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Teachers' autodidacticism in the time of remote teaching

"The teaching profession, which is also a calling, doesn't actually require development as much as it identifies with it (...).

Experience and practice show that preparation for the teaching profession can be only relative and one needs to constantly create a vocation for themselves, which possibly constitutes a base and sense of the life process of being a teacher and at the same time more and more perfect handling of the teaching calling."

(J. Legowicz: 10)

Introduction

The pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus has influenced our everyday life. As a result of this situation, schools and universities were closed and remote teaching was introduced. Since March 2020 students and teachers have been facing the new reality which remote teaching is. Until recently online education was used mostly as a way of receiving professional upskilling through various online courses, available practically for all fields.

In the current situation, autodidacticism is the priority form of professional upskilling. Until now it was creating a bond connecting all substantive, educational and methodical knowledge, and was an inseparable element of self-development in case of people who want to be professionals. The autodidacticism process is still a very important aspect in developing one's personality and knowledge, not only for a teacher but for all people regardless of their profession.

Organisation of the cooperation and autodidacticism network

According to the Wincenty Okoń's definition (1981:269) from Słownik Pedagogiczny, autodidacticism means achieving education through activities of which goals, content, conditions and means are determined by the subject himself/herself. In this process their goals reinvigorate and having reached the higher level of awareness, the goals undergo re-evaluation and refinement. This is because autodidacticism reaches the optimal level when it becomes a constant life need and is a base for life-long learning.

On the other hand, Józef Pólturzycki (1983:14) interprets this process as learning carried out consciously with a possibility of using various forms of help from

other people or institutions. It is a process of independently conducted learning, of which goals, content, forms, sources and methods are chosen and set by the learning individual. The most visible goal of autodidacticism is gaining knowledge in a clearly determined scope. This task may develop and reinvigorate, while its results may lead also to changes in personality, understood as a group of constant qualities and mental processes of an individual which distinguish this individual from other individuals and determine the individual's behaviour. The autodidacticism process in terms of goals and educational content regarding personality traits, attitude, values is also defined as a self-upbringing. Self-directed gaining of knowledge within basics and simple professional tasks is called self-teaching.

In the learning process it is important to realise at the very beginning what we aim for by choosing a particular form of learning. Nowadays the system of autodidacticism has become very popular due to, for example, wide and multiaspectual access to various methods and forms of development. Everyone can choose books, films or other means they want to use. It cannot be denied that the Internet is very, or in many cases the most, useful learning tool. Possessing a computer or other similar devices is an obvious thing. It may be a laptop, a tablet, and sometimes a smartphone is enough. This is why the modern society is often called the information society, due to its wide development and use of various technologies, including information and communication technologies (ICT).

Information technology – IT – is a group of modern devices used in the process of communication (Siemińska-Losko, 2007:16). Another definition defines this technology as a group of means (devices such as computers, computer networks, and media) and tools (including software), and also technologies that serve universal use of information.

Information and communication technologies (ICT), interchangeably called information and telecommunication technologies or information technologies, are technologies that process, gather, and send information in an electronic form.

The tools most often used now by teachers for autodidacticism are:

- Videoconferences
- Online conferences
- Webinars
- Vodcasts
- Internet applications
- Open educational resources (OER) – widely accessible materials (books, courses, scripts, multimedia), free of charge, available for further use and adaptation.

The goals of teachers' cooperation and autodidacticism are:

- Exchange of experience between participants
- Analysis of good methods used by the participants
- Receiving methodical and substantive support of experts
- Enriching the participants' competencies
- Creating new solutions for schools being a part of the network
- Gaining contacts and cooperation between schools.

The types of used networks comprise:

- Interdisciplinary networks focused on a particular issue such as creating own education programmes
- Interdisciplinarily featured networks for teachers interested in a specific field, for example, bibliotherapy in small children's education
- Networks for teachers of a particular field, e.g. network of preschool teachers
Network activities comprise:
 - Online platform activities between meetings
 - Discussions, exchange of information and insights regarding the network's theme
 - Coordination of the participants' work on creating solutions
 - Publication of the results (e.g. developed tools, lesson plans)
 - Sharing resources useful for the network's participants (uploading documents, films, presentations, photos)
 - Participation in e-learning seminars

Forms of work within the cooperation and autodidacticism network supporting self-directed activity of the participants are:

- The forum of experience and good method exchange, which is a developed presentation of proven effects made by chosen participants in small groups, and summary (poster session, group discussion)
- Team work on solutions most often includes defining the issue, developing the understanding and possible reformulation of the issue, generating and analysing solutions, planning of the implementation.
- Action learning which means learning through acting – focusing on a particular, authentic example coming from a professional practice (work form using asking questions, deeper reflection and dialogue).
- Organisation of a demonstration lesson – simulation, actual situation observation
- Lecture
- Training
- Group counselling

Networking, which comprises:

- Creating and maintaining relations with others in order to gain information and mutual support
- Process of information, experience, resources exchange, and mutual support thanks to a valuable network of contacts
- Gaining long-term and trustworthy partners
- Principle of reciprocity

Networking in education consists in:

- Participation of the teaching staff in events taking place even in faraway units, facilities or institutions
- Participation in events directly related to the needs of people who learn, which has an impact on a change in thinking and ways of working
- Assuring continuity of employees' development
- Monitoring changes in law, new requirements, new methods and work standards on an ongoing basis

- No-cost experience exchange, even in a very narrow and specific fields
- Creating effective ways of colleague support, especially for new teachers.

According to Józef Pótturzycki (1991:318), autodidacticism has been both an educational process as well as a lifestyle that is marked by active exploration of the world and self, personality development in all fields of education, not only mental but also social, ethical, aesthetical, and physical. Due to this definition, autodidacticism is not only a way to gain knowledge but also to learn how to behave in various situations, both everyday or problematic.

Stefan Wołoszyn (1982:725) claims that autodidacticism and professional lifelong learning of teachers is an essential condition for their proper and fruitful educational work as they should be open for progress, innovation, and want to keep learning.

Dzierżymir Jankowski (1999:91) divides autodidacticism into:

- Assisted or guided autodidacticism – in a form of counselling, consultation, or sometimes fragmentary direct guidance (e.g. correspondence education)
- Indirectly guided autodidacticism – initiated mostly by authors, creators and editors of various sources of information (textbooks, methodical guidebooks, multimedia programmes and packages, etc.) used by self-teaching students
- Proper autodidacticism – a self-teaching student finds knowledge from scientific sources, materials and statements not designed for autodidacticism, and also directly from observing the surrounding reality. It requires a good intellectual maturity, profound observation ability, correct interpretation of the results, ability to systematise and structure gained data.

When it comes to the core of the autodidacticism, it is very important to be prepared for this process. The first rule is that each self-teaching individual needs to do it out of their own free will. Forced activities are not welcome and do not bring expected results. Every teacher must want to begin the process of self-teaching. If the first rule is met, the next very important aspect is understanding the core of the process from the very beginning, that is, the teacher needs to set a particular goal that they want to achieve.

It may be:

- Developing and enriching one's personality within universally accepted values (e.g. intellectual, ethical and artistic)
- Preparation for the profession and professional responsibilities
- Active participation of every person in national culture, in learning about its heritage, traditions and achievements in shaping its present form, its features and values
- Guiding development of own's individuality – preparing for a proper self-teaching, setting ambitious educational goals and their gradual realisation (Dybek, 2000:37-38)

Autodidacticism is a gradual process. Czesław Maciarz (1966:191) mentioned three levels:

- Basic – learning technical skills of self-teaching work
- Higher – developing certain intellectual skills

- The highest – equal to „initiation” into methods of scientific work and developing reflective and exploratory approach.

The goals of autodidacticism are to bring particular practical benefits. We need to be obviously aware of this and remember that the self-teaching process is in all areas of human life and activity. It may take various forms and it will depend solely on us what forms we choose and what goals we set. Having access to information, courses or online lectures it is possible to achieve goals quickly, easily, and quite effortlessly. Nowadays the Internet offers numerous possibilities of development, in terms of both searching for information or job, and deepening one’s knowledge. The Internet enables us to use a wide offer of additional classes, trainings, courses, or even postgraduate studies. It is also possible to communicate with people from all over the globe. By using, for example, social media we have the perspective of contacting people living on the other end of the world. Thanks to this we can exchange our professional experiences, participating in conferences, symposia, and learn their culture, language or customs.

Mirosław J. Kubiak (2000, 48) defines remote learning as a method of carrying a didactic process when teachers and students are away from each other (sometimes far away) and are not in the place. Apart from traditional means of communication, in order to convey information they use also modern telecommunication technologies sending sounds, video, computer data, and printed materials. Modern technologies enable also direct real-time contact between a teacher and a student via audio or videoconferences, regardless of the distance between them.

The characteristic features of the remote teaching are that:

- The process takes place in the computer network
- The communication between the participants is a two-way communication
- The teaching is based on properly prepared methodology
- The education system is supported by a remote teaching platform
- It uses electronic media.

Basic criteria comprise:

- Proper methodology
- Use of the computer and Internet technologies
- Networking

Fundamental e-learning technologies using the Internet are:

E-learning platforms

- Virtual teaching environment
- Communication tools
- Authorial tools
- Teaching object repositories
- M-learning

The advantages of remote self-teaching within professional development refer to:

- Classes at different parts of the day – thanks to the fact that each person knows how to record lectures, conferences, symposia, workshops, we may choose the time we listen to the material
- Easy replays – many people record classes to be able to listen to them later

- Accessibility – thanks to the fact that the world “has stopped at home”, in the Internet it is possible it is possible on the Internet to find much more various and free classes organized by many institutions, educational establishments, universities and seats of learning
- Place – thanks to e-learning everybody can study wherever they want
- Self-discipline – e-learning teaches us self-discipline and self-control. Now we must make more decisions about our learning and it is up to us how much we will get from remote classes, so we are even more responsible for our development.
- Lower costs – learning online means there is no need to pay for travelling or renting places for the classes
- Easy updates – every update is immediately available for students, unlike in case of printed materials
- Access to educational materials – remarkably wide Internet offer of additional methodical and substantive materials
- Access to special educational platforms that enable conferences with the lecturer and unlimited access to all didactic materials.

The flaws of remote self-teaching within professional development are the following:

- No direct contact in interpersonal communication
- Lack of motivation and regularity in self-teaching
- Often technical problems – studying takes place via computer tools and the Internet. Connectivity problems or problems with devices are very common.
- Spending too much time in front of the computer, which has a negative influence on health, posture, vision, and increases a possibility of a computer addiction.
- Difficulties in autodidacticism in case of science; lack or very few practical examples, exercises, and experiments.
- Less frequent focus during the remote self-teaching at home due to numerous distractions. Many people are not able to resist and don't do not focus enough on the class they are participating in.
- Loneliness.

In spite of appearances, remote autodidacticism has many flaws but there are fewer of them compared to the advantages. The issues usually mentioned first are: limited contact with others, making new connections and feeling of loneliness. However, it is worth realizing that autodidacticism is an essential aspect of self-development, which is improving oneself in order to achieve mastery in one or more field. It is a process realised individually, directed towards a studying person as a subject taking a full responsibility for the choice made. This process does not focus solely on one personality trait but influences the whole personality (Tokar, 2015:228). Autodidacticism, also known as self-teaching, is receiving education through activity of which goals, content, conditions and means are set by the subject itself (Okoń, 2001:348).

Summary

In the 21st century, access to information is shaped by dynamic technological changes and the development of digital techniques quickly transmuting the reality of

modern people. The increase in open-access resources on the Internet and the type of relations made via the web imply important changes in perceiving the role of a teacher in the educational process (Królikiewicz, Pulak 2020:26). The advance of the world wide web allows for the interaction of a user with an Internet application, website, or another user. Technology enables co-creating content, its dynamic processing and sharing information resources. Applications and new Internet services created for this purpose have opened new possibilities that led to the creation of new tools and new techniques of using them. It is worth remembering that the teaching profession always requires constant development and improving qualifications in order to keep up with the changing reality, students' expectations and superiors' requirements.

Wiesław Stawiński (2000:365) claims that the profession of a biology and environment teacher should lead to increasing the knowledge and efficiency of the entire Polish society since it is the crucial condition of our balanced socio-economic development. Along with the education system and curricula reform, the reorganisation of the teacher education system is taking place. It is supposed to lead to changes in organisation, programmes, forms and methods of educating teachers.

Even though remote teaching used in the process of self-teaching has its advantages and disadvantages, unfortunately, in the current situation we do not have other possibility to undertake any particular activities when it comes to autodidacticism. Therefore, it is worth using the numerous available materials that the Internet offers. Thanks to this it is possible to gain knowledge and develop within a specific field.

The significant aid for teachers in learning techniques and methods of working remotely are for example:

- Free online training "Lekcja: Enter" (Eng. "Lesson: Enter") for teachers. It is for early school education teachers, liberal studies teachers, science teachers, art teachers, computer science teachers from elementary and secondary schools. Participants are enrolled by their school's principal.
- Guidebooks for students and teachers about remote learning/teaching.
- Zdalnelekcje.pl – a website for students and teachers.
- All-Polish Education Web – the Internet and devices for schools.
- 0% VAT for laptops and tablets for schools.
- E-materials (Ministry of National Education, Centre for Education Development, Local Education Authority, Teacher Training Centres).
- Free education platform epodreczniki.pl.
- Sample exam papers – aid for 8 graders and secondary school graduates.
- Educational game "Godność, wolność i niepodległość" (Eng. „Dignity, freedom and independence”).
- "Szkoła z TVP" project (Eng. „School with Polish National Television”).
- Remote school – buying hardware.
- Centre for Education Development – in cooperation with Education Computer Centre the Centre for Education Development implements the EU grant "Improving the quality of education and aids offered to remote education teachers by supporting institutions".

Closed schools, cancelled classroom teaching and introduction of the remote education system has had impact not only on students but also on teachers. This situation has shown us how important it is to gain new skills by self-teaching within various competencies. However, the teacher has always been and will be playing an extremely important role in the process of education of future generations because their work brings a huge moral value at each stage of life. Thanks to teachers there are educated doctors who save human lives, nurses helping them, or scientists to whom people owe everything they have today. Not everybody, though, realises that to be able to fulfil their mission of educating people, teachers need to learn a lot themselves and it is not enough to gain the required level of knowledge just once. Each teacher learns throughout their entire life, throughout their whole professional career. It is expected from the present-day teachers that they will handle changes which have been occurring in goals, content, methods, and organisation of education and development. It is possible only through skilful use of organised form of professional development as well as through life-long learning (Buchcic, 2007:41).

It is worth remembering that the self-teaching process of teachers is a course of consciously undertaken, logically connected to each other, and closely organised activities of a learning person, and the aim of this process is gaining required information, skills to manage such information, intellectual and manual skills, and developing cognitive ability, all in a voluntary and unassisted manner. For teachers, all the development and improvement processes, including autodidacticism especially, are very important sources of getting or updating substantive and methodical knowledge, and gaining or improving skills which will bring expected results showing quality of their work.

Each generation lives in a slightly different social, cultural, technical and civilizational reality, which often takes forms of crises, dangers or helplessness in achieving goals.

A number of times does an individual find themselves in unfamiliar situations and it is expected from this individual to face new problems or make decisions the previous generations did not have to make.

(S. Włoch 2010:79)

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Teachers' autodidacticism in the time of remote teaching**Abstract**

The term "autodidacticism" should be interpreted as consciously guided learning with a possibility of using various forms of help from other people or institutions. On the other hand, remote learning is a distance learning with no direct contact between a student and a teacher. It enables education, different types of courses and trainings without having to leave the house. A computer and the Internet are enough to become participants on a virtual plane of any online course. E-learning brings many benefits, among others, a person who takes such course makes decisions about the speed of gaining the knowledge and about time of learning. This model is very flexible and removes territorial barriers. The offer is quite diverse – the most popular courses are obviously language courses that allow us to learn or improve foreign languages. Computer, assertiveness, negotiation, finance or teaching courses are also often chosen. We can find open as well as closed courses, dedicated for a particular group of people. These courses take place through the use of modern communication tools, including chats or information exchange in a form of an email. At the end of the course, the participant writes a paper or takes an online exam, receives a certificate confirming the completion of the course.

Even though remote learning in the self-teaching process has its advantages and flaws, unfortunately, in the current situation there is no other way to organise professional development trainings. The diversity of available materials that the Internet offers allow us to learn on our own and develop in a particular field within autodidacticism.

Keywords: remote teaching, information technology, autodidacticism, self-improvement

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