

UNIVERSITY AS THE SCHOOL OF THINKING

Univerzita ako škola myslenia

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Abstrakt

Najważniejszą inwestycją człowieka jest edukacja. Współczesna edukacja powinna koncentrować się wokół czterech aspektów kształcenia, które w przyszłości będą dla każdej jednostki filarami jej wiedzy: uczyć się, aby wiedzieć; uczyć się, aby działać; uczyć się, aby żyć wspólnie oraz uczyć się, aby być. Autor artykułu wskazuje na jeszcze jeden ważny aspekt kształcenia uniwersyteckiego - uczyć się, aby myśleć. Celem uniwersytetu jest przede wszystkim, aby młody człowiek nauczył się myśleć sam. W tym kontekście zwrócono uwagę m.in. na ogromną potrzebę osobistego dialogu profesora ze studentem, który pomaga w wyrabianiu umiejętności myślenia i badania naukowego.

Kľúčové slová

Edukacja, uniwersytet, myślenie, dialog.

Abstract

Education is the most important investment of people. Contemporary education ought to concentrate on four aspects of teaching: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. They ought to become everyone's pillars of education. The author of the article points out another aspect of university education - learning to think. The prior task of university is teaching students to do their own thinking. In this context, the attention is paid to, among other things, a great need for a personal dialogue between professors and students which helps to develop the ability to think critically and conduct research.

Key words

Education, university, thinking, dialogue

It is not time but early education that teaches us how to think.

Democritus

The 21st century is a period of great transformation of civilization. We witness a rapid development of modern science and technology. What seemed to be unreal in the 19th century or even in the 21th century, is reality today. What seemed to be a fantasy is a fact today. The development of science is immense. Under these circumstances, one should seek opportunities to improve life.

1. Education as the most important investment of a man

While observing socio-political transformation initiated in Poland over 20 years ago, it should be clearly stated that the greatest success is the re-orientation, of the social self-awareness. 30 or even 20 years ago, one might have wondered why young people were not satisfied with graduating from vocational school or technical college, and why they wanted to study if it had no future.

Nowadays, needless to say, education is the most important investment of a man. A good education

and skills are becoming an essential value of modern civilization³². It is evidenced by the number of university graduates, as well as by the popularity of different types of inservice courses and postgraduate studies. The percentage of students increased from 13% of people aged 19-24 in 1990 to 48% in 2008.

Another argument is an increasing interest in the Universities of the Third Age. The first university of this type was founded in France in 1973. This idea was initiated by Pierre Vellas, a professor of social sciences. In Poland, at present there are nearly 110 UTA, which together associate 25,000 students. The main objectives of these universities are (as follows): the spreading of educational initiatives, intellectual, mental, social and physical stimulation of elderly people, expanding knowledge and skills of senior citizens, facilitating relations with such institutions as health service, community centers, rehabilitation centers and others;

³² Trempała, E. *Edukacja nie ogranicza się tylko do sfery szkolnictwa instytucjonalnego.* (in:) Ed. Karpińska, A. *Edukacja w dialogu i reformie.* Białystok: Trans Humana, 2002. 75-87.

engaging students in actions concerning their environment; maintaining social ties and interpersonal communication among seniors³³.

Also Children's University ought to be regarded as a significant valuable initiative. The idea originated in Germany. In 2002, the University of Tübingen organized a series of lectures, for children aged 8-12, aimed at arousing interest in different fields of science. The motto was to encourage students to ask the most difficult questions, the answers to which were provided by university teachers. The mission of children's universities is primarily "arousing scientific passion in children by presenting science as a fascinating adventure which can last through the whole life"³⁴.

2. Contemporary determinants of education

In the Report submitted to UNESCO by the International Commission for the 21st century Education, chaired by Jacques Delors, it is stressed that contemporary education should focus on four aspects of teaching, which, in the future, will become each person's pillars of knowledge³⁵:

- a) learning to know;
- b) learning to act;
- c) learning to live together;
- d) learning to be.

Learning to know, that is learning to be able to benefit from the opportunities that are provided by lifelong education. The main objective is to obtain a capability of understanding man and the world. In the context of university studies, the success is arousing intellectual interests and development of critical attitudes, which contribute to discovery of reality. Studies ought to awake the desire to continue learning throughout life. It is important to become aware of the challenges of education resulting from the fact that in the years 1970-2000 there was an eightfold growth of a store of human knowledge!³⁶

Learning to act means, first of all, acquiring competence which will help to solve practical problems and provide a man with ability to work in a team. University graduates should be able to influence their environment. Their professional training should ensure competent and effective action in difficult situations.

Learning to live together is learning to co-exist with others. Undoubtedly, it is one of the most greatest challenges of contemporary education. The modern world needs joint actions to enhance the idea of good in every sense of this word. Education should serve the involvement and cooperation with others at all levels of human activity. Students should broaden their knowledge of others, different cultures and spirituality, and work together in the atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding. The exchange of students within the Socrates/Erasmus programme should be regarded particularly valuable here.

Learning to be – means that the task of education is the continuous development of human personality. We need to refer to Gabriel Marcel's thought; "a man is worth more because of what he is rather than because of what he has." Therefore, the aim of education is to create a wise and good man.

3. The mission of the university

In his speech delivered to pilgrims on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the renewal of the Cracow Academy, Pope John Paul II noted that "the task of a university is in a sense the birth of a human and souls for knowledge and wisdom, shaping minds and hearts. And this task cannot be fulfilled without the selfless service to the truth - by its discovery and sharing it with others"³⁷.

In the context of previous assumptions there must be added another important dimension of university teaching: learning to think! The purpose of a university is, first and foremost, that a young man could "learn to think by himself"³⁸.

So what is thinking? To think means talking to oneself; thinking is a critical reflection on the world and human life. It is also a skillful way of expression. Among other things, a way of expressing oneself proves the acuity in thinking. Therefore, independence in thinking is a difficult skill, which ought to be acquired by every university graduate in the course of studies.

4. Why is thinking?

Clearly, the greatest achievement of a modern man is human resources, investment in acquisition of knowledge, obtaining necessary qualifications and skills. Independence in thinking should be considered the most precious achievement.

³³ <http://www.utw.pl/index.php?id=10> (12 October 2009).

³⁴ http://www.unikids.pl/page/co_to_jest_unikids (12 October 2009).

³⁵ Maszczak, T. *Wyznaczniki edukacji w obliczu przemian społecznych*. (in:) Ed. Karpińska, A. *Edukacja w dialogu i reformie*. Białystok: Trans Humana, 2002. 103-112.

³⁶ Banach, Cz. *Edukacja wobec współczesnego świata i człowieka*. (in:) Kuźma, J., Morbitzer J., eds. *Nauki pedagogiczne w teorii i praktyce edukacyjnej*. Kraków: Wyd. Naukowe Akademii Pedagogicznej, 2003. 63.

³⁷ Kaźmierczak, P. *Personalistyczna koncepcja wychowania w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II*. Kraków: Wyd. WAM, 2003. 95.

³⁸ Jan Paweł II, *Przemówienie do profesorów i studentów Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego*, Jasna Góra, 6 June 1979 (in:) *Jan Paweł II. Pielgrzymki do Ojczyzny. Przemówienia homilie*. Kraków: Znak, 2005. 129.

At Polish universities we can still notice the famous attitude of students, the one in which the knowledge of academic subjects should be treated according to the principle of "three times z" - learn by heart, pass and forget (in Polish: "zakuć, zdać i zapomnieć"). The reason for this situation is that students, often rightly, feel that it makes no sense to preoccupy their minds with useless information.

This situation can be remedied, for instance, by changing the approach to spreading knowledge and the way of teaching. I regard a project an extremely important method which, to a great extent, enables students to be self-reliant while searching for scientific truth and drawing conclusions³⁹.

In my relatively limited academic experience, I encountered an alarming phenomenon. When asked to write an essay, students "protest" the most often when they are asked to express their opinions. Researching a scientific problem is not a complicated task. It is enough to go to the library and use its collections. However, I regret to say that only the most diligent students go to the library. A large number of students uncritically make use of ready analyses in the Internet.

Why is it so difficult for students to formulate their own opinions? I think the problem lies in the earlier stages of education. Starting from kindergarten, a child must answer in accordance with the wishes of a teacher.

A child takes the first very important test when it is 9 years old. It is a test before the First Communion. The student must learn the questions and ready answers by heart. It learns definitions it basically does not understand. But it is more important how it understands the concept of an angel and God, etc.

In subsequent stages of education the student submits to a kind of game. You must answer in such a way to please the teacher. While preparing for the test in the 6th grade, secondary school exam or school-leaving examination, teachers and students focus primarily on giving answer to satisfy people responsible for preparing the tests.

The school is a place of learning, searching for knowledge, therefore a place of asking questions. At each stage of education (from kindergarten onwards), students should have an opportunity to ask difficult questions and to express their doubts. Unfortunately, it is an alarming phenomenon that Polish teachers are afraid of students' questions. Why is it so? Is it the result of our gaps in education? Or maybe is it the result of our living in a society that is devoid of any reflection? It is easy to notice that in many social spheres the principle of promotion is so-called "bmw" (in Polish: "bierny, mierny, ale wierny") - passive, mediocre, but faithful.

According to Czesław Kupisiewicz, from 50 to 80% of words used while teaching are spoken by a teacher; on average a teacher also asks about 300 questions a day⁴⁰. In Germany, there is a term that defines teaching as an activity the essence of which is the fact that one speaks and the others are silent (*Wenn alles schweigt und einer spricht, da nennt man so was Unterricht*)⁴¹. Unfortunately, it is still relevant today.

The school, much less a university, must open to a new dimension of education - to teach thinking. In the Middle Ages, debates played an important role in the scientific life. They made students aware of the role and importance of logical thinking. At present, students too rarely participate in scientific debates. Unfortunately, at conferences, the discussion on current issues is usually omitted.

Robert de Sorbon believed that "nothing can not be acquired effectively, unless it is achieved by disputation. A debate was held once a week. It was attended by all the professors and students of a given faculty. One of the professors gave a lecture which ended with proposing a few theses. Next, a debate followed. Other professors challenged the proposed theses by presenting their own arguments. A debate held in Paris in 1304 is an example of great mastery. The opponents of the thesis of the Immaculate Conception presented 200 charges. Duns Scotus listened to all of them, and then replied to them with ease. As a method, a debate played an important role since it trained people in thinking and efficient applying of knowledge⁴².

A personal contact of a professor with a student is a very important aspect of academic education. It is teaching of students, that ought to be a professor's intention; a professor can share his most precious thoughts with students. Therefore, a natural thing is to promote the most talented students, who ought to continue the work begun by their master.

A dialogue is the most important aspect of the relations between a master and a student. It is the best way of teaching of research personnel. In his speech *About the dignity of the University (O dostojęństwie Uniwersytetu)*, Prof Kazimierz Twardowski emphasized: "Educational work of a professor and an assistant professor of a university is not something alien and external to him, but it combines with his work of a teacher which involves developing the ability to think and conduct scientific research; the basis of this work of a teacher is a teacher's own research work. Thus, three trends of a professor and an assistant professor

³⁹ Goźlińska, E. *Nie lekcje lecz zajęcia edukacyjne*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 2004. 27-36.

⁴⁰ Kupisiewicz, Cz. *Koncepcje reform szkolnych w wybranych krajach świata na przełomie lat osiemdziesiątych i dziewięćdziesiątych*. Warszawa: Wyd. Żak, 1995. 14-15.

⁴¹ Kupisiewicz 12.

⁴² Moździeń, S. I. *Zarys historii wychowania*. vol 1. Kielce: Wyd. Pedagogiczne ZNP, 1999. 60.

intertwine in one that is the essence of their profession."⁴³

It is worth quoting here Karol Kotłowski's valuable thought: "Great teachers, ought to be responsible for training young teachers; it is not only his works but also people he will leave behind that determine the value of a scholar."⁴⁴ Students are, in fact, the best proof of our teaching.

Human development has always demanded the support from the environment. It also concerns the development of science. A man can do little without any support from the master. To him we owe the most: the love of truth, the inspiration for creative thinking and action, a proper research workshop. Without a master's faith in our abilities it would be impossible to work one's way up the scientific advancement.

In his book *Citadelle*, Antoine de Saint-Exupery gives the following tips. How they are valid to all educators and teachers including academic ones:

"Your duty is neither,
To kill a man in children,
nor to change a man into an ant,
which will live in an anthill.
To me it is unimportant if a man
Will have less or more.
It is important whether he will be less or more
humane.
Do not flood them with empty formulas,
but the abundance of images, which give rise to the
structures.
Do not instill dead knowledge in them,
but give them a style of thinking,
which will capture the heart of the matter
and give them a chance of their own success and
fulfillment."

The most important mission of a university is a ministry of thinking. The task of a university is to arouse scientific curiosity to encourage to ask questions and be honest during searching for answers. It is not the number of awarded diplomas but wisdom and a style of thinking of graduates that proves the quality of education.

⁴³ Szostek, A. *Etyka w nauce*, (in:) Ed. Zdunek A. *Etyka... w nauce*. Lublin: Wyd. Lubelskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2003. 14.

⁴⁴ Śliwerski, B. *Współczesne teorie i nurty wychowania*. Kraków: Wyd. Impuls, 2003. 50.

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