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PROFESSIONAL CERTAINTY (*GEWISSENHEIT*) VERSUS UNCERTAINTY (*UNGEWISSENHEIT*) AS COMPONENTS OF EDUCATOR'S HERMENEUTIC COMPETENCE

*Dream of making uncertainty less daunting and happiness
more plausible [...] promise[s] the 'utopia.*
Z. Bauman

INTRODUCTION

While continuing the deliberations on the essence of hermeneutic competence and its components, as well as its meaning (Kaliszewska 2015, 2016a, b, c; 2017a, b), in this paper I touch upon another (following empathy, distance, and proximity) important professional competence of educators, teachers, caregivers, and tutors, namely the ability of perceiving uncertainty of one's own professional competence, with its shallow areas and gaps, or void information, which causes difficulties in specific professional situations, as well as the ability to deal with the occurring dilemmas, dualities, or even antinomies.

The duality of certainty *versus* uncertainty turns out to be an interdisciplinary category, which is manifested by the number of references both in professional literature and in popular materials to be found on the Internet.

From the pedagogical point of view, the duality can be analyzed as a still unperceived pedagogical category, or more broadly, as sociologists do, as two different facets of the pedagogical profession: theoretical *versus* practical. One can also perceive it in relation to academic teaching where, in the process of educating teachers and educators, there are still no references to humanist aspects of their education, and there is one applicable model specified within the Polish National Qualifications Framework.

“Category,” as used in the text, points to a different approach than in the case of “term,” and is increasingly used to point to the difference between the statically

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understood scientific meaning and the meaning based in social contexts, characterised with variability and developmental dynamics (Lewartowska-Zychowicz, 2001, p. 77). The meaning of category can thus be potentially modified depending on the changing context of its use.

Another category used in this article is “duality,” which, according to Lech Witkowski, is the fundamental structural property of complexity typical in educational situations, and although it is associated with two poles, such poles are not, however, in rigid opposition to one another, but there is a tension between them, requiring oscillation between standards and counter-standards, which are also associated with ambivalence (Witkowski, 2015; Kaliszewska, 2015). Renate Schwarz includes “duality” among the components of hermeneutic competence of caregivers. According to B. Dewe and H.-U. Otto, hermeneutic competence is a “sort of a «Medium» owing to which core knowledge in the area becomes effective and can be passed on” (Dewe, Otto, 2005, after: Schwarz, 2009, p. 57). In turn, according to H.Ch. Koller, hermeneutic competence means “understanding of an exceptional situation and people, as well as general knowledge to apply it in a specific situation” (Karteikarte, 2018). This implies an understanding of both subjective and objective meaning, or interpretation of meanings. In his opinion, it is a component of pedagogical competence, which is justified as follows:

“Pedagogical competencies also include the ability to refer professional expertise and methodology of teaching, available in various formulations, to specific, even exceptional situations and people in such situations. If such ability has anything to do with an understanding of such situations and people, it can be referred to as hermeneutic competence” (Koller, 2006, p. 12).

In a professional situation, where there is the duality: certainty *versus* uncertainty, there is a moment of “reflection” over the choice of further action. “Reflection is understood here as in the mirror, an intense direction of the attention «inwards», using thought to process the impressions gathered in the outside world owing to experience, «deep» thinking. [...] In Luhmann’s systems theory, the reflection means the ability of psychological and social systems to observation, theming and describing oneself” (Hillmann, 2007, p. 738).

CERTAINTY *VERSUS* UNCERTAINTY IN THE DICTIONARY-BASED AND INTERDISCIPLINARY ASPECT

According to Jerzy Bralczyk, “certain” means 1) undoubtedly occur; 2) about a person: one you can rely on; 3) not raising any doubt; 4) reliable, effective; 5) testifying to decisiveness, control; 6) guaranteeing safety, durability; 7) entirely convinced about something; 8) not exposed to any danger (Bralczyk, 2005, p. 549). Uncertain, in turn, means 1) involving a risk, difficult to predict; 2) one that raises

doubt as to occurrence; 3) unreliable; 4) unconfirmed; 5) not having certainty as to something; 6) testifying to hesitation or shyness (Bralczyk, 2005, p. 455). We principally account for the first of those meanings.

Uncertainty can be analysed in three interdisciplinary ranges: 1) global range (worldwide, in science, in religion); 2) local range; 3) individual range.

According to Zygmunt Bauman, global uncertainty has its source in the passage from “solid” to “liquid” modernity; in the “divorce” between power and politics, gradual vanishing or limitation of community (state-based) insurance against individual failure and unhappiness – which undermines social foundations of solidarity; in the decline of long-term thinking, planning, and action, as well as decay of social structures they could be inscribed into (fragmented life); in the transfer of the responsibility for solving dilemmas caused by the changing circumstances onto individuals. Flexibility and adaptability become an advantage (Bauman, 2007, p. 8-11).

It also turns out that we also deal with duality within religion which – it would seem – should be the source of exclusive certainty. This is beautifully illustrated in an excerpt from a poem by Jan Twardowski:

Pewność niepewności
Dziękuję Ci za to
że nie domówionego nie domawiałeś
nie dokończonego nie kończyłeś
nie udowodnionego nie udowadniałeś [...]

[Certainty of uncertainty
Thank you for
not speaking out the unspoken
not finishing the unfinished
not proving the unproven]

At Catholic websites, there are also references to this issue. For example, Z. Kapłański states: “Avoiding questions, escape from hesitation is a sin of negligence,” and adds: “We, however, have the duty to use our thinking and memory. Thinking helps us recall the words of the Lord, even approximate to the situations posed by the events, while the memory is to gather experiences in order to avoid the paths were we made wrong choices” (Kapłański, 2018).

On the publishing market, there is a wide choice of psychological guides on how to deal with uncertainty. The multitude of offers testifies to its continuing presence in both work and life. One can, therefore, learn not to show uncertainty in situations of importance to us, but one cannot push away the need to make choices. Consulting and therapy may help to order one’s life and tasks, but cannot do your job in life and self-reflection. Guides point the way, but we have to walk it ourselves. It is important to be able to ask for help, listen to advice, and use one’s mind and memory, but one must also trust oneself and one’s own system of values. The books can help one’s functioning and (seemingly) alleviate the fear. They can contribute to

the temporary impression made by one's superior/employer/partner. Perhaps they can help solve a problem. But this is not a remedy to duality and dilemmas related to uncertainty in one's life.

The aspect of uncertainty also appears in the decision-making theory. Uncertainty here means a situation where specific decisions can result in various outcomes, depending on which of the possible conditions occurs, whereas the probability of their occurrence is unknown. In the case of uncertainty, the Bayesian probability of occurrence of a specific consequence is usually defined (Wikipedia, 2018).

In the mainstream of economics, the assumptions of decision-making theory are adopted, whereas economists assume that in the event of uncertainty, the decision-maker knows the probability of occurrence of specific conditions. Therefore, the action with the highest expected value is chosen. In turn, contrary to the mainstream, the Austrian school of economics assumes that, in the conditions of uncertainty, the decision-maker may not know the probability of occurrence of particular conditions, as mathematical probability (randomness of events) refers to repetitive events (e.g. rice roll), whereas singular events depend on many factors where only some of which are known to decision-makers (Wikipedia, 2018).

In statistics and standardisation, "measurement uncertainty is due to the fact that it is always imprecise, which not only results from imperfect apparatus and senses of the observer but is an inherent property of such an operation" (Wikipedia, 2018).

Local range of uncertainty, however, involves very many issues that are objects of social discourses and political decisions, such as the approach to national and cultural identity, environmental protection, access to education and culture, security, crime, migration and immigration, as well as local and economic policy.

Individual nature, in turn, refers to every person individually, and can include, for example:

- The uncertainty of parents in respect of their own assumptions on upbringing. How to raise a child to live in the contemporary world? Will make the child sensitive to values not cause his/her failure in life? Will the tolerance for being passive, insensitive, and lacking empathy not result in parents' failure?
- The uncertainty of the adult regarding their own plans and choices in life.
- The uncertainty in professional life.
- The uncertainty in relations with the Others and with institutions.
- The uncertainty of children in respect of unstable attitudes of the adult.
- Fear for one's own health and safety.
- The uncertainty as regards guidelines from religion or ideology.

FEAR AND TAKING RISK AS CONSEQUENCES OF LACK OF CERTAINTY

As Bauman points out, in the conditions of a city, fear results in securities against existential threats: intercoms, monitoring, fences, security, and the establishment of “confined spaces” aimed at segregation and exclusion, not building bridges, understanding, facilitating communication or meetings of residents. These are architectural inventions that are perfected equivalents of moats, turrets and arrow loops, as Bauman states. “Instead of defending the city against an external enemy, walls are established to keep some categories of people isolated, if they are already imposed the status of opponents by the very fact of isolation. In this way, the phenomenon of life shared in a community, in a locality, becomes disintegrated” (Bauman, 2007, p. 109).

Risk, however, is a function of uncertainty. If taken in a conscious manner, it allows accounting for losses and inconveniences that accompany uncertainty in action.

CERTAINTY VERSUS UNCERTAINTY IN THE PEDAGOGICAL ASPECT

The antinomy of certainty and uncertainty can, therefore, be understood as the main element of professional action in complex situations. “The seemingly certain caregiving or educational measures [...] are often grounded in untested procedures and knowledge resources due to which uncertainty and crisis nature of operational practice are not properly evaluated” (Böhnke, Straß, 2006, after: Schwarz, 2008, p. 117).

Also Ulrich Overman, German sociologist and founder of objective hermeneutics, states that in therapeutic and caregiving measures, whenever there are difficulties, one cannot apply the science-based general solution to the problem, but it is necessary that “in this zone of uncertainty, persons performing a particular job, should act professionally in the name of science, and make a decision appropriately adjusted to the risk, replacing the missing practice” (Oevermann, 2016, p. 138). This issue, also important to experts in pedagogy, requires a separate discussion, while for the present analysis, it is important to perceive the existence of the “uncertainty zone” that requires making risky decisions, but the risk should be mitigated to the minimum and result from good knowledge of the available options. In another place, the author admits that there are professions where “the services are not subject to control either by the market or by the administration; they require peer control and self-control relying on inner ideals of the profession’s ethics” (Oevermann, 2016, p. 70). Such professions include teaching professions, which may lead to the thought that the inner ethical self-control makes the teacher lonely in the face of one’s own uncertainty, as it is not easy to admit it, trust the others that such uncertainty would not be treated as our weakness and used against us.

The duality is also an element describing hermeneutic competence. Aside uncertainty, hermeneutic competence is characterized by the understanding: empathy, reflexivity, attitude to make contact with another person, dialogue, interaction, sensing distance or proximity. Particularly in a situation of uncertainty, interaction is important where the tutor attempts to gain certainty through learning how the situation is interpreted by the other person.

For academic teaching, one may find important the conclusions from psychological studies on the *need for closure*, namely the search for and having clear and certain knowledge to reduce the sense of cognitive uncertainty (e.g. among students). The need, as indicated by the studies, is individual in nature, and affects the formation and use of abstract mental representations (schemes, prototypes, stereotypes) that determine thinking about social world and taking action (Kossowska, 2003, p. 335). In Polish pedagogy science, the notion of ambivalence was introduced by Henryka Kwiatkowska, inspired by the article by L. Witkowski where he signalled – after Robert Merton – normative ambivalence in social roles, related to the two-pole tension between standards and counter-standards (Witkowski, 2013, p. 164). Kwiatkowska showed various aspects of ambivalence regarding the role of the teacher and, as sources of such ambivalence, she pointed to contradicting normative expectations allocated to this professional role (Kwiatkowska, 2008, p. 202). Examples of pedagogical dilemmas that give rise to uncertainty:

- Pedagog of one, two, or many paths. Which one to choose?
- Dilemmas of working with a child with special educational needs (disabled, talented, diabetic). How to respond in a situation of lack of clear legal regulations regarding care over a child with a chronic disease?
- Dilemmas of a leader (between personal ambitions and needs of the team).
- Uncertainty in the role of a tutor (whatever I do, it will be wrong).
- Resistance, sticking to the old, or openness to changes?
- Uncertainty in relations with the parents and student's local environment.
- Giving in to the pressure (regarding e.g. organization of a scheduled trip, despite an absence of an additional person to take care of the students) or arguing that certainty of students' (and one's own – legal) safety is more important?
- Admit to a mistake and uncertainty or to the contrary?

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CATEGORY: CERTAINTY VERSUS UNCERTAINTY FOR PEDAGOGY

It can be assumed that, in pedagogy, the category of uncertainty forms part of the duality: certainty *versus* uncertainty, and it should be treated as a natural element of life and professional work.

It is a state of mind/moment in the teacher's professional life when s/he understands – when faced with a problem person or situation – that the problem or task cannot be approached in a clear manner without any doubts, and that the teacher is not convinced s/he is capable of applying theoretical knowledge in practice and must use new, unconventional, and untested solutions, or abstain from performing the task/solving the problem.

In reference to this pedagogical category, one may apply the division to global, local, and individual range of uncertainty, but with the awareness of absence of such a hierarchy, as the global or individual category may pulsate at any time, and each of them requires attention.

The uncertainty of global nature includes, for example, demographics and social phenomena at the large scale; international political and economic conflicts; phenomena with ecological roots.

Local uncertainty refers to an management of a school or kindergarten; dealing with the problem of aggression, cultural changes, or use of new technologies in education.

Individual uncertainty involves, for example, teacher's personal attitude to educational reforms, and the resulting professional behaviours.

In all areas, due to the variability and little predictability of the world, risky decisions are made. If, however, in the economy, the risk refers to financial issues or promotion of the adults, in educational facilities we deal with risking the life and health of the students, with a threat to their development and their future.

Uncertainty in the contemporary society is the subject undertaken by Bożena Majerek in her socio-pedagogical study. The author claims that tolerance for ambiguity is an important element of social competences and recommends it be developed in the process of formal education (Majerek, 2018, p. 242). She also demonstrates a number of areas and educational trends preparing to function in the world and diminishing the fear of otherness and ambiguity.

HOW TO EDUCATE PEDAGOGUES AND TEACHERS IN THE UNCERTAIN WORLD?

The sense of uncertainty stands in the opposition to the “need for closure,” which is most frequently offered by educational curricula. They would require reopening to ambiguity and uncertainty either within the work of interdisciplinary committees dealing with the quality of education or during classes by educated lecturers

aware of the importance of the issue. H. Kwiatkowska has already pointed to often illusive expectations of teacher candidates, who usually assume that their chosen profession is a one devoid of conflicts. If, therefore, reality fails to meet their expectations, they experience painful disillusionment, and even nervous breakdowns (Kwiatkowska, 2008, p. 201).

How, therefore, to extend the perception of the job of educator and teacher? What to do? Here are possible tasks:

- Show dynamic image of the world and ambiguity of pedagogical phenomena (teaching by categories). Account for duality of phenomena.
- Prepare for responsibility (ethics) e.g. by undertaking tasks with deadlines. Teach responsible choices, even bearing risks.
- Allow participation in social discourses on current topics. Perfect tools for discourse: critical reading and writing, undertaking dialogue, polemics, criticism, verbal support.
- Making sensitive to many languages in pedagogy, and provide for the excellence of communication skills.

CONCLUSION

Uncertainty as a category also has two different faces: positive and negative, hence it performs various roles. Uncertainty gives rise to fear and the need for risk estimation.

Uncertainty makes one sensitive and alert, as well as raises the need for self-improvement. It can be hidden for various purposes, but this cannot relieve the duty of reflection over its essence and effects.

One should admit one's uncertainty and account for it while making choices.

The category of uncertainty, as presented here, is present in science, academic teaching, and professional work of teachers, educators, caregivers, and tutors. Therefore, it must be perceived and analysed, and it must be included in educational curricula, together with other components of hermeneutic competence.

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Keywords: uncertainty, duality, category, hermeneutic competence, academic teaching

Abstract: Hermeneutic competence of a teacher/tutor/educator/caregiver is the understanding of both subjective and objective meaning, or interpretation of meanings (contextuality, subjectivity). It comprises a number of skills and competencies that contribute to excellence in the profession. These also include uncertainty as a condition which often accompanies professional everyday work, particularly in untypical situations. The duality: certainty *versus* uncertainty is interdisciplinary in nature, whereas its perception and introduction in pedagogy should have further implications related to academic teaching and educational curricula.

PROFESJONALNA PEWNOŚĆ (*GEWISSENHEIT*) VERSUS NIEPEWNOŚĆ (*UNGEWISSENHEIT*) JAKO SKŁADNIKI KOMPETENCJI HERMENEUTYCZNEJ PEDAGOGA

Słowa kluczowe: niepewność, dwoistość, kategoria, kompetencja hermeneutyczna, dydaktyka akademicka

Streszczenie: Kompetencja hermeneutyczna nauczyciela/wychowawcy/pedagoga/opiekuna to rozumienie sensu subiektywnego i obiektywnego bądź interpretacja znaczeń (kontekstualność, subiektywność). Składa się na nią szereg sprawności i umiejętności doskonalących funkcjonowanie w zawodzie. Wśród składników tej kompetencji wymienia się także niepewność jako stan często towarzyszący zawodowej codzienności, zwłaszcza w sytuacjach nietypowych. Dwoistość pewność – niepewność ma charakter interdyscyplinarny, a jej dostrzeżenie i wprowadzenie do pedagogiki powinno przynieść dalsze implikacje związane z dydaktyką akademicką i programami kształcenia.