

# ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND THE STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: SOME PERSPECTIVES AND CHALLENGES

**Aleksandra Tłuściak-Deliowska**

The Maria Grzegorzewska Pedagogical University, Poland

E-mail: adeliowska@aps.edu.pl

*“When two people meet, each one is changed by the other, so you’ve got two new people.” – John Steinbeck*

Contemporaneity, defined as post-modernity, is a stage of civilization changes, which in its nature entails changes in the sphere of didactic and educational thinking and practice. The rapid pace of social change, shaping new interpersonal relationships, progressive axiological chaos, enforce a kind of revision of views on the school as a place and the role of the teacher in it.

Over the past several decades, throughout the world we have been observing the role of education, which is increasingly seen as a factor affecting, to a large extent, the well-being, development and quality of life of citizens and the economic progress of the countries. One can also suppose that this process will shape the face of future times to an even greater extent. The persons responsible for the organization of education are therefore wondering what education will be most useful to young people in the future. Attempts are made to identify certain key competences for the 21st century. According to the position of some people, any planning and anticipation of such a rapidly changing reality is impossible because the effects of various phenomena that already exist and inventions that are just emerging will be so great that the forecasts themselves do not make sense. On the other hand, “somehow” we have to find ourselves in this reality. And this uncertainty and variability, which, paradoxically, is certain, becomes the anchor point. From this emerges the task of preparing to cope with the uncertainty and changeability that can be met. The aim is to prepare the young generation to live in a world of constant change and to cope with what is unpredictable. Substantially, the task of the 21st century school seems to be double: prepare the young generation to live here and now and to live in a different, ever-changing reality. Is it possible?

The contemporary school is also expected to meet the challenges posed by the integration processes taking place in Europe and the world. Meeting these challenges can be understood in two ways. Firstly, it is about instrumental and technical issues related to minor changes in education programs. Secondly, it is about capturing the qualitatively new cognitive and existential situation of modern people. The need to shape the supranational cultural identity co-created by categories such as humanism, diversity and universality, identity, critical attitudes towards the existing and created reality and the ability to dialogue and communication are perceived.

It seems that the times when the school could equip students with knowledge and skills useful for a lifetime are over. If it is too difficult to predict the future, to be sure what will be useful, the importance of meta-skills of self-education increases. Self-education is necessary in adapting to the changing needs of the labor market. The role of the teacher has changed. Less important is to provide knowledge and more to assist the student in the process of creating knowledge. However, the perception of the role of the teacher through the prism of only “assist-

ing” the student seems to be a considerable simplification. In this context, it is increasingly emphasized that alternative solutions, dialogues that are open to multilateral co-operation. What is more, taking into account the progress of new technologies and their growing popularity, the teacher really ceases to be a knowledge-giving person, and becomes a facilitator, organizer of self-education in the classroom, in which the system of interaction with his students changes and mutual interaction with students also changes. The processes of self-organization, self-regulation, management and decision-making become more and more complex and responsible, therefore they require scientific knowledge, critical and alternative thinking and courage in action. The world “is getting smaller”, but at the same time we have more and more connections with others. The question arises whether the school keeps up with the changes?

The school environment consists of all the institutional, personal and didactic factors that occur at school. These factors can be analyzed in an objective and subjective sense. When we are interested in the subjective side, we touch then on the issue of school climate. Perception and interpretation of individual aspects of the school environment by members of the school community represents the school climate expression. Literature analysis allows to state that the subjective side of school environment is extremely important for the students’ development and their psychoeducational functioning at school. Over the past decades, considerable research has been carried out about the importance of relationship between students and teachers in shaping the quality of students’ school learning experiences (Ahnert et al., 2012). Schools are, after all, interpersonal settings, in which relationships influence students’ motivation, academic performance and psychological functioning. Poor quality relationships with teachers and non-supportive classroom climate can be seen as sources of chronic stress and many other problems related to everyday functioning. Dialogue in the student-teacher relationship understood as a way of being should form the basis on any educational situation in the “new”, it seems, thinking about co-creating the educational reality. It can be achieved by various methods of developing motivation and commitment of learning, methods and techniques that stimulate students to ask questions and seek answers to them. It can be assumed that a specific “culture of individuals” will become a permanent property of human functioning in this modern, objective world. The student’s subjectivity depends on the teacher and his subjectivity.

Although the world in which we live changes, which implies a change in school, it seems to me that these subjective and humanistic factors related to the student-teacher relationship are still important and will be. If not more important than before.

Challenges in education are caused by a variety of factors, which have affected not only teachers and students and relationships between them, but also the school community as a whole. Challenges in education have changed over the social development and technological progress indicated above. According to Bronfenbrenner’s social-ecological model, all existing environments with micro-, meso-, exo- and macro- levels are interconnected, affect each other and human development “... over the life course across successive generations, and through historical time, both past and future” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p. 793). I hope that the few reflections presented above will be an inspiration for further an in-depth analysis of contemporary and future school reality.

## References

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***Aleksandra Tłuściak-Deliowska***

PhD, Dr. Hab. (Post-doctoral degree), Assistant Professor,  
Institute of Pedagogy, The Maria Grzegorzewska Pedagogical  
University, 40 Szczęśliwicka Street, Warsaw, Poland.

E-mail: [adeliowska@aps.edu.pl](mailto:adeliowska@aps.edu.pl)

Website: <http://www.aps.edu.pl/home-en/>