

# Introduction

## Postmodernism as a XXIst Century Phenomenon from the Value Perspective

A new trend in the contemporary reality arising from the crisis of culture of human civilization is referred to as postmodernism. Among other things, it is characterized by the notion of difference, multitude of discourses, attribution of various meanings to educational facts, the existence of a diversity of paradigms which define the world in different ways and imply the need for a dialogue between them. It also means acceptance for cultural diversity and no universality which would be acceptable to everyone as the fundamental values of one culture may not be shared by the other. Therefore, on the one hand, it makes it possible, by interacting with those who are different, to gain more and more new experience including the context of roles which enable to learn and distinguish the types of interaction, which are typical for different cultures; on the other hand, because of the different versions of how the reality is explained and understood, it may make people feel lost and uncertain.

A notion of ambivalence introduced by Lech Witkowski<sup>1</sup> provides an important context of education which reflects the ambiguity, multitude of educational offers which undergo a continuous reconstruction and their indefinite nature. It shows the oscillation between ever changing values which express the “fluid modernity.”<sup>2</sup> This is because when emphasizing freedom of choice, decentralization, lack of clear directives and acceptance of individuals who think and act differently, postmodernism puts an end to universal values.<sup>3</sup>

However, with reference to such freedom of choice and reserved attitude towards unambiguous values as models in life and a lack of authorities and guidance – does it not make people, especially the young generation, feel insecure, lost and uncertain?

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<sup>1</sup> K. Rubacha, *Nowe kategorie pojęciowe współczesnej teorii wychowania*, [in:] Z. Kwieciński, B. Śliwerski (ed.), *Pedagogika*, Vol. 2, Warszawa 2003, p. 60-61.

<sup>2</sup> Z. Bauman, *Płynna nowoczesność*, Kraków 2006.

<sup>3</sup> B. Śliwerski, *Współczesne teorie i nurty wychowania*, Kraków 2004, p. 357-386.

It seems that there is a crisis as far as the sense of direction is concerned when we look at the strengthening of the negative aspects of the modern global world such as, for instance consumerism, anonymity, technological progress making people spend their leisure time in isolation from others, ubiquitous acts of violence and aggression, growing poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, a rising number of divorces, family conflicts and “euro-orphanhood.”<sup>4</sup> Such a crisis is represented by helplessness and uncertainty about the central questions concerning value judgments, standards, the meaning and aims in life. Therefore, the task of emphasizing the importance of universal (fundamental) values and “educating to live the values” seems priceless.

The literature on the subject does not provide a clear and unambiguous answer what the “fundamental values” are. They are understood as virtues, attitudes, conduct, cultural norms, rules, legal and moral standards, but also the institutions of marriage, family, democracy and the rule of law. In spite of the prevailing chaos in this respect, it is clear that they are about the foundation of shared value beliefs which are needed by every pluralistic society.

Colloquially, “value” is understood as any goods considered to be valuable; consequently, it comprises everything that may be evaluated positively-valuable items or means of conveying values. When using the term “educating to live the values,” Wolfgang Brezinka considers different meanings of the term.<sup>5</sup> This eminent expert and classic of practical teaching believes that such education may be treated as:

- the goals of education (with particular reference to component educational tasks which may include e.g. civic, linguistic or vocational education);
- goods, i.e. valuable items (it will then be educating about goods, how to use them reasonably or generally to appreciate goods);
- the existing ideas of values (e.g. ethical, social, moral, religious, legal, political, economic or aesthetic values); and as the ability to “discover values;”
- qualities of personality (which reflect valuable attitudes and beliefs about values);
- acts of passing judgments (the ability to tell what is good or bad, appropriate or unreasonable);
- moral norms (which exemplify moral education).

All these aspects of “educating to live the values” emphasise the essential dimensions of the value-forming process. However, such type of education is most frequently linked to normative signposts, i.e. moral norms and education. The need for moral education is particularly clear in the situation of democracy and pluralism since the world where almost everything that is not explicitly forbidden seems to be permitted may result in moral relativism. When deprived of precious guidance, individuals, particularly children and young people, may act in a thoughtless and irresponsible manner. Especially in the postmodern times when we are overloaded with sensations and information, overburdened with the need to make decisions, and have a huge freedom of choice (we live in the times of “hyper-choice”), as Alvin Toffler

<sup>4</sup> A situation where parent(s) periodically live abroad to earn money, especially in another EU country – translator’s note.

<sup>5</sup> W. Brezinka, *Wychowywać dzisiaj. Zarys problematyki*, Kraków 2007, p. 178-184.

believes, a labile personality may be formed, interpersonal bonds may be loosened, there may be low self-esteem, self-alienation and a “identity crisis.”<sup>6</sup> Therefore, the main educational task should be, as underlined by Alvin Toffler, to help each student in identifying his or her own values, in analyzing and developing them.

Importantly, particular importance of universal values in today’s postmodern world results from the fact that they protect human identity and democracy. In this context, it seems that “educating to live the values” – Promethean values (focus on altruistic and public-spirited activities), Apollonian values (emphasizing the importance of artistic work, development of art and science) and Socratic values (related to the process of improving one’s own personality, continuous self-education and self-improvement)<sup>7</sup> will ensure a unique value which is respect for human dignity and respect for every human being. Therefore, it is connected with respect for its subjectivity and the process of creating conditions for self-realization, thus reflecting the features of the postmodern teaching which are emphasized so much these days.

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<sup>6</sup> A. Toffler, *Future Shock*, New York 1970, p. 264-316 et. seq.

<sup>7</sup> J. Koziński, *Koncepcje psychologiczne człowieka*, Warszawa 1996, p. 223-225.