

Anetta Pereświet-Sołtan

Dolnośląska Szkoła Wyższa, Wydział Nauk Pedagogicznych

Researching Teenagers' Psychosocial Needs: Implications for Education

ABSTRACT: The paper presents the results of survey research on young people's psychosocial needs conducted among junior high school students in Lower Silesia. Based on the relevant literature, the author starts from the assumption that the development and spread of modern technologies contribute to suppressing or reducing young people's need for interpersonal contact. The discussed outcomes, however, do not corroborate the assumption. The second part of the article reflects on the implications the cited results have for education and advocates tutoring—an individualised learning and teaching method—as a viable solution for the Polish schooling system.

KEYWORDS: modern technology, psychosocial needs of teenagers, tutoring.

Kontakt:	Anetta Pereswiet-Sołtan <i>anetta.pereswiet@gmail.com</i>
Jak cytować:	Pereswiet-Sołtan, A. (2013). Researching Teenagers' Psychosocial Needs: Implications for Education. <i>Forum Oświatowe</i> , 2(49), 105-123. Pobrano z: http://forumoswiatowe.pl/index.php/czasopismo/article/view/79
How to cite:	Pereswiet-Sołtan, A. (2013). Researching Teenagers' Psychosocial Needs: Implications for Education. <i>Forum Oświatowe</i> , 2(49), 105-123. Retrieved from: http://forumoswiatowe.pl/index.php/czasopismo/article/view/79

INTRODUCTION

Challenges of the contemporary world and their social effects

The modern world is characterized by rapid changes propelled, among others, by globalization and the growth of transnational corporation, both bound up with technological developments. The global macro-level transformations penetrate all domains of life, triggering changes in culture, economy, politics and social as well as personal lives. Irrespective of how complex their structures are or what place in the social hierarchy they occupy, the state, local communities, business organisations, families and, finally, individuals, all these “organisms,” are similarly compelled to adjust to external pressures and requirements. If they fail to meet this prerequisite, their effectiveness and functioning are impaired and they risk elimination or marginalisation.

That culture influences individual consciousness is hardly a novelty. It suffices to turn to Sigmund Freud to learn that culture's impact is far more incisive: culture, namely, imposes a form of consciousness which contravenes an individual's natural, inborn drives.

We can assume, thus, that to function successfully in the homogenizing contemporary culture or, in broader terms, in the contemporary turbulent environment, an individual must cope with a challenge of satisfying his/her culture-generated needs. As Kazimierz Obuchowski argues (2006), although aspirations are produced by culture, they are experienced by an individual as his/her own and can provide him/her with a sense of achievement, because they facilitate adaptation to the cultural requirements, fulfilment of expectations and confidence in his/her adequacy.

Considering the contemporary trends investigated, among others, by Zbyszko Melosik (2004), we could enumerate a list of needs typifying a teenager who conforms to the demands of his/her environment. According to Melosik, the consumer culture produces a series of crucial categories, with “pleasure” and “the imperative of happiness” ranking among the uppermost obligations. The “*instant* culture” commands immediacy, which is dutifully implemented and, with considerable success, enhanced by the modern media. Easy accessibility of information and people (including those who are spatially remote) generates and reinforces the need for immediacy, reducing thereby the capacity to wait and delay experience and/or gratification. We could also suppose that such a model undercuts willingness to devote time and become engaged

in the construction of profound relations, all the more so as the rapidity of change and the rate at which our lives accelerate go hand in hand with an unprecedented influx of people into our lives. Melosik emphasises that this combination of factors influences the quality of interpersonal contacts: they tend to be increasingly provisional, superficial and anonymous. Importantly, he also concludes that more and more frequently contacts are made not between PERSONS but between ROLES we (i.e., I and my interaction partner) identify with at a given moment, producing, for example a teacher-student or a boss-employee configuration. The space accommodating a PERSON-TO-PERSON encounter seems to be shrinking constantly alongside, perhaps, the skills or needs for such an encounter.

Additionally, ours is the “nowist” culture fixated on the here and now. Such preoccupation, in turn, impedes self-analysis and a general reflection on life, which urge questions transcending the domain of everyday pleasures and common, minor events.

Researchers also underscore how significant the ubiquity and easy availability of modern technologies are for human functioning in the world and, in particular, for the young generation’s life (Wallance, 2001; Hankała, 2004; Hamlin, 2008). Research reports that generations differ not only in their attitude to and use of modern technologies but also in their approach to direct communication, which apparently seems less natural to the young than mediated communication. For instance, generation Y view talking face-to-face as “uncomfortable, confrontational and overly formal” (Hamlin, 2008).

This admittedly short and selective survey of cultural changes currently in progress demonstrates that the contemporary world champions new values. Researchers contend that the reality we are steeped in gravely jeopardises the traditionally endorsed values. Jan Strzelecki claims that

if man’s sustained effort is lacking, values become fragile and, simultaneously, when a constant effort at actualising values is lacking, man becomes fragile (...). Whatever we recognize as a value, whether in the world of objects or in the world of culture, has been produced by human effort and fades away without it (Tyszka, 1999, p. 91).

We face the crisis of authority; we lack role models or heroes who would embody the universal values and perpetuate them at the same time.

In the contemporary reality, young people must be their own teachers and tame the reality they confront all by themselves. They must search on their own for new signposts and formulate values which might prove more fitting in the context of changes permeating their world. They might also put these values into practice differently than their predecessors have.

What do young people think of such a role? Do they manage to cope with it successfully? The latest reports reveal that as many as 900 thousand children and teenagers need psychological or psychiatric help (Cieśla, 2012; Szafranec, 2011). In a change-ridden world, adults also feel frustrated, insecure and vulnerable, which

definitely reduces their capacity to support others. And, quite possibly, children need support and contact now more than ever before.

What are the actual psychosocial needs of teenagers? Can they be fully met by the modern technologies alone?

These were the research questions underlying the study reported below.

RESEARCH METHOD AND SELECTED RESULTS

The research was carried out by means of a questionnaire-based survey. The research tool targeted junior high school¹ students' communication needs and patterns. The questionnaire was constructed in collaboration with the students of the University of Lower Silesia as part of monograph seminar coursework, drawing on the data reported in the literature referred to above and observations of teenagers' actual performance in social communication contexts.

The questionnaire consists of 22 items (some of which are further subdivided into sub-items), with 7 open-ended questions, 5 close-ended cafeteria questions and 10 half-open cafeteria questions. In some of these questions the respondents are asked to choose one answer, and in other ones they can choose more answers.

The tool also includes an instruction explaining the purpose of the research and employment of the collected material as well as a personal data box with the respondent's sex, age and (urban or rural) residence.

The content of the items addresses four major issues: the significance of technology-mediated communication for the teenagers' social functioning; the teenagers' pastime preferences, in particular leisure activities involving meetings with others (the aim of such meetings, conversation subjects, perceived obstacles, etc.); the self-perceived significance of direct contacts; and the teenagers' experienced quality of relationships.

The survey targeted junior high-school students, i.e., the population aged 13 to 16. The choice was partly motivated by the assumption that both the members of this group as well as, probably, their parents take modern technologies for granted, which might be relevant to their mutual communication. Furthermore, the parents of children in this age group were likely to be active participants of the labour market and, as such, often compelled to meet its inflated demands and absorbed in constructing their careers. At the same time, the junior-high school period is a very difficult developmental stage marked by the onset of the adolescent crisis. We could assume, thus, that the junior-high school student sample embodied numerous problems afflicting the contemporary world in general and the young generation in particular.

Recruited by means of random selection, the research sample consisted of 204 subjects, thereof 113 females and 83 males. The majority (160 subjects) were town/city residents.

Having designed the research tool, we carried out a pilot study on a sample of 15 junior-high school students. After the pilot study was completed, we discussed the difficulties and ambiguities surfacing while filling in the questionnaire. Drawing on

the comments and observations collected in such conversations, we developed and refined the questionnaire to be used in the research proper.

The anonymous survey was conducted by interviewers (the University of Lower Silesia students) across Lower Silesian voivodeship² in June 2012. A few questionnaires were completed on-line, and the rest of them in pen and paper format.³

The research results are presented below in four subject areas covered by the questionnaire items.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION FOR THE TEENAGERS' SOCIAL FUNCTIONING

Table 1

Do you think that the Internet is necessary to construct relations with other people?

	N	%
YES	93	45
NO	111	55

Note. N denotes the number of subjects who responded to a given item in a particular way; % denotes the proportion of the research sample who responded to a given item in a particular way.

Answers to this question were distributed rather evenly: nearly half of the research sample thought that it was impossible to construct relations with others without the Internet. Members of the older generation, who had to make and sustain contacts with other people without this medium, are likely to find the outcome alarming. To them it may suggest addiction to the mediated communication or imply that almost 50% of the research sample are “socially disabled.” However, slightly more than half of the research population expressed the opposite opinion. The answers can be accounted for in more detail if we look into responses to the subsequent question: “Why do you think so?”

The arguments provided by the former group (i.e., those who answered “yes”) can be grouped in a few categories. The first category, as I called it, is the “*Coping with shyness*” category. Below I provide a few arguments from this category:

“because I am not stressed out,” “because you can talk more without eye contact,” “because you can talk about personal matters and be less ashamed than when you meet someone in person,” “because we are sometimes afraid to talk IRL and if we do not know a person, it is easier to start an acquaintance on the Internet, because you are open and it comes easy,” “because I am anonymous and feel brave.”

The second distinguishable category is the *Easier, quicker, and at any moment* category.

Arguments typical of this category include the following:

“it makes communication so much easier,” “it is easier to meet somebody on the Internet,” “you can communicate easily and comfortably,” “it’s an easy and quick way to make acquaintance,” “because you can communicate with others whenever you

want to,” “because many people can use social networks at the same time, and that makes contacting easier.”

The third category is the *Constructing and sustaining bonds, relations and contact* category, with its characteristic arguments, such as: “you create bonds,” “it is indispensable in communicating with friends, nothing more,” “because this is the way we keep up an acquaintance,” “because if you cannot go and meet a person, the Internet is what’s left.”

The respondents’ numerous answers could be classified into the common category of *Enhancing opportunities and intensity of contact*. Some arguments cited here include, for example: “because you can talk to people from all over the world,” “because social life thrives on-line,” “because on the Internet you can keep in touch all the time,” “it helps to communicate whenever you wish to, day and night,” “because you can meet very interesting people.”

Argumenting their conviction that the Internet is indispensable in constructing relations with other people, the respondents tended to answer: “just because,” “because that’s what I use it for,” or “because you just can’t do without it.” Such utterances imply that the role the medium plays in making and maintaining contacts with others is simply taken for granted without requiring any further argumentation.

Interestingly, some of the utterances—e.g., “you can meet people” or “you can get to know someone better”—suggest that contacts made via the Internet tend to be treated on a par with an actual encounter.

The most characteristic arguments provided by those teenagers who did not find the Internet indispensable in constructing relations with others are also worth quoting. Many of them claim simply that the Internet “is not necessary” and “does not make the world go round.” Also, the Internet “is useful, but not indispensable” because “contacts can be made differently, you can meet people ‘live’, in person.” The claim that the Internet “is redundant” appeared occasionally, too.

Analysing their answers, we can distinguish a group who prioritizes direct contacts and relations. The sample arguments include the following: “you can meet people IRL,” “I prefer direct contacts,” “because making relations with people IRL is the best way,” or “relations should be built in reality.”

The largest group of the respondents who do not regard the Internet as an indispensable medium in constructing relations with others refer to arguments conveyable by the umbrella term *Encounter is what matters most*. Below, I quote the characteristic utterances of this category:

“nothing can replace a face-to-face conversation and the time spent together,” “because the Internet cannot fill in for a face-to-face relation with another person,” “when people meet, they grow closer,” “if you like someone, you will always make time for them,” “the real world is more important,” “you cannot build relations with others without personal contact,” “because I make friends ‘live’ and cultivate friendship in this way, too.”

Another distinguishable category of answers could be called *The Internet is dangerous*. Here are sample arguments provided in this group:

“because there are paedophiles out there,” “because compromising materials can be put on-line and ruin our relations,” “because you can never really know who you are talking to on the Internet.”

A few people also stated that they hardly used the Internet at all (“because I don’t use it,” “I use the Internet only occasionally”).

Table 2 contain the distribution of responses to the subsequent questions concerning the significance of mediated communication for the teenagers.

Table 2

Have you got friends only in virtual reality?

	N	%
01. YES	35	17
02. NO	166	82
NO ANSWER GIVEN	3	1

Table 3

If so, would you like to meet them in person?

	N	%
01. YES	28	14
02. NO	34	17
03. I DON'T KNOW	34	17
NO ANSWER GIVEN	108	52

The obtained results are intriguing for two reasons. Firstly, we could wonder how to interpret the fact that 17% of the research sample admitted to having friends only on the Internet. Regrettably, despite the pilot study we had failed to notice the ambiguity of the question before the research proper commenced. Namely, it could be interpreted in two ways: either as asking whether a person has no other friends except those in virtual reality or as asking whether a person has a group of friends in the real world and, alongside, keeps in touch with some people only in virtual reality. The ambiguity of this item is corroborated by the outcomes obtained for the subsequent question (*If so, would you like to meet them in person?*), wherein the distribution of answers suggests that as many as 48% of the respondents refer to some people they keep in with touch via the Internet only (if the item had been understood as the author intended it to, only 17% of the respondents—i.e., those who admitted to having solely Internet friends—should have answered it. The remaining 83% should have “given no answer”).

Secondly, if we assume that 17% of the respondents have no other friends than those on the Internet, the outcome can invite two different interpretations. On the one hand, we could infer from it that involvement in virtual reality jeopardises the proper

functioning in the real world. On the other hand, however, we also could conclude that were it not for the Internet and the options of on-line acquaintance it provides, the group would be doomed to utter loneliness (because of their bashfulness or otherness, for example). Briefly, what is it actually that we deal with here: “loneliness on the net” or “opportunity on the net”? Though the query still remains unanswered, we are certainly facing a new, unprecedented phenomenon which possibly attests to the powerful need for connectedness, which can assume rather novel shapes.

**THE TEENAGERS’ PASTIME PREFERENCES (IN PARTICULAR,
LEISURE ACTIVITIES INVOLVING MEETINGS WITH OTHERS)**

Table 4
Where do you most frequently meet new people?

	N	%
AT SCHOOL	128	63
AT THE BACKYARD	77	38
DURING EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES	34	17
ON THE INTERNET	38	19
OTHER	27	13

Note. The respondents could choose several answers.

The results presented in Table 4 do not seem alarming. The proportion of the teenagers who most frequently meet new people on the Internet is not high, particularly as compared to the total of 80% of the research population who meet new people in their natural environment of school and peer group.

Table 5
Why do you meet your peers in person?

	N	%
01. TO GO OUT OF HOME	113	55
02. TO DO SPORTS	52	25
03. TO DO FUN THINGS (CINEMA, LISTENING TO MUSIC, ETC.)	93	45
04. TO TALK WITH THEM	134	66

	N	%
05. TO USE DRUGS	24	12
06. OTHER.....	0	0

Note. The respondents could choose several answers.

The answers provided by the respondents imply that the researched teenager sample crave for social contacts with peers. However, meetings with friends can also be motivated by an attempt to avoid contact with parents or family (as the frequency—55%—of the “to go out of home” option suggests). On the other hand, the research samples were in the age group that particularly acutely experience the identity formation stage bound up with rebellion and contesting the family-promoted values.

Table 6
How do you usually communicate with your peers?

	N	%
01. IN PERSON	85	41%
02. BY (STATION-ARY) PHONE	8	4%
03. BY TEXT MESSAGES	156	76%
04. BY MOBILE PHONE-CALLS	89	44%
05. BY SENDING MOBILE-PHONE SIGNALS	15	7%
06. BY MMS MESSAGES	9	4%
07. VIA THE INTERNET	110	54%
08. OTHERS	0	0

Note. The respondents could choose several answers.

The outcomes in Table 6 corroborate the results obtained by Sonya Hamlin (2008), according to which generation Y find texting as natural as breathing. The accessibility of the new communication media and the possibility they offer to “stay in touch” continually without having to spend energy or interrupt other activities naturally contribute to reducing the frequency of personal face-to-face contacts. Nonetheless, it does not entail reducing the need for contact and togetherness.

TEENAGERS' SELF-PERCEIVED SIGNIFICANCE OF PERSONAL CONTACTS

Table 7
Do you like "face-to-face" conversations?

	N	%
01. YES	164	80
02. NO	31	15
NO ANSWER GIVEN	9	5

The results obtained for this item seem to confirm neither the outcomes reported in the literature nor the popular opinion. According to the former, young people experience direct conversation as awkward and redundant (Hamlin, 2008), while the latter commonly holds that teenagers cannot and do not want to talk. Apparently, however, face-to-face conversation meets the needs that cannot be satisfied in technology-mediated contact, and it may convey irreplaceable values. Answering the successive question, the respondents provided several arguments to underpin the significance they attributed to face-to-face conversation:

If you do, why is it so and who do you like talking to most?

A sample of the teenagers' utterances are quoted below. Answers to the first part of the question fall into two basic categories: ***It is possible to interpret the interlocutor's true emotions and watch his/her reactions:*** "because gestures can tell you a lot," "I like it because I can see others' emotions," "because I can see how people react to what I'm saying," "because I can hear the pitch and tone they use," "because I can keep eye contact, and that's important because you can see what people feel."

Many respondents observed that such form of communication ***facilitates understanding:*** "you can easier explain what you really mean to, say, pissed-off mom," "because you can clarify details."

The second category of arguments centred on direct conversation as ***a source of pleasure.*** For example, "I love talking with my best friends" or "because such conversations make me really happy."

The second part of the question concerned the teenagers' favourite interlocutors. The people they enumerated were almost exclusively their peers (schoolmates, friends, acquaintances). Only few respondents mentioned parents or siblings.

The subsequent question was addressed to those who answered that they did not like face-to-face conversations.

If you do not, why is it so and who do you like talking to least of all?

Below follows a sample of characteristic responses, including a variety of reasons for unpopularity of conversation: "I don't like it because I feel intimidated," "it is boring," "I'm stressed out when I talk," "I hate talking to Klaudia D., because I really want to hit on her but don't know how to chat her up."

Young people from this group pointed predominantly to adults as the least preferred interlocutors (“parents,” “I don’t like teachers, does that count?,” “adults and parents”).

THE TEENAGERS’ EXPERIENCED QUALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

Table 8

How many acquaintances have you got (approximately)?

	N	%
UP TO 10 PEOPLE	29	14
11 TO 20 PEOPLE	21	10
20 TO 100 PEOPLE	64	31
100 OR MORE PEOPLE (SOME RESPONDENTS CITED FIGURES ABOVE 1000)	67	34
NO ANSWER GIVEN	23	11

The results from Table 8 may corroborate the already mentioned tendency to make contact with unprecedented numbers of people via the Internet. The phenomenon we witness here seems closer to “collecting” acquaintances rather than constructing relations or creating tight bonds.

Table 9

Is there anything that you find irritating in communicating with adults?

	N	%
01. YES	89	44
02. NO	50	24
NO ANSWER GIVEN	66	32

Since the respondents typically go through the rebellion and contestation period, the outcomes showing that they find certain aspects of communication with adults irritating are hardly surprising. It is rather their reasons for or objects of irritation that we can find interesting and thought-provoking. The question below was addressed to those who reported dissatisfaction with their contacts with adults.

If there is, what is it?

The most numerous and frequently reiterated answers fall into the category of “**Lack of understanding and respect**”:

“when I’m talking about something, they tell me to stop sassing them, I can’t say what I think,” “they push their opinions,” “sometimes they ignore my opinion,” “they can’t face it that they are wrong,” “they are patronising. I don’t know how to talk with them because I’m afraid I’ll make a fool of myself,” “they do not take young people seriously,” “they tell me off for anything,” “they think they always know better,” “they think they are in charge,” “they don’t listen,” “I don’t like the way they address me,” “they are always preaching,” “I don’t like it when they rush me to state my point quickly,” “they can’t admit they are wrong, let alone apologise.”

Other pronounced (though less numerous) reasons for teenagers’ dissatisfaction with contacts with adults fall into the category of “*Age, cognitive and competence differences*.” Typical utterances included the following:

“they think and see things differently,” “they communicate in a different way,” “they perceive the world differently, they have a different worldview,” “they have no idea what I mean,” “they are too slow writing on gg,”⁴ “they are rednecks ignorant about computers.”

The responses in this item seem to highlight a serious problem. They suggest, namely, that teenagers often feel misunderstood, disrespected and ill-treated. They notice that adults take their own superiority for granted even in the spheres in which teenagers could legitimately feel more competent than their parents or teachers (e.g., modern technologies, speedy and efficient retrieval of information). They also interpret the “patronising attitude” as adults’ attempt at camouflaging their ignorance.

Considering the deep need for contact reported in the research population, we could infer that young people try to satisfy their pertinent psychosocial needs in relations with peers rather than with adults (parents, family, teachers) not only because adolescents naturally seek footing in a peer group but also because adults communicate with teenagers in ways that disaffect the latter.

Summing up the research results, we should focus on two aspects. Firstly, they corroborate the observation that teenagers are “plugged-in” — “fused” with the world of digital technologies. This, however, does not seem to breed negative results or, more specifically, to abate their psychosocial needs, the finding were also confirmed by outcomes obtained in other recent studies (cf. Gajek, 2008; Filiciak, Danielewicz, Halawa, Mazurek & Nowotny, 2010). Bogdan Wojciszke argues that whereas at the end of the 20th century research did report significant loosening of social bonds caused by young people’s use of the Internet, currently the medium’s chief role is to stay in touch with acquaintances and friends (80% of reported uses) (Wojciszke, 2009). Here we come across the second important aspect of our research outcomes. Contrary to our expectations, it turned out that though young people are undeniably submerged in the “on-line reality” and engaged predominantly in technology-mediated communication, they do manifest considerable psychosocial needs. The teenagers from our research sample emphasised the importance of contacts with other people as well as of creating and cultivating relations. The teenagers are interested in other people and want to fathom the unknown and the exotic (“I can contact people from across the globe”). Never before has the need for contact been realised on such a wide scale (with

so many people at the same time), with such intensity (keeping in touch all the time), and via so many media simultaneously.

We could thus conclude that using the Internet and modern technologies is one of the coping strategies that young people resort to when confronting the oppressive reality. For technology creates the space that safely accommodates them and enables them to realise their needs, which can not always be met IRL. If somebody (e.g., adults) or something (e.g., distance or duties) hinders face-to-face contacts, they fall back on the available “screen-to-screen” communication options. If they cannot count on respect and partnership at home, they can search a partner who will meet their needs even without stirring outdoors. And, finally, when what the school offers is unattractive, “outdated” or divergent from their interests, they can do just fine, surfing the Net. Furthermore, the Internet also helps teenagers in coping with shyness. As the respondents emphasized, on the Internet it is easier to overcome insecurity, shame or barriers. According to Wojciszke, this particular property of the Internet promotes sharing personal information, which makes direct relations more profound and intimate: (even shy) teenagers can thus better cultivate their friendships owing to the Internet (Wojciszke, 2009).

Admittedly, the research results presented above deserve a more thorough analysis, yet considering the size of this paper I am bound to proceed now to reflection on the implications the outcomes have for education.

It seems that in the context of the growing need for togetherness, the pronounced need for personal, face-to-face contact and the unlimited access to information, the mainstream education system based on classroom lessons fails to fulfil young people’s expectations. The research implies that teenagers particularly value dialogue-based relations. Educational change is underway, of course, with the modern school striving to meet requirements produced by the mutating reality and children’s new expectations bound up with the novel dimensions and pace of their development as well as with the difficulties they face. Nevertheless, transformations in the Polish education system fail to keep up either with the challenges posed by the modern world or with the needs of children, who are actually entrenched in this world deeper than their parents are. As we are by no means ready to launch or face a revolution, what other ways are there to make school into a place that would be relevant and friendly to young people?

The essential principle of change holds that while we cannot change others, we can create conditions for others to try and change themselves, discover their potential and use it so as to foster joy and satisfaction.

With change conceived of in this way, tutoring seems a promising candidate for a catalyst of school change and “making education meaningful.”²⁵ Tutoring is a method of individualised education whose efficacy, as I believe, is rooted in creating a student-tutor relation (Pereświet-Sołtan, 2011a).

The research outcomes quoted above imply that it is exactly the relation-building factor that can make the method attractive and effective. By creating a personal relation with a tutor, a teenager can find what she/he lacks in relations with other adults,

i.e., respect, partnership, recognition, space for deliberation, acceptance and approval of his/her understanding of the world.

Except transmitting knowledge and skills, the individualised teaching and learning method, if well implemented, may provide a student with an invaluable opportunity of self-analysis and self-understanding. In the confused, indefinite world, this lays foundations for designing and carrying out the individual self-project. Kazimierz Obuchowski argues that a human being who has not formed a self-conception is unable to resist the world and, consequently, yields helplessly to its influences (Obuchowski, 2006). Left on their own without aid or assistance, children who cannot find support in a secure, stable relation are vulnerable to whatever this world hurls at them.

Below, I briefly present the idea of tutoring.

TUTORING AS AN INDIVIDUALISED EDUCATION METHOD: SHORT DESCRIPTION

As already mentioned, tutoring is a teaching and learning method based on the tutor-tutee encounter⁶. In modern history, it was for the first time introduced in England, where it was implemented as a common academic teaching method in 1870 (Pełczyński, 2007). At Oxford and Cambridge, it has been used ever since. In their classical form, the meetings of tutors and tutees—so-called tutorials—involve regular scheduling (once a week) and long-term arrangements (at least one semester).

The core of tutoring lies in the tutor's focus on the tutee's **needs and potential**, and its aim is the tutee's integral development. This underlying premise can be upheld only when the participants in the process create a mutual **dialogue-based relation**, which will be discussed below.

Tutorials should be arranged in the logically sequenced stages. In the first stage the tutor *meets and gets to know the tutee*, which is fundamental to the ensuing process. This is when the tutee's needs and potential are identified. Relying on the knowledge obtained in this stage, the tutor and the tutee proceed to the second stage, in which they *jointly set educational goals and design an action-plan to accomplish them*. If clearly and aptly defined, the goals contribute to the effectiveness of the third stage, i.e., *execution of the bilaterally accepted collaboration plan*, which takes up most of the tutoring period. The process is concluded in the fourth stage, when the collaboration and its effects are assessed the two parties participating in the process, the tutor and the tutee alike (Traczyński, 2009).

It should be added that although the tutoring relation resembles the master-pupil relation, it is founded upon **partnership and mutual respect**, which are key factors throughout its stages. Hence, both the tutor and the tutee have equal right to care for themselves and their needs. Either of the parties, for example, can decide to terminate the collaboration after a few initial meetings and seek another partner. It is a fully legitimate decision which should be endorsed and respected (cf. Budzyński, 2009).

WHO IS THE TUTOR?

Terms referring to the tutor in educational tutoring proliferate in the literature: an academic guide (Brzezińska & Rycielska, 2009), a teacher working with a student on individual basis (Traczyński, 2009), “a mentor who uses coaching tools” (Kolegium Tutorów, 2011) and a master (Czayka-Chełmińska, 2005). The declaration posted on Wrocław’s College of Tutors’ website informs that

[the tutor] is a wise and trustworthy advisor . . . She/he believes in [the tutees’] abilities, supports and advises them, inspires and stimulates them to think, shares his/her own experience and knowledge, and does not shun expressing his/her own opinions . . . First of all, she/he creates good relations founded on trust and respect . . . She/he helps to organise the tutees’ work and prompts them to reflect on their own development, the meaning of their work, and academic and vocational choices (Kolegium Tutorów, 2011).

The website also informs that helping to change the tutee’s preconceptions which hinder the full development of his/her potential ranks as one of the chief responsibilities of the tutor.

The tutor should also skilfully combine partnership and enhancement of the tutee’s assets, on the one hand, with the discipline of weekly meetings, in which the goals determined earlier are executed, on the other. Thereby, the tutor must constantly keep in mind that the roads she/he guides the tutee along are the tutee’s and not his/her own developmental pathways. (cf. Pereświet-Sołtan, 2011b).

CONCLUSION

The outline of the tutoring method presented above suggests that the core of the tutoring process is *RELATION* created mutually by the tutor and the tutee by means of direct communication. Such relation-building requires engagement as well as open and on-going exchange of thoughts since communication both constitutes the “substance” of relation and develops through relation (cf. Pereświet-Sołtan, 2011a). Any sound relationship is rooted in acceptance, partnership and respect. For the lack of space, I cannot comprehensively discuss the role of relation in the development of the tutor and the tutee—the two actors involved in an encounter. The size of the article also precludes analyzing all those aspects of tutoring which can and do promote realisation of both agents’ psychosocial needs. Nevertheless, I must indicate at least that the method creates “spaces” in which the individualised, personal relation fosters values and needs which the Polish educational system patently fails to engage with and the teenagers are unable to satisfy in contact with other adults.

For example, in the first stage of tutoring, when the tutor strives to *get to know* the tutee, a kind of “added value” emerges both for the teacher and for the student, because “getting to know” is usually intertwined with *understanding*. Owing to this,

the teacher can more effectively support the student's motivation and dedication, and the student gains what is, according to the research, of utmost value to young people, i.e., a chance to feel *the subject* in the relation (as opposed to the common experience of contacts with adults, who "do not treat the young seriously" and "push their opinions").

Setting goals together stimulates the tutee's internal motivation, which is a rare occurrence at school, whose system operates upon external motives, which tend to be variable and dependent on reinforcements from the outside. Moreover, in the collaborative work on the jointly set goals the student is treated seriously, which signals to the student that the teacher is genuinely interested in what is of interest to him/her. It imbues the young person with a sense of agency and control over the on-going events that concern him/her directly (cf. Brzezińska & Rycielska, 2009). Such method and the attitudes it is expressive of can counterbalance the negative sensations the respondents reported in their utterances about adults, such as "they ignore my opinions" and "they think they are in charge."

Executing the set goals, the tutor creates conditions which inspire, or even provoke, the tutees to critically assess the discussed issues and encourages them to formulate their own judgments, which—even if controversial—are treated as legitimate as long as they are logically argued and thoroughly analysed. This strategy helps the teenagers to acquire competence to use knowledge in advocating their opinions as well as fosters their self-reflection and critical analysis of their views and ideas about the world. This promotes conceptual and intellectual maturation not only in the *interaction* with the tutor but also through *intra-action* (i.e., self-education) (Tarnowski, 2005).

We might be tempted to ask whether tutoring does not sound somewhat utopian in the Polish school context. This educational method is highly demanding: it saddles teachers, students and schools as institutions with responsibilities. Indeed, it is very unlikely to ever become a principal teaching and learning method, which it is at the British universities. Nevertheless, it can certainly be applied as an auxiliary method of education in the public school sector. It has already been implemented in a number of educational facilities. For a few years now, many junior high schools have made tutoring programmes part of their curricula, which idea germinated at Wrocław's College of Tutors and has succeeded, backed up by its members' determination and the support of the municipality's Department of Education.

School can be a site of encounter for two mutually unintelligible worlds. It can, but does not have to be, a battleground, as well. The responsibility for the future of the school in which our children will study rests on our adult shoulders.

REFERENCES

- Brzezińska, M. I. & Rycielska, L. (2009). Tutoring jako czynnik rozwoju ucznia i nauczyciela. In P. Czekierda, M. Budzyński, J. Traczyński, Z. Zalewski & A. Zembrzuska (Eds.), *Tutoring w szkole, między teorią a praktyką zmiany edukacyjnej* (pp. 19-30). Wrocław: Towarzystwo Edukacji Otwartej.

- Budzyński, M. (2009). Tutoring szkolny: Jak przez dialog rozwijać ucznia i motywować go do nauki. In P. Czekierda, M. Budzyński, J. Traczyński, Z. Zalewski & A. Zembrzuska (Eds.), *Tutoring w szkole, między teorią a praktyką zmiany edukacyjnej* (pp. 19-31). Wrocław: Towarzystwo Edukacji Otwartej.
- Cieśla, J. (2012, September). Presja i depresja. *Polityka*, 38(2875).
- Czayka-Chelmińska, K. (2005). *Tutoring: W poszukiwaniu metody kształcenia liderów*. Warszawa: PAFW.
- Filiciak, M., Danielewicz, M., Halawa, M., Mazurek, P. & Nowotny, A. (2010). *Młodzi i media: Nowe media a uczestnictwo w kulturze: Raport Centrum Badań nad Kulturą Popularną SWPS*. Warszawa: Szkoła Wyższa Psychologii Społecznej. Retrieved December 12, 2013, from <http://www.mim.swps.pl>
- Gajek, E. (2008). *Edukacja językowa w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*. Warszawa: Uniwersytet Warszawski.
- Hamlin, S. (2008). *Jak mówić, żeby nas słuchali: Komunikacja we współczesnym miejscu pracy* [How to Talk So People Listen: Connecting in Today's Workplace]. Poznań: DOM Wydawniczy Rebis.
- Hankała, A. (2004). Psychologiczne społeczne zagrożenia związane z zastosowaniem mediów. In M. Tanas (Ed.), *Pedagogika @ środki informatyczne i media*. Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls.”
- Kolegium Tutorów. (2011). *Kto to jest tutor?* Retrieved from <http://www.tutoring.pl/strefa-wiedzy/tutoring/kim-jest-tutor>
- Obuchowski, K. (2006). *Galaktyka potrzeb. Psychologia dążeń ludzkich*. Poznań: Zysk i S-ka.
- Melosik, Z. (2004). *Kultura popularna jako czynnik socjalizacji*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Pelczyński, Z. (2007). Tutoring wart zachodu: Z doświadczeń tutora oxfordzkiego. In *Tutoring: W poszukiwaniu metody kształcenia liderów* (pp. 31-35). Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie Szkoła Liderów.
- Pereświet-Sołtan, A. (2011a). Tutoring: godzenie wody z ogniem. *News Webweb*. Retrieved February 10, 2013, from <http://news.webweb.pl/2,44040,0,Tutoring,-godzenie,wody,z,ogniem.html>
- Pereświet-Sołtan, A. (2011b). Tutoring jako ważny obszar uczenia się dorosłych. *Edukacja Dorosłych*, 2(65).
- Szafraniec, K. (2011). *Młodzi 2011*. Warszawa: Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów. Retrieved February 15, 2013, from http://zds.kprm.gov.pl/sites/default/files/pliki/mlodzi_2011_printerfriendly.pdf
- Tarnowski, J. (2005). *Jak wychowywać? Uczyć się od wychowanków (przyjaciół)*. Kraków: “Impuls.”
- Traczyński, J. (2009). *Kim jest (mógłby być...) tutor w polskiej szkole*. In P. Czekierda, M. Budzyński, J. Traczyński, Z. Zalewski & A. Zembrzuska (Eds.), *Tutoring w szkole: między teorią a praktyką zmiany edukacyjnej* (pp. 35-37). Wrocław: Towarzystwo Edukacji Otwartej.

- Tyszka, T. (1999). *Kultura jest kultem wartości: Aksjologia społeczna - studia i szkice*. Komorów: Wydawnictwo Antyk-Marcin Dybowski.
- Wallance, P. (2001). *Psychologia Internetu* (T. Hornowski, Trans.). Poznań: DOM Wydawniczy Rebis.
- Wojciszke, B. (2009). *Kobieta zmienną jest*. Gdańsk: GWP.

**BADANIE PSYCHOSPOŁECZNYCH POTRZEB
WSPÓŁCZESNYCH NASTOLATKÓW I ICH IMPLIKACJE DLA EDUKACJI**

ABSTRAKT: W artykule zostały przedstawione rezultaty badań przeprowadzonych wśród dolnośląskich gimnazjalistów, dotyczące psychospołecznych potrzeb młodzieży w tej grupie wiekowej. Wyniki badań wskazują, iż pomimo intensywnego rozwoju nowoczesnych technologii informacyjnych, potrzeba kontaktu społecznego, nie ulega spłyceniu, ani redukcji, ale wręcz nasila się. Druga część artykułu stanowi próbę refleksji nad implikacjami dla edukacji, wynikającymi z przeprowadzonych badań. Mimo podejmowanych starań, zmiany zachodzące w polskiej edukacji nie nadążają za wyzwaniem dzisiejszego świata, ani za potrzebami młodzieży. Jako jedno z rozwiązań dla polskiej szkoły, autorka proponuje zindywidualizowaną metodę uczenia (się) – tutoring, która swoją skuteczność opiera na budowaniu relacji z uczniem.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: nowoczesne technologie, potrzeby psychospołeczne nastolatków, tutoring.



-
1. In the current Polish school system, secondary education is divided into two stages. Having completed elementary education (primary school: 6 classes, years 6/7-12/13), children continue studies for three years in the obligatory junior high school, so-called *gimnazjum* (3 classes, years 13-16) and then choose from a range of senior high schools (usually 3 classes, years 16-19).
 2. „Voivodeship” (*województwo*) denotes a high-level administrative division in Poland, approximately equivalent to a province. There are 16 voivodeships in Poland.
 3. Since the questionnaire was very comprehensive and rendered copious research material, I decided to present here only a selection of the outcomes that answer the first research question (i.e., *What are the modern teenagers’ psychosocial needs?*) and prompt reflection on the other one (i.e., *What are the implications for education?*). Importantly, the results presented here are only preliminary as they have not been processed statistically yet. The possible correlations between the answers reported by the subjects and their sex and/or place of residence will be further analysed and published in another study.
 4. GG stands for Gadu-Gadu, an instant messaging programme which is very popular in Poland.
 5. This is the motto of Wrocław’s College of Tutors.
 6. I will use the word „tutee” throughout the paper since it comes across as a neutral term. Depending on the particular tutoring framework (peer tutoring, university tutoring, tutoring in leader education programmes, and so on), tutees can differ in age and/or experience, etc. My chief experience so far has been in projects of tutoring for extra-mural college students.