

**Rafał Bodarski**

ORCID: 0000-0003-0889-9498

## **The Importance of Education in the Adult Person's Hierarchy of Values**

**Summary:** The text is devoted to looking at the individual through the prism of his subjective functioning. The characteristics of human behavior in this context are analyzed from the perspective of pedagogy, sociology, psychology and philosophy. Particular attention is paid to the sense of agency. The problem of making decisions, making a choice between values becomes a key issue, often proving the professed worldview or human maturity. Taking action by a person is often determined by the value that this action has for him and how much importance the subject attaches to the result of this action. Man's ascribing to successes, which, in his opinion, are a derivative of his abilities and own abilities, appears both in individual actions and in group work.

A similar mechanism is responsible for rationalizing negative events. Explaining failures to oneself in many life and professional situations is related to the shaping of a person's self-esteem. What is the role of building and strengthening self-esteem through previous (educational) experiences, and to what extent does the individual show excessive optimism or lack of realism when taking action in a new situation? The author tries to find an answer to these questions by analyzing various perspectives and theories.

**Keywords:** job; value; decision making, subjectivity; perpetration; education; personality development; aspirations; motivation

**Streszczenie:** Znaczenie edukacji w hierarchii wartości człowieka dorosłego

Tekst poświęcony jest spojrzeniu na jednostkę przez pryzmat jej podmiotowego funkcjonowania. Charakterystyka zachowania człowieka w tym kontekście jest analizowana z perspektywy pedagogiki, socjologii, psychologii i filozofii. Szczególna uwaga poświęcona jest poczuciu sprawstwa. Problem podejmowania decyzji, dokonywania wyboru między wartościami, staje się kluczowym zagadnieniem, świadczącym niejednokrotnie o wyznawanym światopoglądzie czy też dojrzałości człowieka. Podejmowanie działań przez człowieka często jest uwarunkowane wartością, jakie to działanie ma dla niego oraz jak dużą wagę przywiązuje podmiot do wyniku owego działania. Przypisywanie sobie przez człowieka sukcesów które, w jego opinii, są pochodną zdolności i własnych możliwości pojawia się tak w działaniu indywidualnym jak i w pracy grupowej. Podobny mechanizm odpowiada za racjonalizowanie zdarzeń negatywnych. Tłumaczenie sobie porażek w wielu sytuacjach życiowych i zawodowych jest związane z kształtowaniem się samooceny u człowieka. Jaką rolę pełni zatem budowanie i wzmacnianie samooceny przez kumulowane doświadczenia (edukacyjne), a w jak dużym stopniu jednostka przejawia nadmierny optymizm czy też brak realizmu przy podejmowaniu działania

w nowej sytuacji? Na te pytania autor strasie znaleźć odpowiedź analizując różne perspektywy i teorie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** praca; wartość; podejmowanie decyzji, podmiotowość; sprawstwo; edukacja; rozwój osobowości; aspiracje; motywacja

When considering the place of education in the network of adult person's values, different concepts of adult development should be carefully considered. Looking at an individual through the prism of his or her subjective functioning is considered in terms of pedagogy, sociology, psychology, philosophy from two perspectives:

First one assumes a significant impact of the environment (society) on human functioning<sup>1</sup>;

The second, characteristic of the cognitive trend in psychology, is the concept of an individual's actions as subject's causative activity<sup>2</sup>.

The question of the need for agency is, in fact, a solution to the dilemma of the need for an individual's influence on the surrounding world. According to some authors, the desire to be the cause of events in one's environment is an elementary human desire (cf. De Charms, 1968; Deci, Ryan, 1985; White, 1959). The thesis about the benefits that an individual can derive when the possibility of influencing reality is combined with the satisfaction of needs is true. This fact is noted by Brehm (1966) and Kofta (Kofta 1977), among others.

Research on freedom of choice documents that, in general, people prefer freedom of choice over lack of it. The experience of freedom of choice was associated with a feeling of pleasure, and limiting this freedom – with an unpleasant feeling.

It should be emphasized that according to the research results reported by Kofta, in decision-making situations, greater satisfaction with the decision was achieved when the individual had the possibility to choose and the subjective feeling of freedom of choice (cf. Kofta, 2001; Harvey, Jellison, 1974).

In a situation where subjects' freedom of choice was limited, a lowering of mood, tension in behaviour and a feeling of hostility towards the environment appeared (Wicklund, 1974).

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. R. Meighan, *Socjologia edukacji*, Toruń 1993, pp. 273–278; 324–329; L. Witkowski, *Edukacja wobec sporów o (po)nowoczesność*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 56–61; p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> See X. Gliszczyńska, *Poczucie sprawstwa* (in:) *Człowiek jako podmiot życia społecznego*, ed. X. Gliszczyńska, Wrocław Ossolineum 1983.

Our lack of satisfaction when we have no influence on reality or when our choice is limited and this limitation may result from subjective evaluation of the value of an action, may lead to the so-called phenomenon of resistance. This resistance is a result of the threat of choice limitation and is referred to in the literature as reactance<sup>3</sup>.

It should be noted here that the phenomenon of reactance takes place when a person expects a choice. In a situation where there is no such expectation, the phenomenon of resistance will not occur (according to the Brehm's theory of reactance). The discussed problem of agency is closely connected with the activity of an adult, including one of the most important types of this activity, the educational one. According to cognitive concepts, when faced with a choice, a person anticipates the image of changes that may occur after deciding on one of the alternatives. This view is present in the works of many Polish and foreign psychologists (cf. Łukaszewski, 1984; Kozielecki, 1987; Obuchowski, 1983, 1985, 1993; Erickson, 1970; Levinson, 1978; Baltes 1984). According to the representative approach to the problem of subjectivity, one should consider the importance of human judgments and beliefs formed as a result of one's own experiences and how they determine life plans.

As Kofta writes (1989), the representative component of personality is connected with the previously discussed perception of oneself as a source of activity, with expectation of influence and with considering oneself as the cause of events in the surroundings. The thesis that judgments and beliefs about control are formed on the basis of the individual's experience is connected with the existence of subjectivity representation. Initially, they are limited to a single class of phenomena (situations), and over time the person generalizes and we can then speak of a generalised expectation of control and effectiveness. This process is a gradual accumulation of various experiences. Thus, according to some theorists, knowledge of one's own actions is *a posteriori* knowledge (See Rotter, 1966; Bandura 1982).

The opposite thesis is the statement that an individual initiating an action already has an idea of the outcome and the conditions under which the action can take place (Kofta, 1989). A very important component of these expectations is the assumption about the availability of the goal he intends to achieve and the way in which it will be achieved. According to Kofta and Sędek (Kofta,

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<sup>3</sup> See J. W. Brehm, *A Theory of psychological reactance*, New York 1966. The author used: M. Kofta, *Poczucie kontroli, złudzenia na temat siebie a adaptacja psychologiczna* (in:) *Złudzenia, które pozwalają żyć*, ed. M. Kofta, T. Szustrowa, Warszawa 2001, p. 223.

1984; Sędek, 1985), this is how a subject assumes a high degree of controllability of events, paradoxically in situations where an individual's knowledge of the situation in which he or she operates is low. Hypothetically, the subject sets herself or himself a goal, eg. education, assumes its availability and the way of its realization, in short, it operationalises the goal.

The overestimation of one's own influence on the situation, according to research, occurs in „normal” people, i.e. one can assume that there is a slightly higher level of optimism. Although it cannot be considered as completely unrealistic optimism, still, people who see the world in „dark colours” show more realism in assessing their own behaviour and its effects<sup>4</sup>. Biases in the assessment of one's impact on positive situations, i.e. making causal attributions, are referred to in the literature as attributive egotism (Kofta, 2001)<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, it is a denial that he or she is the source of negative events. The attribution of successes, which, according to the subject, results from his or her own skills and capabilities, appears both in individual action and in group work (strong identification with the successful group).

This mechanism coexists with an individual's action of rationalizing negative events. Such „rational” explanation of failures in many life and work situations has a stimulating effect on the level of self-esteem (maintaining good mood)<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, in the situation of educational failures, the subject looks for guilt either in situational factors or in himself/herself. Undoubtedly, protecting one's self-esteem makes it easier to explain failure with objective barriers.

What is the role of building and strengthening self-esteem through previous (educational) experiences and to what extent does an individual show excessive optimism or lack of realism in taking action in a new situation? Kofta points out that our experiences of freedom of choice, with our own effectiveness and agency, have a limited impact on the initiation of actions by the subject. They only influence the probability of initiating a subject's causative activity in a new situation<sup>7</sup>. The causative activity itself, if it occurs, is conditioned by the existence of components that build the cognitive-executive scheme of subject's orientation.

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<sup>4</sup> Research conducted by Abramson and Martin. Cited in: M. Kofta, *Orientacja...*, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. A. G. Greenwald, *The totalitarian ego. Fabrication and revision of personal history*, „American Psychologist” 35 pp. 603–618.

<sup>6</sup> See research by S. Taylor (in: ) *The psychology of action Linking cognition and motivation to behavior*, ed. P. M. Gollwitzer J. a. Borgh New York, Guilford, pp. 219–235.

<sup>7</sup> M. Kofta, *Orientacja...* p. 44.

According to the author of the abovementioned model, previous experiences may block the subject's involvement in new situations. This is because they indicate to an individual what kind of activity one should not get involved in. The subject, not seeing a chance of solving the problem, not seeing the possibility of making a free choice, will most probably give up the activity, so in such situations the occurrence of subjective orientation is small. It is different than when we subjectively perceive that we can plan the action ourselves and (assume) that we have control over the situation. In such a case, the functioning of the individual may be to a large extent characterized by subjective orientation.

Barbara and Frederick Hayes-Roth presented interesting conclusions from their research, confirming to some extent the theses of the subjective orientation model. While investigating the preparation of short-term (one-day) plans by people, they found that the subjects greatly overestimated the number of tasks and activities (planning unrealistically much) they were able to perform in one day. Particularly interesting is the fact that the planning process has always been of a similar nature, i.e. people consistently overestimated their abilities leading to a continuous accumulation of tasks and activities. By cutting themselves off from previous experiences, they overestimated efficiency and time, and underestimated various obstacles that could affect the implementation of plans. However, there is a certain doubt which, in my opinion, does not allow for generalization and referring these conclusions to the problem of the decision to take up education. While in short-term planning, we can observe a relatively easy „structure design” (tasks and activities) of the next day, as far as strategic decisions (determining our future in the long term) are concerned, this mechanism of planning and evaluating the possibility of controlling one's own destiny seems to work more precisely.

The very process of planning an action is conditioned by human needs and the aim pursued by the individual. It is one of the alternative phases of action which includes: planning (preparation phase), execution (implementation phase) and evaluation (final phase)<sup>8</sup>.

When formulating his or her objectives, an individual assesses the situation, taking into account the availability of the objective, the means to achieve it and the time he or she has to invest to achieve it. This rational activity (which

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<sup>8</sup> T. Mądrzycki, *Osobowość jako system tworzący i realizujący plany*, Gdańsk 1996, p. 72. See J. W. Akinson, *Badania nad motywacją osiągnięć*, „Psychologia wychowawcza” 1960 No. 2.

bears the hallmarks of perfect rationality) implies the assumption that an individual's achievement of various goals (including educational goals) is the result of meeting specific needs.

When quoting the assumptions of Atkinson's Theory of Motivation, Mądrzycki points out that the choice of a specific goal (D) is a function of the value (W) and the possibility of satisfying a need and the subjective probability of achieving a goal (Ps), so it is possible to write it down in form of an equation:  $D = f(W, Ps)$ <sup>9</sup>. The subjective probability of achieving a goal is determined by a number of factors that can shape it directly. Thus, the effect of both objective factors (over which the individual has no influence) and subjective variables related to the specificity of how the individual operates should be considered. Another important factor here will be the level of control over the situation and the conviction of one's own effectiveness<sup>10</sup>.

From the point of view of adult educational activity, an interesting aspect accompanying the achievement of a specific goal is that, when striving for a specific result, there is often a fear of failure or a tendency to avoid failure<sup>11</sup>. Rational planning therefore requires an analysis of the decision-making situation from two perspectives, especially when it comes to educational plans related to entering or leaving education. The first must take into account the benefits the individual has to gain from taking a specific action (here education), while the latter is an estimation of a possible failure and then an attempt to balance profits and losses. The subject, by making achieving the intended goal operational in this way, minimizes the unpleasant consequences associated with failure, which can often result from a decision not fully considered.

Mądrzycki's emphasis on this planning function implies highlighting the conclusions he draws on this basis. Planning allows us to undertake new tasks that we are not used to doing. It also allows us to realize what and how much action needs to be taken in order to achieve the desired goal through the operationalisation process. Finally, by trying to create an action plan, we can imagine – hypothetically – whether we are able to achieve such a goal.

Especially when considering the problem of planning the educational pathway, the process of reaching the result by the „trial-and-error method” seems to be a doubtful solution if at all possible.

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<sup>9</sup> op. cit. pp. 73–75.

<sup>10</sup> Due to the fact, that both these questions have been analyzed here, the terms will not be described again.

<sup>11</sup> T. Mądrzycki, *Osobowość...*, p. 74.

Creating plans allows us to avoid the consequences that may reduce self-esteem on the one hand and demotivate to other actions on the other. In Mądrzycki's opinion, it is the action plan that allows for the targeting of activities, organization of those activities, as well as subsequent *post factum* control and evaluation of the process. This emphasizes the role of control over the situation. The manifestation of such control is focused in the attitude of the subject, which Mądrzycki describes as orientation towards action. Thanks to such an attitude, the activity of functioning in various fields increases. Quoting Kuhl, Mądrzycki also emphasizes that the low effectiveness of performing activities may be caused by the previously accented excessive orientation of the subject towards the state<sup>12</sup>. According to Kuhl, the process of taking action and performing activities does not have to be influenced by low expectations of success or a weak sense of control. The process of initiating action by an individual may be the responsibility of the considered dimension of state- or action-orientation<sup>13</sup>.

Mądrzycki points out, citing Kuhl and Marszał-Wiśniewska's research, that the analyzed deficits in the performance of activities (e.g. educational activities) and motivation deficits are definitely determined by personality<sup>14</sup>. The control processes associated with the so-called ego force allow an individual to control the emotions released during the initiation and execution of specific actions. These emotions are partly related to state orientation. When a subject experiences negative emotions (anxiety, fear) and when it is revealed in an individual's orientation towards state, such a situation will undoubtedly lower the motivation and efficiency of activities. The mechanism of emotional and motivational stimulation of an organism is illustrated by the Yerkes-Dodson's law, analyzed extensively in the literature. These laws illustrate the curvilinear relationship between emotional arousal and performance in various situations, especially those related to education<sup>15</sup>. According to them, too strong as well as

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<sup>12</sup> Op.cit., p. 79.

<sup>13</sup> J. Kuhl, *Motivational and functional helplessness: The moderating effects of state versus action orientation*, „Journal of Personality and Social Psychology” 1981, vol. 40 no. 1.

<sup>14</sup> See T. Mądrzycki, *Osobowość...*, p.79 J. Kuhl, *Motivational and functional helplessness: The moderating effects of state versus action orientation*, „Journal of Personality and Social Psychology” 1981, vol. 40 no. 1; M. Marszał – Wiśniewska, *Kwestionariusz kontroli działania J. Kuhla*, „Studia Psychologiczne” 1991/2.

<sup>15</sup> J. Reykowski, *Eksperymentalna psychologia motywacji*, Warszawa 1968, p. 354f. J. Strelau (ed.), *Psychologia. Academic handbook*, Gdańsk 2000, pp. 442–445.

too weak stimulation reduces the effectiveness of functioning in a task situation. The researchers reporting on this dependence emphasize that with the increase of emotional stimulation a given activity is performed to a certain critical level and when this level is reached the quality of task performance decreases. According to the second law, the critical level is lower for difficult tasks and higher for easy ones. (Alexander, Epstein 1978, Kahneman 1973). The completion of realization activities implies the subject's need to evaluate the course of action and the obtained result (Mądrzycki 1996, p. 81). The evaluation of the undertaken activity (here, the educational task) is based on the comparison of the assumed result with the final state that the person intended to achieve. The evaluation is dichotomous and may be positive versus negative. Particularly interesting is the situation when the subject evaluates the actions taken negatively. One might suppose that such a state will cause frustration and bitterness, however, as Mądrzycki emphasizes, a negative evaluation of the result of an action does not always mean the same evaluation of all the actions taken in the course of the task (educational plan)<sup>16</sup>. This problem should be considered in terms of the attributes of successes and failures that the individual has made. As the results of conducted research on performance evaluation in a task situation show, the subject often makes the evaluation in a very subjective or even egocentric way<sup>17</sup>. This is due to the fact that we are much more likely to attribute to ourselves the responsibility for success than for failure. This way of perceiving events is to protect our self-esteem. As shown by the research carried out by Zuckerman (1979), we are much more likely to attribute success to ourselves when the action concerns an important area for us. An additional factor that stimulates the egocentric attribution of success is action in the public forum<sup>18</sup>.

Generally speaking, we can say that most of us tend to overestimate the result we achieve by undertaking an activity for a specific purpose. The persistence of this tendency within a certain framework is stimulating. Thus, when we consider this at the level of educational activity, we can conclude that

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<sup>16</sup> T. Mądrzycki, *Osobowość jako system...*, p. 81

<sup>17</sup> See G. W. Bradley, *Self-serving biases in attribution process: reexamination of the fact or fiction question*, „Journal of Personality and Social Psychology” 1978, vol. 36, No 1. I pass for: T. Mądrzycki, *Osobowość...*, p. 82.

<sup>18</sup> T. Mądrzycki, *Asymetria atrybucji przyczyn pozytywnego i negatywnego wyniku*, „Psychologia Wychowawcza” 1982, No. 3. T. Mądrzycki, M. Kucińska, *Ocena poziomu inteligencji własnej i inteligencji innych osób*, „Psychologia Wychowawcza” 1988, No. 4.



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a slight overestimation of one's achievements may lead to further efforts that are more difficult. This may lead to more effective functioning of the subject and increasing the scale of educational achievements. The evaluation of the results of previous activities has an impact on undertaking tasks, including those of an educational nature, because it shapes the activity of an individual in the scope of choosing the difficulty scale of the task which the subject intends to solve, and thus shapes the level of aspirations, as well as influences the feeling of his or her own effectiveness. Cross, Crowder and Pupynin drew attention to such a mechanism of shaping educational motivation in adults in their concepts of adult development. People with a long educational path, i.e. people with higher education, should, according to the abovementioned findings, show a tendency to further education. Additionally, it is stimulated by the intellectual level and long-term development of cognitive processes through many years of education. This undoubtedly has an impact on other properties of the subject, not only on the cognitive ones. This raises the problem of whether people with a long period of education are similar or different in the subjective dimensions discussed above, as well as whether their professional pathway differentiates the type and level of these dimensions.

Depending on the stage in life and the situation in which a person functions, his or her own activity plays a dominant role in one of the three spheres of an individual's life: in personal life, at work or in education.

In the field of education, in order to link adult's educational needs with their possibilities and proposals from their environment, the relationship between a person and his or her environment must be addressed. Generally speaking, we can assume that human education has two dimensions: *instrumental* and *autotelic*. This is pointed out, among others, by the theoreticians of adult education such as K. Patricia Cross<sup>19</sup>. In Łukaszewski's opinion, one cannot speak of selfless motivation (including educational motivation) because it leads to simplification and shallowing of thinking about a human being as a rational being, beneath whose conduct there are psychological mechanisms of behavior<sup>20</sup>. This does not exclude the fact, however, that the latter, autotelic,

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<sup>19</sup> K.P. Cross, *Adults as Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass 1981.

<sup>20</sup> W. Łukaszewski, *Psychologiczne podstawy popularyzacji wiedzy* (in:) W. Okoń (ed.) *Teoria i praktyka upowszechniania wiedzy*, Warszawa, Wiedza Powszechna 1979, p. 119–121.

aspect is of particular importance, as reflected in the latest documents on education<sup>21</sup>.

The characteristic human behavior manifests itself in three different spheres of reality: in the motivational aspect, i.e. in the sphere of goals, life goals, needs and aspirations; in the sphere of activity, through observable behaviors; in the empirical context, i.e. through objects that the human being chooses or accepts in a non-reflective way, treating them as his or her closest living environment<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> *The White Paper on education and training*, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/d0a8aa7a-5311-4eee-904c-98fa541108d8/language-en>, [dostęp: 2020-05-24]

<sup>22</sup> Z. Włodarski, *Psychologia uczenia się*, (in:) W. Okoń (ed.) *Teoria i praktyka upowszechniania wiedzy*, Warszawa, Wiedza Powszechna, 1979 p. 119–121. Z. Włodarski, *Psychologia uczenia się*, PWN, Warszawa 1996, pp. 228–229.

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**dr Rafał Bodarski** – pedagog, prodziekan Wydziału Nauk Społecznych Chrześcijańskiej Akademii Teologicznej w Warszawie; kierownik pracowni Andragogiki – Katedra Andragogiki i Socjologii Edukacji ChAT. Zainteresowania badawcze dotyczą problematyki funkcjonowania człowieka dorosłego w procesie pracy, zwłaszcza wartości pracy w życiu człowieka oraz aspiracji i realizacji planów edukacyjnych dorosłych.