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Social capital as the basis for academic development of young pedagogues, illustrated with the example of the participants of the Young Pedagogues Summer School, operating at the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences

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Abstract

The development of young academic staff requires them to possess a variety of skills. Nowadays it is especially significant that people are able to trust each other, build relations and, most importantly, act in a creative, innovative way, both individually and in a group. The thesis we propose in the text is that the development capital is the foundation for academic development of young scholars. We further support this thesis by presenting an example of a good practice – the Young Pedagogues Summer School, operating at the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a conference organized in 2013 for the 26th time, which has contributed significantly into the development of Polish pedagogics. The text is composed of two parts, with the first one presenting a number of events from the history of the Young Pedagogues Summer Schools. The second part, based on the experience of Young Pedagogues Summer Schools participants, will demonstrate the value and importance of the last 20 years of their operation for the development of young academic staff and for the development of pedagogics in general.

Keywords: *social capital, trust, build relations, Young Pedagogues Summer School*

Introduction

The issues of our text are presented in a wider context of socio-cultural transformations, which on the one hand carry progress and rapid development, while on the other hand growing unrest and risk among people. Poland's development is multidimensional and rapid. The number of well-educated and wealthy people is growing, but we are still a society of a relatively low social capital. For many years, due to the political situation our country did not create conditions for undertaking joint innovation activities based on mutual trust. For years people were focusing more on surviving, defending values but less on looking into the future openly and independently.

Nowadays, on many planes Poland is looking for an answer to the question: what the future of our country will be like. The general outline of the development vision is included in the Report *Poland 2030. Development challenges*. (2009), in which a special importance is given to cooperation, trust and commitment contained in the general category of social capital. It is understood as the ability of people to trust each other, to create ties with others which leads to undertaking unconventional, creative activities

(individually or together with other people) aimed at development, progress and innovations (*Report Poland 2030, 2009*).

In the text we present, in the case study of the achievement of the Young Pedagogues Summer School (hereafter the YPSS) organized by the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, how the above mentioned goals are achieved by young researchers. The text consists of two parts. In the first part we refer to some images of the past of the Young Pedagogues Summer School, in the second part we will show, on the basis of experiences of the Summer School participants, the value and importance of the latest twenty years of its operating for the development of young researchers and in fact for the development of pedagogy.

The images of the past of the Young Pedagogues Summer School

The Young Pedagogues Summer School is a one-week meeting held once a year in September in different places of Poland and organized by different academic centres every year. The classes of the School are held in a number of tried-and-tested forms such as lectures, panel discussions, academic presentations of invited guests (representatives of the humanities and social sciences as well as outstanding practitioners), talks and consultations with them, task seminars in small groups, presentations of young pedagogues' achievements. To date 26 Summer Schools have been held.

The basic aim of the Summer Schools is to support and stimulate the academic development of young pedagogues, create opportunities for deepening knowledge, enriching their own research techniques, presenting academic achievements and promoting the most gifted. It is important to create conditions conducive to the authentic integration of the environment and tightening intergeneration contacts.

The first YPSS was held in 1979, in the communist days, unfavourable to the development of pedagogy and pedagogues. Nonetheless, thanks to Professor Wincenty Okoń as the first Head of the School and the involvement of the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences and the Main Board of Polish Teachers' Union it was possible to organize a two-week meeting of young pedagogues with outstanding scientists in the name of: *the revival of innovation movement in education*. The first experience shows that it was not (and is not!) an ordinary conference but an event perceived years later as significant for the academic development of young pedagogues who frequently change their career path.

A co-organizer of the first and the head of the next six Schools (in 1986 – 1993, with a two-year break in 1989-1991) was Professor Helidor Muszyński who, recalling the Schools organized by himself, says that 'what we cared for was to open views, but not to close' and adds that 'they were not usual series of lectures, but mainly series of meetings of people with each other' (Kowal 1998, pp. 43-44).

Many changes in the School formula took place in 1994 which was connected with the new head of the YPSS in the person of Professor Maria Dudzikowa, who has performed this post since then and who cares about organizing meetings which will not be 'for' the young but which will be organized 'all together with' young pedagogues. The initiative

has been supported by individual Chairmen of the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The cooperation with young pedagogues is a sign of enormous confidence in them, which leads to mutual openness, being inspired, creating the basis of autonomous activities and initiatives. One of them was the appointment by Professor Maria Dudzińska together with young pedagogues the Forum of Young Pedagogues at the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences whose aim was to create a databank necessary for conducting research and exchanging information between centres. Every year President of the Forum of Young Pedagogues is elected. The President serves at the same time as the School Secretary. His/her work begins by taking over from the former organizers and ends with editing and publishing the Notebook of Young Pedagogues. For the Secretary it is a year of hard work and also an important school of cooperation with other people in order to accomplish the common objective.

Another initiative launched during one of the Summer Schools is an electronic 'Międzyszkolnik' – an all-Poland Internet paper the Forum of Young Pedagogues. Today the database contains about 300 addresses of Forum participants. It was created out of the need to support each other and inform about important events, published books, organized conferences between schools.

Another achievement of the Summer Schools is 17 issues of the 'Zeszyt Forum Młodych Pedagogów' which publishes reviewed texts of young participants of the Summer School edited by the School Secretary (excluding one). Young pedagogues have a chance to publish their papers in it and, which is a great distinction, in the pages of the prestigious academic magazine 'Rocznik Pedagogiczny'.

Commitment – trust – contacts: social capital of the Young Pedagogues Summer School

The YPSS is devoted to a different current subject every year, which teaches multidimensional perception of the world and creates possibilities of dialogue and cooperation above disciplines (Furedi, 2008, p.76). The idea of interdisciplinary viewing of selected phenomena constitutes all September meetings. The best specialists, leading professors of pedagogy and other disciplines (anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology, history, law, philology, linguistics, culture studies, art, music and others) are invited in order to put the idea into practice. The YPSS is the School in which there are neither burnout teachers nor people 'jaded towards knowledge and work' (Simmel, quoting Bauman 2009, p. 49), just quite the opposite there are people of a considerable level of "personal mastery" (Senge 2004, p. 180). Only such people can lead out of mediocrity of thinking and teach others.

Professors who come to the Summer School are open to consultations, questions, dilemmas of young pedagogues. They undertake the work with the young but they are not sure whether their commitment will bring the desire to search and work on one's mediocrity, ignorance and inability. They do it because they believe that young pedagogues are worth investing. The young feel that their problems are important not only to them and when they ask for help they will not be dismissed with indifference or

meaningless words. These unique talks bring numerous inspirations for both parties. The young gain academic support and the Professors gain good students.

The young apply for the participation in the YPSS for many reasons – they are interested in the subject, encouraged by participants of earlier Schools and very often in search for a chance and support in overcoming their academic dilemmas. The YPSS supports the development of young pedagogues by providing numerous chances. The people who come to the YPSS for the first time (but not only them) are often the ones who just graduated from master studies. They come from their home town centres believing that they are competent and educated. Having met outstanding researchers and having gone outside ‘their own backyard’ they find out a lot about themselves – very often about their weaknesses and mediocrity. Sometimes they experience a cognitive dissonance, a tension which can be relieved in two ways: treating it as a motivating force – then they fuel in themselves the cognitive thirst aroused in the YPSS and they work on themselves till the next meeting and reduce the dissonance deluding themselves (Tavris, Aronson 2008, p. 21), they come back to their home town centres and to the state of self-satisfaction – such people will not come to a September meeting any more.

Young pedagogues, who come to the YPSS (as many as 1126 pedagogues participated in the School between 1994 and 2012; about 1500 people have participated since I YPSS) have difficulties which (to put it simply for the needs of analysis) can be divided into three areas: speaking, writing and reading (Eriksen 2003, p. 30). It is more of an art of reading, speaking and writing, and as such it requires not only a talent but also painstaking work on techniques in each of the indicated areas. During the YPSS young pedagogues receive a number of valuable books, but first of all they learn to create ‘reading maps’ in order to study works in the broad meaning of the field of humanities. Professors teach young researchers how to select and analyse current problems, how to write about them, which is a fundamental skill in the days when the rule ‘publish or perish’ is in effect (Kozłowski 2000, p. 24)

The YPSS helps to develop research methods and also to create social networks which require to go outside the interactions of people who know each other. The young present their research results on a wider forum, consult their doubts and reflections with other meeting participants. Those who want to engage in social contacts with people out of the original group have an opportunity to find out if the others are cooperative and friendly towards them. They have more social trust than the people whose social network consists mainly of the members of their family.

The Young Pedagogues Summer School is based on the law of mutuality which does not equip with the feeling of incurring debt which should be paid off. The September conference is mainly an academic meeting, besides it helps to take up other activities – meetings with art (the young write limericks and epigrams), play, tourism, etc. The participants of the YPSS share knowledge, experience, interest, inspirations, sometimes engagement, kindness and care, limericks. It proves that mutuality does not have to be instant and weighed in ‘the same currency’, does not have to come from the people who gained something from us (cf. Sztompka 2002, pp. 75-76).

The acceptance of a gift is a sign of friendship, while the refusal to accept is equivalent to the rejection of relationship and community (Mauss 2001, p. 183; Genep 2006, p.

55). The basis of entering, including in the life of the YPSS is a mutual exchange – sharing gifts/possessed resources. For people who are open to mutuality the School becomes a place to build friendships, ties in horizontal and vertical relations, a community more lasting than ‘one show’ quoting Zygmunt Bauman (2006, pp. 308-310).

The sign of mutual care is the ‘Międzyszkolnik’ whose essence is to share an extremely important resource for young researchers that is access to information. It facilitates attaining objectives (increases effectiveness, lowers costs of defined actions) by individual people. Moreover, it is a way which allows to achieve ‘human resonance’ (Axel – Burow 1992, p. 114), ‘to band together’ in important matters and to maintain ties. Such actions are a sign of social capital, networks of mutual trust and loyalty as well as engagement in social good.

The YPSS lasts for a week (and thanks to the ‘Międzyszkolnik’ and personal contacts lasts much longer) because it takes time to create human ties, to strengthen the feeling that we are ready to invest in our common good. The power of horizontal ties created during and between Schools arouses in young pedagogues the feeling of common cause, mutual trust, solidarity, something that is called in psychology ‘I’m not alone’. Besides, as O. Axel – Burow (1992, p.118) points out when writing about synergetic cooperation ‘when [...] I experience the power of community, I do not have to know everything. [...] It is important [A.KB.] to recognize skills of other people and use them where it has some sense’.

Referring to Z. Bauman’s words, one can say that ‘when trust has a firm ground to take roots then the courage to take risk, responsibility, to engage in long-term commitments increases’ (cf. Bauman 2006, p. 87) – and such is the UPSS. This ‘firm ground’ is built firstly by people who play the role of ‘bridges’/ties in social interactions – academic supervisor of the School, president of the Committee on Pedagogical Sciences of the PAS and academic secretary of the YPSS – who ensure the transfer of trust and maintain the norms of mutuality in relations between participants of the Schools (cf. Bartoszek 2008, p. 80). Secondly, by outstanding Masters – always carefully selected researchers of the currently undertaken subject as well as the Hosts of the Schools.

In September 2013, the YPSS will be organized for the 27th time so the rule of building social capital is observed. The rule consists in continuity of activities and accumulation of effective cooperation for a longer time. It is a considerable success because as Z. Bauman (2009, p. 39) points out ‘liquid environment is not a hospitable place for long-term plans, investments or preservations’. Consistency and engagement in activity results not only in maintaining the engagement but even in increasing it. Preparing young pedagogues to independent, creative research work, the YPSS provides numerous opportunities of engaging in minor activities defined as the YPSS participants’ ‘duties’:

1. “To be able to listen to ‘the voices of others’, to what somebody says and to try to translate it into one’s own area of interest;
2. To have the courage to ask and answer questions without embarrassment or fear;
3. To present one’s own research achievements without conceit and complexes but with dignity;

4. For the whole year to prepare to the next subject of the YPSS;
5. To read literature and prepare texts for publication” (Cackowska 1998, p. 61).

The YPSS is held without a complicated system of agreements and legal regulations. The norms of functioning arise in the process of joint activity, engagement in the common good; they become a fruit of trust which the participants of the academic meeting place in each other. It is important that the common moral rules are created at grass-root level so to say, they are not forced, top-down rules. Social capital is an asset of the YPSS because its participants accept the worked out moral rules such as loyalty, honesty, reliability which ensure stability and effectiveness of activities.

The YPSS competently unites pedagogues into a community and in this way develops their numerous possibilities (cf. Korzeniecka - Bondar, Bochno 2011). So young researchers become more competent, and therefore more and more reliable, trustworthy (both to themselves and others). The experience and heritage of the YPSS is the growing capital of friendships made during September meetings. The common experience in formal and informal relations helps to form human, warm interactions which translate not only into ‘nice memories’ but also real signs of cooperation.

The meetings of the YPSS participants are not only the meetings with other people, but also with themselves. (Korzeniecka Bondar, Bochno 2011), with tradition, with images and dreams about the future (their own and the discipline they represent). Such meetings allow to enter the world of symbols and meanings discovered independently, giving foundations of agreement with others. (Przeclawska 2005, p.171). The YPSS is an example of joint learning – not only does every participant learn, one learns how to learn jointly, how to learn from oneself, how to learn with each other in order to depart from mediocrity.

The acceptance of the creative way of seeing the world demands to acquire the skill of continuous determining what is really important for us, learning to notice clearly the surrounding reality. (cf. Senge 2004, p. 165). This unusual conference helps to recognize what we know, what we should improve, it shows that failures can be an opportunity to learn.

Continuity and change are the features of the School. On the one hand, it is a conference which uses the best experiences of the past meetings, uses what is worth creative continuity and at the same time tries to avoid earlier shortcomings and limitations. For years it has been known for an unusual atmosphere, relevance of the undertaken issues and professionalism. On the other hand the School lives with the problems of pedagogy and pedagogues. It engages more and more young people increasing the autonomy of initiatives undertaken by them. It learns with them and changes to be able to support young pedagogues fully.

The mentioned achievements show how dynamically the YPSS changes as a result of repeated reflections on the needs of pedagogues and pedagogy. The effects can be noticed by everybody who is interested in September meetings. The participants of the Summer School frequently notice and appreciate them years later.

One of the signs of innovation potential of the YPSS is this year's initiative to found a journal which would present achievements of young pedagogues and would be created by them. The idea arises from the School concept of approaching problems in a polemic, interdisciplinary way. The planned periodical is to aspire to arouse discussions, reflections and to engage in changes in the area of widely understood education and pedagogy. It is intended to be a journal integrating scientists dealing with recognizing, analyzing, describing and seeking solutions to basic problems of widely understood education and their relations with the public sphere (politics, economics and the like). The journal enabling discussion wants to promote novel and unusual works of specialists in the humanities who do not agree on banality, appearance and 'to level down standards', it is interested in unconventional perspectives, methods of research and description of the educational and social reality.

Summary

Presenting the activity and achievements of the YPSS we met one of the challenges that is to increase social capital. The Summer School is a good example of how one can act in the contemporary world of dynamic changes without the necessity of fierce competition for merely an individual success. Jointly, in a favourable and friendly atmosphere one can build social capital and achieve more both in the individual and social dimension.

Not every social relation constitutes the source of social capital. In the view of R. Putman (1996, p. 17; 2008, p. 33), social capital refers to such links between individuals which are characterized as a network of links, obeying norms of mutuality and growing sense of mutual trust. According to Z. Bauman (2006, pp. 3008-310), many human communities are characterized as 'cloakroom communities (hanger / carnival)' which emerge on the occasion of one show, arousing similar interests in different people. When the curtain falls, the spectators hurriedly collect their things in the cloakroom and return to their everyday duties, taking off their best clothes which connected them during the show. They are not ready for an authentic openness to each other because it requires trust (Bauman 2006, pp. 308-310).

The Young Pedagogues Summer School is a community endowed with a considerable reserve of social capital based on social ties and civic commitment. Participation in the School meetings shapes the ability to express views, openness to the views of others, arouses the need to keep taking on new tasks, and the atmosphere of cooperation prevailing during the meetings makes the tasks possible to fulfil effectively. The School equips the participants with the skills essential not only to academic development, but also to satisfying functioning in the contemporary world.

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