

Emancipated Pedagogical Reason: Morality, Education and Politics in contemporary Polish moral education

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Abstract

Emancipovaný pedagogický úsudek: Morálka, vzdělávání a politika v současné polské mravní výchově. – Pojednání postuluje radikální změnu v uvažování o mravní výchově v Polsku. Tento požadavek vyplývá z emancipovaného pedagogického úsudku, který vyžaduje revizi rozšířeného paradigmatu, podle něhož etické formace musely splňovat pouze pomocnou funkci pro politickou sféru. Uznání samostatnosti mravní výchovy a jejích principů na jedné straně umožňuje demonstrovat pedagogické podmínky politiky, a na druhé straně určit své vlastní možnosti a meze.

Předkládané pojednání pokračuje ve třech bodech. Za prvé je zde prezentován koncept pedagogického uvažování a vysvětleno na čem je emancipace založena jako neoddelitelný rys pedagogického úsudku. Dále autor zkoumá změnu, která se udála v pedagogickém přístupu k formování morální sféry v Polsku po druhé světové válce. Popis pozadí těchto úvah zahrnuje charakteristiku socialistické pedagogiky, která byla dominantní téměř půl století. Na závěr je zde formulováno několik náznaků týkajících se konstrukce teorie mravní výchovy, která je založena na emancipovaném pedagogickém úsudku.

Keywords: pedagogical reason, emancipation, morality, politics, education

Klíčová slova: pedagogický úsudek, emancipace, morálka, politika, výchova

Speaking of emancipated pedagogical reason, I will focus on education sciences as a group of scientific disciplines that create discursive knowledge, that is, knowledge which is the subject of scientific debate on the pedagogical action of *Bildung*¹ and teaching. The main objective of my analysis is to expose the **emancipatory moment**, which is constitutive for both practical and theoretical action, in the structure of this knowledge. The area of education in which I will investigate the need for strengthening the emancipatory objectives of pedagogical reason will be morality. This domain has been a field of rivalry in various areas of life. I will focus on the dispute between politics and education over primacy in shaping the moral sphere. I would like to convince my readers that pedagogical thinking is entitled to both autonomy and subordination regarding the claims of every aspect of life, not excluding

¹ In the spirit of German language, the term *Bildung* should not be confused with English term 'education'. It is common in the literature to use this German word without translating it. *Bildung* in the broad sense describes a situation where the main focus is on the relationship between man and the world around him. In general, one can therefore say that the processes of education are founded on *Bildung* processes; the latter, however, can take place regardless of education. Thus, theories of education mainly regard opportunities and forms of pedagogical operations and functions, while *Bildung* theories deal with problems and tasks that regard human coexistence. Although the latter also include the educational processes, their scope is much broader than the education theories. (Benner 2012: 135–155)

politics or religion. This ambivalent state requires a clear recognition of the identity of educational action and its theory.

My deliberations will proceed in three stages. First, I will present the concept of pedagogical reason and explain what, in my opinion, emancipation consists of as an immanent feature of pedagogical reason. Next, I will examine the change that took place in the pedagogical approach to shaping the moral sphere in Poland after World War II. A description of the background for these considerations will involve the characterisation of the socialist pedagogy that was dominant for nearly half a century. Finally, I will formulate a few indications concerning the construction of the theory of moral education that will be based on emancipated pedagogical reason.

Pedagogical reason and emancipation

The discussion of a distinct type of rationality that distinguishes educational action from other types of human activity is nothing new. Without reaching too far into the past, a clear indication of such need can be found in the work of Johann F. Herbart, *Allgemeine Pädagogik aus dem Zweck der Erziehung abgeleitet* (English: *General Pedagogics Derived from the Purpose of Education*), published in 1806. In the introduction to the work, he formulated the following postulate:

“It would be better (...) for pedagogy to realise its original concepts as precisely as possible, and cultivate an **independent thought**; by that it will become a centre of research and will avoid the danger of being subject to foreign authority like a dependent, conquered province.” (Herbart 2007: 22)

Today, a similar postulate has been advanced by Dietrich Benner in his work *Allgemeine Pädagogik. Eine systematisch-problemgeschichtliche Einleitung in die Grundstruktur pädagogischen Denkens und Handelns* (English: *General Pedagogy: A Systematic, Historical and Problematic Introduction to Pedagogical Thinking and Action*). The author further develops the tradition of Herbart’s pedagogy. According to him, (2015: 9) Remembering what is understood by the notion of **basic pedagogical thought** seems to be one of the most urgent tasks of general pedagogy today. In another part of that work, he defines that basic thought as *proprium*² and states (2015: 7) that:

“The question of pedagogical *proprium* and the manner of its verbalisation in the science(s) of education does not refer to what is general, and what can be separated from what is specific by reference to a given scope of pedagogy, but it concerns the **universal structure** which is present in pedagogical phenomena, thanks to which it is possible to distinguish and separate pedagogical states of affairs (...) from those non-pedagogical.”

Many authors have examined the history of education and pedagogical thought from the point of view of a gradual crystallisation of the awareness of the specific nature of both pedagogical action and thinking in this field. Therefore, various terms have been proposed to reflect the essence of what is strictly pedagogical. For example, a Polish theoretician of education named Roman Schulz (2009: 210–222) used the notion of ‘logos of education’ and

² *Proprium* – lat. ‘characteristic’, ‘important’, ‘particular’, ‘exclusive’, ‘special’.

Teresa Hejnicka-Bezwińska (2015) used the notion of ‘logic of change’. However, in this paper, I refer to the notion introduced by Stefan Sarnowski (1993) called ‘pedagogical reason’. As I will soon present, the concept of criticism of pedagogical thinking based on pedagogical reason allows for the isolation of the aforementioned **emancipatory moment** in practical education and its theory.

S. Sarnowski (1993: 9) defines pedagogical reason as ‘knowledge on education and teaching’. According to him (1993: 9–10), this knowledge exists in two forms.

“In the first form, it belongs to virtually every human being. (...) all adult members of the human population, for example when they play the role of parents, but also by fulfilling other social functions, are in all seriousness educators, as well as teachers, and thus the carriers of pedagogical reason in its **natural** form.”

In addition to commonness, natural pedagogical reason is characterised by spontaneity, which results from the directness of the educational situation and the need for taking appropriate action within it.

The second form of pedagogical reason is characterised by discursiveness. On this subject, the above-mentioned author writes (1993: 10) as follows:

“But there also is pedagogical reason specially cultivated, in a sense, in the form of pedagogical theory, a reason even pretending to be called a scientific discipline, that constitutes knowledge of a **discursive** nature, which is verifiable and communicable, and meets other standards of rationality, today usually established by methodology and logical reflection.”

Not all adults are holders of such reason, but only professional educators, practitioners and theoreticians, who acquire it by studying theoretical pedagogical knowledge. As expert educators, they are often inclined to think that only they know the essence of education and have the skills necessary for appropriate pedagogical action. S. Sarnowski warns (1993: 11) that this belief can easily lead to *the desire of totality*, known in pedagogical literature as *pedagogism*. (Dewey 1997: 17–23) Discursive thinking that succumbs to pedagogism is characterised by a desire to appropriate the area of legitimacy of the natural pedagogical reason and petrification of an asymmetric educator-pupil relation. The latter results in the incapacitation of the pupil, supposedly for their own good. This ‘care’ sometimes goes as far as to deprive a person being educated of the right to “subjectivity (...), independence, autonomy, freedom, sense of equality with other people, etc”. (Sarnowski 1993: 16) In other words, it makes the process of emancipation impossible. Bogusław Śliwerski (2012: 145–146) supposes that it

“may result from recognising a pupil as an imperfect human being who needs adults’ (experts’) help, as well as an external support of their development. Shaping a human being with the desired, clearly defined personality, consistent with the top-down imposed goals becomes the task of education. Such an approach leads to instrumentalisation and objectification of the pupil, depriving them of the possibility to use the autonomous potential and ability of self-determination and self-actualisation.”

According to S. Sarnowski, (1993: 16) it is necessary to carry out a criticism of pedagogical reason in order to avoid the pedagogism described above. This criticism should equally include both natural educators, which in his opinion is all people, and professionals who work with practical or theoretical education and teach professionally on a daily basis. The criticism should consist of the fact that the first group learns that there is specialist scientific knowledge for their activities which can help them solve everyday educational problems, while the other group learns the limits of their theoretical knowledge, and thus stops considering pedagogy to be a science, even though it is often regarded as such.

As is indicated above, pedagogism in its essence impedes and even thwarts emancipation. In pedagogy, the notion of 'emancipation' has lost the significance that it won not so long ago. Usually, it is associated with emancipatory pedagogy, which was initiated in the late 1960s in Western Europe by a fierce opposition and a revolt of the young generation against the existing system of education. This trend in pedagogical reflection had its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s. (Krüger 2004: 47–69) However, for countries such as Poland, emancipatory ideas started pouring in only in the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium (Śliwerski 2010). After these countries had a brief period of fascination with these ideas, they fell into oblivion. It can be stated that the episodic character of the phenomenon of emancipatory pedagogy and its ideological context, namely left-wing criticism of traditional society, became barriers that interfered with an in-depth reflection on the meaning of emancipation, both in practical pedagogical action and in pedagogy as the study of that action.

According to Jürgen Ruhloff, in order to go beyond the stereotypical connotations and explain how important emancipation is for pedagogical thinking and action, it is necessary to go back to the sense that Immanuel Kant gave this notion in his famous statement: "Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage." Although this sentence does not directly mention emancipation, J. Ruhloff argues that enlightenment and emancipation are the same thing here. He also notes that, in the past, the Latin word *emancipatio* meant 'to release from one's power, e.g. a child', 'make adult' or 'make autonomous', and it was a legal term. It was related to the passive act of 'being emancipated', or being released from parental dependence (it usually concerned a son).

According to J. Ruhloff, (2004: 281) in I. Kant's approach we can observe the transfer of a legal *terminus technicus* into an area previously unknown to it, while giving it a new, active nature, one in which a person escapes immaturity on their own, without the help of others. It is obvious that this new nature does not concern the biological acceleration of the maturing process, but rather the gaining of independence in the pedagogical sense. It seems to me that emancipation refers both to the pupil in the process of education and to pedagogy, which has so far been commonly treated as a dependent scientific discipline that relies on other disciplines.

A problem that is inextricably linked to emancipation is whether it is a one-time process which involves a final transition from the state of dependence to independence, or whether it is a series of (self-)liberations. While considering this question, I will refer to the explanations proposed by D. Benner. In an article on Klaus Mollenhauer, a German protagonist of emancipatory thinking in pedagogy, D. Benner (2008: 24) states that emancipation is a never-ending process, and therefore it cannot be limited to the age at which one is usually subject to education. An example relating to the old age explains it well. Even

in their old age, people are forced to continue to learn and acquire new skills, such as using a walking stick. This skill liberates them from the dependence resulting from the loss of fitness, and, from the pedagogical point of view, it can be interpreted as emancipation.

In conclusion, emancipated pedagogical reason is reason that is open to continuous learning or, in other words, the improvement of pedagogical action, both in practical and theoretical aspects. The combination of both fields, *praxis* and theory, is what characterises pedagogical rationality and determines the generation of its own rules of pedagogical thinking and action, principles that are independent of the dictates of a *foreign authority*. (Herbart 2007: 22)

Interdependencies between morality, education and politics

I would like to support the postulate of building the autonomy of pedagogical thinking and action formulated above with an example of moral education that is perhaps too radical for some. It is an area where various dependencies entwine. I will consider this issue in the context of morality, education and politics.

Moral issues have always, so to speak, been present in pedagogical reflection, even though the shaping of morality has not always been perceived as a task of education. (Benner at al. 2011: 10) In modern times, the spectrum of views and positions on this matter ranges from treating morality as “the highest purpose of people and their education” (Herbart 2008: 130) to identifying pedagogy with ethics (Woroniecki 1995). Moral education appeared in the Polish pedagogical thought as a subject separate from pedagogical reflection only in the interwar period, thanks to the pedagogy of culture (Maliszewski 2004).

In the stratified concept of development which was developed during that time by Sergiusz Hessen, (1997: 156–178) morality was placed at the penultimate place, just before worldview, as an essential prerequisite for achieving one’s full autonomy. He interpreted moral education as, on the one hand, an immanent moment of all kinds of education, and on the other hand, as a task incumbent upon, to put it in modern terms, educational environment (family, peers, society). There was no moral education in the form of school teachings of ethical principles.

A similar attitude was observed in the approach to the shaping of morality in the post-World War II period. However, what characterises this period is a radical change in the importance ascribed to moral education. To see it clearly, first we need to characterise, at least roughly, the socialist pedagogy which dominated Poland at that time.

Researchers analysing the period between 1944 and 1989 emphasise three trends that the pedagogy of that time was subject to: (1) ideologisation, (2) Sovietisation and (3) ‘pedagogisation’. I will briefly discuss each of them.

During this period, pedagogy in Poland was in a state of tension caused by the ideologisation of education. After the end of the war, the sphere of education and teaching became a field for another battle, dominated by the political interest of socialist hegemony. The battle for the ‘power over souls’ began immediately after the Red Army brought so-called ‘freedom’ to the country. Between 1945 and 1947, a fundamental political change occurred

when, after the rigging of parliamentary elections and a forced referendum, Poland *de facto* became a Soviet republic. Polish communists controlled by Moscow took power in the country and had full authority.

From the very beginning, the new authorities sought to control education. First, they did it surreptitiously; once they gained confidence, though, it soon became overt Sovietisation. It became the main theme of the ‘ideological offensive’ that was proclaimed by the Politburo of the Polish Workers’ Party (PWP) in April 1947, and in December of the following year, it was adopted as the priority political objective at the unification conference of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PUWP). It should be mentioned that the slogan ‘ideological offensive’ was in force in Poland until 1990, when the PUWP declared the dissolution of the party. Although the imitation of Soviet ideals always aroused considerable resistance in Polish education, it cannot be denied that the sphere of education and teaching was involved in the shaping of a ‘new’, that is, socialist, human being.

So far, in interpretations of the history of pedagogy in the period of the Polish People’s Republic, less attention has been paid to the third trend, ‘pedagogisation’. This trend was complementary to ideologisation and Sovietisation, but it also had its specific features. That is why, in my opinion, it should be treated as a separate phenomenon. This phenomenon is characterised by a belief in the omnipotence of education and the resulting overestimation of the capabilities and effectiveness of pedagogical interactions. That overestimation resulted, on the one hand, from neglecting the logic of pedagogical thinking and activities, and on the other hand, from the ideological instrumentalisation of pedagogy, both theoretical and practical. At the peak of its development, socialist pedagogy in the Polish People’s Republic was transformed into a scientifically-argued theory, or better, a technology of education, and was degraded to being a tool of political indoctrination and manipulation. How did this happen?

The reason for the above state of affairs is very simple and, what is more, lies in pedagogy itself. More precisely, it lies in the danger of pedagogism that I discussed above. In the discussed period, pedagogism was expressed in a strong, almost impossible-to-subvert conviction shared by many educators that the shaping of a person could be explained using cause-and-effect thinking and, in addition, that the process of education could be directed in accordance with the objectives adopted beforehand. Herbart’s pedagogy was interpreted in this spirit. In 1981, Anna Radziwiłł (1981: 11) wrote about the skewed interpretation of Herbart’s idea:

“You can ‘teach’ to love the Soviet Union, ‘teach’ to hate Tito, etc. Teaching was understood in Herbart’s way, as a transfer of structured, ready-made knowledge, learning as a process of acquiring knowledge.”

The combination of pedagogism and ideologisation resulted in pedagogical thinking that A. Radziwiłł (1981: 6–7) describes as follows:

“The party shapes the life of the nation by setting its goals, and an educator does the same. We come to an extremely voluntarist conclusion that goals shape the reality. An old principle saying that ‘the end justifies the means’ is given a new version. The goal not only grants the means a moral authorisation, but a clear awareness of the goal is a fundamental and

sufficient condition for the effectiveness of these actions. (...) If my goal is 'just', then all my actions will not only be 'just' but also effective."

The final consequence of that approach was the misconception that by means of education, it is possible to shape the pupil into everything that the educator finds desirable and valuable. That is 'pedagogisation', which should, in my opinion, complement the description of socialist pedagogy. That pedagogisation was extended not only to shaping individuals, but also to shaping the entire nation. I will devote a little more attention to this subject.

The idea of the 'pedagogisation' of the entire nation was adopted in a peculiar moment in the history of socialism in Poland. In the late 1960s, the Polish People's Republic experienced another crisis, one that was not only economic, but also ideological. It was then that education was used as a remedy for the accumulating difficulties of building socialism. The idea was to 'accelerate' that building by means of a school reform that consisted of the introduction of a ten-year secondary school with a polytechnic profile, which was of course based on the Soviet model. The introduction of this innovation was preceded by the work of an expert group that was to determine the real state of the Polish education system in the early 1970s. The head of that group was Jan J. Szczepański. In his memoirs, (1973: 64–65) he made the following diagnosis of this period:

"The **educational difficulties in socialist societies** are easy to describe. They arise primarily during the first phase of the fight for the political system, when a battle is going on that involves all institutions and communities of the society. Then, obviously, also conflicts within the educational system, which is only emerging, must arise and this process cannot occur peacefully. However, in the phase where we are now, these difficulties have different sources. The period of fighting for solidification of the system against the forces opposing it has ended. The main source of the current problems are inconsistencies and discrepancies between the structure of particular institutions and their actual operation, and ideological assumptions that they are supposed to implement."

For the inevitable question of what needs to be changed, whether institutions and their employees or ideals which these institutions serve, J. J. Szczepański gives a 'dialectical' answer. He tries to combine both of these elements and proposes (1995: 168) 'a complete system of **educating society**' as a solution. He explains (1973: 45) what he means by educating society:

"Family, educational system, youth organisations, work establishments, mass media, institutions for the popularisation of scientific knowledge, institutions for the popularisation of culture, theatres, cinemas, museums, sports and tourism, as well as justice institutions and all the state institutions that regulate citizens' lives and fulfil their needs."

To put it briefly, everything must be subordinate to the main goal, which is the transfer of socialist values and ideals. The reform of the Polish school system which was initiated in the mid-1970s and was never finished was in this spirit. One of its most characteristic features was probably the fact that it failed to stop the decline of socialism in Poland.

Apart from the antinomy between Marxism and the pedagogy disregarded by most socialist educators, (Sarnowski 1993: 22–24) we should realise how deeply the above

‘pedagogical optimism’ is rooted in the minds of educators. In the mid-1990s, J. J. Szczepański (1995: 163) wrote: “In a sense, all educators are Marxists because all of them, to some extent, want to change and improve the world through the education and teaching of young generations.” To correctly understand this statement, one must take into account the fact that the author, writing in 1995 (166), was aware that “the great socialist experiment of educating the new human being” had failed. But in spite of that, he was enduringly convinced that the role of education is to serve politics as an instrument of strengthening the current system. This is why he claimed (1995: 186) that “new experiments of ideological education” would keep arising in the future.

Using the presented background of the submission of socialist pedagogy to the influences of politics, I would like to reconstruct the history of moral education in the previous era. In my opinion, at that time, an important turnabout occurred in socialist pedagogy which is worth investigating mainly because it affects to a great extent the approach to the problem of moral and ethical education (that is, ethics lessons) in present-day Poland.

In the first two decades after the war, the new government was not particularly interested in shaping morality. As has been repeatedly specified by T. Hejnicka-Bezwińska (2015: 224–281), the main focus was on taking full control over the education system, including the ideological purge of teachers and express qualifying courses for those willing to serve ‘a better future’ and its harbingers. The undereducation of teachers and quick promotions for the price of ideological loyalty contributed to the phenomenon that the author calls (2015: 345) ‘game with the system’.

The subject and the problem of moral education appears in the 1950s and 1960s only as an issue of proper ideological approach. Morality is included in the project of socialist education as a domain subordinate to politics. An exception in this regard is a short book by Bogdan Suchodolski (1961) entitled *O program świeckiego wychowania moralnego* [English: *About the Curriculum of Secular Moral Education*], which announces the forthcoming fundamental change in the attitude of socialist educators towards moral education.

That change took place in the second half of the 1960s. During this time, in the context of the aforementioned failure of the project of socialist education, there was an urgent need to deal with the ‘enemies of the system’. However, these ‘enemies’ were not those of a physical nature (the majority of them had already been eliminated), but those in people’s minds and hearts. What I am referring to is the aforementioned total ‘education of the society’, in which one of the main tools was moral education. It is noteworthy that the concept of socialist moral education was presented by Heliodor Muszyński, the author who systemically developed socialist education. The question is what role he attributed to the shaping of morality.

Referring to the achievements of psychology in terms of shaping individual and social development, H. Muszyński (1983: 94–117) interprets moral education as the formation of personality according to an adopted social standard. By that, he moves the ideological conflict connected with building socialism in Poland to the sphere of morality. Moulding attitudes consistent with the expectations of the system becomes the main task of pedagogical ‘work’. However, by the latter, he means education, not teaching. Therefore, the shaping of morality becomes the task of educators, not teachers. This means that it is the effect of habit and not of reflective teaching (Muszyński 1976).

A phenomenon that accompanied, or rather was caused by, the expansion of socialist pedagogy was the 'internal emigration' of authors who did not cooperate with the new government. I emphasize this because the domain to which they 'emigrated' was the initially neglected morality. Educators turned to it in order to avoid conflicts. One of them was Karol Kotłowski (1976), although it was his opinion that moral education still consisted in education, but the point of reference in that education was no longer ideology but axiology that sought universal values.

After the change of the political system in 1989, several new works on moral education appeared on the publishing market. Some of the authors who have raised this issue include Zbigniew Marek (2005) and Mieczysław Łobocki (2008). It is interesting, however, that these authors still approach the issue of shaping morality from the position of education, almost completely neglecting the question of ethical teaching. At the same time, ethical teaching has become the main pedagogical problem after the introduction of ethics as a school subject, which took place in independent Poland in 1991. Based on this, it can be stated that a strange stratification of pedagogical thinking and action took place in the concepts of moral education and the concepts (curricula) of teaching ethics. However, a detailed analysis of this issue surpasses the scope of this paper.

Towards the theory of moral and ethical teaching

The signalled discrepancy between moral education and ethical teaching, as well as the need for the creation of a proper pedagogical theory for ethical teaching, has recently become the subject of in-depth analyses that have resulted in suggestions of isolating a separate field for teaching ethics. (Kamińska 2015) In the context of the above reflections, I have formulated four recommendations concerning this search:

1. Free ethical and moral education from the direct dependence of politics; a negative example of this is the socialist theory of moral education.
2. Differentiate moral education from ethical and moral teaching, which will allow us to define the specifics of their scopes and their contribution to the shaping of morality.
3. Shape pedagogical reason to become appropriate for moral education (moral education and ethical and moral teaching). This will allow for the possibility of a pedagogical explanation of the possibilities and limitations of interfering in the development of morality.
4. Make pedagogical emancipation (building an individual's autonomy) the primary objective of pedagogical activities in the area of morality.

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