

The troubadours of knowledge and development for contextualised university studies

PAULA GORSZCZYŃSKA
JAROSŁAW JENDZA

The article presented below represents the authors' subjective and free reflections on the conference 'Caring for the quality in quantity – academic education in the process of changes' (Gdańsk Shakespeare Theatre, Gdańsk, Poland, 28-29th April, 2016). In other words, our intention is to share *some* of our thoughts inspired by participation in the event which was the culmination of the tutoring implementation project conducted at the University of Gdańsk from 2014 to 2016 and funded by FSS, EEA Grants, Norway Grants and FRSE.¹

The notion of a *troubadour of knowledge* referred to in the title – as characterised by Serres (2000) – may refer to any (academic) teacher who

[...] with his whole body, all his passion, his anger, and his strained liberty, whoever wants to create resists the power of knowledge, both the works that have already been made and the institutions that feed on them.

(Serres 2000: 98)

Thus, any university staff member whose attitude matches this description is likely to possess three major qualities. First of all, it is a person that incorporates both passion and/or love and their professional knowledge in everyday educational situ-

¹ Details of the project can be found here: <<http://www.projektiq.ug.edu.pl>>, accessed 11.05.2016.

ations within a university. Passion and love seem to be treated as non-scientific concepts and, therefore, are not very popular in academic discourse. However, both the conference and some scholarly contributions show that they ought to be treated very seriously (Dey and Steyaert 2007: 437-461). Second of all, such a person is constructively critical both towards their own practices and towards the social and institutional conditions they work in. Thirdly, the *troubadour of knowledge* is very much humanistic in their relations with the Other, which entails the broadly understood personalisation of educational processes.

The conference opened with a lecture by the world-famous scholar – Professor Heinrich Dauber – entitled ‘Education as searching for freedom in the system of dependencies. The perspective of humanistic pedagogy and psychology’. In his presentation, Professor Dauber focused on the deeply ethical attitude that might be called *ecological university education*. This culture of learning and teaching might only be fulfilled if we – instead of ego-logical relations – practise unconditional openness and appreciation of the uniqueness of every human being and, at the same time, link it with respect and special care about the only shared space of living that we have at our disposal, i.e. the Earth. In academic life this approach would demand the collective crossing of disciplinary boundaries in search of Good for all. This lecture was, from our perspective, a very important framing of the atmosphere of the conference or – to put it metaphorically – the troubadour tuned the orchestra.

Another key-note speaker – Professor Jerzy Axer – subscribed to the remarks made by Professor Dauber and cautioned the conference participants – both the representatives of the institutional milieus and the individual tutors – against relying on a direct transfer from existing (tutoring) method cultures (Doll, Jr 2006: 85-89; Jendza, Zalewska and Zamojski 2015: 46-55) to their own practice. No forms of tutoring should be copied blindly, however efficient they may have proven in

the original setting as the strength of tutoring lies in its potential diversity, which means that anyone whose intention is to work within this didactic system must define it themselves. In this way – so much needed in this approach – the deification of the method can take place creating the perspective of what Rorty called the *methodolotry* (1999), whereby the context of a given educational relation is essential in that it redefines the phenomenon in question, which in this case is tutoring. In his lecture Professor Jerzy Axer emphasised that the only culture that is needed for recreating and developing tutoring in Polish higher education institutions is the *culture of trust*, which currently seems to be almost non-existent. It is therefore an imperative to create a community of trust (Sztompka 2007: 265–302), which is a task to be fulfilled largely by the younger members of the academic staff, who – following Professor Axer – are more likely to question the *status quo* and at the same time are prone to trust the Other. This is yet another characteristic feature of the troubadour, whose objective is to join the questioning of well-established institutional routines with the building of a community of trust.

Another guest speaker – Professor Anna Sajdak – delivered a lecture entitled ‘Humanistic paradigm in academic didactics – utopia, necessity, chance?’, in which she elaborated on the importance of trust in holistic humanistic person-centred university education. In this model, academics offer support rather than teach their students. The theoretical background for such an approach was Roger’s concept of *congruence* (1959). Professor Sajdak stated that, utopian as it may appear, it is our duty and necessity to see the world of the students through their eyes. This seemingly impossible connection of utopia and necessity is actually the only chance of creating an educational environment within university that will support the following indispensable prerequisites: the Rogersian idea of congruence, understanding and listening to the Other, unconditional acceptance, which in the context of higher education was also developed by Derrida (2001), as well as openness and

self-disclosure. By describing the idea of the programme supporting academic teachers at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, Professor Sajdak showed that not only is it possible to practise personalised education with students but it is also necessary to treat scholars in the same way. This is the very condition of creating an environment of academic trust, openness, understanding and, as a possible result, high quality didactics within academia.

Professor Teresa Bauman, on the other hand, concentrated on the notion of *experience* treated as the *contextualisation* of the studying processes. Referring to John Dewey (1910), for whom personal experience was essential in education, Professor Bauman noticed that this concept usually gets a bad press in the field of the educational sciences.

Let us quote Dewey and his notion of experience *in extenso*:

[...] the term *experience* may be interpreted either with reference to the *empirical* or the *experimental* attitude of mind. Experience is not a rigid and closed thing; it is vital, and hence growing. When dominated by the past, by custom and routine, it is often opposed to the reasonable, the thoughtful. But experience also includes the reflection that sets us free from the limiting influence of sense, appetite, and tradition. Experience may welcome and assimilate all that the most exact and penetrating thought discovers. Indeed, the business of education might be defined as just such an emancipation and enlargement of experience.

(Dewey 1910: 157)

Having reviewed two monographs published as one of the outcomes of the IQ Project (Karpińska-Musiał (ed.) 2016a, Karpińska-Musiał (ed.) 2016b), Professor Bauman came to the conclusion that not only does tutoring have the potential to create conditions for *experience* in the Deweyan sense of the notion but also the texts included in the books are tangible proof that it did actually happen. In order for an authentic educational experience to be possible, the context of a student's biography is essential and, therefore, academics must redefine

their role so as to appreciate students as whole persons and build their ideas for teacher-student interactions on the planes of inclusion *owned* by the students. In other words, a mutual contextualisation of studying has to be ensured. This strategy of organizing the students' learning (rather than teaching) seems to be the only way for the students to participate in an authentic educational (developmental) experience.

From the very first moment of the conference the issue of elitism and egalitarianism and their ethical tension emerged as notions of key importance for further debate. On the one hand, it is quite common to think that the tutees are actually the elite of the students wishing to know more, quite often dissatisfied with what they have been offered in the form of university curricula. On the other hand, the tutors are highly conscious academic teachers who take teaching very seriously and know that they have to excel at this hard yet rewarding craft. Some of the participants of the conference did not have any doubts that tutoring is elitist by definition and therefore not accessible to most students and teachers.

Nevertheless, the panel debate showed that this aspect of tutoring was not as straightforward as it may have appeared at first. The question that all tutors should address seems to be as follows: Are we, the tutors, to empower those who are already privileged, or perhaps we should do our best to intervene in the trajectories of biographies that are far from excellent?

In his speech, Professor Tomasz Szkudlarek articulated another crucial tension by comparing and contrasting two universities: the contemporary and one based on the Humboldt model, and suggested that these two institutions do not lend themselves to sensible comparison as they have completely different functions. Still, it is the Humboldt model that we tend to use as a benchmark and frame for our interpretation and assessment of today's university even if the latter has yet to come to terms with the democratisation of social life and of the surrounding reality. This certainly does not mean abandoning highly abstract and therefore elitist contents and students.

Quite the opposite – there is a place for both in a mass university, where ‘mass’ does not necessarily mean ‘bad’.

In this context it is worth recalling one of the notions characterised by Doctor Adam Jagiełło-Rusiłowski – the concept of *resilience*. According to this scholar, denoting the ability to go through failures and regain congruence, resilience may be very well developed with the use of tutoring. From this perspective tutors would be those who help ‘the lost to find their way’. This choir of democratic and empowering voices was supported both by those who effectively implement tutoring at university (Professor Anita Lewandowska), in business coaching (Alicja Gotowczyk, MA), but also by those who have had the chance to experience the approach in various educational surroundings (Agata Dutkiewicz, a student).

The troubadour of knowledge is certainly passionate. Piotr Czekierda – the founder of the Collegium Wratislaviense School of Tutors – in his speech entitled ‘Tutoring as educating for excellence’ – showed that passion, so essential for the tutoring process, is constituted of three different dimensions: love, suffering and anger. This very important point outlines the fact that tutor-like (academic) teaching is not simply a profession or even a reflective practice (Schön 1987) but rather a kind of relation based largely on emotions, sometimes also negative ones. This perspective clearly questions the tradition of perceiving tutoring as a method (see also: Jendza 2016) and puts forward the idea of tutoring as a meeting, where, even for their ‘enemies’ (unwilling students?), tutors are full of love and understanding.

As its leader, Doctor Beata Karpińska-Musiał presented details of the IQ Project as well as results of the research conducted as a part of it.² The presentation clearly showed that this project has changed the lives of many people, i.e. about two hundred and sixty participants, tutors and tutees at the

² The research report entitled: *Edukacja spersonalizowana w uniwersytecie: Ideologia – instytucja – dydaktyka – tutor* is planned to be published in May 2016 by Libron – Filip Lohner.

University of Gdańsk, and has become a significant formative experience in their biographies.

Three presentations that followed Doctor Karpińska-Musiał's dealt with a number of socio-philosophical and pedagogical theorizations behind tutoring and focused on the range of possibilities determining this approach. Bartosz Fingas (MA) talked about practical rationality as a new paradigm in education and personal growth, Doctor Grzegorz Grzegorzczuk presented a contextual and ecological perspective on tutoring and Jarosław Jendza, MA paid attention to the significance of trust that he called the foundation of tutoring.

It is also worth mentioning all the accounts of the practical implementation of tutoring at the University of Gdańsk, which were largely presented by tutors but also by some of their tutees. Professor Maria Sibińska with Anna Hamanowicz and Nataila Wyszynska used Scandinavian literature as a pretext for considerations about the role of the Stranger. Their thesis is: the Stranger is in us, we are full of prejudice but if we want to serve as tutors, if – let us paraphrase this thesis – we wish to be troubadours of knowledge, we are obliged to open up to the Other, question well established routines and, most importantly, dialogue both with ourselves and the person we are working with, building on what we know to be a common ground rather than being hindered by the question of what is yet unknown in mutual relationships

Paula Gorszczyńska, MA, with her tutees – Zuzanna Bonecka, Monika Hadalska and Joanna Łaszcz – presented their tutoring project *Students' audio description*, within whose scope the students selected video materials of particular interest to them found on the Internet to enrich them with audio description soundtracks that they scripted, recorded and screened in a cinema setting, bringing together blind and sighted viewers to participate in the same social event. This idea is the best example of what Professor Teresa Bauman called contextualised educational experience. The students conducted a project that they found important and were abso-

lutely devoted to it. In this way the idea was very much personally significant and developmental both for the tutees and the tutor, and 'bi-productively' fruitful in terms of traditionally understood academic competences.

A similar story was presented by Doctor Małgorzata Karczmarzyk, an artist and academic teacher who offered her tutees what she calls 'picture essays'. By combining art and pedagogy, together they successfully conducted artistic workshops for children, which enabled the tutees to understand the intricacies of their personal growth and expand their creativity.

Since many conference sessions took place simultaneously, the authors of the present article were not able to participate in all the lectures and presentations. This is why, much as we regret it, we have not been able to review all the inspiring events of the two-day conference here. However, beyond a shadow of a doubt, like the soothing tunes of the first evening gala piano concert, the echoes of all the invaluable and thought-provoking exchanges will long resonate in the minds of the troubadours of tutoring and their tutees alike, hopefully contributing to the shaping of the harmonious university of the future.

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Paula Gorszczyńska
Instytut Anglistyki i Amerykanistyki
Uniwersytet Gdański
ul. Wita Stwosza 51
80-308 Gdańsk
Poland
Email: p.gorszczynska@ug.edu.pl

Jarosław Jendza
Instytut Pedagogiki
Uniwersytet Gdański
ul. Jana Bażyńskiego 4
80-309 Gdańsk
Poland
Email: j.jendza@ug.edu.pl