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Show Me a Perfect Teacher. Triangulation of Methods: Content Analysis of Focus Interviews and Analysis of Visual Materials Prepared by Students of Public Schools

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Abstract

In 1912 Jan Władysław Dawid published his idea of a teacher's personality in Polish pedeutology in a book titled "O duszy nauczycielstwa" ["On the spirit of teaching"]. Therein he proposed that the decisive factor in the work of a teacher is substantial knowledge of psychology and pedagogics. In his idea of the "spirit of teaching" J.W. Dawid presented an image of a perfect teacher-educator, with the fundamental assumption that "in no occupation does the human factor have as high an importance as in teaching". On the 100th anniversary of the dissemination of the conception research on the contemporary interpretation of the "spirit of teaching" and the perfect attitude of a teacher-educator was conducted. The research was carried out in Polish state schools, and the research subjects were students concluding a stage in their education (early school education, primary school, gymnasium, lyceum). The scientific investigation was conducted according to the interpretative paradigm and it was based on two methods: qualitative analysis of focus interviews and analysis of visual materials created by the research subjects. The paper presents conclusions drawn from the triangulation of the methods used in this research.

Keywords: perfect teacher, Jan Władysław Dawid, conception of the “spirit of teaching”, teachers’ professional calling

Introduction

Theoretical introduction

Teachers’ personalities, educational talents and abilities, the quality of their professional training, as well as their place and roles in the society and their material situation continue to be current topics that are an important area of research conducted in humanities and social sciences. According to Wincenty Okoń: “there is no educational system in the world in which the role of the teacher in the educational process is ignored. Although there are major differences between the systems it is generally agreed that quality education can be the work of a good teacher-educator” (Okoń, 1996, p. 423). On the basis of this it can be stated that teachers’ work constitutes a strategic element of a properly functioning educational and schooling system (Sikorski, 2006, pp. 125-126; Strykowski, 2005, p. 15; Banach, 1997, p. 435).

Virtually from the very beginning the term “teacher” was mainly reserved for teachers working for institutions, who “were distinguished by their participation in the processes of the socialisation of young generations, transferring cultural heritage in the general context and the experience of immediate communities in the society, with their material lives and culture” (Kwiatkowska, 2012, pp. 24-25). As Helena Kwiatkowska states: “The term teacher has a long history, but a scholarly reflection on the teaching profession is relatively young, especially because teaching has become a defined human profession. The process took place at the turn of the 17th and the 18th century, and scholarly pedeutological reflection appears in the 1930s” (Kwiatkowska, 2012, p. 18). The defining of a new field in pedagogics, which is the study of teachers, coincided at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century with the increased interest in the social situation of children and their rights and the development of, among others, biology, paediatrics, and experimental research in psychology and sociology. This has resulted in a substantial change in the perception of the essence of the education process, and, consequently, of the role of educators (Mirski, 1932, p. 854).

The necessity to draw up a model of a “perfect” teacher-educator-pedagogue constituted the subject of the discourse that from the very beginning has been conducted in the publications in this area. The ways of discovering the particular concepts of the ideal of a teacher that are presented by scholars from Poland and abroad are interesting, however, they are quite varied and occasionally contradictory. As W. Okoń points out: “The particular authors beam with optimism in their search for an ideal teacher [...] or they are reluctant, doubtful, or pessimistic. Some would have teachers-strongmen, teachers-artists, and others are happy to accept what is a collection of the proper competences of an average teacher” (Okoń, 1962, p. 8). Thus,

a question arises: what are the sources of the idea of a perfect teacher: human nature, humanist values, professional causes, educational aims or social, political, and cultural aims and ideas? The factors listed above are the most common guidelines in the process of the forming of the ideal of a teacher. It ought to be noted, however, that the defined ideal of a teacher “[...] is not only a useful matrix to evaluate particular teachers and to plan education and training of future teachers, but it is also a practical tool in raising teachers’ self-awareness, and helping them to recognise their professional and educational strengths and opportunities” (Wołoszyn, 1997, p. 444). Such knowledge is also indispensable in undertaking efforts in self-education.

A number of theoretical approaches can be assumed when describing teachers. In contemporary pedagogical publications the psychological, technological, humanist, sociological, and critical conceptions have been outlined. The first of them refers to the personal traits of a teacher, taking into account the crucial importance of the category of a teacher’s ideal traits. The knowledge about teachers is drawn from biological and psychological theories, phenomenology, idealist philosophy, as well as ethics and the ideas of new education (Kwiatkowska, 2012, p. 29-33). The representatives of this approach in Poland were, among others, Jan Władysław Dawid (1946), Zygmunt Mysłakowski (Okoń, 1962), Stefan Szuman (1947), Mieczysław Kreutz (1947), Stefan Baley (Okoń, 1962).

In the technological perspective teachers are seen as persons with necessary professional qualifications. This approach arises from positivism. That is why these competences understood as the ability and the readiness of a subject to fulfil goals according to certain standards become the main category in defining the model of a teacher (Kwiatkowska, 2012, pp. 35-36).

The prevalence of the individuality of a teacher results from the humanist orientation in pedagogics and psychology. Consequently, a good teacher is not a collection of perfect personal traits or a skilled worker. A good teacher is perceived as “[...] a kind individual, unique personality who cultivates that which makes it a significant being, it is a person who is original and important to a student” (Kwiatkowska, 2012, p. 36).

In the sociological approach, in turn, teachers are seen within the structure of the social role that they serve, which forms a certain collection of norms and values connected with this profession. It can, therefore, be stated that the main source of satisfaction for teachers is fulfilling the social expectations set by the society in connection with their role (Kwiatkowska, 2012, p. 38).

Critical pedagogics proposes to see teachers as transformative individuals, i.e., active participants of the educational process who work for the sake of democracy. The main goal of their work is to teach critical reading, expressing opinions, and, last but not least, to create an atmosphere in which students feel that they are co-partners (Kwiatkowska, 2012, p. 39). Such a teacher works and thinks outside the box.

Assumptions of the conception of “the spirit of teaching” as proposed by J.W. Dawid

The term “the spirit of teaching” was coined by Jan Władysław Dawid, who introduced the idea of a teacher’s personality to Polish pedeutology. He believed that the main decisive factor in the work of a teacher is substantial knowledge in the fields of psychology and pedagogics. What is more, the author emphasises that without such knowledge it is impossible to consciously manage the educational process¹. At the same time he adds that that one cannot expect that awareness of the laws of psychology and pedagogics will guarantee that teachers will be able to overcome all the difficulties of the educational process. Teachers ought to be prepared to find their own “ways of pedagogical work” (Okoń, 1980, pp. 87-88).

In his idea of “the spirit of teaching” J.W. Dawid draws up an image of an ideal attitude of a teacher-educator. His fundamental assumption is that “[...]in no occupation does the human factor have as high an importance as in teaching” (Dawid, 1946, p. 6). The author emphasises that a teacher’s personality informs their power to educate. One cannot be a bad person and a teacher. Certainly, such a person can “[...] occasionally teach something detached and random, but they will remain a stranger to the student, they will play no role in the student’s life” (Dawid, 1946, p. 6). That is why it is crucial that to have necessary emotional, moral, and professional qualifications.

When reflecting on the image of an ideal teacher the following question needs to be asked: what are the attributes of a teacher who can be a role model for students? J.W. Dawid enumerates, among others: “the love of people’s souls” – understood as a sense spiritual unity with others, sense of responsibility for the results of one’s work, the need of perfection, lack of internal conflicts, unity with one’s nation and society, moral courage (Okoń, 1962, p. 12; Bułat, & Samecki, 1963, p. 188; Dawid, 1946, p. 27).

Further traits, such as the need of responsibility and perfection pertain to the teachers’ competences *per se*. It was the opinion of J.W. Dawid that: “He who wants to enlighten others, to elevate them through his love, must at the same time want to do it as best and as effectively as possible” (Dawid, 1946, p. 12). In this context, it is necessary to perceive teachers from the perspective of means, methods, techniques, as well as the organisation of the education process. What is more, assuming that the main aim of teachers’ work is a deep and lasting influence on students, which is expressed in, among others, shaping the innermost essence of their worldviews and will (Dawid, 1946, p. 10), it is in fact knowledge in psychology of education and experimental pedagogics that provides them with information on the subject of the laws governing a person’s spiritual life (Bułat & Samecki, 1963, p. 188). To conclude, the author of the discussed conception emphasises the what is a supplement of

¹ Taking into account the prevalent role of pedagogical knowledge in the work of teachers sine 1910 J.W. Dawid devoted a large part of his scientific work to understanding child psychology and describing and explain the fundamental problems of the theory of education. He published such works as: *Educators ought to know the laws governing the body and the mind* (1882), *On moral plague* (1886), *A study of objects* (1892), and *Intelligence, will, and ability to work* (1911).

teachers' knowledge is "gaining an awareness of what not to desire, of what to aim for, and of what is to be the ultimate value that is to be achieved through education" (Dawid 1946, p. 16).

A mature teacher, with a sense of responsibility and duty and a desire of perfection, will also aim for freedom in his actions. As J.W. Dawid proposes "a teacher needs not passively and mechanically carry out the aims and tasks developed and accepted by someone else and scheduled for him for years, weeks, days, and hours" (Dawid, 1946, p.15). What is more, "the teacher, who needs to influence the student as a human being, and who, consequently, can only work according to what his will dictates, [...] must himself develop the curriculum or the curriculum needs to be developed by representatives of the teacher, so that he may be its co-creator" (Dawid, 1946, p. 15). That is how J.W. Dawid clearly proposes that teachers should secure the right to individual independence that can be expressed through the freedom to arrange educational situations.

When perceiving teachers' work from the perspective of their calling and mission one must not forget the ethical aspect, to which the two further attributes of "the spirit of teaching" belong. They are the innermost integrity and moral courage. J.W. Dawid makes the assumption that everyone ought to create their own canon of moral conduct that one needs to experience and live according to it (Dawid, 1946, p. 17). What is more, he points out that an innermost trueness of feelings, convictions, and conscience is a necessary condition "that allows one to belong to the moral world of aims" (Dawid, 1946, p. 22). As a consequence, it conditions the teachers' sense of integrity that strengthens and upkeeps their spiritual lives (Dawid, 1946, p. 24).

In relation to courage the author treats it as one of the deepest and most mysterious aspects of humanity. He advises that it ought to be understood as an active force that is always active in a human being. For teachers themselves moral courage is the readiness to overcome the dilemmas encountered in their lives and in their work. In this understanding, it is a "state of an individual who has already with a part of his being [...] stepped outside that which is necessary, that which is a condition, a profit, or a loss, thanks to which he is able to act against the interests and the self-preservation of the 'here-and-now'" (Dawid, 1946, p. 25). In education, in turn, courage becomes the result of an awakening within the student, deep spiritual life, and supporting the student's development (Dawid, 1946, p. 26).

In conclusion, the idea of the "spirit of teaching" proposed by J.W. Dawid emphasises the necessity to see this profession as a calling rather than a set of trained skills. Key importance here is assigned to personality, understood as a set of features defining a perfect teacher. It is there that students need to find a place for themselves. It can, therefore, be stated that a teacher is perceived as a mould, as it were, "in which a student acquires his proper form" (Welewander, 2012, p. 9). According to W. Bułat and T. Sarnecki the position presented by J.W. Dawid is shown as "shifting the focus from the school system to the person that implements it, who through their

pedagogical work not only implements the system, but also creates an atmosphere of teaching; it was something new in Polish sciences (Bułat, & Samecki, 1963, p. 189).

Research methodology

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of the accomplished pedagogue and pedeutologist a research project titled: *Contemporarily on the spirit of teaching – the reception and reinterpretation of the pedeutological conception of Jan Władysław Dawid from the perspective of school practice* was organised. Its main aim was to investigate the opinions of contemporary students – participants of the education process – on teachers, their calling, difficulties that they experience, and, last but not least, the interpretation of the “spirit of teaching” as proposed by J.W. Dawid.

The planned research belonged to the qualitative paradigm and it was implemented in three stages: in the first stage the research participants answered four open-ended questions on their opinions about contemporary teachers and the features that a perfect teacher ought to have, how they imagined the difficulties that contemporary teachers have to face as well as the understanding of the term the “spirit of teaching” (in writing). At the following stage the students worked in groups to make posters presenting their views of teachers. This was aimed to encourage them to discuss their ideas about the subject and negotiate a stance. Next, focus interviews were conducted with group leaders. They would answer again the questions from the initial stage. The received answers were, to a certain extent, the result of negotiation.

The research participants were students of Polish public schools concluding a certain level of education: the 3rd and 6th grade of primary school, 3rd grade of gymnasium, and the 3rd grade of lyceum. In general, there were 99 students. At the first and the second stage of the research all the students in a given class would participate, and at the last one only the group leaders who were selected during the art stage of the project. Consequently, focus interviews were carried out in groups of 6 to 7, and only in the case of the 6th grade of primary school it was group of 10, which resulted from the specificity of this age group: they all wanted to be videotaped.

In the present paper the reflections are focused on the conclusions drawn from the use of the triangulation of research methods: focus interviews and the analysis of the posters presenting a perfect teacher done by students.

The perfect teacher according to the student of the 3rd grade of primary school

According to the youngest of the research participants the perfect teacher should be characterised by kindness, patience, love for teaching, empathy, optimism, creativity, and responsibility. The children would express their opinions typically by a description of the traits that a teacher ought to have: “Somebody is patient and smart, and also nice...”, “Teaches us, is worried about the children...”, “A responsible teacher, dedicated to his work...”, “Perfect teacher and liking to work with children...”, “...surprises us with creativity, that means, eh, shouldn’t expect too much of us...”. Some

would also describe the perfect teacher by his abilities of coping with problems: "Every day a teacher has to face the problem of not always a very good mood...", or "...difficulties, [children] screaming", and "...children who don't feel like listening and learning...". In the opinions of the students it should be easy for a teacher to cope with these problems without raising his voice, by presenting a gentleness of character and treating even the misbehaving children well. The teacher can understand his students and tries to help them in solving difficulties in school and at home.

In the focus interviews the students gave substantially longer answers that were also better developed and appeared to be the result of some reflection. This comes as no surprise as writing the answers in the first part might have still been a problem for some of the students, the questionnaire was discussed while posters were made, and, what is more, in the focus interviews one could see the influence of the group and the inspiration it provided. The children came to the conclusion that J.W. Dawid's "spirit of teaching" is, in fact, the spirit of a good, a perfect teacher, who "...likes his work, children, and he just likes it all...", "...dedicated to her work, and children, well... works well and he is fair, and he is so kind...", "...to teach children well...". A teacher that has the spirit of teaching "teaches very well, is such a perfect teacher, has all these good traits, has some... has more already... has more good traits than bad ones...". Here we can see a more realistic image of a pedagogue, who is kind and listens to children, "...gives a lot of good marks and knows, for example, that I have always wanted to work in a school...". As in the case of individual answers here too children emphasised the ability to cope with difficulties: "...almost always can find a way out of trouble, it is simply such a perfect teacher..., such a spirit of this perfect teacher...". The children would enumerate a set of traits that constitute the "spirit of teaching": kindness, patience, understanding, empathy, the ability to listen to children carefully, being interested in children, fairness, sense of humour, meticulousness, wisdom, responsibility, creativity, and passion for teaching. One can observe a development of the set as compared with that of the written answers.

When analysing the posters one can arrive at two conclusions. Firstly, the teachers' appearance is very important to children, they should look "nice", be well-dressed. In their works the children devoted a lot of attention to details of teachers' clothes (Fig. 1). The children that used images cut out from magazines chose good-looking, scantily dressed persons (Fig. 2). It should be mentioned here that during the research the children were given a number of magazines from which they could choose various images of men and women. In most cases, the ideal teacher was presented as a woman (a man was presented in only one of the posters), which seems understandable, because at this level in Polish schools most teachers are female.

Secondly, in the posters made by the children the perfect teacher is often presented in certain context: it was an illustration of a relation with children (Fig. 3), or a background related to what the teacher was teaching (Fig. 1, 2 and 3). Therefore, a

teacher is not only an individual, but also the relation with students and the curriculum.



Fig. 1. The perfect teacher as imagined by the students of the 3rd grade of primary school. The teacher says: “I love children and teaching”. Source: a poster made by students of a 3rd grade of primary school during the research



Fig. 2. The perfect teachers as imagined by the students of the 3rd grade of primary school. Source: a poster made by students of a 3rd grade of primary school during the research

When comparing students answers with the posters one can notice certain coherence, with the exception that in their answers the children did not focus on teachers' looks, they did not mention that this aspect was so important to them. However, without a doubt the importance attached to the appearance of teachers is clearly visible in the posters.



Fig. 3. The perfect teacher (on the left) and her student (on the right). Source: a poster made by students of a 3rd grade of primary school during the research



Fig. 4. The perfect teacher as imagined by the students of the 6th grade of primary school. Source: a poster made by students of a 6th grade of primary school during the research



Fig. 5. The perfect teacher as imagined by the students of the 6th grade of primary school. She has been called “Mrs. Elisabeth Teacher”, and on the presented book there

are some symbols and names of school subjects. Source: a poster made by students of a 6th grade of primary school during the research



Fig. 6. The perfect teacher as imagined by the students of the 3rd grade of gymnasium. The title says: dream teacher, and the traits written in the poster are: thinks outside the box, helpful, funny, calm, nice, intelligent, creative, tolerant, passionate. Source: a poster made by students of a 3rd grade of gymnasium during the research



Fig. 7. The perfect teacher as imagined by the students of the 3rd grade of gymnasium. The traits written in the poster are: nice, knowledge, courage, helpful, readiness, creative. Source: a poster made by students of a 3rd grade of gymnasium during the research



Fig. 8. Perfect teacher as imagined by the students of the 3rd grade of lyceum. Positive traits (on the right): dialogue, example of professor Nowak, energy, contact with the students, discussions about films, passion, student, dedication, pro-green, tolerance, initiative, role model: negative traits (on the left): lack of empathy, promoting conspiracy theories, using schemes in teaching, no dialogue, “007 zgłoś się” [the title of an old Polish TV series about a police officer], encouraging stereotypes, stereotypical teacher. Source: a poster made by students of a 3rd grade of lyceum



Fig. 9. Perfect teacher as imagined by the students of the 3rd grade of lyceum. Source: a poster made by students of a 3rd grade of lyceum

The ideal teacher according to students of the 6th grade of primary school

What the students of the 6th grade of primary school said is largely contradictory. On the one hand, similar to what the younger students said, the term “perfect” teacher is interpreted positively, as a synonym of wisdom, kindness, competent teaching, having broad knowledge, responsibility, love for students, dedication, and empathy. Some students also mentioned teachers’ calling: “...as if he was made for teaching”, “somebody so good at school that he could become a teacher”, “he can teach others as if he was a teacher, although he isn’t professionally”. Even though the term “calling” does not come up, they would relate to competences that make it possible for a person to take up this profession and to the inner decision pertaining to future career.

In the focus interviews one could see a clearly uniform vision of a “perfect teacher”. Ultimately, the students have decided to define traits and competences, as well as the calling. Among the mentioned traits there were: being interested in the students, kindness and good mutual relations (“...the teacher really likes the students”, “...respects them and... has very good relations with them”), extensive knowledge and the ability to transfer it, resulting from education and interests (“... that a person has big knowledge...”, “...and not that he is, for example, an art teacher, but he has no idea about it, he learned it by heart from school textbooks”), dedication to work, self-confidence and the ability to maintain discipline in class (“...is self-confident, knows he teaches well, he wants all the best for us, yells at us when we misbehave...”), but is also kind and understanding (“for example a child is really misbehaving and the teacher wants to write a note to his parents, and the child says: ‘no, please... I’ll be good, I’ll try not to talk and so on’, and then the teacher has a good spirit and forgives him and everyone is happy”).

6th grade students have also agreed that a perfect teacher has a calling. The children would state that: “...teacher likes his job, is good for the job and can find himself in the job”, “...is made for working as a teacher, that’s how I see it”, or: “...the person who has chosen to teach a subject should be good at it, should want to do it, and if they do it, they do it with great dedication”. Therefore, according to the 6th graders the designates of a calling to teach are: having certain competences necessary in the job, finding pleasure in doing the job, and dedication.

As in the previously described group, the 6th graders could draw and/or use the provided magazines containing the images of men and women. The students who decided to use the magazines made posters with a number of persons, mostly female. What is more, the students provided comments in which they presented some postulates pertaining to teachers’ behaviour, their appearance, and their traits. The traits, competences, and behaviours were concurrent with those provided in the interviews. In relation to the teacher’s appearance in the posters the students made it clear that teachers ought to be good-looking, take care of themselves, be sporty, well-dressed, should take care of personal hygiene, etc. The images provided by the students are aesthetically similar: they are slim persons, fashionably dressed, in some cases also sensual.

In the posters that were drawn all the people smile. This positive emotion was often emphasised with emoticons. One may conclude, therefore, that for students it is a very important attitude and it is an emotion that ought to accompany perfect teachers in their work.

When comparing the answers and the posters of the 6th graders one ought to notice a coherence of the verbal and the visual messages supplemented by the descriptions of the appearance of the ideal teacher.

The perfect teacher according to the students of the 3rd grade of gymnasium

The students of the 3rd grade of gymnasium described the perfect teacher in various ways in their written answers, however, as in the other groups, they would mostly enumerate the traits that he should have. The students stated that the traits are: kindness: "...kind teacher", authority: "...is able to win the respect of students and parents, encourages them to study", passion for teaching: "...a person who loves teaching and loves that which they teach", being able to find a compromise between indulgence and making the students meet expectations: "...isn't too strict, but also doesn't do the so-called free lessons, so that you can learn in his classes, but you're not afraid to come", communicativeness and easiness in contacts with students: "...can talk with students". The students emphasised that these traits ought to be evaluated relatively: "The way I see it is that one teacher can stand out from others in a positive way".

The students of the gymnasium would also underline that the perfect teacher has a professional calling, and occasionally they would limit themselves to discussing the relations between the terms, and some would mention its designates: "...then you feel the need to do it, you have a gift", "you devote yourself to what you do".

In the focus interview the gymnasium students mentioned that the ideal of a teacher is expressed in caring for students: "so that they can get as much as possible from the classes, so that they're the best, so that they're prepared as well as possible for later, for the further stages in their lives simply...". One can see clearly that the care does not only pertain to the knowledge that a student gets at school, but first and foremost to the values that may guide him in his life, to developing a certain moral attitude, ethics, whose importance goes beyond school: they become values for the rest of one's life. In this context, the relations between the students and the teachers are crucial. The teacher "must be a master in what he does" who not only educates his students, but also encourages them to develop "...so that they can do their best, simply do all that they can". That is why gymnasium students do not mention the marks as the most important aspect of learning, they focus on motivation for further development of all students, regardless of how much they know. "...So that the good students can excel at a subject, so that those that want to be the best can be the best, and those who do not... who do not feel very good at a subject do their best, they don't have to get straight A's...". Perfect teacher has a calling as well as a passion and love for his job, for the idea of teaching and for the students.

To sum up, the gymnasium students have agreed that few teachers follow this idea of teaching, unfortunately, while expressing a lot of understanding for the contemporary difficulties that teachers have in keeping their motivation high: "if you looked this way at... at teachers, then such spirit, such passion for teaching and so on... you can see in only a few. I think that's not just because it's their work, that they have to teach, because... because they have to, they're employed, they get money for doing that, it all should arise from this... this aim in itself". According to the gymnasium students the

implementation of this postulated “aim in itself”, understood as teaching as an idea, is difficult in everyday life and the necessity to bend to the necessity to earn money, the lack of respect and understanding from other participants of the education process: school authorities, other teachers and school staff, students and their parents, and the general public. To conclude, it is the opinion of this age group that it is difficult to find a perfect teacher in the contemporary world.

The gymnasium students also took advantage of the opportunity to both draw a poster and to use the various images of men and women from the magazines that they were provided with. As in the formerly discussed age groups the traits presented in the posters pertained to personality and behaviour. Both in the drawings and in the collages a certain appearance of a perfect teacher is clearly presented. The gender features are well-defined, and the presented people are slim, sporty, well-dressed, and sensual. Both genders were equally represented in the posters made by gymnasium students.

What appears particularly interesting is that in the posters made by gymnasium students the teachers are always shown alone, and never in a relation with students. One need also notice that the students did not try to present emotions in a symbolic manner in the images of the perfect teachers, there are no smiling people, and there are no symbols of such emotions. It creates an impression of a great distance between the teachers and the students.

The perfect teacher according to the students of the 3rd grade of general lyceum

The final age group that participated in the research was the students of a 3rd grade of a general lyceum. Their answers were the richest and contained the deepest reflections, which comes as no surprise as it is the oldest of the groups, so the participants are the most mature. At the same time, one could see a lot of projections arising from the experience of the group – many students mentioned real people as perfect teachers. This did not happen in the other groups.

The students mentioned a number of traits that are contrary to the idea of a perfect teacher, which can also be seen as a projection of their experience: “Instead of being condescending, expect respect (because for young people now it’s not as important as it used to be before) they should be people who try to understand emotions and keep up relations on the same level with you, because that’s what young people expect”, “It is an idea that doesn’t really exist in Poland”. They believe that the motivation to pursue a career in education should be “not only to pass on knowledge, but also life wisdom”, and currently those decisions “are the result of a lack of knowledge and the inability to choose the right job”. The student, severe in their opinions, mention, at the same time, that the perfect teacher should be perceived as a postulate: “This term shows how contemporary teachers should work with their students”.

The lyceum students mentioned the following as the synonyms of the term “perfect teacher”: calling (“...calling to be a teacher, deriving pleasure from having this job”), passion (“...passion for the profession – teaching with a calling, the willingness to pass on knowledge...”), mission (“Someone made to be a teacher, who treats their work as a mission, a calling”), talent (“I see it as a form of a talent: ease and creativity in teaching”), dedication (“It is a teacher’s dedication to his work”), and enthusiasm (“There aren’t many such enthusiasts among teachers who are really fascinated with what they do and at the same time can get young people interested”). Their answers contained also some rather abstract definitions: “The set of traits characterising teachers with a calling who can help students to find some goals in their lives, and to lead them to a proper path in the future”, “It’s the ability to help students develop, creative thinking, understanding, empathy, trust, passion, and the calling to be a teacher”, “The set of traits governing behaviour, competences, attitude towards students”, or: “A metaphysical phenomenon, a spiritual collective that leads to the common traits of True Teachers; the willingness to prepare young people who are lost in an alien world to survive, to live in such a way as to be able to say: ‘I have done all that I wanted to do in my life’”. Therefore, as in the case of gymnasium students, the lyceum 3rd graders emphasised transferring a certain moral attitude, values that are meaningful from the perspective of a person’s entire life, and competences that are not only necessary in the process of education, but also in making decisions.

However, this age was the only one to state that following an ideal “is a duty that is set for themselves by those teachers who think that they have to pass on the knowledge of the ancestors to the young generations, it is a mission of sorts, that a certain person has to fulfil”, “it is duty set before every teacher”. The duty that the lyceum students emphasise should have both an internal character – understood as the necessity to follow the ideal that one sets for oneself, as well as an external one – as the dedication expected of the teachers. It is only when the two perspectives are combined that a “perfect teacher” is created.

The assumption behind the focus interview was to provide the research participants with the opportunity to discuss and negotiate the definition a “perfect teacher”. In the case of the group of lyceum students it took a form of an analysis of the projections of their experiences. The students departed from the attempts to define the term on an abstract level, as had been the case at the stage of written answers, and instead they focused on the teachers from their immediate environment and an evaluation of their work. The result of this were answers of a dual character: what a teacher should be, and what he ought to avoid. Once again there were the examples of teachers who could be role models and examples of teachers (their names were not mentioned) whose behaviour the students saw as contrary to the ideal: “I think that this is the type of a teacher who tries to understand students and tries to pass on his knowledge, but he doesn’t push it. That his is the most important subject and all the world revolves around it. But he understands that people can be interested in different things and... life is not only concentrated on, for example, English, or history...”. As

previously, the students mentioned such synonyms of the discussed term as calling or passion: “It is simply a teacher who works because he has a calling, and not because he has to... you can see it from the start, even in the first lesson you can see if he is a teacher because... he treats it as his job, or as their entire life...”. What one can see here is the way in which a calling to teach is understood: it is a way of life, it is an attitude that is not only expressed in lessons. Its immanent feature is a “teacher’s mentality”, not a “mask that you put on at work”.

The lyceum students would also emphasise that teachers ought to be able to notice potential in students and help them explore it: “...he can use the potential of young people, because young people are... they are very open, so willing, so full of energy and such a teacher can organise stuff, for example discussions about films, theatre classes, things that help us develop something completely new... to expand our horizons... and they open us to various aspects of life, not only school, school, and learning and... all of that”. In this answer one can see how students perceive themselves, and how their needs and the expectations that they have are defined. They wish to see teachers as guides who show students various “...opportunities, conditions, that allow us [...] to use our potential to the fullest and it’s the most important thing that the teacher can also see... can see himself, that his job is important, because I know many teachers that see their job as..., that they don’t earn enough money, that they aren’t appreciated by their students, by parents, by the society in general. A teacher is with this spirit of teaching, he should believe in himself, in what he does and he should himself think that it is a type of a mission, so that... so that we can grow up to be this sort of person who can cope in any situation and that can say to themselves: “Oh, I saved somebody’s life because in lyceum I had [...] a civil defence course with this and that teacher”. As in the previous age group, it is a clear expectation that the idea of teaching goes beyond school walls and it might influence the rest of students’ lives.

A lot of text was included in the posters that the students made. The 3rd graders hardly ever employ the opportunity to use the various images of men and women from the provided magazines. These were only used to supplement drawings (Fig. 8). In contrast with the younger groups the appearance of the teachers is not important; instead, they use certain symbols and outlines to present teachers, they do not emphasise the attributes of their gender or their clothes. One may, therefore, conclude that in this age group the appearance of the teacher is of secondary importance to character traits, behaviour, attitude, and the relation with students. The traits of perfect teachers presented in the posters are the same as those in the students’ answers, even in connection with the projections that were mentioned during the interviews. Certain oppositions are also presented in the posters, namely between perfect teachers and their opposites (Fig. 9).

Summary

The conducted qualitative analysis of the responses of the research participants and the visual materials created in the course of the research in the form of posters produces an image of a perfect teacher who is characterised by a set of traits and who is to meet a number of expectations regarding his knowledge, skills, and competences. In the reflections of the students teachers' professional calling occupies an important position. Consequently, a set of particular personal traits is created, including, e.g., empathetic, patient, wise, understanding, fair, and skills and competences necessary to fulfil the role of a teacher are mentioned, such as teaching competences, active listening, the ability to cope with difficult situations in education. What is more, students emphasise that a perfect teacher needs to be dedicated to his work and derive pleasure from it. He is then not afraid to make sacrifices and he is dedicated, creative, and student-oriented. In this context it is justified that especially the gymnasium and lyceum students emphasise the importance of good relations between the students and the teacher. That is because these relations are crucial in a successful education process. When students see the teacher as an authority, a master, or a guide they expect him to take care to first and foremost motivate them to develop further, both intellectually and spiritually. That is because they believe that the teacher should not only provide students with knowledge, but also to shape their morality and ethics.

Supplementing the research process with the element connected with graphical representations of teachers makes it possible to enrich its reflections on the appearance of the described persons. Firstly, one can notice a number of projections connected with gender – in the younger classes the teacher was almost always female, which is most probably connected with the fact that in Poland at this stage of education the teachers are typically women. Secondly, in the primary school and in the gymnasium the students attached great importance to appearance; they have a certain canon of beauty. Teachers are presented as slim, sporty, as people who take care of themselves, who are well-dressed, also both in the drawings and in the posters the attributes of gender are emphasised. It was only in the lyceum that teachers were presented in a stylised manner, and the posters reflected ideas rather than a real life appearance.

The vision of the perfect teacher presented by the research participants undoubtedly meets the conception proposed by J.W. Dawid. All the students presented their understanding of the term in a lively manner, and it was coherent with J.W. Dawid's ideas. It needs to be emphasised that the level of reflection increased with the age of the research participants, which was connected with their higher level of education and experience gained in school and out of school education. On the basis of the analysis of the visual materials it can be concluded that with the increased level of reflection less and less importance is attached to teachers' appearance.

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