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POSTMODERN CONSCIOUSNESS VERSUS IMPLEMENTED MODEL OF SCHOOL KNOWLEDGE

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A b s t r a c t. Sociology has proved that subjective reality corresponds to objective reality. Subjective reality is the subject to further reflection in this article, in its first part. In this part of the text we will identify kinds of quality which are generated in the sphere of consciousness of post-modern society. This will restore the subjective dimension of post-modernity. In the second part of the article we will define the characteristics of knowledge functioning in contemporary educational institutions. We will strive to find a common denominator for knowledge as point of reference of students at different levels of educational practice. Implementation of tasks associated with the development of the two parts of the text will create the possibility to compare and contrast the quality in both spheres of intellectual activity (postmodern consciousness – educational knowledge) and to determine the relationship between them – if any.

Key words: postmodernism, consciousness, education, school knowledge.

Contemporary “postmodernism” is no longer only a construct that ideologues came up with, but also the state of society remaining at certain stage of development. Not arguing about further clarification of the concept, its essence can be described with several key parameters related to its objective dimension. These parameters are: a) coexistence of wide variety of elements, features, shades, meanings, ideas and behaviors in all areas of social life; b) this diversity does not constitute a consistent and coherent whole, but rather a multi-colored mosaic of elements which do not always fit together; c) because of this diversity a man is not forced to submit to a certain stan-

dard but he is invited to decide for the chosen option – the choice becomes a challenge and an inevitable condition connected with man's functioning in all dimensions of his activity; d) binding pluralism is also connected with atomization of all levels of social life – from the structure, through culture, to the individual's identity; e) various spheres of social life are subject to rapid changes, however, the transformations do not have clear purpose or direction.

Sociology has proved that subjective reality corresponds to objective reality. Subjective reality is the subject to further reflection in this article, in its first part. In this part of the text we will identify kinds of quality which are generated in the sphere of consciousness of post-modern society. This will restore the subjective dimension of post-modernity. In the second part of the article we will define the characteristics of knowledge functioning in contemporary educational institutions. We will strive to find a common denominator for knowledge as a point of reference of students at different levels of educational practice. Implementation of tasks associated with the development of the two parts of the text will create the possibility to compare and contrast the quality in both spheres of intellectual activity (postmodern consciousness – educational knowledge) and to determine the relationship between them – if any. This confrontation will primarily address the following questions: Whether school knowledge has/has not got characteristics independent of those which correspond to popular awareness? What may be the possible result of the opportunity to comment on the matter: do educational institutions contribute to the students' acquisition of postmodern consciousness or do they try to create intellectual quality on their own?

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF POSTMODERN CONSCIOUSNESS

1) Severing bonds with the past. In the postmodern era getting rid of connection to past experience (not only personal but also social) is considered as condition of progress. Past experience enabled man to gain organic vitality, build the foundations of personality, vision and understanding of the world, as well as determine upon his axiological azimuths etc. Hanging on tightly to the past, looking back and continuous moving within "the old" which does not guarantee fresh, better quality slow the progress down. The era of postmodern society can dawn only if we free imagination and move

perception into new, inspiring dimension devoid of patterns, common notions, stereotypes and other limits to imagination. Therefore one should build strong position in the present and most preferably confidently look ahead. According to the prophets of the new order adopting this perspective is the condition of innovation, acceleration of civilization and other positive changes. It is then crucial to loosen or even sever any ties with the past¹.

Another important reason for adopting such strategy is that it cleans the mind of the experience that might result in claiming damages from the actors in certain situation for the disappointment, anxiety and pain they caused. Any memory of such situations stimulates reopening old wounds, feeling deep hurts and shedding a lot of tears. Memory also helps to recall old, dangerous “demons” which give incentive to call for justice and are always ready to inspire one to make out a bill for the loss he suffered. Such situation is unfavorable. It poses a threat to a peaceful social condition and relative, controlled stability. Therefore a belief that looking back results not only in reactionary attitudes but it also is a source of xenophobia and chauvinism is strengthened in society².

Due to such arguments mental breaking of ties with tradition comes into effect. The achievements of past generations are no longer regarded as sacred, eternal and inviolable goods. They are no longer surrounded by absolute respect and awe. It is the done thing to “turn one’s back” on history, tradition, customs and all that is associated with the legacy from the fathers³.

¹ Cf. D. BELL, *Kulturowe sprzeczności kapitalizmu*, trans. S. Amsterdamski, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 1994, pp. 136-137, 207; cf. P. SZTOMPKA, *Socjologia zmian społecznych*, trans. J. Konieczny, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak 2005, pp. 77, 85; cf. A. TOURAINE, *Rola podmiotu w społeczeństwach nowoczesnych*, trans. M. Frybers, in: *Współczesne teorie socjologiczne*, vol. II, A. JASIŃSKA-KANIA, L.M. NIJAKOWSKI, J. SZACKI, M. ZIÓLKOWSKI (eds.), Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar 2006, p. 771.

² The aspect of breaking with the past in context of culture is mentioned by Lyotard (J.F. LYOTARD, *Kondycja ponowoczesna. Raport o stanie wiedzy*, trans. M. Kowalska, J. Migański, Warszawa: Fundacja Aletheia 1997, s. 73-77).

³ Cf. J. MARIAŃSKI, *Młodzież między tradycją a ponowoczesnością. Wartości moralne w świadomości maturzystów*, Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego 1995, pp. 17-18, 3. An effective way of distracting modern man’s attention from looking back is making the time actually lived as attractive as it is possible or promising future pleasure and fulfillment. This The whole consumer goods industry is working hard on this, beginning with the producers of goods attractive looking products, through tourism industry, cinema, media, entertainment and so on. It is obviously supported by the multitude of entities responsible for advertising and marketing, constantly looking for new ways of attracting customers. It strengthens the foundations for the society of gentle and gullible consumers, rather than reflective rebels who distance themselves from ideological mainstream that appeals to masses.

2) Going beyond the local horizon. Another aspect in which postmodern consciousness manifests itself involves distancing from anything that settles one in homely and familiar space – the matrix of growth. Shifting the perspective from close friends, objects and matters and adopting the one that reaches beyond familiar horizon, beyond the wealth of other than the domesticated characters, objects, orders is the question of modern perspective. Opening to the wider world is, above all, opening to others. Meeting other people leads to eliminating mental distances and other barriers to functioning in today's culturally diverse social reality. It also helps to overcome shyness, fears, anxieties, differences, hostility, antagonism, etc. and initiate dialogue, exchange, cooperation, acceptance, tolerance, and even understanding. In the modern mind the belief is coded that through such openings a large, general community based on positive attitudes starts to develop.

What is more, protection of local borders results in the fact that localness remains as peripheral diaspora with no prospects of growth; it also results in consent to isolationism – suggests „the spirit of post-modernism”. Such condition strengthens stagnation and dulls imagination which is then devoid of stimuli that introduce flexibility, suppleness, softness, freshness. Isolated community begins to close up and solidify which leads to ricketiness and gradual disappearance⁴. So, it is necessary to destroy the wall protecting the domesticated space from the world – this will begin the era of disposing of particularism and “entering the dimension of universality”⁵. However, the condition for achieving this state is not only distancing oneself from one's well-known stretch of space, but also dissociating oneself from assimilated beliefs, ideas, attitudes, practices, experiences, and even people with whom one grew up. Denial of these values and laughing at everything that is connected with localness is most desirable. Such attitude “purifies” and becomes the best measure of progress. Only then can we free ourselves from primitive sectarianism, backward backwater – argue the proponents of postmodern order⁶. In the atmosphere of such opinions holding to one's own, permanent and for generations earned place in the world, which is also the central place in social, geographical and cosmological terms, becomes embarrassing and is seen as source of disability; it is also associated with isolating oneself from the open space of freedom and progress.

⁴ Cf. SZTOMPKA, *Socjologia zmian społecznych*, p. 82.

⁵ TOURAINE, *Rola podmiotu w społeczeństwach nowoczesnych*, p. 771.

⁶ Cf. B. BARAN, *Postmodernizm i końce wieku*, Kraków: inter esse 2003, p. 234.

3) Multicolored reality – the arena for manifestation of freedom and independence. Going beyond limitations of narrow localness collides with diversity. The world is losing its unity and eternal law established order⁷. A mosaic of various sub-universes, beliefs, lifestyles, values, and models of cognition appears before man's eyes. Reality is in all the colors of the rainbow and in different shades. This applies to all dimensions of social life beginning with knowledge, religion, morality, customs, fashion, art, events, etc.⁸ In this mosaic of diversity there are no more or less privileged elements. Each element offers similar epistemic, aesthetic or axiological advantages and each of them functions on equal terms in social space. In this perspective all the options, models, components, states of things are possible for acceptance and may be the point of reference as well as the subject of choice. In the state of popular relativity not only adopting a new philosophy and setting moral preferences different from the existing ones, but also the "sex change" gain excuse. What is more, it is considered the hallmark of progress; it becomes an indicator of liberation from the chains of the overwhelming social conventions and unlacing tight corset of tradition⁹. It also creates the opportunity to manifest one's freedom and independence. Clearly, in these conditions, the choice and not the destiny is the feature of thinking¹⁰.

Such state of affairs strengthens the belief that absolutism is the source of intolerance which becomes a hotbed of antagonisms, conflicts, hostility and various forms of violence. Relativity therefore becomes not only an epistemic category which stems from the adoption of certain cognitive perspective, but a moral category as well. In social relations this should lead to adopting an attitude of the so-called tolerance. It is considered that these values should

⁷ Cf. P. BERGER, B. BERGER, H. KELLNER, *The Homeless Mind. Modernization and Consciousness*, New York: Vintage Books 1974, p. 64 ff.

⁸ P.L. BERGER, *Der Zwang zur Häresie. Religion in der Pluralistischen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer 1980, pp. 28-30. The presence of pluralism is connected to the breakdown of the world's unity into pieces. No longer is it seen as a single, indivisible universe, but as fragmented, broken and shredded. This defragmentation occurs at the levels of structure, culture and identity (cf. J. MARIANŃSKI, *Młodzież między tradycją a ponowoczesnością*, pp. 15, 30; cf. H. JOAS, *Powstawanie wartości*, trans. M. Kaczmarczyk, Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa 2009, pp. 235, 245-346; LYOTARD, *Kondycja ponowoczesna*, p. 59; SZTOMPKA, *Socjologia zmian społecznych*, p. 82).

⁹ Cf. S.N. EISENSTADT, *Nowoczesność jako odrębna cywilizacja*, trans. A. Ostolski, in: *Współczesne teorie socjologiczne*, vol. II, p. 756; cf. BELL, *Kulturowe sprzeczności kapitalizmu*, p. 137; MARIANŃSKI, *Młodzież między tradycją a ponowoczesnością*, p. 31.

¹⁰ Cf. B. BERGER, P. BERGER, *Nasz konserwatyzm*, „Aneks. Kwartalnik Polityczny” 1989, No. 53, pp. 117-118.

become the virtue of a modern man as they are the weapon which protects society from any signs of hostility from persecution, through racism and chauvinism¹¹.

4) Lack of axiological-normative stability, leading to anthropocentrism. Abandoning (even mentally) one's private centre of the world deep-rooting in family, kin, neighbour and national community which is the horizontal dimension of setting, as well as breaking off the relationships in vertical dimension which links by blood ties with past generations whose earthly experience has closed, and in some sense, also with those whose time is to come is the beginning of losing belief about existence of the unchangeable – a lasting point of reference to which one can refer at any time or when facing any choice (this belief applies also to the transcendent dimension of life). Also the view of the world suggests that everything is contextual and impermanent. Visionaries of future who promote new values and trends, authorities in the field of media who promote shocking models of life and morality; scientists who promote revolutionary interpretations of the truth, good and beauty – overturning the age-old canons; politicians who make real the behaviors that defy imagination which had been inspired by high moral standards of held offices, etc., they all contribute to the fact that talking about fixed azimuths is perceived by contemporaries only as fiction or another construct made by man. Under such circumstances a conviction is developed that every man may determine for himself what is important and what is not worthy of attention, what is good and what is bad, what is fair and what is not. An individual becomes the most important point of reference. An individual is the center of the universe. Individual's life fulfillment is a priority which also determines individual's knowledge of the world. An individual is placed over the following: responsibility towards the chain of generations in which an individual is only one of many links, community that is idle in its conservatism, unspecified natural law or the voice of God, heard by some, and not by others¹².

5) Man as the author of states, matters and their changeability. Since the eternal has already been denied, questioned and rejected as permanent herita-

¹¹ A. BLOOM, *Umysł zamknięty*, trans. T. Bieroń, Poznań: Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo 1997, pp. 27-28. Ryszard Legutko writes about sources of thinking present in modern philosophical concepts; the sources point out that tolerance should refrain from negative social tension, hostility and violence. R. LEGUTKO, *Tolerancja. Rzecz o surowym państwie, prawie natury, miłości i sumieniu*, Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak 1997, p. 137 ff.

¹² Cf. BELL, *Kulturowe sprzeczności kapitalizmu*, pp. 126-127.

ge of generations that was meant for acceptance and adoption by contemporary people, something else should be put forward instead. That something cannot be another form of the old. That would simply be shifting of elements. Therefore individuals should be encouraged to construct something new, to build reality on their own measure – the reality in which no one will impose neither style nor size, color or any other detail. Man can and even should design his world and try to make it real – say the prophets of postmodernism. In this way, among many other things, an individual is invited to “creative” activity. The idea of pragmatism is implemented and inoculated in the way of thinking about the whole world and about the fate of man who functions in this world. The belief is strengthened that it is possible for an individual to develop a scenario of his own life alone – a scenario from beginning to end without social dictates or guidelines (which one is supposed to stick to), historic necessity and interference of Providence. On similar basis, one can also formulate one’s own religious doctrine using the output of various confessions; it is also possible to build a collection of moral rules and indicate reasons for these rules; the rules will later be taken as code of ethics which is obligatory in individual action. Similar efforts are taken as far as model of family, child-rearing patterns, or gender are concerned. There is nothing absolute in such circumstances. Everything is a construct, another invention designed by a man. Thus, let the solutions be born in us. Let us become creators of the world, the new gods. This is the content that appears in modern man’s way of thinking¹³.

The world called into existence and built on the above foundations has no power to last. The world becomes and as called into existence it has limited horizon of functioning, it lasts until a new expression, another active manifestation of will and vision of reality by an individual inspired for action. Modernity, with its enormous absorption capacity, will accept the most extraordinary and the least expected proposals. It will eagerly replace more used creations of human imagination with these proposal. Under such conditions it is difficult to talk about the sense of stability, continuity and invariability. The

¹³ Cf. BERGER, BERGER, *Nasz konserwatyzm*, pp. 117-119; A. GIDDENS, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. „Ja” i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*, trans. A. Sulżycka, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2001, p. 112 ff.; cf. A. INEKLES, *A model of the modern man: theoretical and methodological issues*, in: C.E. BLACK (ed.), *Comparative modernization*, New York: Free Press 1976, p. 329; S.N. EISENSTADT, *Nowoczesność jako odrębna cywilizacja*, trans. A. Ostolski, in: *Współczesne teorie socjologiczne*, vol. II, p. 756; TOURAINE, *Rola podmiotu w społeczeństwach nowoczesnych*, p. 772 ff.

belief is strengthened that periodicity, temporariness, instability, constant dynamism and change are the essence of social order¹⁴.

6) Rationality and reflexivity are excluded from the actions taken by an individual. Generally propagated and advertised slogans such as: freedom and progress, consumption and pleasure become the goals and grounds for these practices. These qualities are accepted a priori. Man does not have a second thought either on the ontology underlying the state of affairs which maintains contemporary order of the social world, or on the short-term and long-term consequences of his actions. Emotions, instinct, intuition, exuberant fantasy or "words from a prompter" become driving force behind the actions taken. This mechanism is binding on the adoption of axiological priorities, determining lifestyles, setting standards of performance, doing certain activities, etc. For some time a modern man may even be good at functioning in this way, and he may even find it satisfactory. However, this satisfaction is often short-distance and superficial. It usually ends with the coming of distressing emotional states which throw him off balance, such as: lack of sense, uncertainty, danger, disappointment, loss, loneliness, alienation, depression, etc. It should also be noted that these states do not encourage rationalization of one's actions¹⁵.

7) Experiencing sensation as the base for world orientation. Multiplicity, diversity, and often inconsistency which is inscribed in the modern world, does not allow a citizen of this world to find his place in it; man is not able to form a self-contained and meaningful whole or justify the presence of various elements which make the whole. This would, however, give man an opportunity to understand what is going on around him. He cannot discover the rules that govern the surrounding reality¹⁶. Different interpretations of truth, opposing worldviews, alternative models of behavior, incompatible processes, disproportionate events and objects including figments of one's imagination etc. are beyond the capacity of an average man's mind. Man is not able to cope with rationalization of multi-layered and multi-vector matter.

¹⁴ Cf. F.X. KAUFMANN, *Religion und Modernität. Sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, Tübingen 1989, p. 19; T. SCHWINN, *Nowoczesność: od historycznych źródeł do współczesnej ekspansji. Socjologia Maxa Webera w XXI wieku*, trans. G. Sowinski, in: *Nowe perspektywy teorii socjologicznej*, A. MANTERYŚ, J. MUCHA (eds.), Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy NOMOS 2009, p. 589.

¹⁵ MARIAŃSKI, *Młodzież między tradycją a ponowoczesnością*, p. 17; BELL, *Kulturowe sprzeczności kapitalizmu*, pp. 121, 179.

¹⁶ TOURAINE, *Rola podmiotu w społeczeństwach nowoczesnych*, p. 777.

The answer to the following question: "How does it all function and operate together?" remains an impenetrable mystery, a problem giving no chance for a solution. In such circumstances rationality is diminished and marginalized because of its explication powerlessness. In its place sensation is introduced. Intuitive understanding of the meaning becomes the most appropriate way of orientation in the world (which then provides the basis for decisions and actions). By mentioning its widespread presence Welsch makes it clear that it is not the effect of the current fashion, but the consequence of pluralistic constitution of reality¹⁷. These were the changes in reality itself that caused the transition from the logocentric to aesthetic way of thinking¹⁸.

8) In the mind of a modern man there appears the sense of fast passing time which results in acceptance of lower quality standards. Acceleration of the pace of life stems from continuous following the quickly changing challenges of everyday life, numerous, often overlapping and new obligations, wide range of offers of the commercialized market for goods and services, as well as from the prevailing tendency to maximize every effort. Competition and rivalry associated with the desire to gain dominance but often also with survival itself, the need to "keep one's head above water" make one achieve the most effect with the least effort. In terms of production this is expressed in the concepts of: "faster", "more", "cheaper"¹⁹. These parameters do not go hand in hand with high quality of the effects of taken efforts. The achieved results of action do not have high standards. But modern man gives it his consent. He explains to himself that nothing ever done is permanent. "The limited horizon of duration" does not impose unreasonable expectations of either longevity, reliability or a constant update. There is a belief that the time of the new will come soon: new discovery, new invention, new technology, new demand, new fashion, etc. Too durable products will then prove to be too old, outdated, useless, unattractive etc. Thus, we agree to the dawn of the era of weaker standards. Such feeling is present in almost all dimensions of collective life.

¹⁷ WELSCH, *Narodziny filozofii postmodernistycznej z ducha sztuki*, p. 461.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 459.

¹⁹ Cf. BERGER, BERGER, KELLNER, *The Homeless Mind. Modernization and Consciousness*, p. 36.

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF KNOWLEDGE WHICH FUNCTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

1) Knowledge lacks a strong setting in tradition. The fast increase in new discoveries, theories, concepts and interpretations causes that calling upon what had earlier functioned as the canon of knowledge requisite to be learnt at school, cannot be presented as the starting point for reflection. In the majority of cases such knowledge is either dismissed entirely or treated perfunctorily; it might also be deemed exotic – a type of information which one might quote as an anecdote, curious detail and a confabulation element. Generally, however, it is pushed aside and treated as extracurricular, meant only for those who are exceptionally interested and ambitious. Organizational limitations of the modern school system do not provide an opportunity to present everything that has been discovered, completed and what once had belonged to the canon of basic data taught to young people of that time. Thus, it became necessary to undertake a selection. As a result, such knowledge is dismissed which – from the perspective of contemporary science – seems outdated or – from the point of view of social expectations – does not contribute to progress in any way.

The trend which is discussed here fits well within the strategy of knowledge focused on the present and the future, implemented by educational institutions. From this point of view, reaching for (theoretical) roots of current knowledge is not useful in the process of subjecting the world nor does it permit solving of problems with which the contemporary population is struggling. It is assumed at this point that knowledge should face current challenges or even exceed the present – by providing answers to questions which appear on the horizon of the future times. The result of such outlook is the shortening of cognitive perspective which ultimately stifles the opportunity to construct a formation which would enable understanding of people and the world in which they function²⁰.

2) The dominance of universal over the local content. In educational practice depreciation of the meaning of knowledge related to local aspects of social life occurs in many ways: elimination from school curricula literary

²⁰ M. KOUTSELINI, *Contemporary Trends and Perspectives of the Curricula: Towards a meta-modern paradigm for curriculum*, „Curriculum Studies” 5(1997), No. 5, p. 92; P. KOZYR-KOWALSKI, *Uniwersytet a rynek*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM 2005, pp. 36-37.

and artistic works which originated on the local grounds and replacing them with achievements of different ethnic groups, other nations and foreign cultures; substitution of knowledge relating to local history and recent events for the knowledge of history and present facts which reflect distant contexts; comparing sentimental content which strengthens students' emotional ties with geographical and cultural environment they grew up in with the content designed to diminish the value related to this space and then withdraw it from school circulation; promoting axiology and attitudes which are unfamiliar in the social environment; resigning from honoring important and distinguished people of the local community in favor of people popular in large scale; reducing the number of hours of these school subjects which reinforce sense of attachment to the local environment (such as history, geography, mother tongue) in favor of physical education, foreign languages, entrepreneurship, etc. These and similar efforts are designed in order to weaken students' connection to the well-known socio-cultural context and at the same time to introduce them to strange values, which are often contrary to their own. Commitment to the local values is to be replaced with cosmopolitanism.

3) Knowledge is relative. The multiplicity of presented theoretical directions, research perspectives and alternative viewpoints (feminist, racial, ethnical, etc.) is not so much treated as an enriching outlook opportunity which provides a fuller view of the studied reality but rather it is utilized as a evidence of the existence of ambiguity and incommensurability as well as leads to undermining of universalism. In practice, this results in frequent attempts to put to test the certainties accepted by students. It also leads to the situation when the participants of educational contexts are incapable of differentiating truth from false, good from evil or beauty from ugliness. Values became mixed with anti-values. Students are not given the instruments to divide one from the other. They are not shown ways nor methods to find a reference point which would show directions and help to determine purpose as well as instill values in cognitive acts.

Such state of affairs stemming from the context of didactic actions is further reinforced with the contents of the communicated doctrine. Within the school symbolic space, options negating the existence of truth, beauty and good are in conflict with those which advocate the adherence to these values. In this narration stable structures are replaced with events. The sense which lasts as stable and unchanging is slowly dominated by the sense constantly "called into existence", bearing the hallmarks of elusiveness, impermanence and passing. The timeless is superseded by the temporary. Nowadays, a greater power of influence is observed in the case of such standpoints which

argue that speaking of objective truth is utterly preposterous, that it is an archaism born out of fossilized anti-progressive minds; for everything is fractional and limited, everything can be undermined, refuted and replaced with the new²¹.

Considering the arguments presented, it may be concluded that schools no longer advocate a clear vision of the world while simultaneously arguing that the world cannot be objectively recognized and interpreted. Any attempts at capturing it are fractional and hypothetical. Thus, the only "scientific" standpoint is to acknowledge of the ubiquitous relativism. Under such circumstances, the measure and canon of scientificity is non-scientificity or even anti-scientificity, which leads to the borderline dividing knowledge from pseudo-knowledge being gradually abolished²².

4) Knowledge is not ordered²³. Educational knowledge lacks clear regulations. At school, often such values, behavioral patterns and models of action are demonstrated which lack inner consistency. In many cases, they are even contradictory. There is not a single dominant which would arrange them in order. Young people are also frequently given dissimilar, often mutually exclusive interpretations of facts and topics without a final evaluation. For example, on the one hand, a view is presented stating that a fight for a just cause is worthy of undertaking, that it is an imperative founded on honor and higher good, while on the other, opinions are evoked which stress that any armed action is indeed a nonsense, explaining that it is a contradiction to fundamental values, an utter absurd and as such all armed activity should be immediately ceased and unconditionally rejected²⁴. By presenting alternative solutions, possibilities and positions as well as leaving their formula open puts students in an ambivalent situation, which they are not capable of solving on their own. They are left with dilemmas far beyond their abilities and then they are either directed by their teacher's personal preferences or left to

²¹ Z. MELOSIK, *Uniwersytet i społeczeństwo. Dyskurs wolności, wiedzy i władzy*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo WoLuMiN 2002, pp. 119-121; cf. G. VATTIMO, *Koniec nowoczesności*, trans. M. Surma-Gawłowska, Kraków: Universitas 2006, pp. 63-69.

²² A. BLOOM, *Umysł zamknięty*, Poznań: Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo 1997, pp. 30, 33, 390, 402 ff.

²³ These remarks particularly apply to subjects from outside the canon as well as humanities.

²⁴ W. WĄDOŁOWSKI, *Elementy polskiej tożsamości społeczno-kulturowej w wybranych podręcznikach języka polskiego dla III klasy gimnazjum*, rozprawa doktorska, KUL, Lublin 2008, pp. 99, 120.

their own devices in creating an individual project, of whose suitability they are neither certain nor convinced.

Another case related to the discussed problem concerns creating problematic situations which students should solve on their own, of initiating discussions which they are to settle themselves and of presenting tasks which they are to perform, etc. The purpose of this is to transform adepts of education into creators of knowledge²⁵. It should be added here that they are not given a reference point which would enable them to correct the achieved results. Thus, they are faced with the necessity to determine cognitive values. In doing so they are made not only creators but also arbiters of their own achievements. The evoked case is another proof confirming that the obstacles put in front of students are not placed where they should be. This creates an opportunity of a broad (sometimes unlimited) arbitrariness which frequently results in errors as well as in confirming one's – not always correct – convictions, opening various paths of heresy, equating the achieved results with -knowledge based on scientific methods and epistemic authorities and competing with the said knowledge, which might entail attempts to remonstrate it or even fight against it.

The basis of such educational practice is the ideology which assumes the lack of universal truths, standards and norms of research conduct, etc. Individual experiences and single solutions are a point of reference for themselves, as well as the voucher of their reliability and an unerring augur. The constant is replaced with the volatile, the unequivocal becomes ambiguous, the fixed becomes flexible, etc. There are no definite borderlines nor are there unambiguous and simple answers²⁶. The described situation is particularly relevant in the case of humanities which are taught with considerable liberty²⁷.

5) Knowledge is practical in character. Knowledge does not provide the possibility of understanding but rather opens an opportunity to solve specific problems. Understanding becomes a secondary category, marginalized in work with students²⁸. Its place is taken by usefulness. The knowledge which is

²⁵ P. POPKEWITZ, *The Denial of Change in Educational Change: Systems of Ideas in the Construction of National Policy and Evaluation*, „Educational Research” 29(2000), No. 1, p. 20.

²⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷ R. STEVENS, P. WINEBURG, L.R. HERRENKOHL, P. BELL, *Comparative Understanding of School Subjects: Past, Present, and Future*, „Review of Educational Research” 75(2005), No. 2, p. 134.

²⁸ Ewa Narkiewicz-Niedbalec proves in her research that university education does not instill in its recipients the skill of 'deductive-nomological explanations'. In a test which she

sought after allows to overcome difficulties of practical nature, provides an opportunity to control the course of events and increases the effectiveness of actions, etc.²⁹ Such perspective determines the criteria of what is considered important and what less so, what is worth striving for and what is only treated as a 'filler'. It is this knowledge which is pursued by students, to whom the answer to the question 'Why?' seems redundant and who defy theoretical, immeasurable and humanistic background in general. Such knowledge is desired by the participants of the labor market who realize that employers will require from them specific skills and familiarity with knowledge which is useful in various sectors of collective life, and thus knowledge which provides an answer to the question of 'How?' (How to overcome an obstacle? How to perform the ordered task? How to achieve a better result?). The prevalent opinion is that knowledge which is general, theoretical and which enables understanding does not constitute a sufficient motivation to undertake cognitive efforts³⁰.

A similar attitude can be observed even among people of science, including the greatest authorities in their fields. For example, such stance is illustrated by the statement from a famous English physics expert, Stephen Hawking. He writes, "I [believe] that physical theories are just mathematical models we construct and it is meaningless to ask if they correspond to reality,

conducted, approx. 80% of students were unable to apply such an explanation (that is, they failed to demonstrate the understanding of facts from the given field). What is interesting, the same proportion is found among both 1st and 5th year students. This indicates that higher education does not contribute to the development of thinking and that it effectively continues the strategies realized on lower levels of education (E. NARKIEWICZ-NIEDBALEC, *Socjalizacja poznawcza uczącej się młodzieży. Studium z zakresu socjologii wiedzy i edukacji*, Zielona Góra: Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego 2006, pp. 227-230, 237-239).

²⁹ The usefulness and effectiveness of knowledge are features particularly valued in the knowledge-based economy (DRUCKER, *Spółczeństwo pokapitalistyczne*, pp. 43, 157; cf. LYOTARD, *Kondycja ponowoczesna*, pp. 126-129, 131, 134).

³⁰ Cf. W.B. STANLEY, *What Social Education Content is Most Important*, „Educational Leadership” 1982, May, p. 590; cf. D.H. REILLY, *A Knowledge Base for Education: Cognitive Science*, „Journal of Teacher Education” 1989, May-June, p. 10; D.A. LABAREE, *Educational Researchers: Living With a Lesser Form of Knowledge*, „Educational Researcher” 27(1998), No. 8, p. 6; P.J. GUMPORT, *Academic Restructuring: Organizational Change and Institutional Imperatives*, „Higher Education” 2000, No. 39, p. 83; D. RAVITCH, *Left Back: a Century of Battles over School Reform*, New York-London: Simon & Schuster 2001, p. 408 ff. This conclusion finds its confirmation in the number of people who apply for 'theoretical' faculties in Poland in recent years. Philosophy, classical philology, theoretical physics, mathematics or even history barely manage to assemble a full body of students.

just whether they predict observations”³¹. The quoted statement can be read as an expression of doubt in the power of knowledge as a method of understanding of reality or in the possibility of learning it. It should be noted here that the aforementioned author is not a practitioner but a theoretician par excellence³².

The above examples confirm that at present we are dealing with distinct tendency toward instrumentalization of knowledge. They attest to the contemporary longing for that which can be measured, verified and applied³³. It is also a tendency towards contextual knowledge (in which the context (of usage) decides what is significant, valuable, worth striving for) and not universal knowledge (which is characterized by a fixed cognitive horizon; aiming at understanding the world or its fragments)³⁴.

6) Knowledge is fragmentary. Student is not presented with a broad cognitive perspective which would entail a complete set of facts related to a given subject, a field or a discipline. What is exposed instead are only the selected issues, aspects or extracts of the studied reality, temporal perspectives, while others are neglected or dismissed entirely. No attempts are made to produce a reasonably complete picture of the discussed thematic field. Comprehensive approach is no longer favored, while instead minute, often insignificant facts are highlighted, which function mainly on their own without any important contribution into the understanding of the whole. The constructed image of the world becomes ridden with ambiguity, cracks and gaps. The fabric of knowledge is full of holes, ripped and often disjointed. This does not provide an opportunity to view the studied issues in full perspective. It is often accompanied by unbalanced proportions between the events included in the school communication and the actual events. All these factors contribute to the difficulty in achieving objectivism and properly organized facts³⁵.

³¹ P. HAWKING, *Zastrzeżenia bezwstydnego redukcjonisty*, in: R. PENROSE, *Makro-świat, mikroświat i ludzki umysł*, Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka 1997, p. 166.

³² J. CIEŚLIŃSKI, *Rozumienie kluczem do wiedzy*, in: *Między unifikacją a dezintegracją. Kondycja wiedzy we współczesnym społeczeństwie*, A. JABŁOŃSKI, M. ZEMŁO (eds.), Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2008, p. 59.

³³ KOUTSELINI, *Contemporary Trends and Perspectives of the Curricula*, p. 90.

³⁴ P.J. GUMPORT, *Academic Restructuring: Organizational Change and Institutional Imperatives*, „Higher Education” 2000, No. 39, p. 83.

³⁵ STANLEY, *What Social Education Content is Most Important*, p. 590; cf. LYOTARD, *Kondycja ponowoczesna*, p. 161. Such a state of matters on the domestic education ground is discussed by W. Wądołowski in his doctoral thesis: *Elementy polskiej tożsamości społeczno-kulturowej w wybranych podręcznikach języka polskiego dla III klasy gimnazjum*, Lublin 2008.

A separate issue which should be touched upon at this point placing an emphasis on specialization and not on shaping of a thoroughly prepared intellectual formation and building of strong personality. School's concern is not directed towards educating students with broad horizons, capable of an open-minded attitude and reflectively approaching the surrounding facts, etc., but towards developing selected areas of their personality³⁶, working on specific skills and preparing them to a narrow scope of activity and tasks. The employed practice aims at producing experts in narrow fields, people enclosed within limited framework of specialization. The point is to achieve such – formation of educational institution graduates which would make them the motive force of civilization progress³⁷. In this perspective, the very shaping of student is a secondary issue. In the light of the presented formulations it is not an unsubstantiated conclusion that student is largely treated instrumentally and it can ultimately be concluded that school systems are not assembled with students in mind but rather realize (in a conscious or unconscious manner) the strategies representing particular interests of various social forces³⁸.

7) Knowledge is superficial and limited in character³⁹. Teachers are usually deprived of an opportunity to thoroughly present the issues included in school curricula. Thus, they limit their activity to referencing information contained in books and concerning achieved results of research, suggested models, schemes or divisions, etc. They do not, however, offer (at best, they clearly marginalize it) any method of arriving at these conclusions or constructing them. The material given to students is routinely simple and non-controversial – thus, it does not provoke them to an intellectual effort. It should be noted that such option is favored by those who are being educated

³⁶ A comprehensive approach to student is not possible as the educational system is not coordinated. There is no synchronization in pedagogical activities aimed at awakening a consistent formation in the following dimensions: intellectual (proper thinking, single logic, unambiguous rhetoric), emotional (unambiguous direction of emotional states and a congenial canon of sensory reception and evaluation), axiological (consistent system of values, norms and models of behavior) etc. (cf. F. ZNANIECKI, *Naukowa funkcja socjologii edukacji*, „Forum Oświatowe” 1994, No. 1, p. 248 ff.). Usually, various points of view are assumed to which schooling practice is then adjusted. It leads to intellectual and emotional anarchy as well as a world-view chaos.

³⁷ A high level of specialization is one of the pillars of the knowledge-based economy (P.F. DRUCKER, *Spoleczeństwo pokapitalistyczne*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 1999, pp. 43-44).

³⁸ Cf. MELOSİK, *Uniwersytet i społeczeństwo*, pp. 106-107.

³⁹ This applies mainly to the canon subjects and the so-called ‘pure’ sciences.

and who expect that their educators will indicate a specific scope of knowledge to be learned, hoping that it is as narrow as possible. Clearly specified requirements liberate them from any deeper involvement in the mapping of the analyzed issues about which they are not passionate (which applies to an overwhelming majority of learners). Young people en masse are content with acquiring only such a scope of facts and to such a degree which is required of them. Exceeding teachers' and examiners' expectations is a rare occurrence indeed, despite the fact – and it should be stressed – that each year the threshold of these expectations is lowered⁴⁰.

8) Literary and rational character of knowledge is gradually replaced by a pictorial and emotionally charged one⁴¹. Verbal discourse which entailed the requirements of abstract thinking was aimed at coherent and unambiguous description of the world as well as allowed for a precise explanation thereof. An image entails a rather liberal interpretation. The communication which it carries is not as sharp and unambiguous as the one communicated by terms. It leaves a large area for maneuvering to its interpreters: it creates a number of possibilities of various interpretations, it presents a range of judgments and opinions as well as opens a rich palette of likely associations. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to keep the detailed requirements of precision. Moreover, discourses based on visual forms are not always eligible for comparison, juxtaposition or adjustment⁴². However, it should be remembered that it works in reality which in its constitutive dimension appears to be multi-layered, multi-vector, incoherent, ambiguous and the like. Under such circumstances sensation is placed over rationality. Rationality limits with rules and principles, sensation, however, frees from these rules and principles by opening the horizon of invention and creativity⁴³. What is more, sensation becomes primary means of interpreting the world. In this situation, Welsch's statement comes to mind: "aesthetic perspective once recognized as

⁴⁰ Cf. STANLEY, *What Social Education Content is Most Important*, p. 590; MELOSİK, *Uniwersytet i społeczeństwo*, p. 106; cf. KOZYR-KOWALSKI, *Uniwersytet a rynek*, pp. 36, 52.

⁴¹ It might be worthwhile to compare textbooks for primary and secondary (gymnasium) schools with those used in Poland 30 years ago by young people of the same age. Also the methods of teaching classes have changed – the traditional form of a lecture is gradually replaced by presentation, field trips, films, etc.

⁴² E. Narkiewicz-Niedbalec noted in her research conducted among students of higher education institutions that in the studied group, narrative thinking is predominantly observed (corresponding to pictorial culture). It is discernable over paradigmatic thinking (NARKIEWICZ-NIEDBALEC, *Socjalizacja poznawcza uczącej się młodzieży*, p. 237).

⁴³ WELSCH, *Narodziny filozofii postmodernistycznej*, pp. 431, 457-460.

dubious appears to be the closest to reality and is the most capable of knowing it”⁴⁴.

Let it be noted that the employed means of expression operate to a larger extent in the area of emotional impressions than that of intellect. Thus, it is not a reflection, analysis, measuring or criticism but rather emotions, associations, images or intuitions which become the basis of cognitive references. The affective sphere begins dominating over the rational one⁴⁵. The evoked para-rational states become the fundament on which the construction of student’s knowledge is erected⁴⁶.

9) The level of educational knowledge is lowered. At public schools, the educational requirements are reduced to the level of young people’s low expectations, people who have minimum educational ambitions, who treat school as their unwelcome duty and who have been neglected in terms of their upbringing, while students who are passionate, who have a large intellectual potential, who are eager to learn are usually left to their own devices. Teachers do not have time to devote to them as their entire attention and all efforts are concentrated on weaker learners who require their unrestricted support. Lowering the requirements to the standards determined by this category of students, who are already a largest group within school communities, clearly reduces the level of educational knowledge and in doing so, it lowers the level of knowledge of the entire society⁴⁷.

In terms of its quality, what also suffers is the knowledge employed on higher levels of education. Secondary and higher schools operating in today’s age of the market is oriented on gaining the largest possible number of ‘clients’ which entails the adaptation of these institutions to the expectations of the clientele. This latter group includes a significant number of individuals with rather limited perceptual abilities. Still, schools’ struggle to remain on

⁴⁴ Ibidem, p. 459.

⁴⁵ In many cases, this formula also governs scientific discussions. a convincing example of such situation can be found in the text by Mirosław Filipowicz. Based on the example of a dispute between Polish and Russian historians specializing in the history of Russia, he demonstrates how stereotypes occlude rational arguments and how the circumstances win over objectivism (M. FILIPOWICZ, *Dwa spojrzenia na dzieje Rosji, czyli o tym, jak na gruncie amerykańskim zderzyły się rosyjska i polska tradycja historiograficzna*, in: *Między unifikacją a dezintegracją*, pp. 229-254).

⁴⁶ Cf. T. SZKUDLAREK, *Wiedza i wolność w pedagogice amerykańskiego postmodernizmu*, Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls” 1993, pp. 114-115, 146-147.

⁴⁷ M. ZEMŁO, *Szkoła w stanie anomii. Raport*. Urząd Miejski w Białymstoku, Białystok 2006, p. 82 ff.

the market and their effective rivalry with competition often consists in a strategy of lowering educational standards. In the conditions of mass pursuit of various diplomas and certificates, the minimum level of what is required of students is constantly reduced⁴⁸.

One of the features characterizing modern times is the penetration of mass culture elements into the school knowledge. In many cases, a reference to the current discourse is an experience rooted within the ordinary world. The starting point is that which is more familiar and specific as well as the manner in which it is given to subsequently follow towards that which is less obvious and more abstract. The direction of educating runs from contextual approach towards a universal one. It should be noted, however, that frequently the initial stage is not exceeded. It is easier to move within the field of (trivial) specific elements than reality which must be recalled, imagined or conceptualized. More ambitious forms of knowledge begin to be replaced by those which are easier and which do not require any additional effort or are less sophisticated, etc. Ultimately, the ordinariness and the mass culture evidently impose the standards of school knowledge. An old Copernican rule is at work here which states that better currency is replaced by a lesser one⁴⁹.

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After reviewing the features that correspond to the two areas of subjective reality present in the modern world: postmodern consciousness and school knowledge, parallelism between the two is easily noticed. Most of the identified quality which occurs in one dimension corresponds to the quality present in the second dimension. It is difficult to talk about priority of any of the above-mentioned forms of mental capacity, i.e. it is difficult to decide which of them strengthens the quality presented by the other. The author acknowledges that there is a dialectic link between the two as a result of which selected elements spread from one to another, but they also spread in the opposite direction and they are equally strong. As a result of conducted analyses it has been demonstrated that school knowledge is not exceptionally

⁴⁸ D.A. LABAREE, *Educational Researchers: Living With a Lesser Form of Knowledge*, „Educational Researcher” 27(1998), No. 8, p. 6.

⁴⁹ Cf. SZKUDLAREK, *Wiedza i wolność w pedagogice*, pp. 15, 119, 131, 133-134; BLOOM, *Umysł zamknięty*, p. 384. Parameters of school knowledge are described on the basis of the following text: M. ZEMŁO, *Spółczeństwo wiedzy – kwestia bliskiej czy odległej przyszłości*, „Przegląd Socjologiczny” 2008, No. 3, pp. 59-78.

privileged in the whole socio-cultural context but that it is closely connected with it. In practice this means that the features which correspond to the wider context can also be identified in smaller areas. Even in those, as it would seem, that should be specially protected from the “uncontrolled” influence and should not be subject to “external disturbances”.

One more thing is worth mentioning. The first impulses that initiated the quality of post-modern era were given by chosen philosophers, representatives of various forms of art, as well as those who offered theoretical reflection on artistic creations, and they grew strong in these environments. They later spread across different areas of social life. As it is shown in this paper, they found their place in school knowledge which, being the point of reference to almost all individuals in the highly developed, civilized societies, has the power to disseminate and reinforce the mentioned parameters in wide circulation. Thus it significantly contributes to strengthening postmodern consciousness in the minds of contemporary individuals. If postmodernity has already entered its way into a social circle it will be difficult to replace it quickly with a form of different quality.

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POSTMODERNISTYCZNA ŚWIADOMOŚĆ VERSUS
WDROŻONY MODEL WIEDZY SZKOLNEJ

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Socjologia udowodniła, że subiektywna rzeczywistość koresponduje z obiektywną rzeczywistością. Subiektywna rzeczywistość jest przedmiotem rozważań w pierwszej części artykułu, w której autor stara się identyfikować rodzaje właściwości, cech, które są generowane w sferze świadomości w społeczeństwie ponowoczesnym, a tym samym rekonstruuje subiektywny wymiar ponowoczesności. W drugiej części artykułu autor określa właściwości wiedzy we współczesnych instytucjach edukacyjnych i stara się znaleźć wspólny mianownik dla wiedzy jako punktu odniesienia uczniów na różnych poziomach praktyki edukacyjnej. Realizacja zadań związanych z rozwojem dwóch części tekstu stworzy możliwość porównania właściwości w obu dziedzinach działalności intelektualnej (postmodernistycznej świadomości – wiedzy edukacyjnej) oraz umożliwi określenie relacji między nimi – jeśli w ogóle tak istnieje.

Słowa kluczowe: postmodernizm, świadomość, edukacja, wiedza szkolna.