To Educate Towards Values – But What Values?
Axiological Dilemmas of Education

Wychowywać ku wartościom – ale jakim? Aksjologiczne dylematy edukacji

Lidia Marszałek

The Mazovian Academy in Płock, Poland

ORCID: https://orcid.org/
0000-0002-8425-9591

l.marszalek@mazowiecka.
edu.pl

Abstract: In the simplest terms, the concept of value may be defined as something that is important and valuable to a person. The presented paper provides some reflection on the essence of value and its various understandings and indicates methods of educating young people towards the highest, social, and positive utilitarian values. The fact is, however, that in the modern world the prevailing values, especially among young people, are hedonism and focus on one's own well-being, benefits, possession of valuable things and comfort of life.

This paper discusses the reasons why young people prefer the above values and at the same time points to the dilemmas of teachers, namely, what values should students be guided towards, so that they do not suffer any harm when confronted with the contemporary reality of the world of adults. Should young people be directed towards higher values, if that may make them vulnerable to others especially those who want to use them for their own purposes? Or, should they rather be taught to be uncompromising, to stand up for themselves, which will help them achieve success in their professional and social life? The fact is, however, that hardly any educator will resign from leading students towards the highest values. So, the real question is: How to conduct moral and ethical education of students at the same time helping them prepare for the realities of the modern world? This paper attempts to make recommendations aimed at reconciling these two areas of education.

Keywords: values, education, teacher dilemmas

Abstrakt: Najprościej ujmując pojęcie wartości, można uznać, że określa ono to, co dla człowieka jest ważne i cenne. Prezentowany tekst zawiera refleksje na temat istoty pojęcia wartości oraz różnego rozumienia tego pojęcia. Wskazano w nim także drogi wychowania do wartości najwyższych, społecznych i pozytywnych wartości utylitarnych. Faktem jednak jest, iż we współczesnym świecie, zwłaszcza wśród młodych ludzi, dominują wartości hedonistyczne i nastawienie na własny dobrostan, korzyści, posiadanie wartościowych rzeczy i wygodę życia.

W treści artykułu podjęto dyskusję na temat tego, z jakich powodów młodzi ludzie preferują właśnie te wartości. Wskazano również dylematy wychowawców i nauczycieli, ku jakim wartościom należy kierować wychowanków, aby w zderzeniu ze współczesną rzeczywistością świata dorosłych nie ponieśli szkody. Czy na pewno kierunkować ich na wartości wyższe – przez co mogą stać się łatwą „ofiarą" dla innych ludzi, pragnących ich wykorzystać dla własnych celów, czy też raczej uczyć bezkompromisowej „walki o swoje", co zapewni im w przyszłości sukcesy w życiu zawodowym i społecznym? Faktem jednak jest, iż żaden wychowawca nie zrezygnuje z prowadzenia swoich wychowanków ku wartościom najwyższym. Jak więc prowadzić wychowanie moralne i etyczne wychowanków, jednocześnie pomagając im w przygotowaniu się do realiów współczesnego świata? W zamieszczonych w tekście rekomendacjach pedagogicznych podjęto próbę pogodzenia tych dwóch obszarów wychowania.

Słowa kluczowe: wartości, wychowanie, dylematy wychowawcy

Introduction – the question of values in literature

Values are commonly understood as all things constituting the object of human needs, endeavours, and aspirations. Therefore, values can include both material objects, people, social groups, institutions, ideas, types of activities and social relations. Values are most often considered in the context of human activity, needs, and aspirations.

The way of defining the concept of "value" in social sciences – psychology, pedagogy and sociology – involves emphasizing by those sciences different conceptual categories that values relate to. According to this view, there are three categories of values. From a psychological standpoint, value can be understood as an element of an individual's system of beliefs, other people's beliefs regarding states or actions considered desirable, objects that satisfy specific needs of an individual, or observable behaviours of an individual. In turn, while defining the concept of value, sociology highlights the social aspect. In this approach, values are objects or beliefs of a non-normative nature that evoke relatively similar experiences and behaviours of individuals, beliefs commonly adopted in a given social group regarding judgments and attitudes that are considered desirable for that group members, as well as beliefs of groups or individuals regarding preferable features of individual groups and society as a whole.

In the cultural approach, the source of value is culture. Values are defined here as objects of a symbolic or non-symbolic nature that are commonly desired in a given society, generally accepted existential and normative judgments and widespread beliefs regarding judgments as well as behaviours considered desirable for individuals and the whole society.

There are many ways of classifying values. One of them is the division according to the degree of abstraction covering two categories, namely, everyday values related to various areas of human life (e.g., professional work, family life, social activity, etc.) and more abstract values that give a life its overall meaning. Another classification is based on the degree to which values are internalized by an individual, i.e., values proposed by society, declared by an individual, acknowledged and actually adhered to. Those values form a number of systems that overlap one another.

A system of values can be regarded as harmonious when specific spheres of human existence (biological, psychological, social and spiritual) aim towards defining the hierarchy of importance of goals in view of the overarching goal pursued by man. In fact, this process of prioritizing goals is taking place permanently throughout human life, and therefore the system of human values is inherently ruled by the principle of conflict. Depending on the prevailing pressures of individual spheres of human life, the entire system of values or its subsystems may undergo changes of a progressive or regressive nature, thus moving away from the adopted, overarching goal.

M. Rokeach's (1973) theory of values is inscribed in a general theory of belief systems. In view of this concept, the system of values is a separate structure, located centrally in the system of beliefs, which testifies to its consequential regulatory functions for human behaviour. As M. Rokeach points out, values are beliefs

that dictate and prohibit, adjudicate on the object of belief whether it is desirable or undesirable. The scientist contends that "a value, according to traditional psychological theory, is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite mode of conduct or end state of existence." Individual values form a hierarchical system, which the author has defined as "the enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end states of existence along a continuum of relative importance" (Rokeach 1973, 5)

M. Rokeach believes that the number of values cherished by each individual is relatively small and amounts to about several dozen, while all people, regardless of their living conditions, cherish the same values, but to a varying degree. Rokeach distinguishes two types of values: terminal and instrumental. Terminal values mean certain end states of human existence and development. Instrumental values, on the other hand, refer to an individual's own characteristics that determine positive social functioning (performing social roles) in the moral aspect or those related to self-acceptance.

However, the Author prefers the approach to values in line with the study of Polish scientists and it is in this context that further considerations will be carried out.

As S. Ruciński claims, "Defining what is important and valuable in a human (...) cannot be brought down to the problem of choosing certain norms and patterns, proposed by one or another moral doctrine. It is a broader axiological problem, including questions about supreme human values" (Ruciński 1981, 17). While analysing various approaches to the issue of values, Ruciński emphasizes that values, apart from implying a transcendent aspect as absolute values, can also imply an instrumental aspect as the effectiveness of certain human activities that are valuable for an individual (Ruciński 1981, 33-35).

On the other hand, K. Obrycht, drawing on psychological ideas, states that "The concept of values (...) is interpreted as, on the one hand, what is important for human development, and on the other – as an individual's ideas and beliefs about what is important, desirable, valuable to this individual" (Olbrycht 2000, 71). At the same time, analysing various philosophical approaches (e.g., by Max Scheler, Dietrich von Hilderbrand, Roman Ingarden, Karol Wojtyła and others), he points to various approaches to the issue of values – from avoiding their specific definition, through their transcendent personal dimension, to viewing this concept almost exclusively in instrumental categories, as specific modes of conduct and goods valuable from the point of view of individuals (Olbrycht 2000, 124-140).

A similar approach is adopted by W. Stróżewski who proposes to make a distinction between "the value «in itself» and the materialized value, embodied in an object. And to distinguish something that is a value from something that has value. Value «in itself» can also be understood in two ways: as an abstract, universal, content of a concept extracted from a specific material – in such a case it is a specific intentional object, or as an autonomous, independently existing

entity – in such a case the value appears as an idea, independent of any concretum, although probably necessary for its axiological definition" (Stróżewski 2013, 68).

Following J. Gajda, it should be assumed that "Each human life is based on a more or less conscious implementation of values within a specific social structure and a given type of culture. A meaningful life means axiological maturity, expressed in the cognitive and emotional spheres as well as in the choice of decisions. An individual who lives such a life remains in a rational way faithful to the values he recognizes. He makes decisions about regarding the choice of values, about changing them or opening up to new values based on his own discernment" (Gajda 2008, 40).

There are many more definitions of values and ways of interpreting them that could be mentioned at this point, was it not for the limited volume of this paper presented for publication which prevents further in-depth analyses. However, in general, it can be stated that the concept of value is a multidimensional one, difficult to describe and define unambiguously. In further reflection, the Author will therefore refer to the examples of definitions cited above.

1. EDUCATION TOWARDS VALUES

The modern world brings with it many moral dilemmas. Some important values have been devalued, others have taken on a new meaning and become more important than others. So, what is the meaning of education towards values, towards a valuable life?

"It is difficult (…) to reach a consensus in ordering values presented by individual social groups. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the values passed on to the young generation by parents, educators, and pedagogues, it is important and socially desirable to establish priority values that apply to most people. It is because the social dimension of normative behaviours indicates appropriate behaviours, sets boundaries, establishes binding relations, frames of reference, shaping social identity or national affiliation" (Bieńkowska and Kitlińska-Król 2016, 39).

Development and functioning of a system of values depends to a large extent on the initial conditions, i.e., the biological, mental, social and spiritual capabilities of an individual, and on the stimulation of the environment, leading that individual to recognizing those conditions. Particular importance in the transfer of values is attributed to the social environment of an individual. Through participation in social groups, an individual learns about and undertakes various social roles from an early age, thus learning and internalizing the values assigned to these roles. A different aspect of values is their existence as a psychological category – as objects of interest on the part of individuals and an expression of their needs. The motivating power of a given value in the life of a specific person is a derivative of the position of this value among other values leading to a specific goal. The

strength of motivation depends both on the value itself and on the individual performing the task. However, because of pressures coming from various spheres of human existence, the created system of values or its part may be threatened (Ostrowska 1998, 96).

So, what does education towards values mean? According to the Author, it means proper education of young people, leading them to universal values that determine one's humanity – Truth, Goodness, Beauty. Those are the intrinsically human, unchanging and always desirable values. As indicated by W. Stróżewski (2013, 73) "it is the question of capturing value as such, its *eidos*, which, according to Edith Stein, has its autonomous essential being. This, at any rate, is the real essence of values: the essence of nobility, goodness, humility, generosity, purity, beauty, grace, etc. From the perspective of the subject experiencing a value, its essence signals its presence by «moving the heart», evoking an emotional state." Thus, as W. Stróżewski points out, values are not only "valuable things" important to their owner, but also specific features of the psyche and the soul that are revealed in various life experiences of an individual, evoking emotional states and spurring action for the sake of good.

In the process of leading a student towards adopting proper values, a special role is played by the educator, who should be a role model and a carrier of such values. As S. Ruciński (1988, 191-192) claims: "An educator who would like to introduce a student to a valuable life (…) could address the student and ask: Do you want to live a valuable life? Then come and try to walk by my side but try to walk by yourself and do not imitate me. Let the fact that I walk beside you only give you a sense of security, because I want you to feel that you are not alone, that you will not be left on your own." Thus, the educator is a person whose role is to direct the student towards a life lived according to the right values, awaken in the student the desire for these values and teach him to implement them in his own life. Ruciński also claims that "Practical activity of the educator consists in the implementation or at least a strive towards implementing certain values. The conscious character of this activity does not only consist in the fact that the educator is aware of what he is doing: what are his goals, what are the measures taken, how he understands and perceives individual elements of the process of his educational activity, etc." (Ruciński 1981, 325). The author also emphasizes that "The process of education consists of a certain sequence of activities on the part of both educators and students, it is actually a process of cooperation, aimed at correcting the lives of students (as well as of educators), and therefore it is vital that the activities of both are characterized by this internal consequence. (...) directing the development of the student requires participation of both parties of the educational process and setting the direction of educational cooperation not according to ready-made patterns to which the students should be adjusted, but according to discernment in the student's own needs and abilities as well as in the needs of the society in which he lives" (Ruciński 1981, 213).

Thus, as emphasized by K. Olbrycht, "General nature of education towards values would mean education towards a defined manner of treating «values», accepting their specific status, mode of existence, possible hierarchy, way of learning

about them and implementing them. Therefore, education in this dimension would consist in shaping a specific attitude towards values (...). Education towards values means acting that, in the psychological dimension, deliberately aims at creating the desired standards of «positivity» and «negativity.» (…) Education towards higher values is the very process, most often related to a broad group of cognitive, moral and aesthetic values, while education towards the highest values (…) means education towards goodness, truth and beauty, and at the same time towards recognizing the value of human being as a person (Olbrycht 2000, 93-94).

It seems plausible to include in this study the views of S. Chrobak, who claims that: "Development of the pupil is conditional to a dynamic, mature, fully formed person of the educator, revealing his own life philosophy and choice of values – their hierarchy and justification, and credible in responsible implementation of those values. The educator brings in to the process of education his knowledge as well as his own unique personality. Therefore, he himself must be a role model not only with respect to cognitive attitudes, formal qualifications, but also to ethical ones. «Education of a human being» can only be conducted by a responsible person who is convinced of the purposefulness of his actions. One who believes that the hierarchy of values, sensitivity, imagination and searching mind are more important than the amount of knowledge instilled" (Chrobak 2010, 129). The author claims also that "The teacher-educator's professional practice should therefore take into account manifold contexts of influencing the pupil, e.g., directness, uniqueness and specificity of each school situation, promoting such features of educational activities as: responsibility, collaboration, cooperation, open communication, understanding the sense of planned and already taking place changes in the socialization and civic education of the student. The basic sense of education is to assist in the development of another human being. "Emphasizing the role and tasks of the educator does not mean disregarding the student's role. A young person consciously or unconsciously seeks role models and authorities. Being a teacher-educator means being a master and a witness. Recognition of the role of witnesses and masters in the lives of people and societies requires consent to see the world and other people through the prism of the positive meaning of the «other» in one's own life, starting from the assumption that positive «others» have lived and still live in the real world; consent to the fact that the «other» can be and is someone positively significant, someone who brings positive goals and values, leads the way of truth and testimony" (Chrobak 2021, 30). At this point, it is also worth quoting the words of M. Gogacz: "value is a goal, a task, an idea, and therefore an intellectual construct. Such constructs do not educate. Neither do theories or ideologies. It is people who educate" (Gogacz 1997, 38).

Thus, as the above-cited Authors indicate, in the process of directing the development of proper hierarchy of values in the student, an extremely important role is played by the educator, his personality, the values he professes – values not only declared, but also practised in his own life. The educator is the one who guides his student, shows him both general and utilitarian values, leading the students

towards a valuable life lived to the fullness of his humanity. The educator should be a "master", the "Big" who shows the "Little" the world and its various aspects, indicating the modes of proper conduct in various life situations. According to M. Gogacz, "One must never betray trust. Approaching educators as persons, we learn from them to choose truth and goodness only when they are faithful to truth and goodness. It is from them thus, that we learn how to be guided by wisdom. At the same time, getting to know them as real persons, we gain our first perceptions of interpersonal relationships by experiencing these relationships" (Gogacz 1997, 20). However, while expecting respect from the "Little" due to his knowledge and experience, the educator is also obliged to show respect to the student – his personal properties, dreams, expectations, plans, ways of understanding the world and himself, searching for his own place in the world. He must adopt an attitude of deep kindness, understanding and respect towards the "Little" – not "dragging him" in the direction he has set, or "putting" in his head "the only right beliefs and attitudes, but supporting and directing his development towards the right values and ways of functioning in life." A. Maj set these expectations even higher, claiming that "The basic condition for the education of a person oriented towards the implementation of his own, but proper, objectified hierarchy of values, leading to full humanity, is to integrate around this hierarchy all subjects of education: teachers, students, parents, educational authorities, communities and social groups, the whole society, and to continue bearing witness to those values. Education towards values leading to full humanity should be of a social nature" (Maj 2016, 90). Thus, the aforementioned author does not assign the educator the role of the only person influencing the proper shaping of the hierarchy of values in students but makes all subjects of education responsible for this process – from the very students, through parents and teachers, to education authorities and society as a whole. This is the right approach, because all these elements of the educational process and their functioning are important in managing a student's life and building his system of values.

2. Do we educate towards the right values? Teacher dilemmas

We educate our children, charges and students almost exclusively to positive, pro-social values. We lead them towards Goodness, Truth and Beauty. We shape features such as respect for the Other, goodness, kindness, empathy, willingness to help others, sense of responsibility, honesty. And here comes the educational dilemma – are we not doing our students harm? Are we not making it harder for them to live their adult life in the real world, where these values and characteristics have long since been devalued?

The modern world is not open to people with the qualities that we try to build in our students. This world does not appreciate universal values but promotes hedonistic and materialistic ones. Judgment about good and evil is made not according to the true value of a given act, but according to the benefits, momentary success or pleasure

of people who undertake some actions. Liars are believed when they present their "truths" in a highly popular way, using empty words, which, however, "get recorded" in the minds of other people, especially those who are not fully aware of the reality in which they live, who do not make a critical analysis of current facts, accepting the "mental pulp" served to them as the only right view, regardless of their political orientation and social attitudes. Often, even actions taken partly in the name of serving others are accompanied by "undercover" pursuit of self-interest, dishonesty, greed, and mendacity. "Good people" are used, their ideas of right action, which they take in the name of higher values, are destroyed. People are convinced that one has to "stand up for oneself" even at the expense of the good of others, even trampling on their dignity, "claw one's way" towards one's own goal, elbow others aside, tripping them up, and even destroying the Other in the name of one's own profits and success. Even adults have difficulty finding their way in a world full of contradictions and chaos, especially in the sphere of morality. It is all the more difficult for young people entering this world ruled by hedonistic values. Due to the prevailing pluralism of opinions, views, beliefs, norms and values, young people often receive contradictory or inconsistent content, which causes confusion in socially immature individuals. This information, oozing from the widely available media, causes young people to wonder whether the values instilled in them by us – educators – are really important for their future lives, whether they will help them achieve their own life goals and lead to satisfaction. Lying, plundering millions in dishonest deals, "fixed" tenders and competitions, procrastination, awarding thousands of prizes to oneself "for nothing", highly paid positions awarded not based on competence, but on connections, nepotism or party affiliation, billions spent on malinvestments which will never be implemented, but the people "working" on them receive salaries of thousands for "doing nothing", robbing honest working people for the sake of giving away money for social pathology... one could go on and on. However, the fact is that this is today's Polish reality.

    This is the world of "adults" that our students today must enter. Imbued with beliefs about the importance of humanity, goodness and empathy, brought up by us to implement higher values – both universal (Goodness, Truth, Beauty) and instrumental (benevolence, kindness, helpfulness, honesty, responsibility, etc.), they collide with reality, falling into the traps of the modern world, which usually does not care about those values, following the "rat race", uncompromisingly fighting for their own good, even at the expense of others. The world where "everything is for sale" – honesty, morality, responsibility, goodness – where the question "how much" becomes the core matter? How much am I able to "sell" myself for, sacrifice my own humanity for material benefits and my own well-being? Some will never give in to these material pressures, others will succumb at the first opportunity to gain material benefits, uncompromisingly using family or party connections or betraying their own values in the name of future profits.

    So, do we educate in the right way? Should not we awaken in our students this readiness to "stand up for themselves", teach them to "elbow others aside", "trip them

up" striving for their own at all costs, even if that cost was to be the good of another person? Should we not develop in our students the skills of competing and fighting for their own good and benefits from an early age? It is obvious that such an approach has little to do with morality, true values, humanity. However, it must also be admitted that teaching our students such skills may guarantee that they will achieve success in their future life and work, and this in fact is what we, as educators, wish for.

This dilemma is extremely difficult and probably concerns each "thinking" educator who is not oblivious to the realities of the modern world. Should we sacrifice the highest values and humanity for the sake of our students' future life successes, or should we persevere in shaping this humanity, risking that our students will not be prepared for life in the modern world and may be "trampled" by other people, uncompromisingly fighting for their positions and goods? It is difficult to answer the above questions and it is difficult to choose the optimal way of education, being aware of the world in which our students will live and of what awaits them in this world.

Conclusion – pedagogical recommendations

According to I. Bieńkowska and M. Kitlińska-Król, "An important role in acquiring values is played by education towards values giving direction to our educational activities while offering a young man a spiritual and existential depth. Education without passing on what is most important and essential, tears us away from our roots, leads to the creation of other systems of reference, often to anti-values, which may not only be disastrous for a young person, but also for the general public. The inspiration to build one's own (and educationally desirable) system of values should be provided by thoughtful parents, teachers, the elderly and wiser people, those with life experience. By their attitude, they should set an example for young people to build a hierarchy of values, consistent with superior moral principles, based on universal educational values (Bieńkowska and Kitlińska-Król 2016, 47).

As emphasized above – it is not easy to choose the optimal way of educational approach in the contemporary world – at one end of this continuum there is instilling the desire to pursue positive values at the expense of one's own good and life successes, and at the other end teaching the "fight for one's own" even at the expense of the good of others and the loss of one's own humanity. However, it is possible to some extent, if we manage to find the "golden mean" between caring for the absolute good of the Other and taking care of one's own benefits without violating the process of building positive values. Therefore, it is possible to keep shaping the students' personality towards positive values, and at the same time prepare them to enter the real world through appropriate educational activities.

First of all, it would require introducing content into school and study curricula that may serve building strong assertiveness in students – the ability to take care of their own well-being, say no to unwanted demands without offending other people and

maintaining a bit of "healthy egoism." It would also be important to require teachers-educators to use any measures to build in their students their self-esteem. It would also be worth introducing content and activities into the curriculum allowing students to develop their social skills, interpersonal communication and self-understanding – defining their own needs and aspirations. Educators should also introduce a bit of competition among students, however, not too strong so as not to cause additional stress in the teaching-learning process, but very balanced, just to teach students the skills necessary in their adult life from an early age. Competition, when wrongly understood and implemented may prove detrimental, while some elements of competition when introduced into the education process may serve developing in students the readiness to overcome not only others, but also themselves in the pursuit of excellence.

Shaping the above-mentioned skills in the course of educational work can help our students to understand the realities of the contemporary world and find their own place in it, that will be conducive to their further personal and professional development. It may also help them build their self-esteem, awareness of their own competences and willingness to use them in their personal and professional development. It is not certain whether these activities of educators and the skills they shape will "give wing to" our pupils in the process of self-realization, but the introduction of these pedagogical activities will certainly help them function in the real world and fulfil themselves without causing harm to other people.

References:

Bieńkowska, Izabela and Małgorzata Kitlińska-Król. 2016. „Wartości w wychowaniu współczesnego człowieka". *Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Śląskiej* 95: 37-49.
Chrobak, Stanisław. 2010. „Troska o wychowanie nowych pokoleń. Benedykt XVI o potrzebie wychowania". *Seminare. Poszukiwania naukowe* 27: 127-136.
Chrobak, Stanisław. 2021. „Wychowawca w służbie urzeczywistniania wartości". In *Przestrzenie edukacyjne przedszkola i szkoły*, edited by Lidia Marszałek and Adam Grudzień, 25-42. Płock: Wydawnictwo Mazowieckiej Uczelni Publicznej.
Gajda, Janusz. 2008. „Wartości w wychowaniu". In *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, vol. 7, edited by Tadeusz Pilch, 38-41. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie "Żak".
Gogacz, Mieczysław. 1997. *Osoba zadaniem pedagogiki. Wykłady bydgoskie.* Warszawa: Edycja internetowa pierwszego wydania. Accessed by: 20.05.2023. http://www.katedra.uksw.edu.pl/gogacz/ksiazki/osoba_zadaniem_pedagogiki.pdf.
Maj, Adam. 2016. „Aksjologia pedagogiczna". In *Encyklopedia aksjologii pedagogicznej,* edited by Krystyna Chałas and Adam Maj, 87-91. Radom: Polskie Wydawnictwo Encyklopedyczne.
Olbrycht, Katarzyna. 2000. *Prawda, dobro i piękno w wychowaniu człowieka jako osoby.* Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego.