

Barbara Lulek

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BARBARA LULEK

On the Domination of Transmission Approach and the Lack of Transaction – Parents in Municipal Primary Schools

Doktor, University of Rzeszów, Department of General Pedagogy and Methodology, Poland

Abstract

The scientific purpose of the study is to present results of researches devoted to relations between parents and teachers in municipal primary schools, in categories of a wider description of mutual connections of the aforementioned entities. The article consists of three main elements. The first one refers to the source literature and based on it outlines the surface for own researches. The second one refers to the presentation of methodological assumptions of the conducted research procedure. The third one includes an analysis of the collected research material. The presented research material allows to notice a peculiar bipolarity in relations between parents and teachers in municipal primary schools, covering transmission and transaction social relations, characterized by subjectification or objectification of parents by teachers or other school employees. In the municipal primary schools which participated in the research, parents indicate dominant objectification, based on information transmission from the teacher towards the parents, lacking a dialogue and deeper transactions with teachers of their own children, as the basic element of interpersonal relationships. Parents inform about a discrepancy between the horizon of their expectations and the surface of experiences, which facilitates the popularization of the transmission perspective, illustrating objectifications between teachers and parents.

Keywords: parents, education, parents subjectification, transaction, transmission

Introduction

Social changes happening in the last decades, characterized by a significant dynamics, pace and the scope of influence, in a special way refer to two basic educational environments – the family and school. They cause numerous transformations within these environments referring to the way of functioning of members as well as students, teachers and parents communities functioning in the area of educational institutions. The result of transformations taking place in family life is, inter alia, immaturity of individuals to get married and perform parental roles, the lack of integrity in parents' educational influences towards children, created on the grounds of differences as far as aspirations are concerned and the system of values, the increasing consumer lifestyle of the family, weakening the spiritual aspect of spouses existence, liberalisation of sexual behaviours, difficulties experienced by adult members of the family in finding

a job on a dynamically developing job market (Lulek, 2014b, p. 23–26). Worrying transformations concerning a gradual weakening of interpersonal contacts of families living on a common area should be also noticed, individuals closing themselves in small family groups, not always full ones and often undergoing disintegration, anonymity in collective life (Lulek, 2016, p. 465). In many environments there is a lack of a wider family participation in the life of local community.

Significant changes are also observed at school. They reveal in two basis spheres. On one hand, they cover teachers' concentration on the results of the didactic process, easily checked and allowing to evaluate the work of pedagogues in the category of efficiency and progress. The teacher changes into a master, instructor, who is a specialist in transmitting the curriculum content. Introducing into the world of values, developing student's attitudes is replaced in many schools by measuring educational results (Łukasiewicz-Wieleba, 2014, p. 16). On the other hand, there is a transformation in the relations of teachers, parents and students, more and more often based on educational partnership, the idea of school democratization (Śliwerski, 2013, p. 120) is being implemented.

Transformations occurring in the aforementioned environments do not always co-occur with each other, which may lead to numerous contradictions connected with inadequacy of the manner of behaviour based on schemes, with new solutions resulting from transformations (Sztompka, 2002, p. 278). Asynchronicity of parents' and teachers' activities is visible not only in the field of bearing responsibility for a child and his/her education, but also for the broad understanding of the educational system. Parents often keep a distance from activities, in which they do not feel to be professionals, including the involvement in the child's educational process, providing help and support for a child with educational difficulties, intervening in situations of dangers as well as participating in the works of parental organizations. Whereas teachers' expectations towards parents are very often connected with the didactic-educational sphere of student's functioning and undertaking the role of community leaders by them. The lack of clear and simultaneous actions of the listed individuals leads to a discrepancy between the horizon of expectations and the sphere of experiences (Rutkowiak, 2016, p. 82), which encourages a transmission perspective, illustrating objective relations of teachers and parents. Transactional perspective, based on subjectivity is treated as illusory in many schools (Dróżka, 2010, p. 23–48).

Transmission or transaction? In searching for a perspective of parents' „co-existence” at school

A look at parents and teachers' relations at school in the category of transmission and transaction has been distinguished due to the criterion of the type of relations. The author has adopted the position presented in literature by

Niemierko (2013, p. 29–30), Kluz-Stańska (2002) for the purposes of her own research, recognizing that the transmission model of the teacher-student relation has been in many schools transferred to the relations between pedagogues and parents. Transmission relations are based on historically established subordination of parents towards teachers, thus they stress a specific school-centrism, in which as customary parents should respect teacher's recommendations and act according to the knowledge passed by the teacher in matters concerning the child. This is a specific type of functioning next to each other, based on the division of competencies and responsibilities, in which the child's guardians are placed in a family space, standing by the child, or they are informed and supervised by pedagogues (Lulek, 2014a, p. 167–168). In such an approach to parenthood, the presence at school is externally directed and controlled by teachers. Parents have got a severely restricted area of their own proactivity and decisiveness, which most often applies to parents functioning as passive teacher's assistants, less competent educators of their own child, performing top-down instructions which have been set up. The possibility of experiencing by the parents an authentic influence on the solutions used in child's education at school is often limited to giving opinions on proposed undertakings, getting involved in the works being realized. Such a situation generates typicality and agency of solutions, based on the rhetoric rich in obligations, orders, compulsion, necessity, duty, frequently listed in details. This is a mechanical reproduction of accepted ways of acting. There is a lack of patience, consideration, responsibility for undertaken actions and reflection. In the place of shortages these is mainly subordination and obedience, which is a reflection of objective social relations. In such a perspective, parents perceive their own presence in their child's educational process, by means of criteria assigned to roles, aims being in compliance with obligations and actions resulting from them (Obuchowski, 2000, p. 11–12).

Transactional relations are based on continuous confirmation of one's own agency and decisiveness by parents on the school territory. It means parents and teachers being together and also for each other in the area of mutual education. Parents develop themselves as well as they are developed, they support and co-decide about the education of their own child (Lulek, 2014a, p. 170) inscribing into the authenticity of a situation and specific recognition. Parents, keeping their own autonomy, learn individually or collectively – as a community and between generations (Mendel, 2016, p. 61). It is reflected in the way of formulating questions, defining actions, building a pedagogical dialogue. It creates an area for subjective relations, in which parents decide about their own manner of behaviour, they implement their own intentions in relations with teachers, and the school becomes an action place for the benefit of the community of parents, students and teachers. Communal relations based on ties and identification allow

to define horizons of one's own action as well as areas of objections (Kołodźna, Kołodziej, Waligóra, 2011, p. 23–25).

In such a theoretical context which has been outlined, it also needs to be underlined, that in spite of the obvious oppositionality of the discussed suggestions, they constitute complementary solutions. An extreme preference of parents' subjectivity and transactionality meaning authorship may endlessly generate numerous difficulties at school, leading to home-centrism. Moreover, excessive concentration on transmission and objectiveness, referring to the imprinted way of deciding for parents, it time it results in indifference, resistance, sometimes fighting. Thus, this is to decide upon the common areas of mutual penetration of transmissionality and transactionality for the child's best interest.

The concept of the research

Adhering to the above rationales the author of the study undertook a re-research in the years 2014–2016, which purpose was to make a description of the relation between parents and teachers in primary schools. Answers for research questions were searched for, that is: How do parents of primary school students describe their own relations with teachers? What kind of aims do parents of primary schools students realize while getting in touch with their children's parents? How do parents of primary school children describe school as a place of relations with teachers? Such research issues have been realized within an individual research grant. The total number of 1200 parents was covered by the research, including 150 parents comprising parents' councils and 200 teachers. The researches were conducted in randomly selected primary schools in Rzeszów, including Prymas Tysiąclecia Primary School no. 25 at S. Starzyński street 17, Primary School no. 10 situated at ulicy Dominikańska street 4, Adam Mickiewicz Primary School no. 1 situated at Bernardyńska 4 and Primary School no. 22 situated at Ptasia 2. The following research techniques were used: a questionnaire, interview, documents analysis and observation of mutual actions of parents and teachers. In order to deepen gained results of the researches, the author of the study made interviews with 52 parents. This group of parents was comprised of representatives of parents' communities of each class of students learning in the aforementioned institutions. In the foregoing study, the author will present selected narrations illustrating relations between parents and teachers, in the categories of connections of a transmissional or transactional nature.

The group of parents, who the interview was conducted with, included mainly women – 45 persons. These are highly educated persons – 38 of the respondents have completed higher education studies, 6 of them have completed secondary schools, 8 persons underwent vocational training. The majority of them are of the age of 30–40 (31 persons).

Between transmission and transaction – parents in municipal primary schools

At the moment of beginning school education by a child, parents and teachers interact with each other. Mutual relations can be of various natures. Sometimes they cover relatively short-lasting actions connected with providing help to each other, overcoming difficulties and obstacles. Another time they comprise a more specific action, realized systematically based on the division of tasks. It happens that they are joined together by means of sharing the equivalent of a position held and the same level of participation in undertaken decisions. Unfortunately, they quite frequently rely on competition, they are characterized by indifference, resistance and even an open conflict. The relations between parents and children can be therefore described in two ways. Firstly, through the prism of people being with each other, who describe their position towards one another in categories of agency, equivalency, occurring transactions establishing subjective relations based on a dialogue, which serve transformation and improvement of the educational process of their own children. Secondly, in the area of controlling, supervising, dominating of one side in the co-existence process. This is a subordination of the parents' community to teachers as dominant experts, who prefer an object-based approach towards social relations.

Referring to the above rationales during the interview a reference was made to issues connected with the presentation of parents' own relations with teachers at school. Empirical data, which were achieved, underwent categorization using the position presented above in this respect. On this basis the collected narrations – 38 synthetic utterances and 14 extended ones, were matched to two categories, which have been included in the table below.

The collected research material has been matched to three categories: the description of one's own parenthood at school, in fact the way of its realization, aims of parental actions at school as well as school as the place of parent's activity. Narrations have been also divided into two groups: responses referring to the description of transmission and transaction relations.

Even a superficial data analysis indicates that a bigger group of parents – 43 people, while characterizing their own relations with teachers, perceive themselves as being responsible for the assigned tasks, performers of experts' instructions, petitioners trying to make their child succeed. Respondents while making attempts to define their parenthood in their child's educational process, mainly refer to norms and expectations concerning their behaviour at school. They define their own activity in the institutions in the category of the performed social role and duties resulting from it. Therefore, there is the following parent's remark: *“For me being a parent at school means to guarantee the child has got aids, books, is prepared for classes, “looked after”, “my parenthood means supporting my child in learning at home, making sure he arrives at school on time, providing necessary aids, providing breakfast”, “I focus on my duties towards the child. He/she has got everything that is necessary, I also get in touch with teachers if there is*

a need". The respondents' opinions illustrate constant and typical behaviours connected with parenthood at school. It is difficult to find here formulations informing about an atmosphere in which parenthood is realized in the institution, in categories of being needed appreciated, welcomed. Responds' narration reveals specific actions connected first of all with child's physical development, particularly the right nutrition, care activities, or taking into consideration teacher's recommendations. Parental definitions do not refer to the development of child's abilities and interests at school, developing their relations with peers, or introducing to culture.

Table 1. Types relations between parents and children on the premises of primary school

| Categories of responses | Transmission relations, based on object-based treatment of parents – the total of 43 narrations | Transaction relations, based on a subjective treatment of parents – the total of 9 narrations. |
|--|---|--|
| „Me” as a parent at school | I concentrate on my duties towards the child, I fulfil child's needs, I make sure my child is not hungry, is appropriately dressed and I motivate him/her to work at school, I try to be a good mother and appropriately organize the satisfaction of my child's needs, I take into account teacher's comments and needs referring to my child, | I am in a constant contact with the child, I talk to him/her, Parenthood at school means a conversation with the child, his/her friends and teachers. I help the child and I seek better solutions, I organize myself and I constantly improve my actions as a parent, I develop myself to be able to work with the child better and I constantly improve my relations with teachers, |
| Objectives of parents' action at school | I organize, in fact I participate in events and celebrations planned and realized at school for children, I participate in open classes, I prepare, together with others, picnics, in fact the provision of food during such a party, I inform teachers about what is going on with the child, about past illnesses, difficulties, conflicts, I talk to teachers about the child, his/her progress, this is what I often look forward to, I participate in the works of the Teachers' Council, I do homework with the child, I support the child in difficulties, | For me the child is the most important, therefore I am prepared for a conversation with the teacher. Unfortunately, the teacher does not always want to talk to me, I have got many reflections on this what is happening at school and I am prepared to inform the teacher about it, I get involved at school. To make students' learning a pleasure. And I talk to the teacher on all the subjects, even the difficult ones. |
| School as a place of action | I participate in meetings, consultations, I subordinate to the guidelines provided by the school and teachers, I participate in the meetings of the Parents' Council, providing opinions for internal documents – the prophylactic and educational program, I prepare refreshments for children on Children's Day, Grandmother's Day, I prepare prizes for children together with other parents, I help the teacher in the realization of performances, trips, visits to the cinema. | I make suggestions, suggestions, suggestions. I think that thanks to it, everything can be improved, School is a place, where my child stays, I try to make him feel good, I build relations with other parents and I talk to teachers. We are working for the benefit of our children. |

Source: Author's own studies (selected narrations).

Defining the aims of one's own activity at school, the parents participating in the research, indicate mainly ludic, didactic-educational and organizational activity. The ludic one includes the organization of school events and celebrations, picnics, integration undertakings. These are not, however, parents' independent actions. Respondents talk about co-participating, adjusting to suggestions, getting involved in works which have already been planned. Parents, while describing the area of their own engagement, inform about being a teacher's assistant, in the following way: *I participate in organizing events for students, I am often a room parent during discos together with teachers, I prepare drinks, help the class teacher, I sometimes run a stand at his/her request*".

Among the respondents' comments there such, which clearly stress the presence of parents in the didactic and educational process at school. Unfortunately, it is not a creative activity. It mainly covers home learning, mutual transfer of information between the teacher and parent and participation in open classes. Only 4 parents informed about organizational activities, working for the Teachers' Council, providing opinions of internal documents – the educational program and the prophylactic program: *"As a member of the Teachers' Council I participate in meetings, I am introduced to school work programs, we provide opinions for them as parents' community. We can rarely add something, because it is a ready-made document"*. In a similar context parents describe school as a place of its own action. Respondents often underline frequent performance of service works for teachers and students, including such activities as: *preparation, purchase, help in a venture realization, understanding, realization, subordination*. Channelling parents' activity only in the area of providing free services highly restricts possibilities of parents' participation. It is difficult to notice here co-participation of parents in conducting expert-like lessons with students, preparing an offer of original classes with students, introducing to culture. There is a lack of equivalence of positions taken between parents and teachers, a dialogue, decisiveness is attributed to teachers, and the subordination and realization of tasks – according to recommendations – is attributed to parents. The parent is treated as a knowledge recipient.

On the opposite pole, respondents' replies illustrating elements of the transactional model of the relation between parents and teachers have been placed. Unfortunately, only 9 of the respondents out of 52, informs about such a situation. Attention needs to be drawn that parents strongly underline in their narrations an aspiration to make changes to transform the current reality. In each category, the parents being questioned talk about the necessity of initiating and sustaining a dialogue. It concerns both children – students, their peers, that is the class team, parents' community at school and teachers. In the parenthood definitions, the respondents assigned to a given group, go beyond indicating specified tasks and duties, attributed to parents due to the roles they perform. They put

their own child in the centre and seek his/her best interest. They also see the need of continuous development of their own actions, becoming a mature parent. They declare changing themselves in the dialogue with a child. One of the mother's expresses it in the following way:

"I can say that being a parent at school changes with going together with the child to the next class. From protectiveness and support, particularly in relations with peers in the first class, to accompanying my daughter in the sixth class. Being a parent is difficult. It means listening to what the child, teacher, friend is saying". Respondents underline the necessity of reflection in one's own actions, encouraging critical comments. They do not just limit themselves to communicating with the child, but they also notice the student and parents' community. This group of the respondents do not talk about their rights in categories of potential areas of actions, but they realize them in practice, reporting suggestions, initiating ventures. Parents describe their presence at school by means of taking individual decisions for themselves and their child, transforming the existing conditions. They define themselves as "a source" influencing the existing reality.

Final conclusions

The considerations and researches presented in the foregoing study do not exhaust the whole problematics devoted to parents' relations with teachers in primary schools. It was not though the author's intention, it was not also possible due to formal requirements. Nevertheless, the material which has been collected allows to formulate the following conclusions:

1. In the studied municipal primary schools transmission relations between parents and teachers dominate, which are characterized by the lack of the equivalence of attitudes, parents functioning as a customer, a person subordinated to the teacher in the categories of making decisions, setting the areas of actions and realized ventures. Such a situation leads to celebrating historically ingrained solutions and rituals of circumstances, which restrict the parents' field of action for the realization of tasks resulting from the performed social roles. Mutual relations are accompanied by communication based on a duty of action, order, underlying a necessity and even compulsion.

2. The relations between parents and teachers in the light of responses of 43 respondents are characterized by common schemes, resulting from views being imprinted by many years as far as solutions binding at school are concerned. In this way a simplified scheme of mutual actions with teachers is built. Sometimes it is based on fears and concerns from the past, but it is obvious, natural, not undergoing questioning. It organizes the scope of parental duties at school, encourages a clear division of competencies into experts – teachers and parents – child's educators. Parents instrumentally learn their role, copy learned beha-

viours and actions, they recognize the necessity, as Czerpaniak-Walczak (2012, p. 16) writes, of only proper answers and the use of right methods. Thus there is a lack of reflection allowing to revise previous experiences and get involved into wider actions of the parents' community. Such relations between teachers and parents undoubtedly encourage transmission, acknowledging that the teacher as an education professional has got a right to instruct and inform parents about education. Simultaneously, the obedience attitude is fixed, which gives a feeling of controlling the situation as well as its participants. There is not room here for partnership of two basic educational institutions.

3. Transactional relations as a basic element of contacts between parents and teachers occur relatively rarely in the municipal schools which have been studied. Only 9 out of 52 respondents inform about being focused on a continuous dialogue with their own child, his/her peers, teachers and the parents' community while providing a detailed description of their own parenthood at school, aims as well as the area of action. This is the basis parental activity determining organization of educational activities, allowing to achieve changes of the existing situation, improving the efficiency of the realized undertakings. It is characterized by subjective relations, allowing parents to initiate and suggest educational solutions. Parents' rights in child's education are not a separate category in such relations, on which the respondents concentrate. They become a natural, unquestionable element defining the place of parents at school. Failures in mutual cooperation intensify criticism and result in new suggestions of the directions of actions.

4. Achieving a high level of parents' educational participation is not an easy task, but it is possible. According to 9 of the parents, one needs to start from "*a new view into the place of parents at school*" and the role of parents in the process of teaching and educating children and teenagers. A view "*based on a dialogue, openness*", symmetry and equivalence of social relations, as the basis of the transactional model of the participants of the educational process.

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