Generational Differences and Professional Values of Teachers

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The aim of this chapter is to attempt to show the direction of changes in the teaching profession and the teaching community in Poland in recent years. Questions were asked as to whether – and if so, to what extent and in relation to which areas of values – one can talk about the continuity of the teaching role, mission and ethos, and whether their values and aspirations are clear evidence of a generational change. The origins of this change could be sought in the young generation of current teachers, the network generation, who with their individualisation and competition are so different in their habits from teachers of the older generation. The results of quantitative and qualitative research will be presented, using a survey on life aspirations, the values and needs of teachers, and an autobiographical statement on "The meaning and dignity of my life and work". In total, 405 questionnaires and 112 statements from teachers were collected from three age (generational) groups.

—— **Keywords:**

teaching profession
values
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change

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Introduction. Outline of research issues and reasoning of questions

The analyses undertaken used the results of a broader study on values, goals, and life as well as the professional ambitions of currently active teachers (Dróźka, 2017).

The special aim of the text is to attempt to show the direction of changes in the profession and the teaching community in Poland in recent years using a generational approach. The considerations focus on the following questions: How teachers perceive their social role, life and work, and what values teachers from different generations value.

Questions were asked as to whether – and if so, to what extent and in relation to which areas of values – one can talk about the continuity of the teaching role, mission and ethos, and whether their values and aspirations are clear evidence of a generational change.

The concept of "generation" is here understood in the cultural-historical sense – as a collective of people with common years of birth, attitudes and values shaped under the influence of the momentous experience related to the significant historical events witnessed in their youth (15–25 years).

In this approach, each generation has its own "generational experience", which is a kind of spiritual shock, and is about their way of thinking in life. This experience is the common cultural heritage of those who survived it, differentiating them from other generations.

Using this concept of a generation culturally, sociologically and historically, the generations of teachers surveyed could be characterised as follows (Ostrowska, 1963):

1. Older generation (55 to 65 years and older) – born between 1950 and 1965, the "solidarity" generation, whose political breakthrough came in 1989. Core values and aspirations in youth: freedom, subjectivity, dignity, autonomy, unity.
2. Middle-age generation (36–54 years) – born between 1969 and 1975, the generation of educational reform since 1999, experienced a radical change in the school (gymnasium) regime, new rules for promotion in the teaching profession, a new neoliberal order leading to chaos in values in the sphere of education, and an **axiological vacuum**.
3. Young generation (up to 35 years) – born between 1980 and 1995, the "join the EU" generation, but above all,

the generation of the financial crisis of 2008, labour emigration, demographic decline, closing schools, openness, virtual reality, and individualism.

The origins of this change could be sought in the young generation of current teachers, the network generation, who with their individualisation and competition are so different in their habits from teachers of the older generation.

The older generation, which we can call the "generation of Polish transformation 1989", were raised and educated in a previous epoch, with a "social ethos" strengthened by struggles in the pursuit of freedom and democracy, at the turn of the political system of the 80s and 90s of the last century in Poland.

It should be noted that in Poland there is an ongoing handover between generations of teachers. The generation of older teachers are leaving the professional scene today to retire and take their pensions. They are the last generation of the Polish political and educational transformation – **the last of the Mohicans**, as they call themselves in their memoirs and writings.

The teaching profession now includes the new generation, born, raised and educated in a liberal democracy, a market economy and digital civilisation during the phase of radical cultural changes in the world.

Other levels of comparison could also be taken into account, such as the different school missions that have been carried out over the last 30–40 years, the career span of the older generation: from school as a public sphere, governed by values, as places for the upbringing of citizens of the socialist system, focused on social values, to school as an increasingly commercial, market-oriented place, focused on educating efficient and enterprising workers, consumers in the neoliberal system, etc.

More broadly, the context of the life and work of the current older generation of teachers also includes the changes of a global, cultural and civilisational nature that have taken place, known as post-modernity. Among the many characteristics of post-modernity described in the literature, it is worth pointing out those that have had a particularly strong impact on the sphere of education, on its philosophy and on the way teachers function.

These are:

- **Variability** manifested by fluidity (Bauman, 2000), impermanence, dispersion (values, principles, lifestyle), fragmentation, periodicity – requires flexibility, creativity, mobility, understanding, tolerance, etc.;
- **Interdependence** as a result of the relation of social structures together with a phenomenon known as the "dialectics of modernity" (Giddens, 1991) – requires co-operation, team action, dialogue, participation, reconciliation, negotiation, sharing vision, responsibility, etc.;
- **Reflexivity** as a methodological principle of doubt, both in generalised knowledge and in one's own cognitive resources – requires continuous learning, improvement of one's personality, knowledge of theory and research, practice, research in action, continuous reflection, and a broader ethical and political awareness.

In the Polish (European) dimension, but also in the sense of a global one, the following important changes should also be noted:

- The fall of communism and the opening of borders – the change of regime in Poland (1989) and the change of the school system (1999);
- Poland's accession to the European Union (2004) – the consolidation of the neoliberal order, the pursuit of the market, the privatisation of the public sphere (including education) and its subordination to consumerism, and the ongoing crisis of this system that began in 2008;
- The explosion of digital technology (e.g. the internet), giving universal access to information and lifestyle patterns (experience brokered in the virtual world).

During this period, new processes and phenomena have emerged that affect the axiological condition of schools and teachers. The following should be emphasised here:

- Changes in philosophy and lifestyle: a move away from traditional forms of community for more individualistic ones – attitudes towards the rights of the child;

- The expansion of consumerism, the focus on work, earning and "having", on careers, material, "successful" aspects of activity, mobility, and migration abroad after work;
- Shifting socialisation towards self-socialisation in the cyberspace network (the internet);
- Mass communication, and much more.

New generations have been brought up and educated in this new space, including the young teachers who are currently working there.

The following question thus arises: as the new network-, digital- and world-raised generations are more virtual than the real, "purely professional" one, with a more pragmatic and less romantic and idealistic approach to the profession, what do they bring that is new and valuable?

—— **Type, method and scope of research**

The research was conducted in early 2015, using the survey "Life aspirations, values and needs of teachers".

This questionnaire consisted of an introduction (explaining the idea and goals of the research, as well as appealing for participation in it, etc.) and several consecutive parts containing (semi-)open-ended and close-ended questions that were group into the section titled:

1. Life goals and aspirations,
2. Subjectivity,
3. Values which are commonly recognised and cherished in the teaching community,
4. Needs,
5. Data of the person fulfilling the survey.

The studies also used a personal, autobiographical statement on "The meaning and dignity of my life and work".

In total, 405 surveys and 112 autobiographical narrations were collected from teachers belonging to three age groups:

- young teachers (up to 35 years of age): 141 surveys and 35 statements,
- middle-aged teachers (from 36 to 50 years of age): 154 surveys and 39 statements,

→ older teachers (above 51 years of age): 110 surveys and 38 statements.

In order to draw conclusions from the research sample, its most characteristic features should be mentioned. Of the 405 persons who completed the survey, women constituted the majority (89.7%), and men the minority (10.3%). 94.4% were persons with an MA degree, 4.5% had a BA degree, and three persons (0.1%) had a doctor's degree. 75.9% of them were married, and 20.3% were single. 31.9% of these persons did not have children, while 26.7% had one child, 30.7% had two children, and 8.7% had three or more children.

24.3% of the examined group lived in traditional villages, while 18.0% lived in communal villages, 24.1% in commune towns, 19.0% in medium-sized towns, and 14.6% in large cities. The collected data indicated that the place of residence generally corresponds to the place of employment.

Selected survey results

The analysis will present the results of studies concerning social values, everyday life values, significant differences in terms of professional and occupational values, and significant changes in the autobiographical narrations.

Social values

The teachers were asked about the importance they attach to the values that determine the success of life in the long term, as well as the successful development of their society and country. These are values such as: (1) a high moral level of citizens, (2) the material goods of the population (rich society, prosperity), (3) a high level of mental culture, (4) efficient work practices (efficiency, initiative, diligence), (5) patriotism, and (6) wise governments. The subjects determined the importance of these values on a three-point scale: from 3 (high importance) to 1 (little importance).

The study shows, as shown in Table 1, that the value most appreciated by the subjects is productive work ($M = 2.86$), followed by wise governments (2.85) and a high level of mental and moral culture (2.85).

In general, teachers have a high opinion of these values. The lowest scores were received for patriotism and the material goods of the population.

Table 1. Teachers and social values

VALUE	M	SD	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	N
High level of moral culture	2.85	.36	2	3	400
Material goods	2.42	.59	1	3	400
High level of intellectual culture	2.85	.37	1	3	400
Productive work	2.86	.36	1	3	400
Patriotism	2.63	.55	1	3	398
Wise governments	2.85	.42	1	3	399

Table 2 represents a breakdown between the generations of teachers according to the importance each group attributed to the values concerned.

Table 2. Hierarchy of social values in different generations of teachers

THE SOCIAL VALUES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN TEACHERS' LIVES AND GROWTH	UP TO 35 YEARS N = 135		36-50 YEARS N = 134		51 YEARS AND MORE N = 110		IN TOTAL		F	DF	P	DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS IN THE POST- HOC TEST
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
High level of moral culture	2.75	0.43	2.87	0.34	2.93	0.26	2.84	0.36	7.60	2; 376	0.0006	1-2; 1-3
Material goods	2.34	0.65	2.46	0.56	2.45	0.57	2.41	0.60	1.48	2; 376	0.2293	none
High level of intellectual culture	2.80	0.44	2.89	0.32	2.86	0.35	2.85	0.37	1.97	2; 376	0.1415	none
Effective work	2.85	0.38	2.87	0.34	2.87	0.33	2.86	0.35	0.14	2; 376	0.8718	none
Patriotism	2.56	0.57	2.62	0.56	2.69	0.54	2.62	0.56	1.85	2; 374	0.1589	none
Wise governments	2.78	0.53	2.89	0.36	2.91	0.29	2.85	0.42	3.84	2; 376	0.0222	1-2; 1-3

From the above data, generational diversity exists only in terms of the value "high level of moral culture". This is valued most by the older generation; as the age of the teachers decreases, there is an accompanying decrease in this value (the proportion of "high" importance given to it decreases from 92.8% in the oldest teachers to 75.4% in the youngest generation). The value of the chi-squared frequency distribution difference was 14.16; $df = 2$ (meaning the "little" importance category did not occur); $p = 0.0006$; Cramer's $V = 0.1972$, and the strength of the compound is small.

The values and goals of everyday life

Teachers were asked the question "What do you think a successful life means?" in order to find out the most valued values in everyday life. This was an open question in order to obtain a broader perspective in terms of life values, teachers' approaches to these values, and a kind of programme of life, a vision of a successful, valuable life. What values, aspirations, desires, and aspirations are associated with a successful life? What does it mean to have a successful life? What life is of value? Which values are the most important ones that make you feel happy with life?

Table 3. Hierarchy of teachers' life values

NO	VALUES – THE MOST SIGNIFICANT	N	%
1.	Personal and family happiness	288	71.1
2.	High achievements at work	140	34.6
3.	Good health	110	27.2
4.	Material security	95	23.5
5.	Enjoyment of life	35	8.6
6.	Self-improvement and self-realisation	34	8.4
7.	High level of morale	31	7.7
8.	Recognition and authority	17	4.2
9.	Peaceful and stable life	17	4.2
10.	The sense of usefulness and work for the others	9	2.2
11.	The sense of a job well done	9	2.2
12.	Higher education	8	2.0
13.	Good relations at work	1	0.2
14.	Cultural participation and social life	0	0

NB: The percentages do not add up to 100% because the respondents could choose more than 1 category.

From Table 3, we can see that teachers value and strive to achieve personal and family happiness in their lives (71.1%), high achievements at work (34.6%), good health (27.2%), and material security (23.5%).

Further analysis (Table 4) shows that significant generational diversity only occurs in the "self-improvement and self-realisation" category, which was most often chosen by the youngest teachers (up to 35 years), and significantly less often by the second and the oldest generations. The significance of the diversity was $p < 0.05$ and Cramer's V was 0.1899, signifying the strength of the average relationship of the generation-choice value.

Also of relevance is the value of good health, to which the youngest teachers attach the most importance: $p = 0.0597$. The preferences of the younger generation may be due to the dominant characteristics of their socialisation time, when there is pressure from popular culture patterns, but it may also be due to market requirements, the needs of the self-presentation of physicality, and the cult of a healthy lifestyle.

Table 4. Hierarchy of life-values – differences between generations (N = 380)

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT VALUES	UP TO 35 YEARS N = 135		36–50 YEARS N = 134		51 YEARS AND MORE N = 111		TOTAL		C ²	P	CRAMER'S V
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Personal and family happiness	105	77.8	91	64.9	79	71.2	275	72.4	3.39	0.1839	0.0944
High achievements at work	53	39.3	42	31.3	41	36.9	136	35.8	1.92	0.3822	0.0711
Good health	45	33.3	36	26.9	22	19.8	103	27.1	5.64	0.0597	0.1218
Material security	32	23.7	32	23.9	26	23.4	90	23.7	0.01	0.9965	0.0043
Enjoyment of life	15	11.1	8	6.0	12	10.8	35	9.2	2.61	0.2718	0.0828
Self-realisation and self-improvement	21	15.6	9	6.7	3	2.7	33	8.7	13.70	0.0011	0.1899
High level of morale	7	5.2	8	6.0	13	11.7	28	7.4	4.39	0.1111	0.1075

Another question the study teachers were asked was "What is the importance of your life goals?" and they were asked to respond to 10 categories of values on a 5-point scale, from 0 (irrelevant) to 4 (very important). The data obtained is represented in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5. Hierarchy of values – life goals (N = 405)

VALUES	MEAN	STD DEV	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM	N SIGNIFICANT
1. Social activity for the benefit of others	3.01	0.73	0.00	4.00	401
2. Social advancement	2.20	0.99	0.00	4.00	400
3. To secure a succesful family life	3.82	0.51	0.00	4.00	401
4. High salary	3.04	0.72	0.00	4.00	398
5. Getting the highest education	3.11	0.87	0.00	4.00	397
6. Enjoyment of life	2.62	0.88	0.00	4.00	399
7. Achieving high results at work	3.33	0.65	0.00	4.00	401
8. Authority and recognition in the environment	3.18	0.76	0.00	4.00	400
9. Participation in cultural life	2.91	0.70	0.00	4.00	400
10. Hobbies/passions	3.05	0.81	0.00	4.00	400

A comparison of averages across the group of teachers shows that the decisive value is "to secure a successful family life"; this reaches an average of 3.82, very close to the maximum possible, and must accordingly be interpreted as "very important". Next in the hierarchy, where the values are higher than the "significant" scale value (3), are "achieving high results at work" (3.33), "authority and recognition in the environment" (3.18), and "getting the highest education" (3.11)

The method of analysis reflected in Table 6 makes it possible to identify a statistically significant diversity between teacher generations with regard to two objectives: "ensuring a successful family life" (young teachers) and "authority and recognition in the environment" (teachers from the older generation).

Table 6. Hierarchy of values – life goals and the generations (N = 379)

LIFE GOALS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE	UP TO 35 YEARS N = 135		36–50 YEARS N = 134		51 YEARS AND MORE N = 110		TOTAL		F	DF	P	DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS IN POST-HOC TEST
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
Social activity for the benefit of others	2.96	0.75	3.05	0.74	3.05	0.71	3.02	0.73	0.60	2;378	0,5476	none
Social advancement	2.29	1.01	2.11	0.97	2.18	1.00	2.19	0.99	1.15	2;377	0,3168	none
To secure a successful family life	3.73	0.69	3.89	0.34	3.86	0.37	3.82	0.51	3.64	2;378	0,0273	1–2; 1–3
High salary	3.01	0.70	3.08	0.73	3.02	0.73	3.03	0.72	0.33	2;375	0,7171	none
Getting the highest education	3.18	0.83	3.09	0.84	3.06	0.97	3.11	0.87	0.65	2;375	0.5225	none
Enjoyment of life	3.66	0.81	2.56	0.91	2.65	0.88	2.62	0.87	0.52	2;376	0.5986	none
Getting high results at work	3.31	0.59	3.42	0.58	3.24	0.79	3.33	0.65	2.20	2;378	0.1124	none
Authority and recognition in the environment	3.05	0.83	3.21	0.76	3.29	0.68	3.18	0.77	3,15	2;378	0.0439	1–3
Participation in cultural life	2.79	0.65	2.94	0.67	2.99	0.79	2.90	.70	2.74	2;377	0.0657	1–3
Hobbies/passions	3.02	0.74	3.07	0.86	3.01	0.84	3.04	0.81	0.23	2;377	0.7942	none

Significant differences in terms of professional and occupational values

The examined group of teachers was also asked "What do you care about most in your work?". Their responses are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7. Values of the teachers' professional work

PROFESSIONAL VALUES	T	%
1. Content of work and its results: thorough fulfillment of one's obligations, professionalism, education of open-minded, wise, healthy generations, which could change the world for the better, transfer of knowledge to the youth so that pupils can understand the knowledge presented to them, inculcate sophistication, teach pupils to be active, propagate patriotic attitudes among them, etc.	194	47.9
2. Creative atmosphere and good interpersonal relations: honesty, warm relationships within the group, good atmosphere, mutual respect, etc.	115	28.4
3. High salary and fair assessment of work: conscientious, appropriate assessment of efforts invested in work, boosts to self-esteem through work, appreciation at work, good co-operation with parents/children, etc.	27	6.7
4. Working conditions: good organisation, child safety, permanent/steady character of employment, co-operation within teams, work taking place during favorable hours, availability of didactic aids, opportunities to rest, etc.	31	7.7
5. Opportunities for self-fulfillment and professional development: favorable conditions for advancement, opportunities for supplementary training and professional training, etc.	19	4.7
6. The sense of being needed and deriving satisfaction from work	28	6.9
7. Respect, esteem, authority: respect, understanding, satisfaction from the children, etc.	41	10.1
8. Independence, autonomy, recognition: freedom in decision making, independence in teaching, etc.	1	0.2
9. Personal and family aspects: own family, health, peace of mind, etc.	6	1.5

Table 7 shows that the examined group of teachers first and foremost cares about the inherent values of work, such as the content of work and its results (47.9%), followed by a creative atmosphere and good interpersonal relations (28.4%) and having respect, esteem and authority (10.1%).

Table 8. Values connected to the teachers' professional work by generation (N = 380)

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU IN YOUR WORK?	YOUNG GENERATION (UP TO 35)		MIDDLE-AGED GENERATION (36 TO 50)		OLDER GENERATION (51 AND OVER)		TOTAL		CHI-SQUARED	P	CRAMER'S V
	T	%	T	%	T	%	T	%			
1. Content of work and its results	59	56.3	71	53.0	57	51.4	187	49.2	2.61	0.2718	0.0828
2. Creative atmosphere and good interpersonal relations	45	33.3	36	26.9	28	25.2	109	28.7	2.29	0.3179	0.0777
3. High salary and fair assessment of work	8	5.9	6	4.5	10	9.0	24	6.3	2.16	0.3395	0.0754
4. Working conditions	10	7.4	12	9.0	8	7.2	30	7.9	0.32	0.8506	0.0292
5. Opportunities for self-fulfillment and professional development	8	5.9	5	3.7	3	2.7	16	4.2	1.69	0.4302	0.0666
6. The sense of being needed and deriving satisfaction from work	8	5.9	10	7.5	7	6.3	25	6.6	0.28	0.8705	0.0270
7. Respect, esteem, authority	12	8.9	17	12.7	9	8.1	38	10.0	1.70	0.4271	0.0669
8. Independence, autonomy, recognition	-	-	-	-	1	0.9	1	0.3	-	-	-
9. Personal, family aspects	1	0.7	3	2.2	2	1.8	6	1.6	-	-	-

Results presented in Table 8 are not statistically diversified in any meaningful way with respect to the generation of the examined persons. Nevertheless, the data presented in Table 6 shows that certain differences are present in particular age groups of teachers. And so, for the youngest teachers, for whom the most important aspects are a creative atmosphere and good interpersonal relations (33.3%), we can see a similar situation where opportunities for self-fulfilment and professional development are concerned (5.9%). Among the oldest teachers, a high salary and fair assessment of work are most popular (9.0%). Middle-aged teachers care the most about recognition and respect (12.7%).

Common difficulties and problems in teachers' work

Another important aspect of this research is an attempt to establish what elements of their professional work evoked the greatest dissatisfaction among the teachers. To examine this, open-ended questions about what the teachers would like to change in their work right away and what the greatest thorn in their side is were asked.

Table 9. What evokes the greatest dissatisfaction

THE ASPECTS OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION THAT EVOKE THE GREATEST DISSATISFACTION	T	%
1. Bad interpersonal relationships: atmosphere, elimination of falsity, duplicity, not enough kindness among the teachers, in their contacts with superiors, and with the parents, rat race, etc.	98	24.2
2. Bad behaviour of the pupils: pupils have only rights, they can do everything, etc.	17	4.2
3. Working conditions: regulations pertaining to employment, low salary, favouritism of the older employees, change in management, overseeing entity or minister, lack of appreciation for the experience and reliability of a teacher, lack of methods and means to prevent aggressive behaviour and violence at school originating from pupils, better accessories, connections, corruption, etc.	185	45.7
4. Professional career paths and evaluation of work.	4	1.0
5. Bureaucracy: abiding by procedures, lack of autonomy, lack of freedom to act, etc.	40	9.9
6. Nothing, I am satisfied.	41	10.1

Table 9 shows that the most unsatisfactory issue, which according to the examined group needs to be changed immediately, are the working conditions (45.7%). Another unsatisfactory element relates to bad interpersonal relationships (24.2%). It is also worth pointing out that bureaucracy was indicated by 9.9% of the examined group.

Table 10. What evokes the greatest dissatisfaction by generation (N = 380)

THE ASPECTS OF THE TEACHING PROFESSION THAT EVOKE THE GREATEST DISSATISFACTION	YOUNG GENERATION (UP TO 35)		MIDDLE- -AGED GENERATION (36 TO 50)		OLDER GENERATION (51 AND OVER)		TOTAL		CHI- SQUARED	P	CRAMER'S V
	T	%	T	%	T	%	T	%			
1. Bad interpersonal relationships	38	28.1	30	22.4	29	26.1	97	25.5	1.20	0.5479	0.0563
2. Bad behavior of the pupils	7	5.2	4	3.0	6	5.4	17	4.5	1.08	0.5827	0.0533
3. Working conditions	60	44.4	64	47.8	49	44.1	173	45.5	0.42	0.8109	0.0332
4. Professional career paths and evaluation of work	1	0.7	2	1.5	-	-	3	0.8	-	-	-
5. Bureaucracy	7	5.2	15	11.2	14	12.6	36	9.5	4.63	0.0986	0.1104
6. Nothing, I am satisfied	15	11.1	15	11.2	11	9.9	41	10.8	0.13	0.9387	0.0182

There are no significant interrelations connected to age and generation (Table 10); nevertheless, the percentage data show that **bureaucracy** is most bemoaned by older teachers, whose memories are still fresh of schools before the reform of 1999, schools that did not enforce detailed reporting and complex procedures, and of the time before the so-called "playing of an office worker by the teacher". The youngest representatives of the examined group, on the other hand, treat bureaucracy as something obvious, as something that is inseparable from their work.

The results were confirmed in the light of responses given to a different open-ended question on which prevailing difficulties and problems are experienced first and foremost by contemporary teachers.

Table 11. Prevailing difficulties and problems experienced by the teachers

PREVAILING DIFFICULTIES AND PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY THE TEACHERS	T	%
1. Small salary: for hard, underappreciated work, etc.	64	15.8
2. Overly complex path of professional advancement.	3	0.7
3. Overwhelming amount of "fancy bureaucracy" that does not lead to anything, etc.	82	20.2
4. Difficult entry into the occupation for young persons: difficulties connected to finding employment, lack of full-time jobs, lack of positions, lack of stability, etc.	2	0.5
5. Lack of sufficient professional competences that would help them handle the children: pertaining to keeping discipline, educational failures, being a teacher rather than a buddy, lack of esteem, etc.	11	2.7
6. Tough, inadequate working conditions: ongoing reforms of the educational system, changes in the minister's position, unclear regulations, overloaded curricula, lack of time for school tasks, bringing work home, lack of time/opportunity for an individual approach to pupils, insufficient school staff (lack of educators, psychologists) combined with a growing risk of addictions, pupils' aggression, overwhelming amount of work per teacher, too great a number of pupils in classes, the necessity to constantly train further, lack of opportunities for advancement when the ultimate professional advancement has already been obtained, few chances for a professional career, unfair treatment, lack of support, lack of agreement, envy, helplessness, jealousy, competition, "stereotypical" curriculum, management's reluctance to introduce new methods of teaching, criticism of work methods, lack of free training, lack of courses/training on a particular subject, etc.	108	26.7
7. Lack of respect from pupils, parents, community/society: difficult/lack of co-operation with parents, problems in relations between teachers and parents, lack of interest in school on the part of the parents, fear of being negatively assessed by parents, parents with demanding attitudes, lack of respect within the community/society, lack of adequate appreciation, lack of understanding for the teaching profession, decline of esteem for schools and teachers, media's negative campaign, etc.	158	39.0
8. Problems originating with pupils: pupils' laziness, pupils without any hobbies, addiction to computers, low intellectual level of the youth, pupils' inadequate behaviour at school, aggression, etc.	56	13.8
9. Poor equipping of schools: too low a number of didactic aids, underfinancing of the educational system, etc.	43	10.6
10. Existential aspects: lack of employment stability, fear of losing one's job, emotional problems (frustration, helplessness, stress, professional burnout, occupational diseases), etc.	104	25.7

Data in Table 11 shows that the most frequently perceived prevailing difficulties are such problems as a lack of respect from pupils, parents, community/society (39.0%), tough, inadequate working conditions (26.7%), and existential problems related to a lack of employment stability, a fear of losing one's job, frustration, helplessness, etc. (25.7%).

Inadequate work conditions constitute the greatest difficulty for middle-aged teachers, who are burdened with duties to the greatest degree ($p = 0.0126$). There were no statistically significant interrelations between age (generation) and the other most acute problems and difficulties.

Significant changes in the autobiographical narrations

Some additions to the survey data presented were provided by teachers' personal statements on "The meaning and dignity of my life and work".

Young teachers note that being a teacher once meant admiration, recognition, and respect, whereas today, it too often means a struggle for work and the ability to maintain a reliable level of the work.

One wrote: "The changing conditions of life, beliefs, trends make it not easy to be a teacher. The social pressures, the perception of the profession due to the holidays and vacations, and teachers' social position is not what I knew in my youth, from my time at school".

Young teachers notice a change in the social status of their profession, in which it is becoming more and more difficult to win social respect, prestige and understanding for what they have taken the trouble and effort to do. They also demand clearer clarification of the tasks for which they have responsibility and a strict determination of their functions and professional competence.

Other issues and difficulties regard the very demanding attitudes of parents, the loneliness and alienation of students, uncertainty with regard to the future of the children, and pupils' ongoing generational change, which is very radical and deep: "It scares me, the growing gap between me and successive generations of young people. We do not have common cultural codes".

Teachers write about intense feelings of their incomprehension or even disregard by society, about children from broken families and the effects of the crisis of social life, as well as about the consequences of educational inequalities and fatigue of the teacher: "The father,

the mother in Germany, children on grandparents. [...] This is the reality of the school".

Another teacher states: "Did I choose well? I do not know. I have been in the profession for eight years and it is really hard for me to take stock. It is certainly a difficult profession, requiring a very high level of commitment and mental and emotional effort. [...] I happen to work with difficult and difficult and family-related, emotional, with whom the work is hard and often fruitless. Especially today, when busy parents for training and responsibility is transferred to teachers not only for the knowledge of their children but also for their upbringing. Nevertheless, I believe that the work I do has sense. After all, the teacher conveys knowledge to young people, awakens curiosity about the world in them and motivates learning, thus shaping the younger generation of Poles" (female, 1983, MA, mathematics, married, two children, city-municipality).

"Today, working at school is quite a challenge", writes another teacher, who notes that teachers work in difficult times today. "People are increasingly demanding – unfortunately, rarely of themselves, instead they look at others. They run away from taking responsibility for themselves – it is easier to blame the other person (i.e. it is the teacher who is responsible for how my child behaves in school, for what his relationship with his peers is). This is very demotivating and discourages work. Of course, I do not generalise, but it is happening more and more often. Today, it is the school that is supposed to educate, to teach subjects, the approach to life, responsibility – when, how? The authority of the teacher is almost none. Hearing the responses of students (unfortunately even young ones) to teachers, a man wonders what he did wrong, and who more confidently 'what were the parents saying to their children about us again?' [...] Every day at work is a challenge for me, sometimes it is too much for my own abilities. [...] It is a pity that others do not see it. It is a pity that they see only our holidays, which for me are very necessary to cut myself off from work, from these crowds of people every day, in order to gain strength, ideas and the desire to work with children, and now probably mostly with parents. It is a pity" (female, 1987, MA, pedagogy, single, traditional village).

It is difficult to look for value when there is no work – it is a strong *novum* in the teaching profession in Poland, where, because of demographic decline, and now another structural reform for many teachers, work

is becoming an inaccessible luxury. This is what one teacher writes about this: "Free to look for meaning and dignity when there is no work. It is well known that work ennobles, adds life values. I found myself in a difficult situation; two years ago, I lost my job as a kindergarten teacher. It was not only the loss of my livelihood but also the realisation of my passion, which was working with children" (female, 1982, MA, pedagogy and early school education, single, traditional village).

Pursue your goals with dignity, that is, do not litter your path to the goal with corpses, but act in accordance with the prevailing moral and ethical principles – this is the aspiration of another teacher (female, 51), who continues by saying that "I would like to have a permanent and good job that would allow me to live a decent life. Without work, there is no money, and without money, you do not have enough for the basic things you need for life".

Having money is a common consideration in the collected texts. For example, another states the following on their personal relationships: "It is worth it for me to have financial independence, my own home, and my own car. It is also about holidays [the author takes trips 1–2 times a year] with the family, taking care of your own affairs, having respect for yourself and others" (female, 1982, MA, mathematics and computer science, married, one child, traditional village).

The statements also give a thread of difficulties for some teachers in finding their place in society, in situations of adverse phenomena that are taking place and which limit them.

At the same time, young teachers point out that important values, e.g. family love and family happiness are seriously threatened in the present world "through our spontaneous and uncontrollable behaviours and unhappy states. In today's busy world, we rarely have time for ourselves; hurry, routine, the pursuit of money, precarious financial situations, and instability in the labour market kill love and time for the family. [...] A life without faith, hope and love is shallow, meaningless, meaningless. Of all the gifts, they are the most hidden, inaccessible, but at the same time the most important and strongest".

It should also be noted that young teachers who are currently entering the profession are a generation whose youth was shaped by the years since 2008: the years of the global crisis, unemployment, emigration, the education crisis, the devaluation of diplomas, crisis and

the neoliberal order, the precariat, etc. These teachers do not remember the lack of democracy, freedom, and material deprivation.

They were born in a time of advanced democratic transformation, learnt in neoliberal-oriented schools with their cult of instrumental and pragmatic prowess, and individualistic and consumerist mentalities. Hence, this generation attaches high importance to work being a source of earning in order to live a decent life, maintaining creditworthiness, and achieving as many competencies and certificates as possible in order to be able to compete in the labour market. And the reality of the squabble? The material side of the profession – but how often do the salaries of young and novice teachers allow them a decent life, to start a family, to meet the cultural needs of modern young people living in a consumer and pragmatic environment?

The statements of the older generation of teachers could be put in the form of a metaphor: "Between pride and bitterness". These statements reveal a number of tensions and dilemmas related to their life and professional role in the years of transformation in Poland after 1989, a period full of radical and traumatic changes (Dróźka, 2008).

Today's older generation of teachers, this generation of *social advancement*, are the children of the great boom of the 1950s and later, who are generally descended from peasant, working-class families from small towns and villages. Higher education was a dream come true for a better life, and studying in a larger city is entering into a relationship with culture and nobilitation.

Education and knowledge are great offerings to society, state, culture, tradition. They are parts of a social ethos, requiring a lifestyle marked by the pursuit of high levels of ethical and moral awareness and of cultural, literary and wider interests to help everyone at the expense of their time and family. It is also marked by a failure to attach greater importance to material matters, although it is a pity that pensions are now so low; this reduction is reflected in a similar reduction in the sense of worth and dignity in many teachers of this generation. *Was it worth trying so hard?* There are currently some bitter inquiries ongoing on this topic.

According to the statements of senior teachers, the dignity of the teacher's work was very high during the initial period of their work, but now the fear of one's own fate and existence prevails in the teachers' community, the fear of survival in the midst of constant

change. Teachers are very hurt that society sees only their holidays; stereotypes persist that the teacher does nothing but take these.

The older generation of teachers invariably sticks to traditional, basic values and the belief that the meaning of life is given to family, children and their prosperity. It is a work in which the moral code applies; the teacher deserves recognition from society, and respect and gratitude from parents and students.

They also express the belief that the teacher must be credible, for the teaching profession is a great responsibility: it is a matter of pride and prestige, and it is the most important social mission.

Conclusion

The presented study has highlighted the tendency of a shift in the emphasis of the *ethos* values that are characteristic of the older generation of teachers (lifestyle oriented on the educational mission, responsibility for the younger generation and for the future of the country, etc.) towards values that are more concerned with **everyday life**, characteristic of young teachers, as well as others (work, school, qualifications, degrees, advancement, teaching practice, working conditions, life).

There is less emphasis on the importance of the values associated with this aforementioned *ethos*: lifestyle-oriented projects and intelligence missions, responsibility for the younger generation and for the future of the country, the values specific to the tradition of Polish culture and the progressive, democratic role of intelligence in the history of our country.

The study has indicated that, in the professional lives of teachers, there are a significant number of challenging cases and issues, such as worry, the root causes of discontent, and barriers to work and life. These include such things as teachers' material situation, conditions of rest, the availability of entertainment and social relations in school.

The observations made in this chapter may indicate a generational change, one of the manifestations of which is the progressive disappearance among teachers, especially young ones, of their willingness to take a deeper, reflective attitude towards their own profession, life and work. This may be related to the overall change in society, which is expressed in the pursuit of shortness of speech, imagery and laconicism, patterns and examples of which flow from the internet and

social media. It could also be the result of, in the case of some novice teachers, a weakened process of identification with the profession under the influence of the increasing phenomenon of hiring teachers, especially young ones, on so-called zero-hours contracts, order agreements, and other forms of temporary contracts (precariat).

A certain explanation may be noted in the statements in terms of the predominance of pragmatic and instrumental attitudes of young teachers towards their profession. These teachers attach importance to and demonstrate an understanding (estimation) for deeper, traditional categories of occupation, the so-called ethical "vocation" related to social, cultural and national settlements, but they nevertheless expect, above all, clear criteria for defining the tasks and professional functions to which they are entitled and for which they are responsible. In the statements, conversely, there is a lack of broader perceptions of the profession, with few references made thereto, as a responsible effort to educate young generations and prepare them for further multiplying and enriching the economy, culture, national identity, and quality of life.

Today, the teaching profession is seen by young people more as a source of earning and a dignified life and is seen more often in terms of material aspects than symbolic aspects. A decent life is above all good material conditions, but also kindness, good people-to-people relations, good opinions, not doing harm to others, and having and giving respect to students and people (Dróźka & Madalińska-Michalak, 2016).

Meanwhile, in the older generation, work means above all a source of social and ethical values – these come to the fore in the statements of senior teachers, together with social service, being useful, and creating a well-fulfilled society, which all gives a sense of meaning and dignity to life and work.

It should be added, however, that the current older generation, as well as a high proportion of middle-aged teachers, present a significant amount of bitterness and dissatisfaction with their professional career and even life in their statements. They believe that, due to the socio-cultural and systemic conditions and aspects of the profession and teacher training they experienced (mostly in the 1970s), the ethos of the mission, service, and social and professional engagement prevail in their generation, as well as even a kind of enlightenment, which, in essence, this profession requires in those realities.

As a result, today, at the end of their careers living and working in the changing socio-political and cultural realities, some of them regret that they were not more assertive, that they sacrificed their own family for work, that they had no chance of a social and cultural life, that they did not take time for themselves or for trips, travel, or sightseeing. Some, though mostly only above the age of fifty, did manage to build a house and set up a garden, thus obtaining a substitute for a certain luxury, for the much-needed distance and rest required in this profession.

For younger teachers, one's career is instead a source of earning to have a decent life and family, for the sake of creditworthiness, to obtain the largest possible number of competencies and certificates, and to be able to compete on the **labour market**.

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