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CONCEPT OF HUMAN WORK IN THE OPINION OF STUDENTS OF EDUCATION – THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Streszczenie

Opracowanie pt. „Praca w opinii studentów kierunków pedagogicznych – analiza porównawcza” stanowi kontynuację problematyki podjętej w 2008 r. w ramach badań mających na celu poznanie opinii studentów na temat znaczenia pracy ludzkiej w życiu człowieka. W części teoretycznej omówione zostały postawy człowieka wobec pracy oraz główne założenia procesu profesjonalizacji studentów pedagogiki. Część badawcza zawiera analizę i interpretację otrzymanych wyników badań, których celem było poznanie zakresu zmian, jakie w toku studiów zaszły w postawach studentów pedagogiki wobec pracy. Zgromadzone wyniki w dużym stopniu potwierdziły wnioski sformułowane dla podsumowania pierwszego ich etapu. Niestety nie uległo zmianie deklarowane zainteresowanie studentów możliwością podejmowania pracy wyłącznie z pobudek finansowych. Z drugiej jednak strony studenci wykazali troskę o swój rozwój zawodowy – chcą bowiem rozwijać swoje umiejętności, realizować się zawodowo, a co najważniejsze służyć swoją pracą innym. Postulowane jest wobec tego stałe wzmacnianie takich postaw, zwłaszcza ze strony środowiska akademickiego, które w sposób szczególny w procesie profesjonalizacji odpowiedzialne jest za przygotowanie studentów do przyszłej pracy pedagogicznej.

Key words: human work, attitudes, professionalization of students of Education

Summary

The study “Concept of Human Work in the Opinion of Students of Education – the Comparative Analysis” is a continuation of the issues discussed in 2008 as part of the research aimed at becoming acquainted with students’ opinion on the significance of work in human life. Theoretical part of the research reviews human attitudes towards work, as well as the main principles of professionalization process among the students of Education. The empirical part contains the data analysis and interpretation of the research results. The purpose of the research was to analyse the scope of changes that occurred in students’ attitudes towards human work during their university studies.

The data collected proved extensively the conclusions formulated to complete the first stage of the research. Unfortunately, the students’ interest in taking up a job for financial reasons only has not changed. On the other hand, the students seem to be aware of their professional development, since they want to develop their skills, find fulfilment in their careers, and – what is the most important – offer their work to others. Therefore, it is necessary to enhance such attitudes, particularly by academic environment that in the process of professionalization is responsible for preparing students for future work in the field of education.

Introduction

Work is the basic form of human activity, so the proper attitude to work should be developed since childhood. A particular role in this process is played by family environment¹, then by teachers and class tutors – in the subsequent stages of a child development. The analysis of principles for school core curricula on different levels of education (from primary to higher education)² proves that the problem of work and proper approach to work exists at each of the educational levels. The content of curricula is surely debatable and insufficient at certain levels, but undoubtedly it is essential to prepare students of educational areas appropriately so that they could develop in their pupils relevant attitudes towards work e.g. arousing the need of employment, explaining the nature and sense of a good job, and internalisation of ethical-moral rules concerning behaviour at work³. Because of the above mentioned reasons, the research on attitudes of future teachers towards human work appears to be extremely important and valuable.

The inspirations for this study were also alarming results of the survey conducted in 2008. Among the respondents, that is students of Education, one-sided attitude to work predominated which was expressed in treating work mainly as a way of earning a living. Such approach was confirmed by the choice of financial reason for employment declared by a great number of the respondents. It has been assumed that new research will help find whether it is permanent attitude to the value of work, or it has been changed for instance as a result of successively extended knowledge, a new approach and skills acquired during subsequent years of academic studies.

Before the research findings are presented, selected types of attitudes to work will be discussed which are also described in specialist literature, as well as the principles for the process of professionalization among the students of Education. In this context the results of comparative research will be interpreted.

Variety of attitudes towards human work

W. Furmanek⁴ classifies human attitudes to work describing them as “life orientations associated with understanding the importance of work and including work in the sense of human life”⁵. The awareness of human attitudes to work will allow better understanding and interpreting motives that drive us to particular socio-professional activities which then result in different ways of behaviour. Below, each of the attitudes has been briefly discussed⁶.

¹ H. Cudak, *Funkcje rodziny w pierwszych okresach rozwojowych dziecka*, Warszawa 2000; pp. 228, 229.

² W. Błażejowski, *Skuteczność wychowania do pracy i przez pracę*, [w:] Furmanek W. (red.), *Praca człowieka jako kategoria współczesnej pedagogiki*, Rzeszów – Warszawa 2007; pp. 169-176.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 173

⁴ W. Furmanek, *Zarys humanistycznej teorii pracy*, Warszawa 2006, pp. 167-178.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 169.

⁶ After: W. Furmanek, work cited, pp. 167-178.

Thus, human work might be:

1. **Necessity of life resulted from economic compulsion.** Work is treated then superficially, exclusively as a tool essential for obtaining necessary goods. The character, type and conditions of work are determined by economic reasons. Work does not have to be the source of satisfaction, and it is not connected with personal freedom. Such a type of orientation strikes at human dignity by limiting a human being to the role of machine.

2. **Human obligation** understood as an imperative for both an individual and a group member. The responsibility for accomplishing a job and performing occupational tasks in professional and solid way results from the above mentioned obligation. A sort of calculation of self-contribution to undertaken activities and predicting possible benefits are associated with such attitude. However, they are not the only motives behind the choice of profession. It is also essential to feel the sense of job performed, its purpose, working conditions and possibilities for making good use of one's abilities and professional qualifications.

3. **The opportunity to fulfil the need for personal identification and identity.** Work becomes a particular form of human activity that enables individuals to find their place in the world, and to identify with socio-professional role played in the society. Such a condition evokes the need for striving after perfection in the job, as well as constant improving qualifications and expanding competencies.

4. **The way and area of self-actualisation.** Such an attitude might be expressed in each human being's tendency to discover oneself at work, becoming aware of personal possibilities and strong points. Work appears to be the area of basic human activity. Therefore, it provides the possibility to fulfil individual plans, objectives and ambitions.

5. **A sign of social prestige.** Work determines particular position in the social hierarchy. While taking up different activities, it is essential to diversify them in terms of social and individual significance.

6. **A chance to create social bonds** and opportunity to meet the need for socialising. Human work is then the occasion to accomplish social duties; it confirms usefulness of human activities in contacts with other people.

7. **Creation of one's own life.** A person creates one's own socio-professional aspect of life. Thanks to expressing oneself in various dimensions: spiritual, intellectual and social, an individual may create one's own life with a sense of satisfaction.

The process of building a person's approach to human work has not been clearly defined. The value of these attitudes is affected by different, both internal and external, factors. The former results from the structure of personality of each pupil, while the latter seems to be the consequence of other people, groups and social environments' influence, as well as particular situations and the course of events. The role of teachers is here invaluable. However, teachers have to be properly prepared for their work in order to assist effectively in creating relevant attitudes among pupils. This can be achieved mainly during the process of professionalization whose basic principles have been reviewed below.

The process of professionalization among the students of Education

In the "Dictionary of Foreign Words PWN" (Polish: „Słownik wyrazów obcych PWN”)⁷ professionalization has been referred to as “the process of emerging new types of professions or specialisations in a particular field” or “the process of transforming a set of activities and abilities into a particular profession”. The second definition seems to be closer to the meaning of professionalization in the aspect of pedagogy where it is described as “the processes of learning, acquiring knowledge, developing skills which determine success in performing duties peculiar to a certain profession or specialisation”⁸.

The meaning of “professionalization” differs depending on a particular scientific discipline. And thus in psychology, “professionalization” means reducing the interests of an individual to professional activities only, accepting the range of self-judgement corresponding to the prestige of a job performed, as well as combining success in life with successful professional career. Whereas, sociology focuses on diversity of the population in terms of occupation, emerging and disappearing professions, as well as institutionalisation of individual interests in different professional groups. Seen from pedagogic aspect, as mentioned above, professionalization means achieving particular professional knowledge and skills, as well as developing motivation essential to perform any work⁹.

The process of professionalization might be connected to acting within a particular professional group, for example a group of teachers which is characterised by certain features typical of particular profession, its insularity, exclusiveness, even control kept by institutions and professional associations over the occupational activities performed by the members of a professional group. Individual perspective on professionalization indicates professional development of a person who acquires and then masters professional competences, as well as prepares for changing occupation¹⁰. Such an individual aspect of professionalization should be considered with reference to the students of Education.

In the process of professionalization among the students of Education, two main aspects might be distinguished, that is pro-social readiness which is expressed by efficient communication, assertive behaviour or abilities of creating appropriate conditions for cooperation, as well as job readiness which includes: 1) the needs and motivation for professional career; 2) the awareness of professional requirements and activities necessary to perform a certain job; 3) internalisation of the values of professional importance; 4) motivation to act and knowledge update, abilities and emotional characteristics¹¹.

Future teachers are extensively prepared for their work during the years of university studies when they acquire knowledge and skills necessary for successful professional career. University environment, especially academic teachers play a significant role in this process.

⁷ M. Bańka (red.), *Wielki słownik wyrazów obcych PWN*, Warszawa 2003, p. 1020.

⁸ K. Duraj-Nowakowa, *Nauczyciel: kultura – osoba – zawód*, Kielce 2000, p. 254.

⁹ B. Hajduk, *Socjalizacja studentów*, Warszawa 2003, pp. 296-298.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, s. 296.

¹¹ K. Duraj-Nowakowa, work cited, p. 257.

The quality of their activities may affect students' professional career, scientific research or social work. It is important to enhance positive attitude of students towards human work, to emphasize valuable motives behind the choice of occupation and support their pro-social behaviours, as well as individual qualities essential for self-actualisation in terms of professional career. Self-actualisation should be supported by the selection of suitable teaching contents, applying various methods, forms, teaching materials, and above all, organising one's own workspace so that it could become a model for future teachers, what unfortunately seems to be often neglected. Specificity of professionalization among the students of Education involves preparing them to perform significant professional tasks. Direct contacts of teachers with pupils, their professional performance, a broad range of knowledge, the quality of their work and attitude to occupational activities, as well as the level of professional identification may extensively create similar attitudes in pupils. Various attitudes of the respondents towards human work have been analysed below, as well as compared with the previous research findings.

Analysis of the research results

The research was conducted in two stages – the first in February, 2008¹², the second at the end of February and the beginning of March, 2010. The purpose of the research was to answer the question (main research problem): What sort of changes occurred in perceiving the significance of human work by the students of Education? It was assumed (main research hypothesis) that during the world economic crisis, and also thanks to permanently expanded knowledge, new attitudes, and skills acquired in the subsequent years of university education, significant changes occurred in perceiving the importance of human work by the students of different educational areas. The method of diagnostic survey¹³ was applied to collect research material by means of questionnaire form – the main research technique. The research tool – questionnaire form – included both open and closed questions.

Research sample was selected deliberately in both research phases. In the first stage 100 students were surveyed in their third years of university (full-time) studies in the field of *Education* and different areas (*Rehabilitation and Social Prevention, Childcare Education*) at the Jan Kochanowski University of Humanities and Sciences in Kielce as well as the Świętokrzyska Higher School in Kielce. Whereas, in the second stage 96 of 100 previously surveyed students were questioned.

¹² The analysis and interpretation of the research results of 2008 were published in: A. Przygoda, J. Sikora, *Znaczenie pracy ludzkiej w opiniach studentów kierunków pedagogicznych*, [in:] J. Pavlovkin i in. (red), *Technické vzdelávanie ako súčasť všeobecného vzdelávania*, Banská Bystrica 2008, pp. 152-157.

¹³ T. Pilch, T. Bauman, *Zasady badań pedagogicznych. Strategie ilościowe i jakościowe*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 79-84.

It should be noticed that due to limited space it is not possible to present, analyse and interpret the research material and results entirely. Therefore, only selected parts of the research (for the needs of this study) were analysed.

An open question featured in the questionnaire form required defining what human work means for each of the respondents. Table 1 contains the answers.

Table 1. Responses to Question 2: Specify what human work means for you

No.	Type of Response	Research Stage I		Research Stage II	
		Number of responses	%	Number of responses	%
1.	A way of earning money, the source of income	51	51	60	62,5
2.	Opportunity to demonstrate skills and develop new ones	10	10	19	19,8
3.	Chance for fulfilling professional ambitions	10	10	3	3,1
4.	Pleasure	5	5	9	9,4
5.	Obligation	3	3	2	2,1
6.	What creates opportunity to serve other people	1	1	3	3,1
7.	What gives you a sense of independence	1	1	2	2,1
8.	What creates opportunity for better, notable life	7	7	1	1
9.	Sense of life, professional fulfilment	11	11	20	21
10.	Making use of spare time	1	1	2	2,1
11.	Meeting other people	1	1	11	11,5
12.	No answer	3	3	0	0

The respondents, what is clearly visible in Table 1, explained what human work (in both research phases) means for them referring to its function (role) in each human life, including the respondents. More than a half of those polled (51%) in the first and even more (62,5%) in the second stage of the research considered human work as the source of income to be the most important since it gives the possibility of acquiring financial resources. The increasing importance of work as the source of income compared with the results of the first research seems to prove the assumption that in the years of the world economy crisis changes in perceiving human work occurred among the students of different educational areas. However, the respondents – 19 persons (almost 20%) – still highly value “the opportunity of demonstrating their own skills and developing new ones”. A significant number of the respondents – 20 persons – regard human work as their “sense of life, professional fulfilment” that is also proved by the increase in the value of work.

At the attempts of providing a new definition for the concept of human work, completely new categories appeared that were not recorded in the first stage of the research – human work as:

1. The source of personal satisfaction – 5 responses / 5,2%
2. The way of earning money for educational purposes – 2 responses / 2,1%

3. An escape from personal problems – 2 responses / 2,1%
4. A dream – 2 responses / 2,1%

The respondents confirmed the significance of acquiring financial resources thanks to work saying „yes” (in the first stage of the research) to the question whether they could do a job even if it would not bring them anything but financial resources (56 positive responses, 29 undecided, and only 6 definitely negative). However, during the second stage of the research, they were even more determined to do a job which brings only financial satisfaction – 64 respondents. There were no respondents convinced that they would certainly not be able to do such a job – Table 2.

Table 2. Responses to Question 3: Would you do a job that does not bring you pleasure or satisfaction, but gives the possibility of acquiring considerable financial resources?

No	Type of Response	Research Stage I		Research Stage II	
		Number of responses	%	Number of responses	%
1.	Yes, I would.	27	27	31	32,3
2.	I think, I would.	29	29	33	34,4
3.	Difficult to say.	25	25	20	21
4.	I think, wouldn't.	15	15	12	12,5
5.	Certainly not.	6	6	0	0

The respondents were also asked the closed question concerning the motives behind the choice of work. According to Table 3, the amount of salary plays significant role (for 50% of the respondents). However, it is not the only and most frequent reason why the respondents would take up a certain work. This refers to both phases of the research. The respondents more frequently (61% in the first stage and 66,7% in the second stage) were motivated by the opportunity of developing professional skills, and equally often by the chance of accomplishment their occupational plans (46% in the first stage and 50 % in the second stage). Those polled were also convinced that their work should serve others, what seems to be considerably associated with the specificity of their occupation – Table 3.

Table 3. Responses to Question 5: If you could choose from several job offers, what would influence your choice?

No	Type of Response	Research Stage I		Research Stage I	
		Number of responses	%	Number of responses	%
1.	Opportunity to develop professional skills	61	61	64	66,7
2.	Amount of salary	50	50	50	52,1
3.	Family and friends' opinion	9	9	12	12,5
4.	Belief that you would be able to fulfil your professional plans	46	46	48	50
5.	Possibility to work in a well-coordinated team	31	31	36	37,5
6.	Chance for quick promotion and considerable increase in salary	16	16	15	15,6
7.	Possibility of establishing contacts with people who perform important tasks – they have achieved high social and financial status	13	13	9	9,4
8.	Belief that my work can help others	44	44	52	54,2

Summary (conclusions and proposals)

The research findings considerably proved the conclusions formulated to summarise the first stage of the research. It is alarming that students' interest in possibility of taking up a job due to financial reasons only has not been changed. This may be explained by a certain economic necessity or the need to provide bases for decent life, but as W. Furmanek (work cited; p. 170) claims, people who decide to take up work only for short-term benefits, in the next years will be condemned to social exclusion and demotion. Based on the analysis of the research results, quite pessimistic yet biased image of different educational areas students emerges. It should be emphasised that the process of professionalization and concern for professional development seem to be important for the respondents. They want to develop their skills and abilities, find fulfilment in professional career, and what is the most important – serve others by their work. Therefore, consumerist and pragmatic approach to human work seems to depreciate against the attitude which shows work as vocation and mission to carry out. It is essential to address a proposal to the academic environment, which is particularly tasked with preparing students for educational work, to support such attitudes and to spare no effort to make them dominant life orientations among students of various educational areas.

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