hierarchy of values. When we assess the intensity of a colour we compare it to the standard maximal pattern¹¹.

We did not ever meet an ideal pupil also but we have the clear image of him. Nobody also saw a perfect teacher, however many books and dissertations were devoted to such model educators who are fair, objective and have ability to individualize his pedagogical impact and is ready to devotions. They also put a lot of effort to treat his students fair, and have a lot of motivation to improve their skills. There are only few professions where people have to face

⁷ P. Plichta, Wypalenie zawodowe pedagogów specjalnych a ich poczucie sensu życia i poziom kryzysu w wartościowaniu (na przykładzie specjalnych ośrodków szkolno – wychowawczych dla uczniów upośledzonych umysłowo). Łódź (UŁ niepublikowana praca doktorska), 2004.

⁸ P. Oleś, Kwestionariusz Kryzysu w Wartościowaniu – Podręcznik, Warszawa, 1998.

⁹ Ch. Maslach, Wypalenie w perspektywie wielowymiarowej, [w:] H. Sęk (red.) Wypalenie zawodowe. Przyczyny, mechanizmy, zapobieganie, Warszawa, 2000.

¹⁰ Frankl V. E. Frankl, Homo patiens, Warszawa, 1998.

¹¹ Cz. Matuszewicz, Psychologia wartości. Warszawa-Poznań, 1975, s. 105.

so high and serious expectations. That group includes teachers. Acting as a teacher demands freedom in making decisions and fulfilling what the teacher believes in. Every our activity, every our day, attitudes toward the others and to ourselves are based on values. There is no escape from validation. The ignorance of values can cause serious problems. Every negation is also the choice from the perspective of values, too¹².

The effectiveness of values' dissemination at schools through lectures and discussions has strong limitations¹³. Values can be effectively transmitted only when they are present in teachers' and students' personal relations.

¹² W. Chudy, Prawda człowieka i prawda o człowieku. [w:] K. Popielski (red.) Człowiek – wartości – sens. Studia z psychologii egzystencji, Lublin, 1996.

¹³ P. Meirieu, op.cit.

References:

1. W. Chudy, Prawda człowieka i prawda o człowieku. [w:] K. Popielski (red.) Człowiek – wartości – sens. Studia z psychologii egzystencji, Lublin, 1996.
2. V. E. Frankl, Homo patiens, Warszawa, 1998.
3. T. Lewowicki, Przemiany oświaty, Warszawa, 1997.
4. Ch. Maslach, Wypalenie w perspektywie wielowymiarowej, [w:] H. Sęk (red.) Wypalenie zawodowe. Przyczyny, mechanizmy, zapobieganie, Warszawa, 2000.
5. Cz. Matuszewicz, Psychologia wartości. Warszawa-Poznań, 1975.
6. P. Meirieu, Moralne wybory nauczycieli. Etyka i pedagogika. Warszawa, 2003.
7. P. Oleś, Kwestionariusz Kryzysu w Wartościowaniu – Podręcznik, Warszawa, 1998.
8. A. Olszak, Psychopedagogiczne kompetencje nauczycieli szkół specjalnych, Lublin, 2001.
9. P. Plichta, Wypalenie zawodowe pedagogów specjalnych a ich poczucie sensu życia i poziom kryzysu w wartościowaniu (na przykładzie specjalnych ośrodków szkolno – wychowawczych dla uczniów upośledzonych umysłowo). Łódź (UŁ niepublikowana praca doktorska), 2004.
10. D. Tuohy, Dusza szkoły. Warszawa, 2002.
11. E. Tomasik, Wybrane zagadnienia z pedagogiki specjalnej, Warszawa, 1997.