

# Maria F. Szymańska

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## Teacher knowledge application in a child's moral development : the selected aspects

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**Maria F. Szymańska**

Academy of Humanities after A. Gieysztor's name

## **Teacher Knowledge Application in a Child's Moral Development. The Selected Aspects**

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### **Introduction**

The aim of the article is to show the significance of a teacher's knowledge in supporting a child's moral development. The contents of this article is oriented towards raising teachers' awareness while organizing and managing the educational process, which requires the skills of selecting morally valuable material for children to learn. It requires a mature approach rooted in moral judgment that determines the quality of teachers' practice, and is aligned with the process of reflection formation, openness to become a moral reflective practitioner, which elicits a challenge to disclose its own moral self-identity when performing tasks belonging to a particular subject area. Reflection, here, should indicate the importance of responsibility while organizing and realizing that early childhood education has a tremendous impact on both the quality of further educational stages, and children's motivation to work.

When discussing the aforementioned subject, it is necessary to focus on the following aspects: moral development, moral autonomy, moral imagination, teacher knowledge, content knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, reflective practice. They are going to be aligned in the context of supporting the children's moral development determined by teachers who perform roles as moral models for them. Finally, an analysis of the material using the hermeneutic method will lead to some implications that can be useful when arranging pedagogical and didactic work with children.

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### Teachers' roles as moral models in children's moral development

When defining pedagogy as an art comprising both theoretical and practical dimensions, one should refer this term to the personal and social context being in constant mutual interaction. Pedagogy with its anthropological, axiological and philosophical background belongs not only to the formal sciences, but to those that are informal as well. Its deductive and inductive character elicits reflection upon the contents to be taught and learned through a transformation process going from moral heteronomy to autonomy, which is reflected in building both teachers and pupils' moral attitudes. Moral autonomy is connected with the person's skills of creating social interactions based on mutual respect between people, equality, and justice. Teachers possessing their own autonomous system and hierarchy of values, moral principles, should behave morally, being open and ready to recognize consciously their self-sense of moral duty and willingness to fulfill moral standards (Gałkowski, 2003, p. 114). It especially refers to working with children, as teachers' moral development has an impact on children's moral development. Moral development means developing in a way in which (Szymańska, 2013, pp. 219–221) a person develops "in such a way that each moral state in turn becomes more perfect than the former one" (Kunowski, 2000, p. 182). The maturity of the complete state requires moral autonomy.

In this context, the morality of teachers performs a significant role when it comes to conducting the educational process. That is why, discussing issues of teachers' knowledge requires some form of reference to the moral field. Then, after specifying its components we are able to see the quality of teachers' influence on pupils' moral development, particularly that teachers are regarded as moral models by young students. Being conscious of this fact obliges teachers to care about their own moral development work that should be transferred into the pedagogic and didactic fields showing the components of teachers' knowledge; this is what is going to be presented below.

Thus, teachers who are expected to be moral models for children, ought to behave in a virtuous way. The following virtues can be enumer-

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ated: honesty, trust, fairness and responsibility. Such values are very precious for the pupils. "Teachers display honesty by telling the truth and acting in an honorable way (...); honesty includes fulfilling promises and commitments, such as maintaining the confidentiality of student records. Honesty also includes not lying, cheating or stealing as teachers fulfill their professional responsibilities" (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 47).

There are many occasions every day to teach pupils honesty. Making them conscious that, for example, copying another pupil's paper is dishonest, or that an attempt to conceal the fact that a pupil's hand has touched the ball during a football match is also dishonest, fosters their honesty attitudes. Moreover, eliciting and emphasizing the meaning of virtue "honesty" while analyzing and interpreting the approaches of the main characters in fairy tales can be useful as well. Teachers possessing the axiological knowledge are able to explain professionally what honesty is. Being honest to students becomes the "personal source" of this virtue. Honest teachers build trust and become trustworthy at the same time. One must know that "the emergence of mutual trust is a vanguard of education. Trust replaces apprehension or fear with confidence and openness. When students trust their teachers, an inevitable mistake is transformed from being a fear of failure into an opportunity to learn" (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 47). Particularly, young children need to trust their teachers who perform the role of moral models for them. Trust helps to create a warm pedagogic atmosphere (Szymańska, 2013, p. 18–20) influencing positively the trajectory of educational process. Feeling safe, children can sincerely open their hearts and minds during various activities designed for them. Trust also releases their creative potentiality connected with the propensities for compassion and appreciation of others, which influences moral development. According to Narvaez, "three general ethical motivations arise from neurobiological substrates of human evolution and are influenced by early experience: Security, Engagement and Imagination" (Narvaez, Lapsley, 2009, p. 262) and these shape moral life. These propensities and substrates appear to be crucial when discussing the process of moral development. Teachers cannot neglect moral knowledge when planning and realizing the pedagogic and subject content within the school curriculum. They are

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obliged morally to make some interventions which "should include the full range of moral skill development, from moral perception and sensitivity to moral action skills" (Narvaez, Lapsley, 2009, p. 265). V. Guroian states: "only a pedagogy that awakens and enlivens the moral imagination will persuade the child or the student that courage is the ultimate test for good character, that honesty is essential for trust and harmony among persons, and that humility and a magnanimous spirit are goods greater than the prizes won by selfishness, pride, or the unscrupulous exercise of position and power" (Guroian, 1996, p. 6). Thus, teachers should pay greater attention to shaping children's moral imagination; this can be described as a dynamic and active process employing metaphors of their own experience image (Guroian, 1996, p. 6). A responsible choice of literature for working with children; their competent analyses and interpretation of contents conducted in an appropriate, professional way, enriched by their own positive experience image, can be particularly fruitful. "Fairy tales and fantasy stories transport the reader into other worlds that are fresh with wonder, surprise, and danger. They challenge the reader to make sense out of those other worlds, to navigate his way through them, and to imagine himself in the place of the heroes and heroines who populate those worlds" (Guroian, 1996, p. 7). It may be worth mentioning that many present tendencies in culture try to "sell" rubbish naming it valuable, original. The word "rubbish" refers to many popularly launched products: for example, ugly toys, violent games, stories, fairy tales, or films full of expressive, sophisticated, brutal, even immoral (deeply concealed) and caricature contents, often illustrated in a very simple, colourful, thoughtless way, which do not inspire moral curiosity. All these things are coded in children's minds. Furthermore, the language is often very poor, short of quality metaphors, which results in difficulties that children may have while describing and analyzing the events in a given context. Therefore, such products are supposed to affect children's perception and imagination which are very active and dynamic. This becomes worse when parents do not have the knowledge of the potential negative consequences when buying the products their children want to have. V. Guroian writes: "Our society is failing to cultivate the moral imagination in part at least because very often the stories we live by – the

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stories we read ourselves or read to our children, the stories we watch on television or at the movies – are not stories that grow the moral imagination, but stories that crowd it out” (Guroian, 2005, p. 34). Many people naively see virtues in them, while these products have nothing in common with them. Teachers who should be moral experts in this area often get lost because they do not possess effective knowledge in this regard. They may not have an idea that some forms and ways of raising imagination are not educational. It is important to mention that we can distinguish different forms of imagination such as: the idyllic – utopian, idolatrous, diabolic and enriched – which can stimulate moral attitudes to life (Guroian, 2005, pp. 39–45). Teachers, if they are honest with their students, cannot avoid showing the truth hidden in the pieces of literature which are being discussed in the lesson, for they are trusted.

Trust “is most effectively taught when it is lived. When students trust their teachers, they do not worry about being embarrassed during class, since they know that misbehaviour will be addressed individually and privately. Trust is natural when students turn to their teachers because they feel they will be listened to, when they are struggling with interpersonal relationships, academic issues, or personal problems” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 47). Children need to be attentively listened to, especially when teachers teach them listening skills that can be applied in communication with others. It seems that the use of this skill is very complicated nowadays. Easy access to many non-limited moral sources of information can bring chaos when making the appropriate choice, decisions affecting clarity, logic, and dialectic of thinking which afflicts the moral communication process. Pupils are exposed to a pervasive moral relativism. If they trust teachers, they seek their help when discussing matters that worry them. When discussing these issues, teachers “should emphasize the importance of exercising self-control and restraint when challenged and responding appropriately” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 47), showing their own limitations and humility, which is fair. Even if pupils treat them as moral models, teachers who are aware of this fact, will admit that they are not the only source of wisdom. Fairness displayed in such a way induces feelings of justice, respect and responsibility. Fairness makes teachers demon-

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strate respect for all people, regardless of their origins, gender, race, social status, or individuality.

Honesty, fairness, sensitivity, compassion, care of students are built on a good personal relationships based on respect and openness. Respect encourages respect from others. "Real respect requires that teachers care for those students toward whom they might not have a positive feeling. Teachers who model respect will always appreciate each individual student, even when the behavior of some may be less than worthy of this respect" (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 48). Respect recognizes the dignity of a person, and self – moral identity, possessed by someone "when moral categories are essential, central, and important to one's self-understanding" (Narvaez, Lapsley, 2009, p. 246).

Teachers have a variety of tools for fostering the process of interiorizing the values mentioned above, in order that dignity can appear as the fundamental virtue to be emphasized in any educational undertakings. To do it appropriately, they are obliged to "demonstrate responsibility by being morally accountable for their action and fulfilling their duties" (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 48). Responsibility belongs to vital virtues of moral character, as well. K. Ostrowska presents some dispositions of responsibility. She defines them accordingly: "I have dispositions of influencing the surrounding reality; I am a member of a community; I am the maker, creator of events; the external criteria for our own activities assessment is accepted; I should be prepared to take responsibility for the activity results; motivation and willingness have an impact on reality and its shape; motivation and willingness to develop the capacity of getting to know our own possibilities and means that will lead to the goal" (Ostrowska, 1998, p. 25). Being responsible indicates a mature approach to self, others, the world, and to God. Being responsible means a readiness to bear the consequences of the results of our own actions which affect not only our own life perspective but others as well. Thus, being responsible is tightly linked with reasoning, sensibility and wisdom.

A readiness to take responsibility for the results of our own actions, to bear the consequences, to change the way of doing things, shows the quality of critical thinking in action. D.T. Willingham states: "Critical think-

ing is not a set of skills that can be deployed at any time, in any context. It is a type of thought that even 3-year olds can engage in – and even a trained scientist can fail in. And it is very much dependent on domain knowledge and practice” (Willingham, 2007, p. 10). Teachers showing critical thinking behave like researchers and historians. They constantly desire to broaden and deepen the constructive knowledge of pedagogy, subject content knowledge tied up together in teachers’ knowledge. This enhances reflection upon our own specific work style, and raises the question – *How to become a reflective practitioner transferring the fruits of own reflective knowledgeable practice into building children’s reflective responsibility?* M. Carter, W. Cividanes, D. Curtis, D. Lebo claim that a reflective teacher „examines his or her reactions to children or their action to understand their source; is curious about children’s play and watches it closely; documents details of children’s conversation and activities; takes time to study notes and photos to work out what is significant; eagerly shares stories about children’s learning with families and co-workers; asks co-workers and children’s families for their insights; reads professional literature to learn more; shows children photos and stories of themselves to hear their views; changes the environment and materials to encourage new play and learning possibilities” (Carter, Cividanes, Curtis, Lebo, 2010, p. 1). Teachers as reflective practitioners assist students – learners in their process of building reflective attitudes to life, rooted in moral virtues. This assistance must be real, true, subtle, delicate, not self-imposing, although very concrete and visible when the educational situation requires it, when the pupils’ safety is at risk (Szymańska, 2013, pp. 14–17). Such a pedagogic readiness fosters the children’s process of moral, autonomous development, for which teachers are also responsible.

### **Categories of knowledge a teacher is supposed to possess**

Children – young learners and teachers, performing their own roles, participate jointly in organized educational activities directed at concrete practical tasks. J. Cogill claims: “Practice may be affected, for example by

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the school environment, a teacher's position in the school, previous teaching experience, teacher training and a teacher's own experience of learning (...). Meanwhile, there is a consensus from those working in the field that "teacher knowledge' is fundamental to pedagogy" (Cogill, 2008, p. 1). To depict the meaning of pedagogic content knowledge it is necessary to mention seven categories of knowledge: content knowledge, general pedagogic knowledge, pedagogic content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, knowledge of learners, educational contexts, and educational ends, purposes, and values (Shulman, 1987, pp. 61–77). Teacher pedagogic content knowledge seems to be crucial in building moral character, moral imagination, and moral development. That is why some of its components need to be presented below.

Content knowledge covers all substantive domains that teachers teach in a didactic approach. This kind of knowledge obliges them to choose appropriate materials, books, devices, methods, techniques, and strategies to produce positive effects in learners (McNamara, 1991, pp. 113–127). This makes teachers search new areas of deepening, widening, and updating subjects' references. They become scientific explorers of a newly discovered land inhabited by their students. Teachers who possess a wider knowledge, embracing the moral development domain, have the chance to teach in a more interesting, dynamic way; they show the content knowledge from a different perspective and a meta-side point of view inducing meta-cognitive analysis of teachable aspects designated for their pupils at the appropriate age. They become more objective showing critical and divergent ways of thinking with reference to the topic taught by them. The subject content knowledge helps teachers to arrange, in an adequate developmental way, their professional interests. It also helps them to resolve moral dilemmas if they appear during their interactions with students. Teachers who have an awareness of the fact that each choice is somehow biased and subjective, try to be objective when students' moral goodness is considered. As mentioned above, what appears to be crucial in this respect is responsibility.

An additional positive influence on learning effects is the amount of relevant knowledge to that of the content that teachers possess. Under-

standing the problem to be solved from different perspectives helps them find the key to children's minds and their hearts, awaking their moral imagination in searching for the true beauty in the activities that they plan to undertake.

Another form of knowledge – that which is pedagogic – constitutes what is generally understood to be teacher knowledge as well. There are some attempts to define it. Shulman treats it as “the broad principles and strategies of classroom management and organization that appear to transcend subject matter” (Cogill, 2008, p. 2). This indicates the meaning of a teacher's personal talent, which can be described as a scheme of virtues that are combined as follows: mature creativity; ability to control and discipline students in the classroom; clear, resourceful, and a didactic way of subject fulfilment; skills motivating students to work and good behavior; support and help; ability to build good relations with other teachers, students and their environment; and creating a positive atmosphere of trust, safety, engagement and sincerity. Thus, teachers' talents impact children's abilities to fully exploit their talents and their moral development. It should be remembered that there are “four dominant models of learners' minds that need to be understood: children as initiative learners, children as learning from didactic exposure, viewing children as thinkers and children as managers of their own knowledge” (Cogill, 2008, p. 2). This should foster a trajectory of didactic and pedagogical process aligned with possessing pedagogical content knowledge. It indicates that teachers' responsibility must be considered in terms of being treated as models of virtues by their students.

The awareness of who the teachers are, leads to a deeper, reflective understanding of the fact that, since they perform an “influential role in the lives of young people, the public still expects teachers to display behaviors reflective of moral virtues, such as fairness and honesty, and adhere to professional codes of conduct (...); school and teachers should educate for character, especially through teaching respect and responsibility. As teachers interact with students, it is vital for them to serve as role models of character by making professional judgments and decisions based on society and moral virtues” (Lumpkin, 2008, p. 45). This re-

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quires hard work to achieve the moral development of self – integrity that shows moral character. Moral character is revealed in the act of undertaking variable tasks in variable circumstances. Forthrightly, it reflects a person's morality as the result of their integrity tailored with self-identity. A person "who has a moral character or identity, is one for whom moral constructs are chronically (moral chronicity), where accessibility and availability are dimensions of individual differences" (Narvaez, Lapsley, 2009, p. 246). Teachers as moral persons with professional competences must pay attention to possessing a high level of pedagogic knowledge content which enables them to predict and build a perspective for their school undertakings. Shulman indicates that "Pedagogical content knowledge identifies the distinctive bodies of knowledge for teaching. It represents the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organized, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction" (Shulman, 1987, p. 4). This demands creative skills from teachers who should teach creatively and for creativity. Teaching creatively determines the quality of the educational effects reflected in the trajectory of an integrated, creative development process that comprises biological, psychological, sociological, cultural and spiritual alignment. The creative aspect of personal development includes: "imagination; originality (the ability to come up with ideas and products that are new and unusual; productivity (the ability to generate a variety of different ideas through divergent thinking); problem solving (application of knowledge and imagination to a given situation); the ability to produce an outcome of value and worth" (Sharp, 2004, p. 5).

To achieve harmony and integrity it is necessary to design professionally the process of an integrated upbringing that supports and enhances pupils in the realization of their potentiality (Chalas, 2007, p. 11) to enable them to form better personal relationships with others, society, the world, based on freedom and responsibility (Gadacz, 2005, p. 219).

The next important component of teacher knowledge is curriculum knowledge. "Curriculum knowledge is knowledge of what should be taught to a particular group of pupils. It requires an understanding of

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children's learning potential, national syllabuses, school planning documents and year group plans. In addition, any examination or testing syllabuses must be taken into account and any local or contextual requirements considered" (Cogill, 2008, p. 4). In this way, curriculum knowledge has the chance to be implemented successfully into practice. Furthermore, it directs teachers' targets to raise their qualifications areas comprising of reflection and practice. To be a reflective practitioner it is necessary to have the skills of a reflective practitioner. There are five principal skills such as: "being, speaking, disclosing, testing, and probing" (Reaelin, 2002, p.69) settled in moral virtues.

The skill "being" is reflected in building an educational and reflective climate through the provision of realistic expectations, tolerance, attentive listening and engaged responses. Its components are: "inviting questions and comments, considering one's positions as hypotheses to be tested, acknowledging expressions of vulnerability by others" (Reaelin, 2002, p.72). Such a climate helps both teachers and students externalize their thoughts whilst feeling secure. The skill "speaking" displays: a logical sense and quality of language to express their own thoughts, "articulate voice from within ourselves. In speaking, we attempt to characterize the state of the group or its meaning at a given time" (Reaelin, 2002, p.73) while discussing issues. It shows respect for every speaker, an equal opportunity to use the time devoted to discussing matters, sticking to problems, avoiding garrulousness, and developing reflective negotiation. The skill "disclosing" is depicted in the externalization of one's own point of view, trying to make it transparent to others, in accordance with the following statement: "As people disclose more about themselves, the group learns more about its membership" (Reaelin, 2002, p. 73). The skill "testing" "is an open-ended query directed toward the group as a whole that attempts to uncover new ways of thinking and behaving (...). In testing, we are trying to promote a process of collective inquiry" (Reaelin, 2002, p. 73). A testing skill requires courage, and, at the same time, humility in openness which is opposite to argumentation. The skill "probing" indicates the importance of conducting one's own mature insight dialogue with ourselves that results in a reflective, patient, understanding attitude

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to others. It needs to be explored in a state of meditation, "being engaged in relations with others" (Reaelin, 2002, p. 71). Such a relationship discloses the state of commitment, trust, balanced affirmation and investigation, secure judgment based on careful observation, pause and reflection, shared paralleled thinking, attaining more freed-up roles (Reaelin, 2002, p. 72). These roles reveal the need for constant moral development in order to find self-identity integrated with society.

Having the reflective skills supports the moral development of all educational subjects which, in a peculiar, individual way, try to disclose the deeper sense of substance of our own vocation. Teachers' knowledge comprising the components mentioned above, reflected in practice, and the true moral approaches, can be treated as the key factors in our own way of attempting this.

### **Conclusion**

Analyses of the aspects comprising teachers' moral formation with reference to children's moral education, which elicits the process of awakening their moral positive imagination, shows the necessity of carrying out scientific research within the theme undertaken above. Presenting these issues, while treating pedagogy as a theoretical and a practical art, personal moral autonomy, the teacher's role as a moral model for children in the context of values, such as honesty, fairness, responsibility, trust, seem very important, especially for early child education. It should induce reflection upon the teachers' workshop arrangement. Teachers cannot be indifferent to the material content to be taught and learned, the methodological tools, etc. Teacher knowledge should be understood reflectively, critically in the light of moral pedagogy, as it always affects the attitudes to self, others, the world and God. Deepening and broadening its meaning leads to their reflective skills application. The skills of being, speaking (discussing), disclosing, probing and testing, when ethically implemented in a pedagogic and didactic way, foster the integration process trajectory. This must be reflected in practice with a high degree of attention to the children's moral imagination, which is formed, espe-

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cially, in contact with the teacher's personality and the sources of knowledge applied by them. The formation of personality cannot develop properly without creativity in the process of moral development.

To conclude, moral reflective awareness in teachers' approaches to their professional, subject, and pedagogic content knowledge appears to be very precious, as it may support the quality of children's moral development that is going to shape the morality of future generations. Thus, the following research questions need to be addressed: *What do teachers know about moral shape of teachers' knowledge components? Does the teachers' knowledge of moral pedagogy find its implementation in their didactic practice? To what extent does it take place? How do teachers document the process of their continuing professional development grounded in moral reflective practice? What do teachers do to foster children's moral imagination? What moral criteria are used by teachers for selecting teachable materials?* The aspects shown above can help scientists pose such research problems, which can then be investigated. Their results might be used for halting the relativist stream hidden under the surface of contemporary needs in the range of moral development interpretations.

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### **Abstract**

The article aims at deepening teachers' responsibility and raising their awareness while organizing and managing the educational process, covering the reflective skills whose quality is reflected in teachers' moral approaches. Morality performs a significant role when it comes to conducting the educational process. That is why discussion of issues of teachers' knowledge seems to be important. Specifying its components means that we can see teachers' influence on pupils' moral development, particularly when teachers are regarded as moral models by young students. Being conscious of this fact obliges teachers to perform self-moral developmental work which is then transferred into the pedagogic and didactic fields. The components of teachers' knowledge understood in a perspective of creative, effective, reflective and practical implementation become meaningful.

**Keywords:** moral development, moral imagination, moral model, reflection, reflective skills, teacher knowledge, content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum knowledge.

### **Information about the author:**

**Maria F. Szymańska**, Associate Professor in pedagogy, a former English teacher, one of the founding teachers of the John Bosco Salesian Secondary School in Legionowo (nearby Warsaw); performed functions: Vice-Dean, Head of Elementary Education Unit, Coordinator of Environment Consultancy Board, a supportive member of Pedagogy Faculty Education Quality Committee Board at the A. Gieysztor Academy of Humanities, a member of the Academic Senate, a member of the Library Board, a secretary of *Artes Liberas* Journal at the A. Gieysztor Academy of Humanities, an initiator and founding member of Competition and Other Creative Initiatives Team, an organizer of foreign language

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competitions in literature for secondary school students; an initiator, one of the founding members, Vice-President, then, President of the Scientific Society Educare, a member of Intercultural Section and Program Board of Educare; a member of international organization BBCC; a member of Christian Pedagogy Team PAN at KUL; an organizer of many conferences, seminars, an author of many articles, reviews within pedagogy and axiology dealing with integrated and upbringing aspects; cooperated with John Paul II's Institute in Warsaw, UKSW, NKJOUW, and other higher education institutions; cooperated with such institutions as: Mazovian Self-Government Centre for Teachers' Development, County Supportive Team Units for Fighting Violence in Piastów; now – an Associate Professor at Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow. Interests: creative art in pedagogy, processes of students' and teachers' educational development, axiology, philosophy, Polish and English literature.

Contact address:

Maria Szymańska

Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow

ul. Kopernika 26

31-501 Kraków

e-mail: [mariaszymanska59@gmail.com](mailto:mariaszymanska59@gmail.com)