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The importance of teachers' professional practice and personal development in terms of career stages

Professional teaching practice is of interest to the field of pedeutology. However, research into teachers' professional work in the context of their personal and professional development from the perspective of career stages is underdeveloped. Therefore, in response to research needs within this area, an analysis of the content of diaries obtained as a results of a competition (two editions) has been performed to fill the void. The conclusions of the study are important for introducing changes in the field of teacher training, and its implications should serve as guidelines to be applied in this area.

Keywords: teacher, work, personal development, career stages

Znaczenie pracy i rozwoju osobistego nauczycieli w perspektywie etapów kariery zawodowej

Praca zawodowa nauczyciela stanowi przedmiot zainteresowania wielu pedeutologów. Jednakże badania nad pracą zawodową nauczyciela w kontekście rozwoju osobistego, jak i zawodowego w perspektywie etapów kariery zawodowej należą do rzadkości. Odpowiadając na potrzeby badawcze w tym zakresie, dokonano analizy treści pamiętników pozyskanych drogą konkursową (dwie edycje) w celu uzupełnienia luk w tym zakresie badań nad zawodem i osobą nauczyciela. Wnioski z badań są ważne do wprowadzania zmian w zakresie kształcenia do zawodu nauczyciela, zaś implikacje są wytycznymi do aplikacji w tym zakresie.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciel, praca, rozwój osobisty, etapy kariery zawodowej

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Be yourself — find your own way. Learn about yourself before you decide to learn about children

(Korczak, 1987, p. 32).

Introduction

The modern world, churning with social, economic, cultural, and technological changes — and the consequences of those changes — is not without significance for the world of education and for teachers. The consequences are evident, for example, in the evolution of teachers' functions and responsibilities in the direction of 'emphasis on teaching real life, on multilateral activity and independence, and on supporting young people in shaping their educational and life plans' (Szempruch, BIPS, p. 202). These and other effects of social change are provoking pedeutologists to answer as soon as possible the question, 'What kind of teachers do the modern school and the world need?' and to apply practices that will facilitate the shaping of specific traits, skills, and attitudes. Undoubtedly, the most up-to-date answer to the question would be to focus on shaping self-reflection and fully conscious, internal, independent personal and professional development. As a pedeutologist, I especially focus on these predispositions, because it is teachers who shape the young generations' functioning and benefiting from change, who are experts in their scientific disciplines, who — thanks to new scientific discoveries — still provide new knowledge, new understanding, new reading of contexts, etc., and who are members of society representing school as an institution responsible for preparing young generations to live in what is new, unknown, and changeable. Henryka Kwiatkowska drew attention to the need to prepare teachers to function in the changing schools and the changing world as early as 2005, emphasising that schools today need teachers who understand that education 'cannot be adapted to the agreed socialisation suggestions or proposals, marked by the primacy of uniqueness, organised only according to "cultural imposition", with a top-down system of values. Being such, it deprives itself of significant social meanings and becomes alienated in relation to the changes and new needs' (2005, p. 5). Such an understanding of education requires relevant teacher training that includes reflectiveness, an emphasis on internal motivation, and a focus on comprehensive, lifelong development. As Wanda Dróżka rightly observes

'modern man needs reflectiveness for intellectual and practical mastery of this fluid and changing reality and to cope with its meanders. As an attitude towards change — reflectiveness - which is the ability to reflect on what, how and why - is a competence close to wisdom, necessary above all for a modern teacher. For a teacher is required to be able to distinguish between valuable and good things and worthless and bad things, to reconcile various human aspirations, interests and influences. And this means that they must have a good theoretical and practical insight into a given situation and a deep conviction — based on knowledge and experience — that their goals, methods, and initiatives are justified within a specific vision of education, of which they should try to convince others. Teachers (as well as all contemporary humans) are also required to

be aware that their every move has a global reflection and vice versa; therefore they cannot be thoughtless, they must think, read, ask, talk, observe, learn, wonder, question, and be aware of risks' (Dróżka, 2018, p. 186).

Regarding the above premises, I would like to emphasize that the inspiration to speak on shaping the basic skills of teachers in a changing school and the world has become the reading of teacher diaries and research conducted among graduates of teacher faculties starting their professional career. For the purposes of this article, due to its specific framework, only content analysis has been used. The purpose of the qualitative research is meant to draw attention to its influence on professional work and career and personal development in the perspective of preparing current candidates for the teaching profession and to improve those already working in the profession. I especially focus on the lack of reflection and research in the pedeutological discourse on the category of 'teachers' personal development'. If it exists at all, then it is only marginally on the borderline of the category of 'professional development'. However, it is never a key category that is superior to the latter. Jim Butler (1991, 1993, 1996) emphasises that teachers' personal development is a basic and a necessary precondition for professional development. Without conscious personal development, there will be no conscious professional development, a consequence of which is evident in resistance to change and adherence to routines and patterns that are inadequate to the changing situations and events.

Theoretical research framework

In psychological and pedagogical literature, it is emphasised that internal motivation — i.e. 'the human attitude to active participation in transformational processes, to the implementation of a certain vision of an ideal state' (ibid., p. 15) — as well as one's attitude towards the future, which, 'assuming a correctly formulated ideal state, directs individuals to activities which promote development and creativity' (Cybal-Michalska, 2017, p. 16) and constitutes a basis for development-oriented initiatives. In addition to the factors listed above, Zbigniew Pietrasiński (1997) points to those that are associated with the structure of personality (including, e.g. positive self-esteem, autonomy, and a strong sense of internal control), as well as with the structure of the mind and such abilities as intelligence, special talents, and openness to new knowledge and with the sphere of intellectual activity, such as reflexivity and self-reflection (for more see: Łukasik, 2018).

The desired development-oriented activities (which I associate with self-creation) exert a positive effect when proper self-recognition occurs (recognition of one's own potential). This makes it possible to achieve one's goals by overcoming one's own imperfections, developing positive personality traits, and increasing control over one's behaviour. In addition, it makes it possible 'to choose one's own way of life, to build the competence of self-understanding, both in the sphere of one's own needs, aspirations, and motives and in relation to the ways of satisfying and implementing them' (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2008, p. 138). Therefore, as emphasised by Mirosława Nowak-Dziemianowicz (2008), self-knowledge constitutes a basis for development, while a lack of recognition or misdiagnosis and self-assessment can contribute to alienation,

failures in personal and professional life, and hunger and a sense of defeat in life. Self-knowledge is therefore a condition for successful development (Obuchowski, 1993), both personal and professional. In relation to teachers, Jim Butler emphasises that professional development will not occur or does not exist if there is no personal development. In my understanding, personal development is a complement to professional development or an area of total privacy not related to professional work, whose 'positive consequences have an extremely strong impact on the quality of both professional functioning (e.g. distancing oneself from professional experience, going beyond, not 'living professional problems only', etc.). Focus on lifelong personal development is a basis for self-acceptance, recognition, fulfilment, satisfaction, and better coping with difficult situations in the workplace or in personal life, etc.' (Łukasik, 2018b, p. 29). From my research to date on the personal development of teachers/candidates for the teaching profession, it is evident that it has been mistakenly identified with the implementation of professional promotion paths, sporadically with professional development, and in rare cases with development that guarantees the satisfaction of personal needs as well as a better well-being and functioning in both personal and professional life (see: Łukasik, 2016c).

Based on the analysis of available research in the area of teachers' professional and personal development, it can be said that without personal development, teachers may be subject to professional promotion procedures (strictly defined by law). Unfortunately, initiatives requiring guaranteed permanent employment in accordance with the provisions of the 'Teacher's Charter' have little to do with development (the appearance of development activities confirms teachers' participation in improvement courses after the completion of their career paths and the fact that, e.g. the knowledge and skills obtained in the course of various forms of improvement during the implementation of professional promotion are sporadically used in everyday educational practice) (e.g. Łukasik, 2017a, 2017b, Szumiec, 2016). Butler (1996) writes that professional development should always be focused on teachers' development. He believes that this development is possible only through internal orders, motivation arising from internal needs, and only then may teachers be focused on improving the quality of their professional practice. Thus, the purpose of personal development is to develop:

- a structure of personal analysis for drawing conclusions from theory and professional practice,
- an ability to understand and appreciate the role of reflection,
- skills in linking content and processes characterising the subject being taught with one's own experience,
- an ability to read and extract meaning from literature on education and development,
- an ability to criticise, analyse, and reflect on the assessment and use of available research,
- an analytical structure as a basis for designing learning from real situations,
- an ability to transfer knowledge and perceptions of the world,
- the art of argumentation during design and development,
- a response mechanism and reflective attitudes towards improving educational processes, and
- the art of maintaining distance from the curriculum (ibid.).

Reflection, critical thinking, setting one's priorities, and taking initiative are conducive to the implementation of ideal patterns that self-conscious individuals strive for. Therefore, care for teachers' personal

development should constitute a basis for designing the process of teacher training. Unfortunately, this is still its weak point, mostly absent and sometimes implemented 'along the way.' It may depend on who introduces it and how much they care about their own personal development (on whether they are aware of it).

From the perspective of reflections on teachers' professional practice and development, I have also considered the category of *career stages*. In connection with numerous studies of the concept of a professional career, I will refer in my theoretical considerations to the specific classification of professional career stages necessary to conduct analyses and interpretations in the empirical part. The design axis of the study was based on Izabela Lebuda's four stages of a professional career (2014, p. 125):

1. 'Exploration and creation of a professional role'
2. 'Continuation of the adopted strategy'
3. 'Increased effort'
4. 'Retired teacher'

The first stage, 'Exploration and creation of a professional role,' which after Wanda Dróżka can be called 'professional shock' (2002, p. 25), is recognised as difficult and full of doubt. This is mainly due to young teachers' search for a survival strategy in a new working environment which is very different from the teaching practice required as part of teacher training, as well as concerns about their own competences or the acceptance of their peers (Łukasik 2010, 2018a). At the same time, despite fears and numerous anxieties about the implementation of professional tasks, it is also a period of euphoria, internal commitment, incentives to build relationships, and confirmation of recognition. Based on the research by I. Lebuda (2014, p. 138), four adaptation strategies manifest at this stage: 'Adapt' (adaptation to the peer group of teachers), 'Hide deficiencies' (a focus on hiding incompetence from teachers, pupils, and their parents), 'Equalize deficiencies' (a focus on acquiring the necessary knowledge and competences in the shortest possible time), and 'Flash' (desire to be distinguished, to demonstrate). Referring to this classification of the concept of development, I have distinguished three leading elements: motivation (internal/external), future orientation (now/sometime), and intellectual activity (lack of reflectivity and change/reflectivity and change).

'The continuation of the adopted operational strategy' is the second stage in teachers' professional careers. According to the author, it is a stage when the working strategies developed in the first years of professional adaptation lead to a personal strategy that is reproduced in subsequent years. At this stage, the following game plans dominate: 'Craftsman' (focused on transferring knowledge and duplicating work patterns, isolated from pupils' problems), 'Fireman' (task-orientated, focused on solving pupils' problems and building relationships with them), 'Win the race' (focused on professional and personal development, striving for mastery and reinforced mastery), and 'Running makes sense' (focus on continuous, total professional and personal development) (ibid., p. 145). In the context of development, motivation (internal/external) and personality structure (self-esteem and autonomy/lack of autonomy) are particularly apparent.

The next stage is labelled by Lebuda as 'Increased effort', and it covers the last years of work before retirement, during which teachers try to continue the adopted strategies; however, they require much more effort, which often leads to a decrease in well-being and self-efficacy (ibid., p. 156). This is often limited by

restrictions on their professional development opportunities (e.g. their training is not funded), anxiety about their professional future, perception of them by the social environment, or the compulsion to give up their place to younger staff (ibid.). In the perspective of developmental theory, motivation is especially dominant at this stage (internal/external), conditioning conscious developmental activities or their absence. This stage will determine the professional balance and the accompanying feelings during the first years of retirement.

The author refers to the fourth stage of 'Retired teacher' as a time of retrospection and the strengthening of professional identity. Lebuda's research shows that in the first months of retirement, teachers want to rest and leave work, but after about half a year, there is a longing for work or a sense of uselessness (ibid., p. 156). They improve their emotional state by returning to tutoring or providing support to others, which is an effect of 'intensified consolidation of their identity with the previously performed professional role' (ibid., p. 157). At this stage, from a developmental perspective, the following are particularly important: motivation (internal/external), future orientation (formulation of goals and a sense of purpose in life / no goals for the future, no sense of purpose in life), personality structure (self-assessment, as a result of balance), and intellectual activity (reflectivity/a lack of reflectivity).

In view of the above, the purpose of this research is to learn the meanings ascribed to teachers' professional and personal development at various stages of their careers. Isolating and describing these meanings are important for teacher training activities, as well as for further training in the context of their functioning in the changing school environment, immersed in omnipresent social change. It is also important from the perspective of introducing new standards for teacher training, in which 'personal development' is still marginalised, and the recruitment conditions for teacher training are non-existent (negative selection still dominates, and the efforts to introduce positive selection have been unsuccessful, mainly due to the lack of candidates interested in the teaching profession). Deficiencies within these premises may lead to an educational catastrophe with 'random' teachers who fail to develop and are not able to support their pupils in their development.

Methodological assumptions of research

This part of the article presents the results of my own research using the biographical method for the content of diaries obtained as a result of two edition of a writing competition. Participants could write a diary, journal or report entitled: 'A month from a teacher's life' (Łukasik, 2011, 2016a, 2016b). In total, 93 diaries were analysed (from the first edition there were 41 diaries, from the second edition – 52 diaries).

Diaries and journals constitute an important source of knowledge for researchers. They allow researchers to analyse teachers' course of life 'with all its complexities, problems, dilemmas, and social contexts' (Lalak, 2010, p. 280), while biographies best express individual or collective experiences the way they are seen and interpreted by their authors (Denzin & Lincoln, 2009, p. 73).

In order to find answers to the research question, 'What significance do teachers assign to their work and personal development at particular stages of their careers?', the biographical method was used together with content analysis.

In the empirical part, no conclusions were drawn as to the existence of any tendencies in the social dimension due to the qualitative research methodology which was adopted. The results can only refer to the respondents. At this point, I would like to add that due to the fact that the content of the scientific article has a certain length, I will not cite the content of teachers' statements or detailed descriptions of the indicated categories, but will only refer to typical tendencies and their meanings.

The importance of teachers' professional and personal development in the light of the own research results

Taking into account the theoretical premises of the content of teachers' diaries, the significance of their professional and personal development were analysed in two categories from the perspective of four stages of their professional careers (the selected categories are presented in Table 1). I am also convinced that the research results presented herein are important from the perspective of teacher training, improvement, and self-education, as well as the development and planning of teachers' own futures, and understanding various aspects of their professional and personal lives in real terms and conditions.

Table 1

The importance of teachers' work and personal development, by career stage

Career stage	Importance of work	Personal development
'Exploration and creation of professional roles'	– the act of getting a job is the greatest value (success in life) – a source of acquisition of basic (minimal) remuneration – a chance to compare knowledge with practice and notice areas of imperfection – a theory applied in practice makes it possible to supplement knowledge, develop skills, and develop oneself – the ability to create educational reality – a desire for positive recognition (management, other teachers, parents, and pupils) – a desire to display strengths in order to obtain acceptance and appreciation, and to secure a contract for the next year(s) of work	– discovering one's potential – passions and interests – creative and artistic inclinations (theatre, writing, or photography) – better quality of professional work – personal fulfilment and happiness – the ability to use it and combine with work – expanding one's horizons

'Continuation of the adopted professional strategy'	— work as a guarantee of employment — a source of perceived satisfaction and professional stability — economic stability — the sum of one's own and one's pupils' achievements to date (school subjects competitions, called the Olympics, competitions, voluntary activities, social, cultural, and educational initiatives, etc.) — a source of professional fulfilment and a feeling of success (awards, diplomas, medals for achievements at work and support of the local social environment)	— self-awareness — focus on personal development (work with a coach or writing a diary) — a source of reflectivity, reflection on achievements as a precondition of change — focus on spirituality (meditation, contemplation, or prayer) — acquiring new skills (e-learning courses or first aid courses) — care for physical condition (running, aerobics, exercise, dance, or other sports) and mental condition (relaxation or calming) — hobbies (travel, cooking, reading literature, or family board games) — little free time fully utilised for own development
'Increased effort'	— a source of professional and personal identity — a source of meaning for one's life (satisfying it with the need for usefulness, and being an important and valuable person) — a guarantee of their survival in pupils' memories — the mission to be important to the pupils; activities after work to meet their expectations or tasks arising from professional roles (they become involved in projects, writing lessons scenarios and activities plans, etc.) — a source of high human status (prestige) — a source of satisfaction and a place of success, fulfilling oneself in a professional role, a sense of value — a guarantee of a stable source of income	— creativity (painting, poetry, fairy tales for children, occasional rhymes, designing and sewing clothes, or photography) — hobbies (travel, sailing, exploring other cultures, regional culture, or the natural world) — acquiring new skills (English or Spanish) — maintaining physical condition (walking or gymnastics)

'Retired teacher'	— a source of inspiration for life ('an idea for life') — an impulse for development and activity — a source of motivation for lifelong education — a source of motivation for passions and interests, and sharing knowledge and experience with other retired people — a sense of professional success — experience of the existence in pupils' memories (letters, emails, telephone calls, small gifts, visits, etc.)	— rediscovering one's potential — indulging in interests and passions — transmission of professional subject knowledge and life knowledge (running training sessions or courses) — creativity (writing or photography) — extension of 'neglected' areas of knowledge and development of new skills (English)

Before proceeding to the interpretation of the results, I would like to emphasise that while the categories related to work (its meaning, daily experience, difficulties, successes, etc.) are dominant in teachers' narratives, the category relating to personal development is rather marginal, only sporadically corresponding to the implementation of the path of promotion and professional development.

Discussion of the research results

Adopting theoretical assumptions, I will conduct the following analyses and interpretations in an orderly manner through the stages of professional careers, against which I will read the meaning of professional and personal development, which are characteristic for the specificity of experiences determined by given stages.

The first stage of work — 'Exploration and creation of a professional role' — is a unique period for the surveyed teachers, and is especially important in terms of work and its value, as well as personal development. Teachers combine theory and practice and reflect on their own actions to modify them and achieve success. Personal development activities (manifested in hobbies, interests, or unusual skills) combine with daily professional practice to gain the trust of pupils, parents, and peers and to confirm a sense of development and a potential of using it in an unusual/unconventional way in practice. Personal development is possible thanks to the dominant internal motivation (its external counterpart refers to the positive presence in the minds of other adults), future orientation (the opportunity to continue working at the place of current employment) and reflectiveness and changes made through it. The value of work is determined and strengthened by commitment and the experience of social recognition. The dominant adaptation strategies are 'To level the gaps' and 'To shine.'

'Continuation of the adopted operational strategy' is the second stage of professional careers. The surveyed teachers perceive work as a source of permanent employment and economic gratification.

In addition, the value of work is measured by pupils' success and external confirmation (e.g. awards or diplomas). Personal development, which is important to the respondents (concerning spiritual aspects, physical condition, and new skills) is not combined with professional work. It exists in parallel, however; teachers do not transfer experience and skills acquired as part of personal development to their professional practice. Personal development is treated rather as just one's own activities. It is determined by internal motivation and autonomy. In the professional perspective, activities are conditioned by external motivation, as well as by the self-esteem (confirmed by the number of successes) and the limited autonomy (regulations and external expectations) associated with it. This usually results from thinking about the teaching profession through the prism of professional tasks and professional promotion, which for the respondents is not equivalent to personal development.

The next stage — 'Increased effort' — is particularly important in the case of the surveyed teachers from the perspective of building and constituting a professional identity. The elements of balancing professional life which are visible at this stage are particularly significant for identity-building. In their professional work, they tend to take actions which promote a sense of satisfaction in life built through 'remaining in pupils' memory'. Work is a goal and a meaning of life that is most often completed at this stage, so being promoted provides a sense of professional security and makes it possible to construct a positive self-image of a successful teacher. This is a stage when teachers, under the influence of professional experience, acquire beliefs about their own professional activities. As with the previous stage, they do not combine personal development (which is important for them) with work and professional development. Their activities are based on internal motivation, while their reflectiveness is particularly sharp in connection with the emerging balance in professional achievements. This stage determines how they will function when retired.

The last stage — 'Retired teacher' — comes across in teachers' narratives as a moment of rereading their sense of work and life in a new situation. Work is a particularly important link here in connecting the past with the future (professional identity). Thanks to this, they are focused on action, and a sense of self-realisation through the prism of professional experience of being a significant person for their pupils, means that they willingly undertake developmental and professional activities. At this stage, the importance of work and personal development, just like at the first stage, are integrated. They combine all forms of personal development with their educational activity (including sharing one's own experience with others). Their activities are conditioned by internal motivation and deep reflection, typical of their age and developmental stage. A positive balance of their professional work translates into a positive balance of their lives and strengthens the motivation to develop and act on behalf of themselves and others (see: Łukasik & Jagielska, 2016).

At this stage, the following are particularly important from a developmental perspective: motivation (internal/external), future orientation (the formulation of goals and a sense of purpose in life / no goals for the future, no sense of purpose in life), personality structure (self-assessment, as a result of a balance of professional life), and intellectual activity (reflectivity/lack of reflectivity).

Final conclusions

For the teachers who were surveyed, professional work is of great importance. At particular stages, it is characterised by its specifics, conditioned knowledge and professional experience, seniority, and degree of professional promotion (a sense of professional and financial security). It gives them a sense of professional satisfaction, fulfilment — which most often stems from relationships with their pupils — and a sense of professional recognition and satisfaction. The importance of work and its value are also evident in their professional identity, which is reflected in their thinking, initiatives, and reflectiveness.

Personal development is also important for teachers. Although it appears marginally in the narratives, if at all, it is related to conscious development and self-formation as a person. In a sense, self-realisation as a teacher and a person at the second and third stages of professional careers shows attempts to build parallel identities (me as a teacher and me not as a teacher), hence personal development activities are most likely not integrated and applied to work. They certainly give teachers an opportunity to distance themselves from their professional experience, but they fail to help teachers face it better and more effectively. The integration of personal and professional development is more evident in the activities and meanings ascribed to professional and personal development at the first and second stages of professional careers. I believe that it would be worth analysing the individual experiences of the following categories in the process of lifelong human development in order to determine whether this way of experiencing and reading professional work and personal development is conditioned at each stage of the career: a) education for the teaching profession, b) appearance of new life roles (wife/husband, mother/father, daughter/son), c) working conditions (workplace atmosphere), d) bureaucracy and schematic frames of the professional role, e) structures of personality, mind, and ability, f) the sphere of intellectual activity, and g) future orientation.

At this point, we may only reflect on the shape and content of teacher training. In particular, during the teacher training process, it is important to pay attention to the personal development of teacher candidates and preparing them for professional careers in such a way that they would care about their personal development as the foundation and inspiration for their professional development. Their professional development would flow out of their own needs, their internal motivation. This should happen without external control and coercion to 'get on with' their professional promotion, (the collection of documents — which is usually common during achieving professional promotion levels — is in most cases divergent with professional development). It is also worth noticing that after completed all of the professional promotion levels, most of teachers' (pseudo-) developmental activities (lack of application of the acquired knowledge and skills in school practice) also is completed or even abandoned. Based on the above analysis, we may ask, 'To what extent does teacher training meet the changing reality of schools and the changing pupils?' and 'What competencies do teachers lack most?' Most likely, there are deficient self-creation competences, based on self-awareness and concern for personal development, on which professional development can be built, free from school bureaucracy and plunging into schematic frames and routines. Unfortunately, as emphasised by Wanda Dróżka, the situation is so complicated that the phase of independence of schools and teachers has not yet arrived within the borders of Poland (Dróżka, 2018).