

MARIA M. STRAŚ-ROMANOWSKA

University of Lower Silesia, Faculty of Psychology

## EDUCATION IN PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP OF MEETING

*It is during a meeting when a human being becomes a 'true I'  
– a person: 'a human becomes I, thanks to You'*

**Abstract:** This article presents an outline of a personalistic model of education based on assumptions of a philosophy of meeting. The model is set against two classic models: pragmatic as well as voluntarist, pointing out their limitations, such as a deficiency of an axiological, that is – ethical aspect. It is emphasized that in an educational process partake two subjects, each of whom, thanks to personal relationship of meeting has a chance to open up to another and to derive an inspiration for development. As the most important aim

of education, sensitization to moral values and teaching these principles accordingly were indicated – for personal and community welfare. Consequently, three levels of educational process were distinguished, namely: pre-educational level (pre-education), educational level (education) and post-educational level (self-education).

**Keywords:** personal relationship of meeting, pre-education, education, post-education.

### INTRODUCTION

Although an issue of education, in whose center there is a care taken to prepare a young human being to live in a society, has always been in scope of interest of both social scientists as well as practitioners – parents, teachers, caretakers or simply educators, nowadays, it is gaining a status of a priority. Reasons for that are intense, overwhelming civilizational and cultural changes and also accompanying difficulties of a young human being finding themselves in the world, which altogether generate numerous problems and therefore lead to a search for educational strategies, which would encourage development of social competencies tailored to personal and society's needs.

In the article, a model of education is described, which can be classified as a relationalist or meeting-based, and which refers to philosophical ideas of personalism (e.g. Buber, 1991; Levinas, 1994; Tischner, 2000). A background for this proposal was created using two most popular in the Western culture general models, which were referred to as pragmatic and voluntarist respectively. The first one is rooted in behaviourism, the second one, in turn, in the American humanistic psychology.

## PRAGMATIC MODEL OF EDUCATION

A notion of education in its broadest meaning refers to conscious, intentional actions, whose main aim is to prepare an individual for an independent life in a community, in accordance with its norms. In a culture strongly associated with ideology of pragmatism, the aim of education comes down to preparing an individual for an effective, most possibly successful fulfilment of social roles, which actually can be described as an adaptation. This adaptation one can describe as external – to requirements of the surrounding world, family, school, professional and social environment <sup>1)</sup>. In the spirit of pragmatism, an essence of educational activity, as a specific educational practice, is forming a mind and personality of an individual with help of socially acceptable psychological-pedagogical methods or techniques. The practice is based mainly on assumptions of behaviourism, treated sometimes directly as ‘philosophy of psychology’ (Malcolm, 2002).

Behavioural theories define human personality in terms of a system of regulatory mechanisms, which develop on the basis of biological structures and are influenced by more or less controlled effects of external environment. From such perspective, in education an acting element is also present – which is intended for an educator in the first place, as well as a processual element – referring to psychological processes of a person who is being educated., their way of thinking, attitudes, aims translating into behaviours, which also are an object of educational actions.

Educational theories which are in line with behavioural applied psychology define their main aim as delivering to educators knowledge about strategies and techniques to evoke desirable, from a practical, adaptive point of view, changes in personality and behaviour of a person who is being educated. Such type of educational activity is sometimes described as a ‘technology of education’ (Konarzewski, 1982). Behavioural psychology delivered theoretical scientists and practitioners of education a fair amount of thoroughly documented, based according to the standards of positivist science, knowledge referring to efficiency of specific educational techniques, including mainly, broadly understood, rewards and punishments, which often have steering or even a manipulative character. It is one of the greatest scientific achievement of psychology and is used in various aspects of social life.

A certain benefit of using pragmatic techniques of education, classified under a general category of learning techniques, is making it easier for an individual to satisfy in a socially acceptable way their important, basic needs, such as a need for safety, group membership or social approval and also to undertake, in an effective and satisfying way, various roles and tasks at different stages of life journey. A benefit not without meaning is also a fact, that in a process of learning rules of conduct and realisation of tasks, an individual has an opportunity to compare themselves with other group members they belong to and therefore to acquire knowledge about themselves, own potential, limitations, preferences.

Despite an evident efficiency and usefulness in numerous aspects of social life, educational techniques based on behavioural assumptions, used in the name of a widely understood social interest, have some serious limitations. Using them exclusively can

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<sup>1)</sup> Apart from adaptation to the external, social world, one can also distinguish such forms as internal adaptation – to own dispositions, and also existential adaptation – to absolute values (Straś-Romanowska, 2005).

even generate some negative effects. Among them, one of the most important is, apart from overestimation of an attitude of rivalry and instrumentalization of a relationship between an educator and an pupil, weakening of pupils' subjectivity or even objectification. An educator can, or even is obliged to such acting, using punishments and rewards, in order to achieve the aim which is formation of a style of behaviour of a pupil in accordance with specific environmental standards. Gratification is here ultimately the main, and often the only motive to obey these standards. What is more, numerous rules of functioning, especially those in professional or social environments where cultural changes are taking place, need to be modified, and the fact creates a pressure of ever-lasting re-adaptation and, as a consequence, puts an individual in danger of experiencing a permanent tension and a feeling of being underestimated. It should also be underlined, that an overdiversity of the roles undertaken and changes in their scenarios, together with external pressure regulated by the reward and punishment system, creates a danger for development and stabilisation of a feeling of identity of an individual. A world in which a change turns out to be a value in itself, does not encourage self-reflection and wondering about a purpose of one's life, which can ultimately lead to disorders of psychological functioning of an individual in a form of e.g. depression or addiction. This was also pointed out in the last century by e.g. Victor Frankl (1978), Rollo May (1989) or Philip Zimbardo and Floyd Ruch (1998).

### VOLUNTARIST MODEL OF EDUCATION

The pragmatic model of education, based on assumptions concerning human being as a creature mainly psycho-physical and social, whose development is directed towards adaptation to the conditions of the surrounding world, in the second half of the 20th Century lost its importance, and the methods applied in its repertoire of educational engineering were under a scrupulous critique. This happened mainly due to popularity of American humanistic psychology, together with a large influence of social revolution from the sixties, which started in the US and reached almost all of Europe. Voices appeared which questioned traditions concerning social behaviours and interpersonal relationships.

Slogans declared by followers of humanistic psychology referring to individual freedom and also a right of an individual to self-realisation and self-determination, as key, indisputable, human values, caused a change of the pragmatic model of education which was promoting strategies serving almost a directive formation of an individual's personality – to the voluntarist model, which assured an individual a maximal freedom of functioning, restricting at the same time the role of an educator or even depriving them from the right to intervene in a process of development of a pupil. It was thought, that a pupil, as an equal subject in the educational relationship, is an autonomous person and has a full right to an independent decision-making, being directed in their own choices, by personal preferences, needs, likes or beliefs. In its extreme shape, the libertarian model, known as 'education without failures', was created to serve in the best possible way an individual to self-reflection and implementation of developmental potential only in accordance with his or her free will (Gordon, 1991).

However, radicalism accompanying the implementation of slogans of humanistic psychology to educational practice and social life, termed as a 'pedagogical revolution'

(Bauman, 2000), did not afford expected exclusively positive results, which significantly questioned its value. A lack of intervention in a developmental process of a pupil, avoidance of any, especially critical assessments or restrictions towards their incorrect behaviours and a guarantee of unrestricted freedom in making decisions, which then was turning into a quasi-freedom or wilfulness, turned out to be not only ineffective in reaching the assumed educational and developmental target, but also to be counter-effective, detrimental for both an individual as well as for social relationships and community's functioning. It was stated, that a young person indeed needs a direction for their actions, stable and clear points or a frame of reference and also a support, which all were not sufficient or even not existent in the libertarian model.

Despite that, one can point out, similarly as in the case of the pragmatic model, some positive aspects of that model also. An undoubted merit of its supporters is above all an estimation of an individual's subjectivity, noticing them already at the early stages of life and turning attention at a disposition of free will as a base of life choices. A fact was appreciated, that freedom is not only an individual's right, but it also constitutes a significant condition for a development of identity and self-fulfilment.

In the light of the before-mentioned benefits and limitations of the educational models: pragmatic and voluntarist, it so seems that an optimal solution would be a synergic model, combining the two, which would assume adaptation of an individual to an effective and satisfactory roles' fulfilment following from a social organisation of life, in such a way, however, so that respect towards pupil's subjectivity is in place. It should not therefore lead to psychological incapacitation and at the same time would help in making successful choices in accordance with social rules.

Nowadays, one can discern in a field of a broadly understood educational practice and social life space, a presence of both before-characterised educational models. A distinct echo of humanistic ideas is recognised in the overwhelming cult of individualism, underling individual's subjectivity as an autonomous, causative, self-determining, person who is also predisposed for taking independent actions and living in accordance with own self. On the other side, it is hard not to notice a ubiquitous and omnipotent influence of strategies inspired by behaviourism on life of modern humans. We are constantly under more or less evident influence which is steering our choices, way of acting, preferences or likes, and even lifestyle. The aim of these manipulative strategies is not so much shaping in people, including also children and adolescents, righteous from a community perspective needs or actions, as maximising a broadly understood success or even profit of influential people or social groups, who, minding their own interest try to 'manage' developmental potential of those who are under their influence.

One does not need to be an expert in order to see that both described models of educational practices: pragmatic and voluntarist, even in a convergent form, will not be enough to shape personality or character of a human being tailored to their potential and developmental aims, and also society's needs. Their competitive co-presence in a social space has a number of negative consequences – it leads to axiological disorientation, to cognitive and motivational chaos, it makes self-awareness more difficult, it encourages emotional tension, weakens a feeling of psychological safety and eventually increases inner emptiness. As a result, we are dealing with a paradoxical picture of a modern human being – an individualist who is not him or herself.

## MEETING-BASED MODEL OF EDUCATION

When referring to a statement shared by many researchers, concerning a presence of two main dimensions in a psychological structure of humans – causal-competence and moral ones – through whom perceiving of one self and other people occurs, a remark occurs, that for a modern human, the first dimension has a greater meaning than the second one, which is indirectly suggested in results of studies in social psychology (Wojciszke, Baryła, 2005). Moral dimension, responsible for community's life, is appreciated mainly at a declarative level and implementation of values belonging to it has a smaller influence on self-assessment and a feeling of life quality when compared with an implementation of the values referring to causality, which is determined by skills and competencies (Wojciszke, 2010). Admittedly, during a life course (especially among children and adolescents) preferences of declared values undergo a change, which is in connection with developmental processes (Cieciuch, 2013). However, attention-grasping is an increase of a rank of hedonistic and individualistic values in modern Polish society and an accompanying increase of moral relativism, together with a simultaneous lowering of moral values' rank, marked in numerous sociological studies, (Mariański, 2017). It seems, that an intensification of worrying phenomena, such as violence, abuses of all kind, addictions, weakening of interpersonal relationships, suicidal attempts or depression, can with a significant probability be thought of as a consequence of, among others, undergoing a pressure of rivalry, generated by an extreme pragmatism and consumerism, and on the other hand – a result of a cult of individualism and a misunderstanding of freedom as a limitless liberty (lawlessness), marginalising higher ethical values.

In the light of anthropological knowledge about a human being as a multidimensional creature, not only psycho-physiological, social and subjective – meaning free and self-determining, but also spiritual – meaning sensitive to higher values, including moral ones (Straś-Romanowska, 1992), both approaches to the issue of education – pragmatic and voluntarist – should be considered reductionist. They narrow the essence of educational activity, on one hand to forming of a pupil's personality not appreciating their subjectivity – in a style of behavioural engineering, on the other hand to ensuring a pupil with a maximal liberty of self-determination under slogans of individualism and extreme freedom, which are based on misunderstood and selective ideas of humanistic psychology. They omit, or at least marginalise, a traditional, ethical aim of education, whose essence is to sensitise to moral values, such as honesty, decency, fairness, loyalty, respect for one another and so on. With an implementation of such kind of values, a responsibility comes not only for oneself, but also for another human being, for a community, and also for natural environment.

Admittedly, human being, due to a personal nature, has an in-born axiological sensitivity, is – everyone according to their own measure – open to the world of higher, absolute values. However, this sensitivity, similarly to other senses' sensitivity (which was pointed out by Scheler, 1999), while being exposed to environmental influences, can be sustained, strengthen, or weakened. Implementation of most important values, acting in accordance with (quoting V. Frankl, 1978) – 'responding to the value's appeal', requires appropriate environment, inspiration coming from significant people, as also appropriate patterns of behaviour. Therefore, so significant in the process of education remains the role of an educator, and also of all important persons from pupil's environment, who usually is a young human being. Members of a community,

by directing their choices by values and setting a behavioural example, inform about an importance of the values and, at the same time, motivate to respect them during every-day choices and life activities. An important effect of following higher moral values, which go beyond a logic of utilitarianism and often a pragmatic, external adaptation, is an experience of a specific, available only for a human being psychological state which is a feeling of purpose, accompanied by a feeling of own dignity, treasured more than self-assessment based on social comparisons referring mostly to capacity's aspects (Straś-Romanowska, 2010).

Anthropological assumptions about human nature, as a personal creature, whose specific attributes are: sensibility, axiological sensitivity, free will and relationalist attitude – seen in a striving towards a direct, honest being with another person, towards another person, and for another person, together with a potential for a constant development (e.g. Straś-Romanowska, 2005), justify a formulation of a higher aim of education as a realisation of developmental potential, aiming in a direction of a personal ideal. In a centre of this ideal, there is a moral responsibility – for another human being, community, and for oneself, which requires of an individual self-restriction and self-perfecting. Moral responsibility is therefore the highest manifestation of a personal existence of a human being. What is important, education, whose aim is to shape a character in a direction of personal ideal, refers in the same degree to a pupil as well as an educator. The view is shared with representatives of the philosophy of meeting i.e., among others, with Martin Buber, who was quoted before, Emmanuel Levinas, Józef Tischner, and also by philosophers representing different philosophical currents, e.g. Leszek Kołakowski or Zygmunt Bauman.

The sketched model of education, taking into account an importance of moral values, can be compared to a valued in ancient times educational system called *paideia*, in which knowledge, wisdom, and beauty of a human being (including health, physical fitness, and agility) were closely related to a character, nobility, decency, goodness, and the higher aim of education was a shaping of character's virtues according to the perfect templates, which were personal ideals (Jaeger, 2001). Admittedly, decency, righteousness, and personal culture are values which are not questioned in other models of education, however, in the personalistic-meeting-based model they gain a rank of priorities and become an aim in themselves, whereas in e.g. pragmatic model they are sometimes treated instrumentally, as a way of gaining acceptance, approval, or as a conducive factor in becoming successful.

It seems, that turning *paidei* into a leading idea within a reality of modern schools, which are functioning more according to rules of corporation rather than community, would not be an easy undertaking. It would require changes in a broadly understood education, which would rely upon appreciating, taking aside those measurable in points – skills and knowledge of students, but also ethical competencies of students, moral sensitivity, civic attitudes, prosocial and social attitudes. It would need to be related to a re-definition of a role of a teacher, with taking away formal and administrative duties from them in favour of a more often, closer and more friendly contact with pupils, and also with a modification of an education program preparing for a role of a teacher at the start. It is a long way, but maybe it is worthwhile – in a face of cultural challenges – to be inspired by the tradition and also by modern personalistic thought in order to bring to an educational practice more humanistic, personal character.

Being inspired by a modern anthropologist thought, developed in a spirit of personalism and a philosophy of meeting (Buber, 1991; Gadacz, 1991; Levinas, 1994; Tischner,

2000), apart from noticing an unquestionable importance of the axiological factor in a process of education, it is also worthwhile to underline a significance of another important aspect of a human nature, namely relationalism. A notion of relationalism, close to, although not interchangeable with a notion of interaction (Dryll, 2001), refers to a disposition for being with another human in a specific, subjective relationship, which is termed a meeting or a dialogue (Buber, 1993). A dialogical or a meeting-based relationship is characterised by a fact, that each person is open to another one, to their diversity, being special, to their secrecy and unconditional value, and also their limitless potential for a personal development, activated by environmental and cultural factors.

Referring this thesis to an issue of education one can state, that education is a meeting of two subjects, where one – an educator – should support a development of another one – a pupil. An essence of a personal, relational meeting is, apart from openness to Another one and unconditional acceptance, listening closely to their voice, with an honest will for understanding and sympathy. An attitude of openness, above all, should be characteristic of an educator, who by self-expression, their authentic I, has an opportunity to show a pupil important, treasured values, testifying with their own behaviour their meaning and at the same time inspiring to reflect upon them. Crucial here is not only a content of revealed or encouraged values, but also a way of implementing them, authenticity, which has a power to invigorate axiological sensitivity and to shape a will directed towards values. There is not a more effective educational method than being an example, a personal testimony for a righteousness and importance of what one is convinced about. In order for an authentic, personal meeting to occur, a maturity of an educator is necessary, their clear identity, grounded in a stable system of values, present in their actions, and also a disposition for self-development.

The conditions named above build an educator's authority and create a special climate helping a pupil to get to know themselves, develop their identity and become a subject, with a simultaneous shaping of character's virtues. An educator, while sharing with a pupil personal experiences, being an example of how one should act and why it is worthy, being directed in life by values higher than merely utilitarian and hedonistic ones, showing at the same time an approval for pupil's individuality, in a way is sharing him or herself with pupils and therefore has a power to pull them towards a common ideal. An educator not only teaches how to live, not forcing anything, but, using wise arguments, kind persuasion, and above all a testimony of a righteousness of what they claim, inspires to undertake resolutions based not, or not only, on a will, needs, or a rational calculation, but above all on a feeling of duty and responsibility – due to higher ethical values which make life more meaningful. An educator also encourages a consequent behaviour in accordance with the values, ensuring at the same time safety of a pupil and strengthening their self-value. An educator is a master or a guide on a way to self-development of their pupils. In order to achieve a status of an educator-guide, one should go through their own path towards self-development and stay on it in a readiness for further self-perfection.

## MULTI-LEVELS OF THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION

Following the presented assumptions, taken from the personalistic anthropology and the philosophy of meeting, and leading to the conclusion, that the aim of education is an adaptation of an individual for a meaningful and serving a community's good

shaping and perfecting of character's virtues, one can differentiate three levels at the path of a pupil.

The first level can be seen as an introduction, preceding an actual educational activity. At this level a 'pre-education' occurs which is a preparation for a fundamental educational process. It relies upon creating conducive conditions for a child's development within all dimensions of their personal nature, and is happening already at the earliest stage of life. The conditions, in a form of unconditional love, acceptance, and security, were correctly recognised by Abraham Maslow (1986) and Erik Erikson (2004), and were also appreciated by contemporary authors of the Theory of Attachment, underlining an importance of an appropriate emotional climate and the first contact of a child with a close person for a process of a trustful opening for the surrounding world, including also the world of values, and also for revealing and invigorating developmental potential. Relationships with the closest people, parents or caregivers, and also patterns of behaviour they employ in everyday actions, have a meaning hard to overestimate for a child's development: they prepare a ground, on which a personal condition of a pupil will develop, including sensitivity to values.

The next level of the educational process is a fundamental one, which can be termed 'educational'. The education at that level requires a conscious, wise engagement of an educator and a trustful attitude of a pupil. The role of an educator here relies upon directing a personal potential of a pupil at aims which stay in accordance with his or her capacity as well as with values of a society he or she belongs to, and also upon activating in a pupil a feeling of responsibility for undertaken actions. Appropriate strategies serve this, among them and above all – a dialogue, whose content should be made realistic and shown through examples of (in the best scenario) educator's behaviours, which was mentioned before. It should be added, that education occurs within a personal meeting-based relationship and, what is more, it teaches in a natural non-directive way rules of making a conversation, attentive listening to a subject of an interaction, while respecting their subjectivity. One can say that it is a specific educational workshop focusing on interpersonal communication. At the educational level, there is also a space for positive reinforcement of desired behaviours of a pupil and for creating boundaries for their freedom, which in a meeting-based, dialogue strategy has mainly a persuasive character, which also explains the aim of those limitations. Such strategy encourages directing will at noble targets, strengthening it, and also a determination for practice within one's capacities of such forms of activity which rely upon self-restriction and self-perfection. Shaping of a will is closely related with evoking a feeling of responsibility and sense, and seems to be the most important element of education in spirit of personalism and philosophy of meeting.

A specific education, which is happening in a personal relationship of a dialogue, leads to the next level of the educational process, which is self-education. At this level, both current and potential educator adopt a role of a pupil. They create requirements towards themselves, try to fulfil them consequently and execute possible omissions or negligence. Entering the level of self-education, which formally is a post-educational level, requires meeting of conditions, which, following Kazimierz Dąbrowski, can be determined as self-awareness, self-choice, and self-confirmation. Self-education is in a way a culmination of the named processes and states, and is leading to the personal ideal (Dąbrowski, 1975; Mróz, 2008). It is equal to reaching the highest, fifth level of human development, as described by the author of the Theory of Positive Disintegration. It reaches this level thanks to a personal engagement, deepened reflection about a mean-



ing of own life, based upon a realistic knowledge about oneself and about the world – by making a conscious choice of values and also by taking care of determination in order to realise them in a face of an ideal, which is in truth distant, however it remains attractive, because it is meaningful and is serving community's good. An educator with such a personal profile, directed at a constant self-perfection, has the highest power of eliciting the best predispositions from a pupil and taking part in his or her personality by paving the way towards an essence of humanity. Educational activity attributed to the third, post-educational level as such, should actually precede the activities attributed to the earlier levels and accompany them at all times.

## SUMMARY

Education, understood in the spirit of personalistic anthropology and philosophy of meeting is a constant and never-ending activity, directed towards supporting a personal development, perfecting and strengthening character's virtues. Therefore, it is an activity oriented towards a life in accordance with virtues, which is taking place within a context of relationship of personal meeting. Such understood education refers with the same degree to a pupil as well as an educator.

Education is both an activity and a process – it starts with shaping of a character of a potential educator, who, by his or her actions, evokes and directs a personal developmental process of a pupil, taking care at the same time of perfecting own personal condition, thanks to which they can become an even better master for others.

A complexity of a phenomenon of education, its multiply levels, and requirements concerning tasks faced by an educator, lead to a conclusion that it is the most demanding art. While teaching responsibility, an educator is obliged to take care of their own responsibility – for a pupil and for him or herself, and also for a community where both subjects of the personal relationship of a meeting belong to.

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