



THEORIES OF WORK PEDAGOGY AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING PRACTICE – IN SEARCH OF CONSENSUS

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Abstract. The issue of vocational education is constantly present in the discourses and literature of labour pedagogy. In various forms, the environment of work pedagogy presents positions, theses, models of solutions, and ideologies referring to various problems of this educational area. They encompass, among others: the humanization of vocational education processes and maintaining the balance between instrumental and directional education; a holistic model of education and the preparation of school graduates, etc. Meanwhile, the practice of vocational schools clearly shows a tendency towards market rationality and extreme economic efficiency of schools, measured, for example, by external evaluation.

TEORIE PEDAGOGIKI PRACY A PRAKTYKA KSZTAŁCENIA ZAWODOWEGO – W POSZUKIWANIU CONSENSUSU

Słowa kluczowe: pedagogika pracy, kształcenie zawodowe, teorie pedagogiczne

Streszczenie. Problematyka kształcenia zawodowego jest stale obecna w dyskursach i literaturze pedagogiki pracy. W różnych formach to środowisko naukowe prezentuje własne stanowiska, tezy, modele rozwiązań, ideologie, nawiązujące do rozmaitych problemów tego obszaru edukacyjnego. Mowa w nich m.in. o warunkach humanizacji procesów kształcenia zawodowego i zachowaniu równowagi pomiędzy kształceniem instrumentalnym i kierunkowym, holistycznym modelem kształcenia i przygotowaniu absolwentów szkół itd. Tymczasem w praktyce wyraźne są oznaki zmiernia ku racjonalności rynkowej i skrajnej efektywności ekonomicznej tych placówek oświatowych, którą mierzy się głównie oceną zewnętrzną.

Introduction

In scholarly and public speeches on current problems of the functioning of societies, economies and systems, which are part of political constructions, it is quite common to accentuate the multifaceted and undefined nature of events or the lack of clear reference points. All of these positions are perfectly legitimate. This is exemplified by the current “difficult” crisis of a geopolitical magnitude that no one, not even the most seasoned analysts, expected until recently. This is perhaps the rationale for starting the search for unambiguous yet simple metaphors to explain not only the current reality but also its future imagery.

The eminent English physicist and theoretical mathematician Stephen Hawking was famous, among other things, for his search for simple theories and solutions in an area that is already oriented towards “indescribability” in its name. Indeed, this mathematical genius claimed that there was a simple equation with which to describe the entire universe. Something like Einstein’s theory of relativity, $E=mc^2$.

According to Hawking, the ultimate goal of any science should be the search for a single theory that will describe all its problems, because: “A theory constitutes an entity existing only in the mind of man – it does not exist in any other reality” (Hawking, Mlodinow, 2015, p. 31).

It seems that especially today, in the multitude of media information, and changes accompanying social, political or economic life, one simple theory or equation explaining and solving all these problems would be highly desirable. As our great Nobel laureate said, “The world is a fabric which we spin every day on the great looms of information, discussion [...]. Today, the scope of the work of these looms is enormous – thanks to the Internet, almost everyone can participate in this process, responsibly and irresponsibly, with love and hate, towards good and towards evil, for life and for death, we live in a world of a plethora of contradictory, mutually exclusive information, fighting fangs and claws” (Tokarczuk, 2018).

In the current world, with its strongly individualised viewpoints, a number of separate economic, political and social models are being constructed and basically, no one mentions a single, common theory to describe and explain the entirety of the modern world. The same is true in the field of education. The literature provides ample evidence of theories explaining phenomena related to education. Often, newly emerging theories are a kind of extension of previous theories, but at the same time, there are also theories that negate their predecessors. New

narratives are also constructed that change everything that came before. We can mention, for example, theories originating from the current of personalistic pedagogy, which emphasises the autonomous value of the human being as a person; from the current of existential pedagogy, which distinguishes, among other things, existential pedagogical categories, i.e. authenticity; involvement and dialogicity; from the cognitive school of learning called constructivism, up to the sociological concept of “social becoming” based mainly on the “subjective agency of individuals”. There are also voices arguing for a *stricte* economic model of education, in which learning outcomes are subsumed under the symbolism of a “product” subject to the market laws of supply and demand. In opposition to each other, models of the behaviourist school and the humanist school; the so-called traditional school and the constructivist school etc. are constructed. The division and multiplicity of pedagogical theories do not solve the problems of teaching, learning, organisational and curricular educational systems. Moreover, attempts to commercialise the education system lead to treating it as a commodity for sale with all the philosophy of *branding*, *targeting* and other terms used by modern capitalism. The great Czech educator Jan Amos Comenius used the term *pansofia* in his *Pampaedia*, in which he included the idea of possible *omniscience*, a universal knowledge that accommodates all possible cognition. It was also and above all a dream of knowledge accessible and comprehensible to everyone. But it is also a dream of educational models and ideals governed by simple rules and principles understandable and accessible to all.

According to Olga Tokarczuk, at the time the Internet came into being, it seemed that these ideas would finally be able to be realised in a total way. “Wikipedia, which I admire and support, [...] could have been a dream come true for humanity – here we are creating and receiving a vast body of knowledge that is constantly replenished, refreshed and democratically accessible. Dreams come true often disappoint us. It turned out that we are not able to bear this immensity of information, which instead of unifying, generalising and liberating – differentiates, divides, encloses in bubbles, creates a multiplicity of stories incompatible with each other or even hostile to each other, antagonising” (Tokarczuk, 2018).

The multiplicity of theories is also encountered in the field of vocational education. Their creators are mainly labour educators, to whom the problems associated with this educational environment are particularly close. Over the course of fifty years of labour pedagogy, new intellectual contexts, economic systems, social needs, and political expectations have emerged. Hence, in the literature, one comes across many proposals and theses trying to unravel current and future

problems in vocational education. The sphere of vocational training is a kind of sensitive membrane of the condition of the economic system, the labour market, and the wealth level of society. Any fluctuations, even small ones, in these areas result in the need for changes within vocational education, setting new goals and tasks for it, directing it towards different relations, e.g. of the following type: vocational education – labour market – economy, vocational education – career – the wealth of society, vocational education – preparation for work – labour market activity, etc. In a situation where so many external and internal factors affect a certain system, the search for simple rules for its functioning seems, on the one hand, an impossible undertaking, but, on the other hand, an indispensable one. As long ago as in the period of transformation in our country, a diagnosis that is still valid today, referring to research problems falling within the circle of interest of labour pedagogy, was made by Stefan M. Kwiatkowski who wrote as follows: “Instead of a synthesis conducive to optimal educational decisions, we get partial analyses that do not form a common whole” (Kwiatkowski, 1995, p. 51).

Therefore, it seems that educational discourses to date have not produced such synthetic “frameworks”, unambiguous theses or theories that fit precisely with the needs of the vocational education system and its stakeholders.

Selected problem areas and theories of work pedagogy

The test of the validity of any theory is its ability to predict outcomes, including, above all, those that lay behind its assumptions. What were and still are the basic assumptions of the theories of labour pedagogy? Synthetically speaking, at the root of the labour pedagogy theory lies the relationship: *human being-work*, considered in various configurations, defined by various adjectives, seen in different temporal-structural spaces. Despite the multiplicity of problem issues included in the theory of labour pedagogy, the core that unites them is *human*, described, among others, as a creator, maker and subject of all educational, economic or social processes. This thesis is confirmed, among others, by Tadeusz Nowacki’s stance: “Everything around is engulfed in a process of constant transformation to which the man-made world is subjected. There is no ready-made, settled life waiting for anyone. Each generation must build its own world, according to the level of technology achieved, which has been built up by the experience of tens of thousands of years [...]. At all times, a human challenges cosmic forces, faces the necessity of building, their own, new world,

and has to acquire the maximum creative skill. That man who, through work, has created themselves, has created and continues to create their own world, is the man-creator. Homo creator is not an individual, it is a collective, organised human [...]” (Nowacki, 2008, pp. 43-44). Assigning to human a priority place not only in civilisational development processes but also in the “toil” of self-improvement, T. Nowacki clearly emphasised the fundamental role of man in the theory of labour pedagogy. He emphasised the importance of pro-developmental activities, exposed the role of education in the formation of skills useful in future work, in the choice of school and future profession, in further education and self-improvement, and thus – in the pursuit of being a valuable and fulfilled human being.

In the 1970s, T.W. Nowacki outlined the ten most important research areas, which soon became the problem areas of Polish labour pedagogy. Due to the issues addressed in this text, we can mention among others: the area covering the problematic of the objectives of education and their analysis in relation to the changes in culture, economy and employment structure; the area of equipping teachers with methodologies and methodological studies for vocational subjects; the problematic area concerning the conditions of proper realization of processes; the problematic area formed by the issues of control and evaluation of education; the area covering pedeutological issues, especially, concerning vocational school teachers (Wiatrowski, 2005, p. 31; Nowacki, 1982).

In the mid-1990s, as a result of the transformational changes in our country, the frame of reference of the research areas of labour pedagogy was modified, making a significant turn towards a market economy. The role of small and medium-sized private workplaces; decentralisation of planning the size of education; the place of vocational schools in the structure of the education system; broadly profiled qualifications and competencies with consideration of the professional mobility of workers were emphasised and accentuated (Kwiatkowski, 2007, p. 15). These new frames of reference were constantly being supplemented, including the socio-economic system evolving towards modern capitalism; civil society or the subjectivity of each individual.

The new millennium brought new expectations and challenges relating to human labour. In the scientific literature one can read, among others, the stance of Ryszard Gerlach, who considered that since the economic and political conditions in the country had changed so radically, the areas of research in labour pedagogy should now be defined from a different perspective. His concepts included: the problem of human work and its place in the system of values;

the new situation of vocational education; the recognition and comparability of diplomas and certificates; the relationship between general and vocational education; the goals, content and methods of education for democracy, peace and tolerance; the problem of preparation of teachers of vocational education (Gerlach, 2006, p.115-123). In addition, theories belonging to different scientific areas, but reflecting the ideas of contemporary thinking about human labour and its contexts, have also started to appear in the discourses of labour pedagogues. These are mainly the competence theory of human capital, social capital or civic capital. Labour pedagogues have approached fields such as human resource management, scientific organisation of work or labour market theory in their scientific projects.

These considerations are mainly devoted to vocational education, its theoretical foundation created by labour pedagogues, and its practical references. For a number of years, there have been known opinions of labour pedagogues breaking the stereotypical perception of vocational education situating it in the instrumental sphere, in favour of professional education, understood not only as knowledge and skills but as creative dispositions, ability to break out of patterns and routine, acceptance of professional norms and values. The foundations of the theory of vocational education were prepared by T. Nowacki and expounded in his book *Fundamentals of vocational didactics*. In his view, vocational education is: “A system of statements about the content and methods of shaping the personality and skills of workers” (Nowacki, 2004, p. 228). His continuators have supplemented this definition with, among others, the problems of professional preparation – specialist and general professional, preparation for work and the like. The goals of vocational education are also constantly evolving. Stefan. M. Kwiatkowski reduces them to the following: “preparation for life and creative work in a democratic state; formation of flexible general-professional skills facilitating change in the nature of work; formation of the ability to communicate, search and process information; formation of an attitude conducive to self-education” (Kwiatkowski, 2001, p. 25). On the other hand, R. Gerlach believes that the goal of vocational education should be the formation of the whole person, therefore attitudes, views, pro-vocational interests, conceptual, innovative and creative thinking, the formation of a correct attitude to the world of values, society, other people, oneself are important in it (Gerlach, 2002, p. 313).

The presented positions give the basis for the formulation of the thesis that vocational education, in the view of labour pedagogues, is that scientific and research area in which there intersect issues not only related to the preparation

for work and professional work of a person but also those that refer to the humanistic and axiological version of the life of modern people.

The presentation of theoretical positions in the field of vocational education is worth supplementing with a reflection presented by Renata Tomaszewska, and referring to reliable and real changes in the organisational model of education, including vocational education. For, as it is not difficult to notice, the world behind the walls of schools is constantly changing, and schools are still stuck in their 19th-century conception, i.e. the usual rules of behaviour, rituals, teaching everyone the same things and the division of scientific knowledge into subjects, completely unjustified by the current state of the science. The researcher poses two basic questions about what the school model will be in the future: “[...] will the education system continue to be placed in the metaphor of Fast Food reminding us of the meticulous standardisation of everyone and everything, or will it be reoriented into the metaphor of the Michelin Guide, in which a model of excellence is described but the ways of achieving it are not indicated” (Tomaszewska-Lipiec, 2017, pp. 97-111). Adopting Michelin’s philosophy is certainly accepted by many educators, but it requires radical decisions in many educational contexts, including the legal-organisational – abandoning the classroom-education system, in favour of integrating formulas; programmatic-didactic – programmes with an open, flexible formula, methodologies inspired by the achievements of many sciences, e.g. bioneurology, psychology or genetics; pedagogical – implementation of different teaching roles, e.g. teacher facilitator; socio-cultural – overcoming mental barriers and perceptions of the broader social environment imprinted for many years in the traditional model of education.

The title of this text obliges us to identify specific theses or theories that directly relate to the practice of vocational education. The choice is very difficult, but it is probably worth considering how the goals of vocational education affirmed by labour educators correlate with the practice of vocational education. Further thought and reflection are required on the problem of the relationship between the theory of vocational education, including the proposed didactic methods, educational content and assessment, and the didactic reality of the vocational school. Also of interest seem to be the connections between pedeutological theory, especially when it comes to vocational education teachers and the practice of their preparation for and functioning in the profession. Within these issues, the practice of vocational schools will be considered.

The practical dimension of vocational schools – selected problems

The first category considered is the objectives of vocational education, or rather their practical interpretation and adaptation to the practice of vocational schools. For this area of education, the objectives are set by the Minister of Education. In the current Ordinance of 15 February 2019 on the general aims and objectives of education in vocational education professions and the classification of vocational education professions, we can read: “The aim of education in occupations of industry education is to prepare learners for professional work and active functioning in the changing labour market. A graduate of a school providing vocational education should hold full professional qualifications and be prepared to obtain the necessary professional qualifications” (MEN, 2019). This brief and perhaps overly general statement in no way conveys the importance and need for the universalisation of the educational goals that labour educators insist on. Moving on, it should be noted that the instrumentalism of the educational objectives of a lower secondary vocational school is fully reflected in the framework teaching plan of this school. Among other things, it provides for six hours (i.e. two hours a week) in a three-year training cycle for the Polish language, five hours for a foreign language, three hours for the basics of entrepreneurship and only six hours for facultative subjects: geography, biology, chemistry and physics. Only five hours are allocated to mathematics. And physical education or religion nine hours each, i.e. three hours per week for the entire education cycle (MEN, 2019a). Even a brief analysis of this document illustrates the personal profile of a graduate of this school, and the staggered emphasis on education gives reason to believe that it is not about a holistic conception of human development.

In order to visualise the importance of the problem under discussion, it is worth mentioning that, according to the Central Statistical Office (CSO), in the school year 2020/2021, more than 202,000 young people studied in lower-secondary vocational schools (CSO, 2021, p. 89). This is a significant number of young people, who in a relatively short time will become active participants in the labour market or take decisions on further education. With the above in mind, it is impossible to escape the question: How will these processes proceed, and to what extent will these graduates be prepared to undertake and implement such important tasks and decisions?

The quoted regulation also sets objectives for general secondary and technical high schools. The first remark that comes to mind after reading these objectives is the absolute disregard for the principle of interdisciplinarity and the connectivity of general objectives with vocational training objectives. The given formulation of the objectives in no way corresponds to the formulas of the labour educators cited above. On the basis of many years of experience, it should be stated that the separation of general and vocational objectives is an almost universal practice in vocational schools. It is also worrying that neither the general nor the vocational objectives mention such fundamental values as work ethos, work ethics, loyalty and reliability, responsibility, professionalism, professional integrity, identification with the profession, etc. These values are the foundation for labour educators to reflect on the essence of human professional work, labour roles, and on the characteristics of vocational graduates. Let the figures also serve as an exposition of this problem. Well, in the 2020/2021 school year, 647,147 young people studied in technical schools. This is a significant number of young people who see their professional and life chances in the vocational education system.

In summary, the problems mentioned by labour educators do not refer to some marginal group of young people, just the opposite. In the 2020/2021 school year, this was nearly 900,000 students. On the one hand, this is cause for satisfaction, as perhaps the “attractiveness” of vocational schools is returning. On the other hand, there is some concern about the quality of education, the well-being of students while at school, their level of satisfaction with their participation in education, the level of satisfaction of employers regarding the preparation of graduates, and finally the public perception of this type of education.

As experts on the problem write, the transition from education to the labour market is multidimensional, repeated many times throughout life, and thus a career is a sequence of repeated cycles of employment, of investment in career capital (Bańka, 2007, p. 64). When analysing labour market reports, it is clear that employers „to ensure better performance, are increasingly looking for employees with a broader set of skills – both cognitive and non-cognitive [...]. With increasing automation of repetitive tasks, skill requirements are expected to gradually shift towards entrepreneurship, critical thinking and creativity and other skills used to perform non-routine tasks” (EC, 2020; Institute for Labour Market Analysis, 2020, p.19). Also, very many other studies and reports indicate that the qualities most valued by employers in candidates include: „responsibility/discipline of work/honesty, creativity/innovation, courtesy/presentation, willingness to work, independence, diligence/scrupulousness, entrepreneurship – these qualities were

indicated by 79% of employers; [...] contact with people; cooperation in a group; communicativeness. These were mentioned by as many as 58% of employers. Less than half of all indications related to typically professional skills. They appeared in only 42% of the respondents (Portal praca.pl. 2022). Justifying these positions, one can still refer to the data contained in the IFTF report of the University of Phoenix. It lists 10 competencies that determine finding and keeping a job in the near future. These are the ability to discover and give deeper meaning to what we want to express; social intelligence; adaptive thinking and creative problem solving; cross-cultural competence; processing large amounts of information and data-driven reasoning; use of new media (including critical evaluation of content published online); interdisciplinarity (reading and understanding concepts from multiple disciplines); design thinking; cognitive skills (assimilating multiple stimuli using a variety of tools and techniques); and the ability to collaborate effectively within virtual teams (the University of Phoenix Institute for the Future report, Szykowski, 2017, p. 11). So, the employers value catalogues of soft competencies, the kind of competencies that are mentioned marginally in the educational process, in passing rather than in deliberate action. This raises the question of the relevance of the educational objectives pursued in a vocational school. Whose needs are then being fulfilled by means of the still visible escape into simple rules of thinking or programming the behaviour of participants in the educational process, into established patterns of behaviour and probably to some extent ignoring the opinions of experts in this area?

Staying with the organisational and curricular issues of vocational schools, it is worth mentioning that, despite repeated announcements of “making the curricula more realistic”, they are generally still burdened with an increasing number of subjects with overly elaborate content, often repeated in many subjects. The dominance of the *value-packaging* myth, in which each subject in the curriculum, together with the instruction manual, is packaged separately and delivered separately, is evident. An example of this is the programme for the economic technician. There are as many as 34 subjects in the framework curriculum in the four-year education cycle. By implementing such or similar programmes, teachers have rather little chance of presenting the theoretical foundations of the taught profession as a common, logically interconnected whole.

At this point, another problem should be clearly emphasised. It concerns issues related to the preparation of vocational training teachers. So far, there has been no systemic solution to this problem. It is not only about the quality of didactic conduct, but also about overcoming mental barriers blocking students’

activity and innovation, attitude to change, fluidity of didactic forms and formulas and pedagogical intuition and sensitivity. For a long time, both in pedagogical theory and among active teachers, there have been calls for the space of the classroom system to be replaced by an education immersed in economic and social reality, a holistic and authorial education. Modern vocational education should free itself from verbalism and abstractness and move towards openness, and flexibility in regulating goals, forms and content on an ongoing basis. This is all the more so as technological modernity has in principle already entered the walls of schools. IT tools give teachers the opportunity to use them in all kinds of teaching situations, but there is a lack of reliable methodological studies. Modern teaching resources need modern vocational education didactics. Especially since the European Commission report cited earlier reads as follows: “digital transformation requires the development of policies that foster competence development, promote lifelong learning and strengthen the links between education and training and the world of work” (EC, 2020).

An attentive observer of educational practice in the field of vocational education can easily guess that it is clearly differentiated and polarised. Unfortunately, the majority in this system are schools and other educational institutions based on established old organisational and curricular patterns, on the traditional model of teacher-student relations, in which knowledge given at school has a “certificate of validity and legitimacy”. This thesis is confirmed, among others, by Zbigniew Kwieciński: “[...] the unbridled, chaotic revolution is exacting a terrible toll in the form of great functional-economic, psychological and social damage. The former consists of huge expenditures on computerising schools and training teachers in constructivist methods, even though this has no effect in changing the basic patterns of how education works.[...] Therefore, a full, holistic educational alternative is needed” (Kwieciński, 2011, p. 121). The islands of innovation in the area of vocational education are probably the vocational schools being set up by enterprises to train future staff for them. These schools are a practical example of the realisation of the thought of not only Pestalozzi, who wrote that humans learn by acting, and deeds are their consolation. (Pestalozzi, Nowak, 1998), but also the Polish humanist Tadeusz Kotarbinski, who wrote about the role of combining practical experience with knowledge, and knowledge with practice, especially by teachers, as follows: “Let the conviction settle in society that the grooming of the young selves is at least as important as the making of machines since man is to direct the machine and not the machine to stifle man. Let the boundary between the world of producers

of science and the world of disseminators of its results be blurred, let the researcher be a teacher and the teacher a researcher” (Kotarbiński, 1957, p. 15).

Concluding this thread, it is worth posing the question: Which is in power in today’s vocational schools, vocational didactics or examination didactics? As practice shows, there is a noticeable progressive reduction of time for content that escapes the examination framework, such as social behaviour or entrepreneurial attitudes, analytical and critical thinking, civic duties, communication and interpersonal bonds, etc. Therefore, we are probably witnessing a loss of social *consensus*, even on fundamental matters, i.e. education and upbringing of young generations. For years, there has been a visible process of mythologising only those outcomes of vocational education that are easily measurable, most often through standardised, simple tasks. It seems, however, that the complexity and specificity of the process of vocational training should affect the complexity of assessment, which should take into account not only the cognitive sphere and the acquired knowledge, but also the skill sphere, or rather an appropriate and skilful combination of both in order to solve vocational tasks. As T. Nowacki writes: “we consider the best test [...] to be the level of execution of professional activities” (Nowacki, 1973, p. 422).

It may also be mentioned that faith in external assessment is being undermined by employers themselves. It is quite common for this community to call for the creation of so-called “market qualifications”, formal certifications of practical skills, awarded in a more flexible form than education or occupation. Also, labour market reports show that: “Diplomas and certificates did not play a key role in the process of professional change. Mostly, they acted as a pass to get through the first sieve of the recruitment process: they legitimised the application for a position in a particular industry, looked good on the CV and boosted self-confidence. In some cases, the basis for employment was not so much the competencies possessed as the ability to learn. In these recruitment processes, the way of getting there (acquiring skills) mattered at least as much as the final result – because it allowed the potential of the future employee to be better grasped. From the employer’s point of view, the assessment of an employee’s potential can sometimes be more important than his or her competency” (Danilewicz, Hornik, 2020, p. 7). The external examination of vocational qualifications in its current format can only be regarded as a test of basic knowledge and simple activities.

For a number of years, many labour educators, including Zygmunt Wiatrowski, among others, have called for a system or model of vocational school teacher training. The current state of affairs in this regard can be considered at least

inadequate or hardly adequate to the needs and specifics of this educational area. In the light of the current normative arrangements, a person is qualified to teach in a vocational school if he or she has completed a course of study in a field of study that is compatible with the subject/activities taught, or as “subject preparation + pedagogical preparation”. By pedagogical preparation, the legislator means the acquisition of knowledge and skills in the fields of psychology, pedagogy and detailed didactics, taught for no less than 270 hours, and a positively assessed pedagogical practice of no less than 150 hours. In the case of practical vocational training teachers, the necessary pedagogical preparation coursework is no less than 150 hours, and the pedagogical preparation is evidenced by a university diploma or other document issued by a university, a diploma from a teacher training establishment or a certificate of completion of a qualification course. A frequent pathway to vocational education teacher positions is postgraduate studies preparing for this profession (*Standard of education...*). The problem is that the purpose of this type of study is to prepare for the teaching profession “in general” and not for a specific form such as vocational education. Using statistics – in the school year 2020/2021, there were 13,565 teachers (per full-time equivalents, FTE) in lower secondary vocational schools and 51,758 teachers (per full-time equivalents, FTE) in technical schools. In relation to the total number of teachers, the group of educators of the so-called professionals does not seem very representative. And indeed it is not. For years, the trend of ageing teaching staff in vocational schools has been evident, and there are fewer and fewer substitutes. The FTEs shown above do not represent an actual teacher. In that order, one person may be counted several times, as multi-tenure is now becoming a common phenomenon. It is also not difficult to calculate that, on average, there are about 15 pupils per teacher from the above-mentioned schools alone. But since one person can work in several schools, this number must be multiplied. From this perspective, the profession of vocational training teacher is demanding and significant enough to finally find a solution that satisfies all parties in the vocational training process.

The idea of embedding economic specialists in vocational education has, so far, not been entirely successful. The reason for this may be the policy that has been practised for many years of discrediting vocational schools, their students and the teachers who work there. Until recently, it was suggested that they were second-choice schools or schools “for other people’s children”. Only now, and looking at it from the perspective of the labour market, is it gratifying to see more than 50% of vocational and technical education in the overall structure of secondary schools.

According to labour market analysts, “this is dictated by the growing demand for graduates of trade schools with relevant qualifications, including digital competencies. There is a growing perception that industry schools are not an inferior (to high schools) educational prospect for young people and do not mean lower wages in the future. Looking ahead to 2030, there will be a demand in the industry for computer scientists and programmers as well as machine operators, mechanics or welders. However, the issue of human resources for the industry of the future is not only about the participation of students in vocational education by name, but about the continuous development of the teaching infrastructure, the professionalisation of vocational teachers and professional specialisation. Vocational education for the industry of the future is education that keeps pace with technological changes in the labour market” (Socha, 2022). This stance may be a kind of punchline to the above considerations.

Conclusions

The concept of *consensus* is generally perceived positively. It denotes an agreement reached through discussion and compromise or the establishment of a consensual position on something. The above-mentioned issues and problems in the field of vocational education practice and theory undoubtedly need discussion, compromise and agreed upon action. In order to read the reality of vocational schools, theories are needed to facilitate the understanding of the processes taking place in this type of education. However, it seems that labour educators are rather discreetly entering the thresholds of vocational schools. They are certainly few in this type of institution and probably too few, in general, to be noticed in the overall number of teachers. Therefore, it may be worthwhile to take advantage of what the *branding philosophy* proposes and make their presence increasingly felt in the field of education. After all, representatives of this scientific discipline should play a major role in raising the profile of the profession of vocational education teachers, affirming its importance for society, the economy and also for the design of individual students’ destinies.

It also seems important for labour pedagogues to be interested in other fields of knowledge but to a greater or lesser extent connected with the widely understood human labour. No one at school is able to explain to students how they are to find employment, for example, when an employer may offer, within the framework of flexible forms of employment, twelve different versions of it or work in an *office-first, remote-first* model. The identification of labour

market practices towards vocational school graduates should be the responsibility of labour educators.

A *consensus* on curricular and organisational issues in vocational education is badly needed. It is about the explicit participation of labour educators in the development of vocational training curricula, including the effort to integrate the content of teaching in such a way that a comprehensive picture of the profession and its requirements emerge clearly. Practice in this area shows that the proposed educational content is not always correlated with each other and certainly not with the content of general education.

A *consensus* seems to be important in the area of vocational education teacher's preparation. The positions of labour pedagogues on this issue, so far, remain in the postulatory sphere. My own many years of methodological experience give me the basis to conclude that vocational school teachers at the beginning of their career, not only in didactic situations but also in psychological-pedagogical situations, seem to be inefficient or even lost. Thus, another space is created for the activity of labour educators, especially in the direction of organising such forms of training that would prepare strictly for the profession of vocational education teacher.

In conclusion, it should be noted that there are still many areas for agreement between the theory of labour pedagogy and the practice of vocational education. This is because contemporary volatility requires vigilance and quick responses to ever-changing creations of reality.

In the introduction of this text, it was suggested that there is a need to search for a single, simple theory that encompasses and explains the entirety of vocational education issues. As shown in the text, work educators have formulated many of its elements, but it seems to take time to integrate and explain them anew. Vocational education practitioners, i.e., the teachers, need a simple, clear message on how they are to fulfil their obligations. For, as S. Hawking argued, once we have formulated a complete theory, "after a while it should be generally understandable to everyone, not just a handful of scientists. Then we can all take part in the discussion [...]" (Hawking, Młodinow, 2015, p. 200).

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