Ewa Pasterniak-Kobyłecka[*]

LATE MODERNITY TEACHERS FACED WITH THE CHOICE OF VALUES. DILEMMAS AND CHALLENGES

Introduction

The beginning of the 21st century is characterised by broad cross-cultural contacts, increasing globalisation and dynamic growth of knowledge which quickly becomes outdated. It is a time of great of changes in civilisation, an era of mass media that shape human consciousness. We live in a world of liquidity, volatility of meanings and values, and their random and instantaneous selection. Decency and moral and aesthetic sensitivity seem to be losing momentum, giving way to such priorities as material goods and easy, pleasant lifestyles.

Cyber culture grows "out of the development of new technologies, especially digital, which will definitively reformulate all the aspects of the functioning of social structures in a world dominated by computer technology" (Zawojski 2010, p. 112). Thanks to satellite communications, people quickly and easily exchange large amounts of information and highly developed neoliberal societies dictate comprehensive developmental strategies. These economic and political changes result in certain regularities which manifest themselves in the process of globalisation:

1. Scientific and technological progress, accompanied by modern education shaping awareness of civilizational changes, is a key driving force of globalisation.

2. Anticipating acculturation, which involves adaptation of local institutions, organisations, attitudes, behaviours, aspirations to the challenges of civilisational change introduced in highly developed countries, manifests itself in the perception of socio-political life remaining under the influence of globalisation.

[*]**Ewa Pasterniak-Kobyłecka** – Ph. D. in pedagogy, Associate Professor, University of Zielona Góra; research interests: axiological basics of education, teacher functioning in education, contemporary tendencies in didactics; e-mail: e.kobylecka@ipp.uz.zgora.pl

3. Cultural amalgamation is an important sign in the process of trans-
formation of political life (selective modification of attitudes, civic
behaviours, functioning of political institutions, accompanied by sti-
mulation and revitalisation of local values, especially those present in
traditional political culture; these phenomena interact, complement
and coagulate).

4. Cultural imperialism, which manifests itself in the promotion and dis-
semination of lifestyle patterns and models of socio-political behavio-
ur by countries with the strongest political position, is a significant
phenomenon in the process of political transformation of the modern
world.

5. Unification of political life, which is determined by the process of
globalisation, lies at the root of a momentous crisis of values, especially
noticeable in the degradation of humanistic ideals, in the omnipresent
quest for superficial success, in the depth of depreciation of moral
principles, as well as in the onset of universality of the illusion of
virtual reality (Chudobski 2007, p. 38).

Axiological and ideological disputes have lasted for centuries. Different
hierarchies of goods and values, visions and ideals of human culture ha-
ve been created throughout historical periods. Today, at the time of rapid
transformation, people are faced with the requirement to assess the surro-
unding reality in order to accept or reject the changes. What was constant
and given for previous generations (e.g. God, honour, homeland), is not
necessarily appreciated in today's reality, as contemporary everyday life
increasingly stresses the need "to have more" rather than "to be more". Eve-
ryone has the right to autonomous axiological choices. Thus, people accept
universal human values as their own, respecting and multiplying them, or
disapprove of them, living their lives as if they were not there. They may
also advocate anti-values, i.e. adhere to various manifestations of evil, yield
to the temptation of easy, pleasant life without commitment and concern for
another human being. In the former case, people develop and improve, whe-
reas in the latter, they regress, succumbing to the process which may lead to
self-doubt, despair and depravity. Self-centred and anti-social attitudes are
widespread, a phenomenon which has led many thinkers to identify them as
manifestation of dehumanisation and depersonalisation within the chaos of
media information onslaught, which confuses and alienates contemporary
individuals.

The problem of selection of values is part of social, cultural and educa-
tional transformation in the new circumstances of democracy construction

in our country on the one hand and the ongoing global civilisational breakthrough, on the other hand. Being in the contemporary world is marked by the stigma of identity crisis, a phenomenon which has also affected the teaching profession. The desire for immediate fulfilment of desires, without incurring the consequences of unworthy acts, without responsibility for them, devoid of guilt, seems to be the zeitgeist of our time, in which integrity, heroism, nobility, modesty and mercy are perceived as vices rather than virtues.

School largely reflects the processes taking place in larger communities. Within its walls, there are many new problems, challenges and tasks. Educators are expected to understand the reality and to be able to explain it to their pupils by impersonating guides, consultants, entertainers and coordinators of comprehensive development support. It is not only important what teachers know or can do, but also who they are, what principles and norms they respect, and whether they may become authorities and role models for pupils.

Terminological comments

There are numerous definitions, classifications and hierarchies of values. It is predominantly believed that they are what is "valuable and desirable for people, what they aim at, what they want to achieve, learn or multiply, what gives meaning to their existence and enriches their lives by defining their lives' objectives" (Kobyłecka 2009, p. 29). Stanisław Kowalczyk, adopting a dualistic concept of values, identifies three basic criteria for their classification, i.e. subjective, subjective and formal.

I. Types of values due to their content: 1) values of goods and individuals; 2) values belonging to the inanimate, animate, and psycho-mental world; 3) natural values of the natural world and human creations; 4) values of independents entities (substantive) and accidental values (owned by substances).

II. Values associated with humans as personal beings: 1) material-economic, 2) bio-vital (related to the somatic dimension of humans); 3) sensitive-emotional and ludic; 4) cognitive-intellectual centred on truth; 5) artistic and aesthetic associated with beauty; 6) morality-related customs, 7) religious and sacred.

III. Values that take into account formal and general aspects: 1) positive and anti-values, 2) primary (autotelic) and derivatives, 3) absolute and relative, 4) ideal (behavioural patterns) and specific-concrete

5) instrumental-utilitarian and categorical -obligatory, 6) infinite and finite, 7) individual and social (e.g. family, national, civil), 8) isolated and integrated 9) rational and irrational; permanent and ephemeral (Kowalczyk 2006, p. 140).

Especially the second optics appears to be essential for the undertaken research. The *Core Curriculum for General Education* incorporates such values as: family, friendship, tolerance, patriotism, health, honesty, responsibility, respect, truth (Regulation of the Minister of Education, 2008). They are often referred to by Polish teachers when working with pupils in the classroom (Kobyłecka 2009, pp. 212-213).

As the collapse of interpersonal relationships has become widespread nowadays, educators emphasise the importance of such values as peace, respect, love, honesty, humility, simplicity, cooperation or unity (Denek 1994), as well as truth, life, humanity, honour, spirituality (Gajda 2000), and altruism, human person, responsibility, freedom, tolerance, justice, non-harming attitudes (Łobocki 2008). To some extent, school teachers take these values into account when teaching (Kobyłecka 2009, p. 158). Researchers also point to some common values established by the European tradition, e.g.: peace, entrepreneurship, prosperity, democracy, law and order, secularism, freedom, equality or altruism (Pomian 2004, pp. 117-227). However, they are not accepted to the same degree by the citizens of different countries, as cultural factors play here a decisive role.

Values can also have their opposites. Anti-values are certain "ideas, principles [...] reminiscent of a kind of value, but in fact being its contradiction; apparent false values; illusory" (*Słownik współczesnego języka polskiego* 1996, p. 32), with pejorative axiological content and negative aftermath (mental destruction, pathologies). According axiotropism, anti-values repel, discourage, people escape from associating with them, reject and avoid them[1].

Selection of values is a decision-making process, which is affected by both internal (knowledge, diversity of experiences, habits, sensitivity, motivation, emotion, intuition) and external (social and cultural determinants, e.g.: the impact of the nearest environment, of significant people or the mass media) factors. Conscious selection of moral values (such as: truthfulness, tolerance, honesty), which have obligatory character, is an especially important foundation of a decent life and constitutes "objective qualifications for

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[1]For more see: A. Skrobas, *Antywartości jako przedmiot badań i refleksji. Zarys problematyki*, [in:] *Aksjologia współczesności. Problemy i kontrowersje* (2012), B. Truchlińska (ed.), Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin, pp. 126-127.

attitudes, behaviours and actions of particular individuals" (Siemianowski 1995, p. 107).

Acceptance, hierarchisation and observance (implementation) of universal and significant values is helpful in the making of vital decisions and solving everyday problems, including interpersonal conflicts. The choice of values is a consequence of their prior recognition (identification, isolation), understanding (designation) and approval, and as such, the decision-making process depends on numerous factors. Values are chosen "as 'tools' or 'procedures' or 'methods' meant to appreciate these entities that turn to them, considering them as 'the cause' or 'condition' of self-formation, i.e. self-development, becoming a better person" (Flores d Arcais 1993, p. 35).

There are three most important needs decisive in human aspirations and choices: the cognitive need instigates to choose the truth, the need for emotional contact instigates to choose moral values and the need to seek the meaning of life instigates to look for ideals and universal values (Obuchowski 2000). Elections of values also establish their hierarchies in a particular social, educational, life, etc. situation.

Adults usually have a relatively crystallised system of values, which is meant to "set the directions for life aspirations in individuals and social groups, including undertaken and implemented educational paths" (Szymański 2000, p. 21). Teachers are usually able to determine the meaning of their own lives, to define the status of selected values, to identify their strengths and weaknesses and thus, to make decisions related to self-improvement. Their choices may be either explicitly communicated or hidden.

Between individualism and collectivism

Contemporary people have the right to liberty and freedom of speech. The same is true for teachers: "Emancipation extends individual autonomy, widens the range of impact and the space for decision-making processes; it is also conducive to own initiatives and reinforcement of self-reliance attitudes" (Bokszański 2007, p. 84).

Being independent and original is now popular and fashionable. We may identify two main dimensions of individualism: 1) being unequalled and unique; 2) intensity of identities' attitudes towards themselves, ability to turn themselves into objects of cognitive creations (Foucault 1995, pp. 415-419).

In their perception of the world, individualists are focused on themselves, their own biographies and the discovery of their "unique selves". They care about their development and privacy. Therefore, they:

- appreciate personal autonomy (are characterised by conscious formu-

lation of plans and commitments selected from a wide range of options, shaping their own lives in accordance with individual criteria);

- are convinced that they are entitled to forming values (a privilege of judging as to what is worthy of effort and what should be selected in situations of alternative courses of action and evaluation);

- prefer social and moral pluralism, because it constitutes an essential condition for the emergence of multiple courses of action and moral options, necessary for the existence of autonomous entities with the potential for making choices (Bokszański 2007, p. 82).

Teachers are active entities, so they are required to make different decisions, evaluate, organise, diagnose, prevent, support and cooperate, as well as to be constantly active, perceptive and creative. At the same time, everyday school reality forces them into conformism, into submission to the administrative system, to the will of superiors or to parental demands. Their work is expected to be effective, as their pupils must be able to pass their final exams. All this may result in excessive stress and the burnout phenomenon. Research by Henryka Kwiatkowska indicates that 41.2% of Polish teachers experience traumatic experiences, manifested in the sense of material degradation, hardship, etc. (Kwiatkowska 2005, p. 126).

Deindividualisation, being the opposite of individualisation, is characterised by search for the creation of new communities or ties and for unification of lifestyles (Bokszański 2007, p. 86). At school, there are collectivist tendencies, intergroup agreements and cooperation. Children are taught respect for common good and other people, as indispensable qualities in the building of future based on the culture of peaceful coexistence. Nevertheless, it happens that in relation to their colleagues teachers behave in an unfriendly or even hostile manner. There is rivalry, jealousy, envy and struggle for recognition or promotion, whereas my recent research reveals the need for friendly atmosphere, friendly relations and cooperation in peer teams. In their work environment, teachers most appreciate: discipline, commitment, integrity, professionalism, tolerance, creativity. They declare joint actions stemming from their concern for the welfare of their pupils. They want to create the best possible conditions at school for their all-round development, as well as to ensure safety[2].

In the context of teacher's work, it is also worth referring to the eternal dilemma. i.e. what is more important: obligation (promoted by the Sto-

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[2]Group interviews conducted by the author in primary and lower-secondary schools in the Province of Lubusz in 2015.

ics) or happiness (advocated by the Epicureans). Adherence to the former position may lead to pride, whereas adherence to the latter may result in consumerism and hedonism. Therefore, is it possible for educators to be diligent without losing the enjoyment of life? This is likely to happen if teachers-educators will accept universal values and at the same time deem their particular tasks necessary and rewarding. Perhaps that is why teacher's work is treated as a service or mission and many of those involved strive for professionalism and perfectionism.

We read: "A master is a person who embodies the reachability of the vision to change the world, who works creatively, in accordance with a measure of necessity and possibility given to him or her, who has achieved outstanding achievements in performance, who is a model of fulfilled humanity and teacher for others" (Góralski 2003, pp. 34-35). School tutors who strive for perfection are able to overcome antinomies, because they know that they cannot betray their vocation to support pupils in their development and cannot deny their responsibility for their actions or break away from the ideas of humanism.

(Un)certainty, ambivalence of elections

In their work, teachers encounter multiple problems. The constant reforms of the Polish education system, uncertain employment situation and insufficient reimbursement are often at the root of frustration and confusion. The freedom resulting from cultural pluralism, secularisation of society, belief in the power of human mind, cult of knowledge and moral relativism are increasingly causing axiological chaos. It is not easy to make decisions amongst multiple options. There is an orientation among educators, especially young, towards new values, such as: activity, individuality, innovation, resourcefulness, independence. Elections of permanent and invariable values, such as truth, good, humanity, are rarely addressed. In their private elections, more than half of teachers indicate other values (family, health, love, work) than those that are linked to the objectives pursued in the classroom. Caregivers frequently refer to honesty, respect, tolerance, patriotism, justice, truthfulness or responsibility (Kobyłecka 2009).

Modern school is mainly oriented towards the teaching of pragmatic competences (Wojnar 2016, p. 10). There is insufficient emphasis on the development of moral and aesthetic sensitivity. Development of spiritual intelligence is not supported, resistance to failure is not taught and to be autonomous entities, involved in social life, is not a primary goal.

As noted by Erich Fromm: "The prerequisites of the 'being' *modus* are independence, freedom and the ability of critical thinking. Active existence,

in which activity denotes inner rather than outer activity [. . .] that is about creative use of human potential [. . .], talents, abilities and, generally speaking, all the wealth of gifts with which, to various extent, are endowed all human beings, defines its fundamental properties" (Fromm 1999, pp. 147-148). The prevalence of human over material values makes it possible to overcome the crisis of civilization and is conducive to the survival of humanity. However, in the existential 'having' *modus*, according to the thinker, "my relationship with the world is based on acquisition and appropriation, in the course of which I would like to make everyone and everything my property, including myself" (Fromm 1999, p. 66). Consumption is characterised by "ambivalent properties: it frees from anxiety, because what you have can no longer be taken away. At the same time, however, it leads to consuming larger and larger portions, as goods that have been consumed promptly lose their satisfying properties. Modern consumers may make the formula: 'I am what I have and what I consume' their motto" (Fromm 1999, p. 70).

Teachers often find themselves in situations in which they must make important decisions related to their pupils' well-being. They seek support in eternal values, but also strive to fight for modern school, making use of new media and information technologies. In general, they are aware that societies without universal, immutable values become hostile to their individual members, so young generations should be bestowed with knowledge about what is important and valuable anytime, anywhere.

Therefore, what remains to be done by educators who believe in the sense of individual and social life that is still subordinated to the embodiment of the living message of spiritual values? Outstanding humanists are looking for answers to this question: "I believe it is participation in centuries-old traditions, which stubbornly carries small, yet multiplying, Miłosz's 'particles of virtue' along the difficult paths of history. It is them which make it possible, despite many dark predictions, to look with hope to the future of the human world" (Puzynina 2005, pp. 20-21).

Concluding Remarks

Humans lead their existence in the world of different goods and ideas. School and teachers face the problem of selection of values in ambivalent education, oscillating between "the practice of freedom" and "the practice of domination". In their activities, educators of children and adolescents are often guided not so much by their own beliefs, but rather by external instructions, fads or by easy access to specific scientific studies and methodologies. The space for exploration of teachers' axiological choices is also limited for

other reasons, namely the so-called interdisciplinary teacher training, which is often far from satisfactory. This mainly applies to philosophical, psychological, sociological and praxeological knowledge. The practice of investing in own development is not common in teachers who have acquired the status of qualified teacher. They rarely benefit from different forms of vocational training.

The division of human reality into material and spiritual may lead to axiological confusion and anxiety. Consumerist and hedonistic attitudes result in elections of goods that are unstable and transient. Nonetheless, other human beings, such as colleagues, pupils, their parents, most often constitute the most important value for educators.

In pedagogical and sociological literature, reflections on the selection of values are scattered. Variously interpreted, partial theories and concepts are usually only fragmentary. There is deficiency of analyses of the process values selection in education and self-education. The issue deserves more in-depth deliberations, as it is values that lay the groundwork for the existence and development of culture.

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Ewa Pasterniak-Kobyłecka

TEACHERS OF LATE MODERNITY IN THE FACE OF VALUE CHOICES. DILEMMAS AND CHALLENGES

Keywords: values, value choices, ambiguity.

Contemporary educators of children and adolescents face the importance of the assessment of the surrounding reality and the acceptance or rejection of the ongoing changes. They are required to understand and be capable of explaining these changes to their pupils. In the group interviews made by the author, teachers spoke about their axiological preferences, what they value, approve of, and want to expand.

Among the educators, especially young ones, one can notice the orientation towards new values: activity, individualism, innovation, resourcefulness, and independence. Fixed and constant values (e.g., the truth, good, and humanity) are rarely chosen. More than half of the teachers point in their choices to values (family, health, love, and work) other than those related to the educational purposes realized in classes. The educators declare that in their work with pupils they most frequently refer to honesty, respect, tolerance, patriotism, justice, truthfulness, and responsibility. The author of this article stipulates the uncertainty and ambiguity about the value choices made by teachers.

Ewa Pasterniak-Kobyłecka

NAUCZYCIELE PÓŹNEJ NOWOCZESNOŚCI WOBEC WYBORU WARTOŚCI. DYLEMATY I WYZWANIA

Słowa kluczowe: wartość, wybór wartości, ambiwalencja.

Współcześni wychowawcy dzieci i młodzieży stają przed koniecznością oceny otaczającej rzeczywistości, akceptacji bądź odrzucenia zachodzących zmian. Wymaga się od nich, aby je rozumieli oraz potrafili wyjaśniać swoim podopiecznym. W przeprowadzonych przez autorkę wywiadach grupowych nauczyciele wypowiadali się na temat swoich preferencji aksjologicznych, tego co cenią, aprobują, chcą pomnażać. Wśród wychowawców, szczególnie młodych, można zauważyć orientację na wartości nowe: aktywność, indywidualizm, innowacyjność, zaradność, niezależność. Rzadko pojawiają się wybory wartości trwałych i niezmiennych (np. prawdy, dobra, człowieczeństwa). Ponad połowa nauczycieli w prywatnych wyborach wskazuje inne wartości (rodzinę, zdrowie, miłość, pracę), niż te, które są powiązane z celami kształcenia realizowanymi na lekcjach. Opiekunowie deklarują, że pracując z uczniami najczęściej odwołują się do uczciwości, szacunku, tolerancji, patriotyzmu, sprawiedliwości, prawdomówności, odpowiedzialności. Autorka dostrzega niepewność i ambiwalencję wyborów wartości przez nauczycieli.