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A teacher in kindergarten as a model and authority for children and their parents

Keywords: teacher, authority, model, example, personality, respect.

Introduction

The first years of a child's life are crucial for his emotional, social, intellectual and physical development. A significant role in this period is played by early school education, in particular a teacher whose task is to ensure the comprehensive and harmonious development of children and to prepare them optimally to study in a primary school.

Being a kindergarten teacher is a great challenge, and at the same time a responsibility resulting from care for a child's future. This responsibility consists of creating optimal conditions conducive to building a sense of identity, conditions that will allow young people to know their needs, possibilities and limitations, and also to set the path for their individual development. It is up to a teacher to prepare a child for functioning in society, to accept and perform various social roles and to take responsibility for themselves and others. Due to such an important task that has become the participation of teachers, it is extremely important that they are a model and authority for children and parents who have more and more demands for them.

1. Authority – the meaning of the concept

We hear and talk about authorities in different fields. Certainly, many people dream about being an authority for their children, grandchildren, subordinates, and in the case of teachers for their pupils, students and their parents. Hearing or talking about authority, we mean a person enjoying social recognition, prestige, possessing many valuable qualities, a person to whom we have trust and respect. Undoubtedly, this is the person we admire. Their behavior, knowledge, and professed values are a role model for us.

The dictionary of contemporary Polish defines “authority” as follows: “trustworthy person who is an expert in some field or oracle in moral matters, enjoying respect and influence on the behavior of others, the power to influence opinions and behavior of other people, recognition and universal respect”¹. Authority is a model, example, respect, a positive effect on others.

In contemporary pedagogy, teacher’s authority is understood as trust and respect for the a teacher who is an adviser and also a guide in difficult situations. “The authority in upbringing is the source of patterns, examples, attitudes, ways of thinking and acting. We do not care about the views, attitudes of people that are insignificant to us, not the authority for us, and on the contrary – what an authority says and does is at least indifferent to us, and to a certain period in life even the most important (especially in the phase of absolute recognition of the teacher’s authority in pre-school and early-school age). Whereas, a teacher who does not have the so-called authority of pupils has no influence on them, is not able to motivate them to act, does not fulfill their role to a sufficient degree”². Pupils willingly accept teacher’s advice and suggestions, show a tendency to imitate if she/he is a person whom they respect and admire. “Knowledge about humanity and their development confirms the possibility of effectively using personal examples to influence people. It can be an influence of manipulation but also of an educational character”³.

The essence of authorities is the fact that one can turn to them if it is necessary, because they are people whose opinions are taken seriously. “We need authorities to know how to proceed in order to avoid mistakes. To be sure that we are not going astray”⁴. In personal education that supports the pursuit of improving one’s abilities and qualities, there is a need to seek and appreciate authorities.

¹ B. Dunaj (red.), *Słownik współczesnego języka polskiego*, Wydawnictwo Wilga, Warszawa 1996, s. 78.

² M. Bednarska, *Racjonalnie czy irracjonalnie – rozważania o autorytecie w wychowaniu i nie tylko*, [w:] M. Bednarska (red.), *O autorytecie w wychowaniu i nauczaniu*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2009, s. 59.

³ K. Olbrycht, *O roli przykładu, wzoru, autorytetu i mistrza w wychowaniu osobowym*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2014, s. 83.

⁴ L. Bojarska, *Belfer na huśtawce. O autorytecie nauczyciela*, ABC Wolters Kluwer business, Warszawa 2012, s. 59.

However, this need has to be developed. Showing pupils the need to look for authorities does not weaken their independence, responsibility for themselves, their thinking and acting. It only makes them aware of their own limitations, and thus discourages them from being their own authority in every matter, treating their own reasons as the only right and their own choices as the best ones. Such activities prepare pupils for conscious functioning in the world of appreciating knowledge and experience, personality values of other people. They lead to the understanding that personal development takes place among people and should be supported by them especially during the educational and didactic process.

2. Elements developing the teacher's

Each of us needs a person who would be a model and inspiration. The most important factor shaping the human value system is the presence of personal patterns in family, school and social life. Authority exists thanks to the fact that some people consider others outstanding and perfect, which is why they inspire them to act or make an individual or a group willingly succumb to its influence and voluntarily submit to them. "There is admiration, gratitude and even a feeling of love on the side of a person subject to the authority. The authority becomes an example for admiring them, acts as a model, someone worthy of identifying with"⁵.

Building authority is a complex and lengthy process. The teacher's authority arises from the "combination of wisdom, pro-social attitude and effective pedagogic activity"⁶. Authority cannot be built and maintained unless it is based on own values. The authenticity of beliefs and attitudes arouses respect in pupils, which is why it is worth basing it on authentic principles and rules. "The source of authority can be skills and knowledge, personal characteristics, ways of acting accordingly to generally respected values, as well as social position or post"⁷. According to A. Piekarska, the authority results from "possessed advantage of e.g. knowledge, skills, character traits, strength or power, social position"⁸.

The process of becoming a model begins as early as at the stage of working with the youngest children in kindergarten. At that time, a teacher is one of the most significant people in the life of a child, it is a personal pattern for children and that is why it is so important in what way pupils perceive them. Children at a younger age highly value establishing close relationships and emotional ties, which are often expressed by cordiality and kindness. As the children grow up, a teacher's role may gradually decrease. "The younger the observer – the more

⁵ E. Fromm, *Ucieczka od wolności*, Czytelnik, Warszawa, 2000, s. 161–163.

⁶ M. Kazimierowicz, *Nauczyciel autorytetem?*, „Nowa Szkoła” 2014, nr 5, s. 34.

⁷ R. Stach, *Autorytet i przywództwo*, [w:] W. Szewczuk, *Encyklopedia psychologii*, Fundacja Innowacja, Warszawa 1998, s. 27.

⁸ A. Piekarska, *Czym jest autorytet?*, „Emocje” 2013, nr 1, s.13.

emotional role plays with the observed persons in this process”⁹. Pre-school and early-school children prefer teachers who embody qualities similar to parents, such as warmth, cordiality and strive to build close relationships. “Authority is also gained by warmth and kindness”¹⁰. Older students want a teacher to create a friendly atmosphere. Teenagers, on the other hand, value the high level of knowledge and competences teachers present, looking for respect of their independence. However, according to the parents of the youngest participants in the educational process, “the condition of gaining authority is the sociability of a teacher, manifested in the positive spirit, pedagogical optimism and interest in problems of each student. It should be supported by sound general knowledge, psychological and pedagogical knowledge as well as medical skills. Therefore, an educated teacher who is able to share their knowledge is the most appreciated”¹¹. Knowledge, often the passion and wisdom of a teacher, are features that definitely help to gain authority. “A contemporary teacher can be an authority for their pupils, if she/he is not authoritatively imposing their position. Such a teacher is to be a guide who is fallible and can admit their ignorance (they are not afraid of criticism), as well as they can ask for help their foster child. Acquiring the authority of students is associated with showing the way to acquire and analyze information”¹².

High requirements also apply to the moral sphere. Once a teacher states something the proper actions should follow. “The most desirable upbringing is when the examples are so convincing that a pupil finds a pattern for their own behavior. The value of such an approach to the pattern increases with age and level of development. Personal thinking which assumes the freedom and rationality of a person, rejects the situation of imposing patterns on a child, if they can already know and understand to some degree another human being and independently evaluate”¹³.

E. Kozak considers the educational attitude to a student as the main source of a teacher’s authority. “It must be unconditionally based on the knowledge of a pupil’s psyche and the meaning of their inner life. In addition, this relationship must be emotionally positive and honest, and it must have a respect for a foster child”¹⁴.

Another factor that builds the authority is mutual respect. All people have their dignity and the role of a teacher is to guard it, so that every person from the youngest to the oldest can be treated with respect.

⁹ K. Olbrycht, *O roli przykładu, wzoru, autorytetu i mistrza w wychowaniu osobowym*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2014, s. 57.

¹⁰ L. Bojarska, *Belfer na huśtawce. O autorytecie nauczyciela*, ABC Wolters Kluwer business, Warszawa 2012, s. 10.

¹¹ I. Jazukiewicz, *Autorytet nauczyciela*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 1999, s. 34.

¹² E. Kozak, *Nauczyciel twórcą swojego autorytetu*, [w:] M. Bednarska (red.), *O autorytecie w wychowaniu i nauczaniu*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2009, s. 86.

¹³ K. Olbrycht, *O roli przykładu, wzoru, autorytetu i mistrza w wychowaniu osobowym*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2014, s. 185.

¹⁴ E. Kozak, *Nauczyciel twórcą swojego autorytetu*, [w:] M. Bednarska (red.), *O autorytecie w wychowaniu i nauczaniu*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2009, s. 89.

Certainly, an important role in building the authority is played by character traits and personality, and finally pedagogical talent manifested in the skills of passing knowledge, arousing interest and enthusiasm to constantly expanding their knowledge.

The values that contribute to building the authority can be divided into intellectual, moral and external advantages.

Intellectual values include: broad and detailed knowledge, the ability to make students interested in the content, good mastery of pedagogical, methodical and didactic skills, that is adjusting the material, methods and forms of teaching to the age and capabilities of students, and the ability to use modern multimedia technology.

The moral values consist of respect for others, kindness, objectivity, patience (so important especially in work with young children), the ability to motivate pupils to work by making them aware of the value of knowledge for their development, pedagogical tactics, and finally the punctuality and consistency of the teacher in his behavior.

External values include good manners, tactfulness, neat clothing, sense of humor, and being able not to treat oneself too seriously.

Foster children's parents play an extremely important role in building the teacher's authority. They can support this process or make it difficult, since all what a pupil hears at home about teachers significantly influences their perception. They especially pay attention to a teacher being fair, truthful, honest and characterized by being well-mannered.

It is worth recalling the views of a priest M. Rusiecki according to whom "having authority, enjoying exceptional recognition and gratitude is a big deal. However, by far more important work expected from a teacher is inspiring others with ambitions, the passion of authentic growth to the limits of their capabilities"¹⁵.

3. Personality traits necessary in the teaching profession

People differ in their personality and have long lasting qualities that affect their thoughts and behavior. Personality according to W. Okoń most often means "a set of fixed properties and psychophysical processes that distinguish a given individual from others, affecting the way of its behavior, and therefore stability in the acquisition and ordering an experience, information and skills required to react emotionally in relations with others and for consistency in the choice of goals and values"¹⁶.

¹⁵ M. Rusiecki, *Rola autorytetu w wychowaniu*, [w:] J. Jagiełło (red.), *O autorytecie. W poszukiwaniu punktu odniesienia*, Wydawnictwo Znak, Kraków 2008, s. 106.

¹⁶ W. Okoń, *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak, Warszawa 2001, s. 277.

Pedeutology lists several features crucial for each teacher. They may be congenital, but in a large number of cases they should be worked on, developed and mastered. These include: “authenticity, self-acceptance, the ability to accept criticism, the ability to adapt to changing conditions, tactfulness and emotional maturity of a teacher”¹⁷. An especially appreciated feature is justice expressed in the equal treatment of all children.

The indispensable specific features in the teaching profession include “love for people, a tendency to social influence, and also a suggestive ability, which consists of three characteristics – self-confidence, faith in own abilities and uncompromising and straightforward pursuit of achieving their goals, justice and inexorable consistency”¹⁸. On the other hand, non-specific features include “mental and physical health, honesty, diligence, proper level of education, knowledge of working methods”¹⁹.

The teacher’s positive image also depends on their qualifications and on whether they are able to use such methods, forms and means that enable them to achieve their goals, and release cognitive and practical activity in their pupils. “A good teacher is not a matrix, a copy of the assumed concept of education. On the contrary – it is an individuality whose development is the overriding concern of the creators of the concept. Becoming a teacher is a deeply individual process that basically involves getting to know and discovering oneself.

In today’s reality, the existing traditional model of a teacher is not able to meet the demands and challenges imposed by contemporary pedagogy. “The contemporary teacher needs the skills: to give meaning to the uncertain, artistry or choice among competing theories/paradigms”. Therefore, a modern teacher should analyze their actions and be able to find a solution adequate to the existing situations.

4. Attitude of a kindergarten teacher in the context of pedagogical concepts

Being a teacher for the youngest children requires personality predispositions, experience and life wisdom. A teacher should treat the goodness of a child as the most important one. A child wants their teacher to be wise, caring and patient, able to show that they are special, valuable and very important. While working with young children, the ability to make and maintain close contacts with them is particularly important. Emotional attitude to this work also has an impact on the

¹⁷ J. Jankowska, *Nie ma nauczyciela idealnego*, „Bliżej przedszkola” 2015, nr 4.163, s. 12.

¹⁸ L. Smółka, *Osobowość nauczyciela*, [w:] B. Muchacka, I. Czaja-Chudyba, L. Smółka, *Edukacyjne i wychowawcze wyzwania nauczyciela w przedszkolu i szkole podstawowej*, Wyższa Szkoła Ekonomii, Turystyki i Nauk Społecznych w Kielcach, Kielce 2012, s. 125.

¹⁹ Tamże, s. 125.

good performance of the given tasks. Lack of personal ties “significantly reduces the effectiveness of all methods of educational influence”²⁰. The built emotional bond based on understanding and friendship allows a teacher to influence properly the youngest generation.

The attitude of acceptance and understanding of pupils by a teacher is also of great importance. As early as in a kindergarten, one can see that each child is different and it does not refer to external features. Everyone is individual, has its own virtues and faults, each thinks and feels different, enjoys and saddens, and a teacher’s duty is not only to accept pupils as they are, but to show them the interest and kindness, because everyone is valuable and unique. A teacher’s duty is also to make a child feel accepted, “as an absolutely valuable unit, that is, without setting any conditions”²¹.

Accepting a child is associated with understanding. Empathy is a trait that every teacher should have, because without it, full understanding of a child is not possible. A teacher must descend to the level of pupils, feel in what they see, experience what they need, look at the world through their eyes. Only thanks to this she/he is able to understand their fears and experiences, and thanks to this knowledge of a child’s psyche and the correctness of development, she/he satisfies their needs.

A pre-school and early-school education teacher has a very big influence on their pupils. Thanks to their personality a teacher can stimulate the development of children, and with his own example teach how to be a good, just and sensitive human being. It is extremely important that a teacher of the youngest children has a cheerful disposition, and in the educational work towards a pupil she/he has always been “guided by the principles of love and trust”²². Everyday smile, kindness expressed sympathy is not only awaited by a child but also their parents who, having to deal with such a teacher without feeling fear and anxiety, will leave their most valuable gem under their care.

Conclusion

Becoming a teacher is a long-term process, starting with making a conscious decision regarding the choice of profession, through constant education. Teacher’s professional development is based on permanent broadening, deepening of knowledge and skills as well as critical assessment of own activities, which

²⁰ A. Klim-Klimaszewska, *Pedagogika przedszkolna. Nowa podstawa programowa*, Instytut Wydawniczy ERICA, Warszawa 2010, s. 162.

²¹ Tamże, s. 163.

²² M. Parlak, E. Zyzik, *Rola nauczyciela-wychowawcy we współczesnej szkole*, [w:] M. Kątny, M. Parlak, E. Zyzik (red.), *W kręgu zagadnień edukacyjnych*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno – Przyrodniczego Jana Kochanowskiego w Kielcach, Kielce 2008, s. 133.

leads to qualitative changes in both competence and personality. The reform of education requires from a teacher to be an initiator, creator and implementer of the ventures.

Being a teacher in a kindergarten is a responsibility, but also a source of beautiful experiences resulting from a joint exploration of the world with human beings who are just beginning to get to know themselves and the environment that they accept and trust unconditionally. Working in the teaching profession is also a big challenge since every child is different, thinks, feels and perceives the surrounding reality in a different way, but at the same time each is valuable. A teacher receives under their care of a young child whom they need to get to know and lead the right way during pre-school education. And this is where the responsibility comes from taking care of the future of this young human being.

A teacher is responsible for creating conditions conducive to learning about people's own needs, possibilities and limitations. Such kindergarten teacher participates in the beginning of building children's sense of self-worth, determining the path of their individual development. A kindergarten begins preparing a child for later functioning in society, performing various social roles and taking responsibility for himself and others.

The literature on the subject of the teaching profession draws attention to the fact that the authority facilitates the teacher's work and helps in achieving educational and didactic goals. The teacher's authority is the ability to exert a positive educational influence on children. A teacher's knowledge and wisdom are significant determinants that help to gain authority among parents. They allow a teacher to introduce different models of team management that play an important role in shaping social relations. It is extremely important that a teacher is at the same time a model for a child and an authority for their parents, because the common, thoughtful and responsible influence on a child at this age by the teacher and parents will be the basis for the child's knowledge, skills and attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. Many problematic situations are successfully solved thanks to their authority.

The teacher influences a foster child in many different ways and through various situations in a kindergarten. It affects a child with his whole person, reactions, actions taken in various situations. Process of building the authority of a teacher and an educator involves many various factors. Completing pedagogical studies does not ensure that one has authority either in the children they work with or with their parents. In order to be an authority, one must be led by own intensive work, as well as the taken actions related to the educational-didactic process.

There is no doubt that the teaching profession is a profession of great responsibility, and a teacher's work, particularly important and difficult. But one should not forget that shaping the personality of a child is a beautiful and unique role, which is why it is often said that the teaching profession is a vocation to which

one must have appropriate predispositions, especially because it often happens that a small child puts the teacher above the parents' authority.

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Nauczyciel w przedszkolu jako model i autorytet dla dzieci i ich rodziców

Bycie nauczycielem przedszkola to wielkie wyzwanie, a zarazem odpowiedzialność wynikająca z troski o przyszłość dziecka. Odpowiedzialność ta polega na stworzeniu optymalnych warunków sprzyjających budowaniu poczucia tożsamości, warunków, które pozwolą młodemu człowiekowi poznać swoje potrzeby, możliwości i ograniczenia, a także wyznaczą mu drogę indywidualnego rozwoju. By to osiągnąć nauczyciel musi być wzorem i autorytetem w oczach swoich podopiecznych. We współczesnej pedagogice autorytet nauczyciela rozumiany jest jako, zaufanie i poważanie dla nauczyciela, który jest doradcą, a zarazem przewodnikiem w trudnych sytuacjach. Kształtowanie osobowości dziecka to rola piękna i wyjątkowa, dlatego często mówi się, że zawód nauczyciela jest powołaniem, do którego trzeba posiadać odpowiednie predyspozycje, którego podstawowym elementem jest autorytet.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciel, autorytet, wzór, przykład, osobowość, szacunek.

A teacher in kindergarten as a model and authority for children and their parents

Summary

Being a kindergarten teacher is a great challenge, and at the same time a big responsibility resulting from care for a child's future. This responsibility consists of creating optimal conditions conducive to building a sense of identity, conditions that will allow young people to know their needs, possibilities and limitations, and also to set the path for their individual development. In order to achieve this, a teacher must be a model and authority in the eyes of their pupils. In contemporary pedagogy, a teacher's authority is understood as trust and respect for the teacher who is an adviser and also a guide in problematic situations. Shaping a child's personality is a beautiful and unique role, which is why it is often said that the teaching profession is a vocation to which one must have appropriate predispositions, basic element of which is the authority.