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## Dignity of the Child in Research on the School of Maria Montessori. Assumptions and Manifestations

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*Godność dziecka w badaniach nad szkołą Marii Montessori*

### SUMMARY

Maria Montessori identified work with children and youth as a support for the human development process, which mean constant growth and becoming. The educational embodiment of respecting the dignity of a person – in light of the Italian researcher – is the child's right to freedom of choice in a prepared school environment. Events and circumstances that a person meets in his/her life (including school), shape his/her dispositions and attributes. The education, which encourages the development, creates opportunities for undertaking various tasks, including developmental ones, which are manifested by specific personality traits. In the conducted research, characteristics of the author's personality of the Montessori class graduates became the subject of analyses.

**Keywords:** Maria Montessori pedagogy; human dignity; author's personality; Montessori class graduates

### THE DIGNITY OF A PERSON IN REFLECTIONS ON THE SCHOOL

The adoption of the dignity of a person as a category of pedagogical analyses prompts emphasis on the right of students to free choice, to ask questions, to discussions, to seek and demand justification. In reflections on the subject of the school, it is worth looking at the relationship between the aforementioned rights and respecting school requirements and social values by the students. Zofia Matulka explains that free choice cannot be associated with pupils' right to reject absolute values presented in the educational process, as the value of perfecting the person and his integration

into society is attributed to them. That is why, the author explains that “there is a duty to accept these values (...). However, the process of internalisation of these values by students is to be rational and voluntary” (Matulka 2005, p. 231). To be an educator: a parent, a teacher or a pedagogue – Krystyna Ostrowska (2005) concludes – means to have a strong, mature system of values.

It has been proved that man lives in a circle of values in relation to which he must define himself, which means that he chooses some of them and omits others. He then discovers his own freedom, the source of becoming a human being – good or bad – by his actions. The subjective experience of freedom is expressed in the attitudes of man, defined in the following way: I can – I do not have to – I want to (Kowalczyk 2008). Freedom is, therefore, in the field of human possibilities (Męczkowska 2006, p. 196). The consequence of freedom is “self-possession” and “self-rule”, invariably being the task of man (Kowalczyk 2008, p. 322). Education is thus also upbringing to freedom of choice of good (Adamski 2005, p. 15).

The placement of freedom and striving to achieve it at the top of the hierarchy of values is the result of fulfilling many conditions. Above all, self-discipline, achievement of maturity, but also a huge effort associated with the recognition of the value, its internal transformation, identification with the value, enrichment of the person, transfer of the value to others (Majka 2005, p. 157). Correctly understood freedom, as Marian Nowak argues, is synonymous with the possibility of expressing a personal being, making a decision of will towards specific challenges (Nowak 2005, p. 349). Freedom, therefore, is not playful. It is the ability to choose a good and its implementation, to seek the values that we have recognised and deemed worthy of our efforts. (Majka 2005, p. 159). Freedom is also a means of perfecting a person. It is inseparably connected with responsibility. Both characteristics are mutually conditioning, they occur as “intrinsically connected with thinking and acting in pedagogy” (Nowak 2005, p. 345). To be free is to make decisions on your own and accept responsibility towards someone, for something and for someone. It is clear from the acceptance of this attitude that man is responsible for his own life, especially in this regard in order to live it according to his own existence and his being. He also remains responsible for the lives of others, for he finds fulfilment only in social relations (Nowak 2005, p. 350).

Ostrowska emphasises that the process of education and upbringing is based on the full, free development of every human being within the limits set by the existing individual, social and economic conditions. Therefore, the acceptance of the fact that the development of a child/becoming man is the highest value implies the conclusion that the school system and pedagogical activity remain at the service of this value, and not the other way round (Ostrowska 2005, p. 293). Pedagogy, from the source perspective, despite many differences in worldviews, ideas or cultures, requires relying on knowledge, first and foremost, of who man is. The next questions resulting from the above are: is he also the subject of his own actions and someone more than a constantly developing person? And also: Does he potentially have something that

predisposes him for special treatment (Łobocki 2009, p. 23)? It must be remembered that pedagogy is rooted in the truth about the human being. Therefore, scholars point to the important truth – before anybody becomes a child of any civilization, he is a human child, a human being, a person (Kaczmarek, Gadacz 2005, pp. 172–173).

The acknowledgement of the status of a child as a human person must result in love and recognition of him as an individual whose dignity in the learning process is inviolable, and who has the right, *inter alia*, to be active, independent, responsible, but also to be helped when he needs it and to partnership. The fact of recognising a child as the highest value determines the conclusion that the school system and pedagogical activity remain at the service of this value. In this way, children's rights are included in the education process, which increases the value of conducted education.

#### THE MANIFESTATIONS AND DELAYED EFFECTS OF EDUCATION BASED ON RESPECT FOR THE CHILD. SELF-AUTHORING PERSONALITY OF MONTESSORI CLASS GRADUATES AND ITS FEATURES. OWN RESEARCH

In the completed research project (Bednarczuk 2016), an attempt was made to describe the functioning of Montessori class graduates with reference to ideas describing human reality through the categories of empowerment, self-fulfilment and individualisation (Bednarczuk 2016). It is possible to explore these properties on the basis of Kazimierz Obuchowski's (1985, 1993, 2000) theory of self-authoring personality. Self-authoring personality encompasses an organised set of dispositions that enable people to find themselves in contemporary culture, improve them to achieve the state of intentional subjectivity, predestine them to make the full use of the autonomy given to them, obliging them to permanently become more and more human.

The research covered 94 graduates of Maria Montessori Primary School No. 27 in Lublin who were educated according to the principles of an alternative system of education. I analysed 69 sets of research tools completely filled by persons meeting the criteria for the selection to the group.

The persons were selected for the research in a targeted manner. It was assumed that the minimum Montessori education period of people qualified for the research amounts to 6 years. The age was another criterion of the intentional selection of the subjects. I decided that the research should cover graduates of Primary School No. 27 in Lublin between 16 and 21 years of age, that is people who are in the late phase of adolescence, at the end of childhood, "captured together with the period of adolescence, the latter being always understood as a transition period between childhood and adulthood" (Brzezińska 2004, p. 220).

The Self-authoring Personality Measurement Questionnaire (POA) of Obuchowski et al. (see Błachnio, Obuchowski 2011) was used to study the level and structure of self-authoring personality.

The carried out analyses show that the average level of the intensity of self-authoring personality characteristic in the studied group ( $M = 136.84$ ) is significantly higher than the theoretical average for the scale, which amounts to 93 points ( $t(68) = 17.182$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). I did not find a basis to differentiate the inquired persons into self-authors and non-self-authors. Almost all examined graduates of Primary School No. 27 have developed self-authoring characteristics at an optimal level. What is more, the group was fairly uniform in terms of the examined value. High scores prevailed in it. Only three persons obtained results which were below the theoretical average of the test.

In the studied group there are no people who achieved extremely low results. The surveyed graduates of Montessori classes therefore use their own autonomy, which determines the ability to create the concept of “desired self”, conditions the skill to distance themselves from who they are and, consequently, determines independent personal development.

Both the mode ( $Mo$ ) and the median ( $Me$ ) amount to 138 points, which means that it is the result most frequently occurring in the studied group. Thus, at least half of the respondents have scores above this value, which exceeds slightly the obtained average level of the intensity of self-authoring personality in the studied group. The value of  $Me$  also informs us that the studied graduates most often achieved 75% of points that could be obtained in the test. This confirms the fact that the category of the self-author is commonly found in the studied group (Bednarczuk 2016, pp. 203–209).

At this point, it is worth recalling Obuchowski’s position on setting standards in the measurement of self-authoring personality. He emphasises that in the classic psychometric approach, standards allow one to classify the examined persons and organise the collected empirical material, “smoothing the obtained picture of reality” (Błachnio, Obuchowski 2011, p. 161). Obuchowski reflects on whether there is a place for standards in thinking about man as a self-actualising and transgressive person. According to the author, there is no sense in “using a ‘standard’ as an average of personality traits, or a standard as well-being, because empirical studies have shown that such people are just average in everything” (Obuchowski cited in Błachnio, Obuchowski 2011, p. 181). It is also difficult to describe the model of becoming man by means of static standards. Therefore, reference was made to the individual interpretation of the quality of functioning of Montessori class graduates – the respondents’ statements on the dominant feature of their lives and activities.

On the basis of the analysis of interviews conducted with graduates of Montessori classes of Primary School No. 27 in Lublin (Bednarczuk 2016, pp. 209–229) it can be concluded that self-authors generate goals of action, and the fact of the formulation of goals itself demonstrates the respondents’ orientation towards the future – a characteristic feature of intentional people (Obuchowski 1993, 2000, 2001; Błachnio 2006, p. 101). Objectives related to further education were presented in a clear and specific way. Graduates of Montessori classes state that learning is a priority in their lives. It should be emphasised that the point of reference in all explanations are the respondents

themselves: “going to university is important to me as studying means pursuing my interests”, “it is important to learn and develop yourself; I want to be someone better and do something more for myself and society”, “it is important to prepare for the final exams to be accepted for the desired field of study”. Learning and education, as the objects of intention of the respondents, are an indispensable tool for development. Obuchowski wrote that the process of the reconstruction of culture in oneself, that self-authors do, is not only technically difficult, but requires liberal education.

The category of goals, important for getting to know the respondents’ self-authoring features, refers to tasks determining the active realisation of the person, and going “beyond the effects and reasons of physical existence” (Obuchowski 1990, p. 6). They define independent projects of what self-authors should be to live in harmony with their nature (Błachnio, Obuchowski 2011), which is suggested, among others, by the following opinions: “I want to participate in my daughter’s life as a full-fledged and fulfilled Mum”, “I would like to create a relationship”, “constant pursuit of happiness through self-development, running and striving for financial freedom”. The analysed aspirations capture the development of predispositions that are currently not manifested (e.g., a fulfilled mother, a life in a relationship with another person, being happy, the opportunity to learn in many areas). They point to the autonomy of the respondents in the situation in which they are and constitute the expression of an intentional act: “I want it” (Obuchowski 1985, p. 250).

Another important area of self-authoring functioning that is present in the respondents’ statements emerges from the strongly emphasised need to shape and maintain interpersonal contacts. The graduates of Montessori classes who participated in the research enumerated people significant in their development, most frequently parents, siblings, grandparents, acquaintances, friends and fiancés. There were also respondents who presented the value of support, obtained help, power motivating for action they gain from their relatives: “the support of my fiancé who tries to support me and strengthen my good beliefs and positive attitude”, “I am lucky to have wonderful mother who loves me and supports me”, “my elder sister, whom I see several times a year and who supports me in many matters, is important”, “the most important thing for me is my family, especially my sisters who are my best friends”, “my boyfriend is important, thanks to whom I do not break down under the pressure of learning and stress”.

The aspect of community, readiness to establish and maintain social relations cannot be limited only to the indicated interpretation category. As dynamic interaction (Brzezińska 2004, p. 65), i.e. constant exchange between a human being and his surroundings, in particular between a person and other people, is the essence of human development, then statements revealing the fundamental role of other people in the life and development of the respondents were naturally noted, also in other evaluation categories, especially related to the concept of a person. This means that the graduates covered by the research consider relationships maintained with other people as part of their own self.

Social values belong to those currently implemented by the Montessori Primary School No. 27 graduates: “my essential feature is friendliness”, “making new friends, establishing contacts with people with disabilities”, to those that they develop and shape: “I try to be more open in the field of interpersonal relations” and those that are desirable: “creating bonds, I start to trust people again” despite sometimes painful experiences: “bad treatment by mother”. Their fulfilment makes it possible to satisfy the need for security and boosts self-confidence: “my parents always motivate me and support me in what I do; thanks to them I have not retreated from many things and achieved much more”, “my friends who support me in the implementation of my plans are important to me”. Turning towards people results from the need to be for others: “I like to give as much as possible, which applies to my own development as well as to contacts with my relatives”, “I am a prefect of my year, I try to fix everything because I want the best for my colleagues”, but also to be with others: “I’m not a man who likes to stay at home, I like to hang out with people”. The presence of others brings satisfaction and fulfilment: “I find fulfilment in the organisation of aid actions, support for poorer families, the family cannot be chosen, life in poverty is not something that you choose”.

The quoted answers indicate that the surveyed graduates actively integrate personal and non-personal motives, and a young woman put it in a unique way: “the most important for me are the closest relatives, as well as friends and acquaintances whom I choose myself. They are supportive for me, as well as I have contact with various problems that affect people, which will help me in my further career”. A young man directs attention to the importance of conversation: “I like talking, I can say everything to grandma and grandpa”. Thanks to being in a community with friends “I can enjoy every day”. The respondents take into account the opinion of others: “the influence of people from the foundation I work for, friends and family”, “my family’s opinion is very important”, “friends and people who are close to me have quite a big influence”, “I consider myself a person sensitive to what is happening around me”, which may mean that they synchronise individual interests with the interests of the communities they identify themselves with (Błachnio, Obuchowski 2011, p. 175). Certainly they consider relationships maintained with other people as part of their own self. Many of the respondents take action for other people.

The shape of the person depends on the active attitude of achieving values, their development and implementation. The analyses carried out so far indicate that the value of development and self-fulfilment is widely adopted and accepted in the studied group. Among the respondents there were people who defined themselves by reference to the values of freedom and responsibility. Critical points of the analysed choices are also personal values: “full-fledged and fulfilled Mum”, “I find fulfilment in the organisation of aid actions, support for poorer families, the family cannot be chosen, life in poverty is not something that you choose”, “the creation of interpersonal relationships is practically the most important”. Among the mentioned there is also the issue of the

absolute: the role of the religious community, religious meetings (retreat), Holy Mass, or faith. The respondents also choose real values, and almost universally Montessori classes graduates give expression to the implementation of ideal values related to the ideal of personality, morality and ethics: "I try to be a good, honest person", "I want to be someone better and do more for myself and society", "I try to take care of my interests, develop them", "I develop as comprehensively as possible", "I develop such features as perseverance and diligence", "my passion, that is cars, is the most important thing in my life", "theatre, culture – these are the things that affect me most", or passion in general terms: passion and hobby. The importance of intellectual values (knowledge and education) as well as of interpersonal and family ones (relation to others) was stressed and analysed. The content of activity is also a value, and the areas of activity of the researched persons are presented above.

Focusing on the implementation of values indicates that the studied persons have a flexible and stable motivation, "not enforced by the situation, the state of the organism or the content of experiences" (Obuchowski 1985, p. 257), but rather by the tasks set for themselves, hence, according to Obuchowski's theory, they have a greater chance for subordinating the present to the future and for further intra-steerable development (see Obuchowski 1985, p. 220). Nevertheless, the members of the studied group are still searching: always learn something, get to know different values (52), as evidenced by their involvement in social work, in after-school and extracurricular activities, conducting various activities for the benefit of others, or with others, etc.

Further analysis of the statements of the Montessori class graduates makes it possible to supplement the emerging image of the self-author with further features: activity and commitment. The following categories define the most important manifestations of activity undertaken by the respondents (apart from the common activity of learning at school or university), and having a significant impact on the current situation: work in youth/student organisations: "I develop in work and the student organisation, participate in many meetings with interesting people", "I am a patrol leader", "it is important to be an adjutant in the scout team, scouting duties", social work: "I am socially involved, I set up organisations and circles, choirs, I take part in various initiatives and infect others with zeal"; participation in classes improving and developing skills: "learning Spanish", "Capoeira practice"; participation in contests, competitions; participation in Catholic organisations: "I am involved in the activities of the Youth Ministry Centre"; work in social organisations, such as volunteering, the Sempre a Frente foundation, and the Cultural Centre. These are forms of voluntary activity, which done in free time cause that – as one of the respondents says – "I am a bit overworked, but it is worth doing what you like". It should be assumed that the taken actions result from the adopted concept of the self. What is more, the analysis of the statements allows us to formulate a conclusion that we are dealing here with activities aimed at creating a better reality, a constant search for meanings, with actions for one's own well-being and that of the social environment.

## CONCLUSIONS

At the end it is worth noting that the picture of personal dignity is, among others, the effect of school experiences of graduates of Montessori Primary School No. 27 in Lublin, who attended the institution in the years 1998–2008. It is assumed that events and circumstances that a person encounters in life (including at school), shape his dispositions and attributes. Education favourable to development creates opportunities for undertaking various tasks, including developmental ones, which is manifested by specific personality traits.

The members of the studied group are people with developed self-authoring features, characterised by considerable internal independence, capable of building the concept of themselves as a person and of formulating the subjective standard of valuation. Montessori Primary School No. 27 graduates are characterised by the awareness of their own strengths and subjective abilities. They have proved that they are able to reflect on different dimensions of the time of their own biography, they live consciously, and the past or present are not their only points of reference. They are oriented towards the future and open to new experiences, and fulfil tasks that are an expression of motivation for development. It is in the matter of development that, according to Kazimierz Dąbrowski, there is a possibility of building certain visions, experiencing certain hope that personal progress in the world of internal experiences will enable even slight, partial “surpassing of the unknowable” (Dąbrowski 1996, p. 162). Thus, the respondents treat themselves as the perpetrators of their lives and look for original ways of achieving their goals. Mieczysław Łobocki (2009, p. 16) concludes that personalism sets the goal entirely worthy of implementation in the process of education because in the educational dimension, personalism emphasises the uniqueness of the individual and his right to choose his own path of personal development and improvement in all forms and at all levels of education and upbringing. Therefore, the person has something in himself that he deserves special treatment for (Łobocki 2009, p. 23). The indicated truth is the impassable horizon of humanity (Kaczmarek, Gadacz 2005), and, therefore, of the work of the school.

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## STRESZCZENIE

Maria Montessori utożsamiała pracę z dziećmi i młodzieżą jako wspomaganie procesu rozwoju człowieka, który polega na stałym wzroście i stawaniu się. Edukacyjnym ucieleśnieniem poszanowania godności osoby w ujęciu włoskiej badaczki jest przyznanie dzieciom prawa wolności wyboru w odpowiednio zaprojektowanym środowisku szkolnym. Zdarzenia i okoliczności, które osoba napotyka w życiu (w tym w szkole), kształtują jej dyspozycje i atrybuty. Sprzyjające rozwojowi kształcenie tworzy okazje do podejmowania różnorodnych zadań, w tym rozwojowych, czego przejawem są określone właściwości osobowości. W przeprowadzonych badaniach przedmiotem analiz stały się właściwości osobowości autorskiej absolwentów klas Montessori.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pedagogika Marii Montessori; godność człowieka; osobowość autorska; absolwenci klas Montessori

