

Renata Miszczuk¹

ORCID- 0000-0001-7529-5702

REVIEW OF THE BOOK EDITED BY

Joanna Ludwika Pękała and Katarzyna Białożył-Wielonek
entitled
Areas of (un)certainty in the work of the contemporary teacher

Education is one of the areas of society hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak of the epidemic due to the SARS-CoV-2 virus in March resulted in the closure of schools. After the initial suspension of the teaching activities, teaching moved to the virtual sphere. In the new reality created by the epidemic, the most important objectives were twofold, i.e. to stop the spread of the infectious disease and to implement the core curriculum.

The book I am reviewing reveals the current state of instability of the world we live in. The year 2020 appeared to us as a great uncertainty in all areas of our lives, also in the field of education.

The authors of the individual chapters present their point of view concerning certain areas related to the work of a contemporary teacher,

¹Renata Miszczuk, PhD, Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, Institute of Pedagogy, Department of Adult Education, Poland, e-mail: renata.miszczuk@ujk.edu.pl

both during the still ongoing pandemic and also at other times when their dilemmas at work became areas of uncertainty.

The book comprises an introduction and two parts, the first of which contains AREAS OF (UN)CERTAINTY FOR TEACHERS – THE OUTLINING OF THE PROBLEM FIELD while the second provides AREAS OF (UN)CERTAINTY FOR TEACHERS – ACTIONS AND INSPIRATIONS.

The first part contains the following articles: Stefan T. Kwiatkowski – *A state of uncertainty on the eve of starting work. Does personality influence the level of self-efficacy of candidates for early education teachers?*; Joanna Ludwika Pękala and Inga Mączka – *Teacher's sense of professional efficacy in the opinion of students*; Hanna Kędzierska and Zofia Kędzierska – *Buffering provisional 'Selves' – (non-)institutional changes in the course of teachers' careers*; Maria Groenwald – *Time in a teacher's work. On the awkwardness of managing it*; Katarzyna Białożył-Wielonek – *Areas of uncertainty in a teacher's work from the perspective of retired female teachers*; and Wanda Maria Dróżka – *Teacher's reflectiveness in the face of the challenges of the epoch of uncertainty*.

The second part opens with an article by Anna L. Grygoruk – *Teacher in the context of digital transformation of reality*; next, we can read works by Aleksandra Tłuściak-Deliowska – *Teacher's self-efficacy in the context of the problem of peer violence among pupils*; Aleksandra Szyller – *A textbook in early school education – support or limitation?*; Joanna Dobkowska – *A signpost on the teaching paths or a strict code? Changes in the provisions on language teaching in the core curriculum for early school education as a source of uncertainty in teachers' work*; Kamila Wichrowska and Paulina Marchlik – *Foreign language teacher and remote teaching of preschool and early school age children*; Barbara Kwiatkowska-Tybulewicz and Wioletta Kielbicka – *Inspiring anxiety and joyful uncertainty: theatre pedagogy in the school space*; and the final article in this part, by Iga Kazimierczyk – *My pupils are bored at school. What teachers know and think about it*.

In both parts of the book under review the authors of the articles made an attempt to demonstrate the variability and ambiguity of the concept of professional confidence of the teacher, ranging from edifying experience, resulting from personal agency that gives a sense of confi-

dence in professional activity, to the state of ambivalence caused by the duality of their own experiences in teaching work and experiencing many contradictions.

And so, S.T. Kwiatkowski in his work *A state of uncertainty on the eve of starting work. Does personality influence the level of self-efficacy of candidates for early education teachers?* makes an attempt to answer the question asked, and in doing so he analyses the results of comparative empirical analyses aimed at determining whether the intensity of the main personality factors significantly affects the level of self-efficacy of teacher candidates. The analysis of the research results discussed in the paper shows that the intensity of the main personality factors has a significant impact on the level of self-efficacy of the candidates for early childhood educators participating in the study. The author concludes by stressing that the awareness of the importance of personality traits, seen from the perspective of laying the foundations of teachers' abilities to cope with everyday uncertainty and the numerous challenges that arise from it, undoubtedly encourages deep reflection, especially on how this knowledge should be used.

The article by Joanna Ludwika Pękala and Inga Mączka, *Teacher's sense of professional efficacy in the opinion of students*, contains an analysis of early education students' opinions on teachers' sense of efficacy. The study conducted and described in the article shows how future teachers perceive an important element of their chosen profession. The authors proved that the building of a teacher's self-efficacy takes time and depends on the teacher's individual characteristics and competencies as well as on the working environment. The opinions of the students included in their study suggest that those teachers who have a higher sense of self-efficacy are more committed to their profession and more likely to motivate their students, which translates into positive learning outcomes. In conclusion, the authors emphasise how important it is for students taking courses in pedagogy to understand what the sense of professional efficacy is, and to be aware of its impact on the results of the teaching-learning process, and also to be able to actively build this competence in the course of their careers.

Hanna Kędzierska and Zofia Kędzierska, in the article *Buffering provisional 'Selves' – (non-)institutional changes in the course of teachers'*

careers, present the results of a study conducted with teachers of the closed lower secondary schools, conducted in the period from March to June 2019 and in February and March 2020. The study involved teachers from lower secondary schools who prior to the closing had above-average educational achievements evidenced by high places in school rankings and by their pupils' achievements. Each of the schools in which the teachers in the survey were once employed had developed its own original concept of teaching and education work during its nearly twenty years of operation, which made it renowned in the community. The results of the study proved that the process of (re)organisation of professional identity in the course of non-institutional changes does not occur automatically. The authors come to the conclusion that if change is to be successful, then it is vital to lead people through this change, which implies building an institutional system of support for schools and teachers in the process of (non-)institutional transitions.

In the paper *Time in a teacher's work. On the awkwardness of managing it*, Maria Groenwald presents the concept of time and its management in Polish schools. The article presents the possibility of creative time management, e.g. in the situation of a pandemic. However, the author is troubled by the fact that the constructivist and transformative approach to teaching only found its application in the actual work of teachers with pupils in such difficult times for us as the pandemic period and that its use was only possible for such a short time. She notes that the duration was short because it was only possible in the first weeks of the pandemic when there were no top-down decisions with regard to conducting and documenting remote education. The widespread chaos and lack of information that prevailed at that time gave impetus to creativity and teaching freedom.

The next article, *Areas of uncertainty in a teacher's work from the perspective of retired female teachers* by Katarzyna Białożył-Wielonek, shows the areas of uncertainty of retired female teachers who began their careers in the 1980s and the 1990s. Working in different periods of political, economic and social transformations, they experienced many changes, especially those related to the school and education system, which determined the development of their professional paths. The author also presented a brief analysis of the teaching profession

in the present times which undoubtedly differs significantly from the same work in the past centuries; therefore, according to her, it becomes important to know the conditions of this profession in the perception of teachers themselves. The results of the qualitative research show that the teaching profession is not an easy one; nevertheless, it gives a lot of satisfaction. The teaching profession involves numerous challenges and tasks which change at a rapid pace. The areas of uncertainty are mainly related to the conditions of employment and the new challenges that teachers face. On the basis of the studies conducted, the author concludes that the ongoing transformations and transitions in many areas of social life determine the areas of uncertainty in the work of teachers.

The concluding chapter of the first part, i.e. *Teacher's reflectiveness in the face of the challenges of the epoch of uncertainty* by Wanda Maria Dróżka, focuses on the theme of cognitive and moral and existential issues which place high demands on the entire humanities field, social sciences, but above all pedagogy and education. The reflections described suggest that the emerging new era, so different in terms of culture and civilisation, needs teachers that are wise. According to the author, these are such teachers that above all will be able to reflectively reconcile in their work the complex interdependencies of modern life with the development of education which is meant to meet the needs of the individual, the economy and society in the twenty-first century, and the requirements of their own continuous development. She stresses that contemporary, humanistic and reflective trends in the development of the pedagogical thought related to the teaching profession pay special attention to the personal dimension of teacher professionalism.

The second part of the book opens with Anna L. Grygoruk's article *Teacher in the context of digital transformation of reality* in which the author seeks answers to the questions such as, What is the place of new technologies in the teaching process? What skills do students need now and what skills will they need in the future? How can a teacher develop them using new technologies?

In the next article, *Teacher's self-efficacy in the context of the problem of peer violence among pupils* by Aleksandra Thuściak-Deliowska, the author presents the teacher as a significant person in the context of the

problem of peer violence at school. She justifies this e.g. by the fact that teachers' actions play an important role in creating a safe and friendly school climate. She also believes that teachers' perceived efficacy is a factor that should be taken into account when reducing peer violence at school.

In the article *A textbook in early school education – support or limitation?* Aleksandra Szyller makes a rather risky statement that the school with its arsenal of measures and procedures stayed back in the behaviourist and transmissionist tradition. As it appears from her considerations, modern education is focused not on the student, but on the textbook, which for many teachers is the only 'certainty' in the constantly changing, uncertain educational reality.

In Joanna Dobkowska's paper *A signpost on the teaching paths or a strict code? Changes in the provisions on language teaching in the core curriculum for early school education as a source of uncertainty in teachers' work* we can read about teachers' dilemmas related to the assumptions concerning language teaching at the first stage of education that were included in three successive core curricula, which are allegedly mutually exclusive.

The last article in the second part of the book, closing the whole publication, is the work of Kamila Wichrowska and Paulina Marchlik, *Foreign language teacher and remote teaching of preschool and early school age children*. The authors address a very topical issue, namely remote teaching in a time of pandemic at the early level of the curriculum, i.e. among pupils who need a lot of movement, are unable to stay still or focus on one activity for a longer time. The article describes the findings of a study the aim of which was to find out the answers to the research questions, 'What challenges did language teachers face in connection with remote teaching?' and 'What are the benefits of remote teaching according to English language teachers?'

Turning to the overall assessment of the collective work entitled *Areas of (un)certainty in the work of the contemporary teacher*, I would like to emphasise its clear structure and skilful combination of theory and study results.

In my opinion, the book is a very important contribution to the approach to the problems faced by contemporary teachers, both those

caused by the pandemic and those that are the so-called everyday problems at school. I believe that the whole study also offers considerable teaching assets and is indispensable for both theoreticians and practitioners who are involved in the affairs of Polish education on a daily basis.

Date of the submission of article to the Editor: 27.09.2021

Date of acceptance of the article: 19.12.2021