STUDENTS RELATIONSHIPS AND TEACHER´S AUTHORITY AS AXIOLOGICAL, ETHICAL, PEDAGOGICAL, SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

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Abstract

The paper is focused on the research into the problems of education regarding the relations between students (bullying, competiveness and cooperation) and the decreasing teacher's authority in schools and society. We found that relations between pupils and students of elementary and secondary schools show several negative tendencies including harming each other, reduced rate of mutual sensitivity and preference of rivality to cooperation. Authority of teachers is permanently decreasing not only with pupils and students, but with parents and society, too. Society, parents and students much less value study results and wisdom, and these issues consequently influence the decreasing teacher's status. On the other hand, this behavior leads to decreasing the interest in semantic learning. The roots of these problems can be found in the postmodern crisis of Western culture, associated with severe deficiencies of the political system and market economy as well as one-sided rational orientation of Western society at the expense of the spiritual needs of man.

Key words

education, society, authority, problems, teacher, students, postmodern

Introduction

Educational process at schools has always been and will be closely monitored by society, experts in pedagogy and educational psychology, teachers, students, parents, politicians, sociologists, but also business sector, churches, doctors and so on. Such deep interest is good news on the one hand, since a massive multidisciplinary discourse can bring the quality of ideas, resources and active support, cooperation, but on the other hand, it is also bad news because the broad interests and too many "players in the game" hardly result in acceptable consensus.

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It is only natural, on the one hand, that on these processes challenge a broad and diverse social discourse which will actually never stop, but on the other hand, we should realize that it is just a lay discourse signalling the feelings and needs of society to the scientist and educators.

Theoretical and cultural context of education

Education and training always have cultural and ideological context. With its scientific, cultural and ideological apects, Pedagogy provides answers to society's needs, which are always culturally and ideologically contingent. It is logical, because education serves mainly to hold the state together and develop it in terms of its ideals and cultural values. Opinions and attitudes of teachers (as well as the other debater) are always theoretically and ideologically grounded in the culture and its values. In recent decades, the Western countries and we have ideologically been under the influence of neo-liberalism, democracy and market economy. Under this approach, we have noticed a tendency to leave education to family, subcultures and multicultural segments of society. The state is, de facto, unwilling to take responsibility for the future generation. The result is that the diversion of increasing values and subcultures results into inadequate social tensions and antagonism. This causes the gradual disintegration of the spirituality with all the consequences, as it can be seen in practice.[1]

The question is, whether to strengthen the philosophy of pupils' individualism, which is the core idea of democracy and market economy. Market economy is successful when it produces a self-centered generation of individuals able to win in competition. Cooperation and a sense of belonging to society of other individuals do not develop wolf-like individuals. On the other hand, cooperation, sense of partnership and prioritization of "we" to "I" creates the pre-conditions for tightening and developing social relationships, which is the foundation of a healthy society. Individualistic and self-centered eneration is inattentive to nature and ecology, as well as to society, state and other people. Such a philosophy in practice, however, leads to the collapse of social relations that are fundamental to the functioning of any human community, not excluding the State. Western society will need to undertake serious and open discourse on this subject, unless it wants to commit its gradual internal disintegration. In the same direction, here is the restoration of ancient issues (dilemmas) of Erich Fromm, "to have" or "to be". Do we want to be more materially rich or spiritually (morally) rich? Clarify the substance of these priorities for schools, because they are preparing future generations. The next generation will be just as good as its education and training. What values, ideas and its virtues are present in it. In Slovakia, yet few are aware of the abovementioned ideological and theoretical context and the related discourse is missing.

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[1] This is particularly the decline of values and negation of existing, loss of common goals and motives of self-development, open ideological struggle of different groups (subcultures) Disfunction of social processes and functions of the state and the subsequent apathy in the form of increasing social pathologies - crime, drug and alcohol dependency, gambling, promiscuous and shallow way of life, increased depression, loss of sense of being, suicide and etc.

Research and its results

In the next section, we present the results of our investigations aimed at solving the following problems in the educational process:

1   Relationships among students (bullying, competiveness and cooperation)
2   Decrease in teacher's authority in schools and society.

The research was conducted in the years 2006-2010 via qualitative methodology with a critical focus using the methods of observation, group interviews and critical analysis. The research results were analyzed and compared with quantitative and qualitative research of other authors.

Students' relationships

We found that relationships of students pose a serious problem in our schools. Mainly bullying is common in primary and secondary schools. It severely affects not only the mental health of students, but also the process and results of teaching. Similar findings were achieved by by other researchers.

Bieliková and Bošňáková (2006) in their research conducted in primary and secondary schools noted 21.0% of bullied students. In further research of Havlínová and Kolar (2001), 41% of pupils and students claimed they were bullied. A similar result were reported by Fojtíková, a Czech scientist (45.3% bullied pupils, 2000) and Diaz Kohout, a French scientist (42.3% bullied pupils), who compared the state of bullying in the Czech and French schools. Various studies show the rates of bullying only about 14-15% (Diaz Kohout 2007), which is considered very much in France. Despite these facts, the issue of bullying in Slovakia is being dealt with insufficiently and formally. There is no relevant concept of serious analysis regarding bullying and anti-bullying, which would be binding for all schools, while effectively, sanctioning bullying in particular According to Michele Elliott (1995), the causes of bullying in schools may include: underestimating, ignoring and poosponing arising problems, roots in tensions, authoritarian approach in school education and misconcepts in teaching. We can also supply other indicators such as increasing aggressiveness in the society, global disruption of social relations in society, an emerging need to dominate over the other, uncontrolled concept of education of children in families and schools, mainly due to failure to cope with emotions, too benevolent education, non-acceptance that children should clearly define the boundaries of behavior and punish them for non-compliance and the like. The abovementioned indicates three main factors of bullying:

1   failure to deal with this problem in the Ministry of Education,
2   serious disruptions of relations in society, which is reflected in the education of children in families (cultural aspect),
3   wrong philosophy and practice of educating children both in from families and schools.

Children undoubtedly need to be educated with love, so that to become strong personalities with confident and positive relationships to each other, but unfortunately we forget that[2] in addition the child needs clearly set up standards and limits, strict requirements

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[2] Today's neo-liberal times, unfortunately, brings about the naive and harmful ideas that the child should be both limited and punished.

for compliance and effective punishment for non-compliance. Another problem concerning the ethics and values of students' coexistence and relationships concerns the question of rivalry in schools. In this regard, we found that pupils and students prefer competition to cooperation. Similar findings were confirmed by other authors.

Kusá studied eighth-graders and found "... high degree of rivalry is rooted the pupils'shyness and caginess". In her research, there was the lowest rate of friendship motivation (1992, p. 360). Focusing on individual success impedes spontaneous development of cooperative forms of behavior." (Kusa, 1992, p. 362). The researchers also noted that "for most students, the emphasis on the results in the learning process is a negative emotional and stressful factor. Learning and schools are associated especially with a sense of fear of failure" (1992, p.526).

Some degree of rivalry among pupils and students is probably beneficial in the psychological and social context particularly that promotes motivation, assertiveness, self-realization, self-development and positive self-evaluation. However, socio-psychological studies clearly point to the fact that rivalry, especially if it is dominant in the psychological sense, results in the failure, loss of motivation, reduced self-esteem and self-image and self-realization. This leads to frustration, dissatisfaction and other negative psychological and health consequences in social terms; in turn, competitive preference leads to a reduction in pupil's positive relationships, the indifference of another, to the reduction of altruism and social sensitivity and empathy. In other words, it supports the dominance of individualism and self-centeredness and well weakens social ties, social values, social participation, which ultimately leads to inoperable society. This, in our view, necessarily leads to social isolation of individuals (and hence to their overall mental decline) and degradation of social ties, which are most important to everyone in every culture, state and society.

Teacher's authority

The authority of teacher has two fundamental dimensions: the ability of teachers to become an authority, and the pupils and students' willingness to accept authority, respectively. Using critical-interpretative analysis in our research we found that the problem in our primary and secondary schools and universities concerns mainly the second dimension. The problem of teacher authority has several levels. Perhaps the most significant is the postmodern value orientation of the western culture that is characterized by liberalism (impeaching traditional values, moral order), plurality (everyone is entitled to do and get anything), multiculturalism (right to preach any values and ideas) and strengthening individualism. In this socio-cultural-political environment, where everything is relative and everyone is entitled to have their own subculture, no authority can succeed, as the importance and meaning of authority is linked to the mediation and acceptance of values and norms of society as a whole. Reinforcing the idea of individualism associated with the values of democracy and market competition, young people develop the false impression that they are not subordinated to the authority other than their own.

Furthermore, we found that our school students reported decrease of meaningful learning. This is manifested mainly in cognitive learning site, lack of understanding ability textbooks, analyze and apply it in solving practical problems. Problems are also reflected in students' ability to open the new knowledge and develop their knowledge. Thus, we refer to the qualitative aspects of learning.

As for the the ability to be open to new knowledge and develop it, we refer to the qualitative aspects of learning. As a result of reduced acceptance (sometimes non-acceptance) of authorities (teachers, society, parents), self-centralism and liberal philosophy of individualism, ego of today's pupils and students is so large that it has the effect of closing the learning in terms of reluctance to assume the values and knowledge from teachers. Today's students acquire the knowledge and values usually only formally without mastering and acceting them, just to obtain marks (credits) and complete the education. Some students literally believe that they themselves know everything best. Without the authority of teachers and schools, no student can learn semantic knowledge and values mediated by school and society (culture).

M. Slaninka (2009) says: "The teacher has the authority resulting from hi knowledge of the world. This is what addresses his pupil, who is to be introduced into the world freely".

Slaninka is right, that the world (the internal and external) can be recognised only via the the authority of the teacher (and other real authorities). Bečvař highlights: in conditions of dominating undispicpline, teaching and learning fail. Current schools and teachere do not have effective means of retaining their respect, however. Today a teacher dares not criticise their students without being blamed and endangered by parents and all-powerful media.

Today's school (primary, secondary) and teachers are clueless in terms of education, values and respect and decency standards by pupils. The current Czech minister of education says that the growing aggressiveness in school and disregard of the teacher authority must be urgently deat with (2010). Diaz Kohout (2007) in her comparative research of school climate in the Czech Republic and France found that indicated strong rawness and aggression against teachers, claimed by 61% of surveyed students and teachers in the Czech schools only 15.2% of surveyed students and teachers in France, where similar behaviour is considered typical. Yet, according to D. Kohout, the Czech school applies punishment quite rarely, as indicated by 36.6% of students surveyed, compared to 57.7% in France. The research confirmed that the low rate of punishment in the Czech Republic is due to the teachers' effort to avoid conflicts with parents. This idea is supported by Prokop (2003), who explains the context of education in the market environment.

Conclusions

Our research confirmed that the students' relationship in the elementary and secondary schools show several negative tendencies: harming each other, reduced rate of mutual sensitivity, increased rate of egoism and selfishness, preference of rivality to cooperation. Authority of teachers keeps decreasing, not only with pupils and students, but with parents and society, too. Society, parents and students do not value learning results and wisdom, and these issues consequently influence the decreasing teacher status, which leads to the decreased students' interest in semantic learning. Learning is becoming more formal and superficial, and teachers cannot stop this trend. The current situation is rooted in cultural, political and economical phenomena of the market economy and one-way rational preference of western culture to the spiritual dimension and people's needs. Low social status of teachers is due to the low moral and financial evaluation of the teacher in society. The value of education has sbeen degraded.

Possible improvement in the above-mentioned trends may be due to the change of axiological, ethical and rational-material priorities of today's postmodern western society. These changes may be feasible only when the whole society is convinced about the important role of school education and training objectives.

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