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The Conception of Authority and its Alterations

Introduction

In the same way, as it is adjudged to individuals or social groups, authority can be related to scientific fields, philosophical theories and even to social institutions. What is the place of contemporary school within this intersection of relations? Does it reflect the crisis of culture, society and democracy? What is authority based on? To what extent is it necessary to deal with authority in the period of its indubitable crisis? Is there anything new we can discover in this area? To what extent is it useful to consider authority a pedagogical problem?

Unclear terminology – characteristic feature of our age

In relation to the clarification of the term “authority” we must realise *the need of scientific interpretation of the term* (not only the term as such, but also the related terminology). *Authority as the widest and most complex area can be interpreted from the point of view of the individual fields of science* (e.g. school as an institution and its authority can be perceived in terms of sociology, psychology as well as pedagogy.) It is actually always the *particular point of view and selected aspects which are being judged* – pedagogical interpretation can differ from, say, political interpretation. However, we can state that philosophical and political aspects penetrate into pedagogical point of view. 1).

Upon looking into the specialised literature we soon discover that there isn't, by far, *any concordance in understanding the term “authority”* – it is a very complicated term the case of which is liberal and not precise,

sometimes even distorted. Personal, real, true and natural authority is spoken about as well as the authority of power, governing, official or directive. Furthermore, authoritative behaviour is considered, the authority of superiors, adults, parents and older people, authority of an educator and teacher, authoritative, autocratic and authoritarian style of education, authoritarian personality, authoritarian pedagogy, authoritarian style of management. The term itself was doubted and misused many times by totalitarian systems whereas today it is perhaps concealed on behalf of democracy.

Looking at the *etymology of the word authority* we discover that the Latin equivalent “auctoritas” bears a whole set of positive meanings like: supportive, guarantee, certainty, reliability, trustworthy and many other. The relating word “auctor” means among other: helper, supporter, ideal, example, predecessor. The root of both words – augo – expresses the verbs: to support growing, enhance, multiply, thrive, enrich, endow. Where are the terms like oppression, tyranny, violence or force? The preceding positive connotations of the word authority present a sound argument against the ultraliberal destroyers of authority. The reality and historic development of a society often neglect the etymology by moving and changing the meanings of words (the concept of the word “authority” was influenced especially by sociological and politological essays on the relationships between power versus authority, authority versus government, authority versus social pressure).

The term “authority” is usually understood on three levels: firstly, as general respect, influence, power, admiration. 2) Secondly, as a publicly recognised expert, influential personality and last but not least, authority representing state, science, national symbols, offices, law and police force. *Influence, dominance, control and competence* are among the most frequent synonyms to the word “authority”.

The types of authority and the term “global authority”

What are the *types of authority*? What are the *problems of classifying authori-*

ty? The most serious issue is the actual identification of valid classifying criteria. 3) It is not a complete survey, which is our biggest concern and moreover, some classifying differences are mutually overlapping. Regarding the fact that we will use some terms in thinking about the problems of authority in education, it is inevitable to mention the criteria at least briefly.

The first criterion to consider could *be genetic* (possibly differentiates between the authority natural and authority gained). Another significant criterion is generally the *social point* of view. According to *social status*, we can classify authority as personal, positional and functional. With regard to the effects in the behaviour of social environment, we can determine real authority and apparent authority. In view of *social prestige*, authority is divided into formal and informal type. According to the bearer within a *historic development* we recognise parental authority, authority of the older, authority of governors, religious, official or scientific authority. Last but not least, we can speak about *statutory, charismatic, special and moral authority*.

A complicated task felt by each of us is to find the scope of the relations between the individual types of authority while using them in particular situations – in professional and personal life. The emphasis placed on proper links and balance in using statutory, expert, moral and personal (charismatic) authority becomes a challenge even in the school and family conditions. A person can represent a great degree of authority while another is respected due to his/her human and moral qualities where the others are recognised only by their statutory authority and consequently, his/her position of power. A good combination of all kinds of authority, although conditioned by individual situations as well as by time constraints, is labelled by the term *'global authority'*.

Authority can be generally determined as a significant form of realising power which is based on more or less general recognition of authority, legality, certain influence of a person, institution or a group. It is a commonly accepted fact that authority differs from power which is based on direct enforcement, by its legalisation – i.e. to a certain extent, a particular person,

institution or group is entitled to carry out the power, especially stimulating, enforcing, organising and controlling human activities as well as expressing and co-ordinating individual and group interests.

The looking of relation between education and authority

Each of us has encountered the terms “authority” and “education” in their mutual interaction during school attendance. 4) However, they have not been discussed, so far, in this particular context. In relation to the innovative approach in pedagogical theory as well as in the actual process of education *the problems of authority become the subject of attention of expert and layman public* (especially when related to discipline, freedom, responsibility and moral).

Lately, we could notice how the idea of educational freedom renewed and reintroduced some reform pedagogical trends in the educational practice. A significant trend to enforce different alternative approaches in education now exists in the Czech educational system; various didactic concepts are used, new variants of teaching models are verified. Several extreme groups, however, understand authority as something odd in education because it destroys natural human need of self-regulation and self-confidence. Actually, authority, in the opinions of these groups, is not accepted at all. People should be given the opportunity to follow their interests and likes from childhood. The process of self-challenging can be realised in this way only – raising the tendency to remove all the individual and social influence and any form of authority. 5).

We have had hundreds of years of the *conflict between both the concepts of education: authoritative versus anti-authoritative education*. The conflict shows that the problem of proper form of education has been continuously dealt with and considered a significant matter even today with regard to the democratic trends in our society. Numerous results of authoritative and anti-authoritative behaviour have an impact on all areas of people’s co-existence – in families, neighbourhood, social life, state authorities, political parties and social institutions and as far as the

relations in work.

What is, thus, the *relation between education and authority*? The relationship can be looked at and discussed from *three points of view, which are interconnected, dependent on each other and similar in their contents*:

- *macro-social*: involves mainly the relation between authority and education in a society, emerging from the relations of norms and values of a family, school, society in the widest possible context;
- *micro-social or inter-individual*: deals mainly with the values, norms, behaviour, rules and principles which are determined, for example, by family life or by the interactive scheme at school. Main goal is to discover particular situational behaviour, it is the level of everyday activities of educators and today's young people;
- *intra – individual*: directed towards investigation of the way in which the acting subjects (children, teenagers, students) acquire the norms and value orientation from others; what are the means by which they are influenced most and what is the way that determines the development of an individual, character or individual behaviour.

What then is the possible expression of the relationship between authority and education? The norms and values of a society are fixed in authority and enforced through it. The way of presenting the values is, at the same time, the matter of the educational process reflecting the styles of education, parental attitudes, ways of management and the scope of emotional relationship between adults and children. Leaning on this theory, we can contemplate that education and authority are of the same origin and authority cannot be separated from education - in both cases it is a question of the mediation of the society's values and norms.

The authority as social relationship between adult and student

The above mentioned contemplation reflects the constant strive for finding an answer to one of the most essential questions: to what extent should the school, parents, adults intervene in a child's development? Each type of education is, to a certain extent,

authoritative in facilitating the young individual's search for a place in the world of adults, teaching him/her to respect the rules which are important for his/her development and for the functioning of the social group. The practice – not only educational one – strongly indicates that school, family and society fail to complete its tasks without authority and reasonable rules thus, losing its value, firm position, securities and basic functions.

People sometimes state that a *person either has authority or lacks it*. This opinion perceives authority as a human characteristic feature regardless of its dynamics and social aspects. Thinking of authority as of the mutual relationship between the bearer of authority (e.g. a person who influences people around him/her) and the receiver (e.g. the “addressee” of the influence, who respects the bearer and accepts him/her to a certain extent), we have to keep *two basic aspects* in mind:

- a) *aspect of relativity* – an individual gains authority within a limited period, in relation to his/her social surroundings, towards certain people, particular groups (e.g. at work, in family, in a group of special interest). Not necessarily has the person the same “extent” of authority in different spheres of his/her influence, in different social groups, in limited time and towards particular members of the group. Social conditioning of authority casts doubt in understanding authority as a human feature which a person is endowed, regardless of his/her surrounding sphere (perhaps there exist such features which help a person to gain and keep authority);
- b) *aspect of asymmetry* – the bearer of authority has a decisive, overwhelming impact creating the relationship of superiority and inferiority, the dimension of leadership and following. The asymmetry of a relationship can originate in a formal position of the bearer as well as in his/her informal position, respectively in the combination of both. The receiver of authority conditions the existence of authority by respecting the bearer and by accepting his/her influence.

Tempting to understand authority as a social relationship we are perhaps able to better explain its links with education. However, *authority can be interpreted as a “play” of social roles where one part of the relationship is formed by the “leading” role while the other by the “following” role (e.g. parent – child, teacher – pupil, lecturer - student). Both roles help to form each other, they tend to be mutually balanced, they are complementary, although asymmetrical (they cannot be identified with each other). Eventually, it is essential to respect the specificity of social roles and competencies ensuing from these roles.* The dynamics of relations in the educational process depends on a co-participation of all the present actors -teachers and students.

Conclusion

The term *authority* is also in coherence with such expressions as *discipline, power, freedom, responsibility, morality, law, duty, tolerance, rule, fear* True authority, however, cannot be only sought in schools but also among parents, citizens, politicians, in the laws, legal system and in the social system. 6) This is the only way in which young people can accept the faith and confidence in authority. *School as an institution, school management and a team of educators can develop many positive features in young people but what they certainly cannot do is to replace the family and society. Phenomenon of the authority and the recommended decalogue:*

- Authority as a multidimensional and multidisciplinary conception.
- The conception of authority does not constitute an isolated problem.
- Authority does not mean authoritarianism.
- Authority is not in contradiction with criticism.
- Authority does not necessarily lead to conformity.
- Authority expresses relationship.
- The aspect of relativity and asymmetry in perception of the authority.

- Specifics of accepting and development of authority in different social environment.
- Development of authority as a long-term process.
- Danger of relativization of the authority in social context.

I think these are the problems actual not only in our country - in Czech Republic.

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