The Conception of Authority and Its Alterations
(History, Presenttime and Perspectives)\(^1\)

Introduction

In the same way as we can attribute the authority to individual persons or social groups it can be attributed to the scientific fields, philosophical theories but also to social institutions. And how is the contemporary school viewed from this intersection? What is its position and prestige in the society? Does it reflect the crisis of authority? And what is on the contrary offered to the school and teachers by the society for strengthening of the prestige at the general public? How is the authority understood in the modern family, how important is it for the development of the child’s personality? What can be understood under the term of authority and how can it be determined and structured? What are the relations between the authority and education? What is inherent to authority made relative and how is it reflected in the value structure of the contemporary young people?

Unclear terminology – characteristic feature of our age

In relation to the clarification of the term “authority” we must realize the need of scientific interpretation of the term (not only the term as such, but also the related terminology). Authority as a large and most complex area can be interpreted from the view of individual fields of science (e.g. school as an institution and its authority can be perceived in terms of soci-

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ology, psychology as well as pedagogy). It is actually always the particular point of view and selected aspects which are being judged – pedagogical interpretation can differ from, say, political interpretation. However, we can state that philosophical and political aspects penetrate into the pedagogical point of view.

Upon looking into the specialized literature we can soon discover that there isn’t, by far, any concordance in understanding the term “authority” – it is a very complicated term. Personal, real, true and natural authority is spoken about as well as the authority of power, governing, official or directive. Furthermore, authoritative behavior is considered, the authority of superiors, adults, parents and older people, authority of an educator and teacher, authoritative, autocratic and authoritarian style of education, authoritarian personality, authoritarian pedagogy, and authoritarian style of management. The term itself was doubted and misused many times by totalitarian systems whereas today it is perhaps concealed on behalf of democracy.

Looking at the etymology of the word authority we can discover that the Latin equivalent “auctoritas” bears a whole set of positive meanings like: supportive, guarantee, certainty, reliability, trustworthy and many other. The relating word “auctor” means among other: helper, supporter, ideal, example, and predecessor. The root of both words – augo – expresses the verbs: to support, growing, enhance, multiply, thrive, enrich, endow. Where are the terms like oppression, tyranny, violence or force? The preceding positive connotations of the word authority present a sound argument against the ultraliberal destroyers of authority. The reality and historic development of a society often neglect the etymology by moving and changing the meanings of words (the concept of the word “authority” was influenced especially by sociological and politological essays on the relationships between power versus authority, authority versus government, authority versus social pressure).

The term “authority” is usually understood on three levels: firstly, as general respect, influence, power, admiration. Secondly, as a publicly recognized expert, influential personality and last but not least, authority representing state, science, national symbols, offices, law and police force. Influence, dominance, control and competence are among the most frequent synonyms to the word “authority”.

In connection with clarification of the term of authority it is necessary to be aware of the necessity of its scientific interpretation from the position of individual scientific disciplines - authority as an multidimensional and multidisciplinary concept. The assessment usually concerns only certain points of view and selected aspects (for example the school, as an institu-
tion in the context of authority, can be perceived in regard to its functions from the sociology, psychology and pedagogy point of view).

New aspects in the conception of authority consider at present the position of the subject in the society; needs for freedom and self-realization of an individual; ability of orientation in the complicated social relations and demanding life situations; importance of individual and social responsibility, self-discipline and volitive efforts; and personal characteristics.

The changes of social processes and their impact on continuity in the conception of authority are viewed with plurality of life forms and social relationships; ethical and ecological problems; changes in valuation ideas and attitudes; multiculturalism; virtual and medial reality; and transformation of family and partner relationships.

**Pedagogical thinking development in context of authority perception (at the turn of 20th and 21st century)**

A multidimensional approach which takes into account philosophical, social, psychological and pedagogical approaches in their synthesis is very important for clarification of authority issues. The developmental perspective is focused on a certain summary of historically developed opinions on education and training - namely in its theory and practice (classified and adjusted according to J. Škalková, 2005, p. 20 - 27)

Causes and effects of alterations in the authority conception are based on four main principles: The first principle is a concept of the authority in the context of pedagogical thinking of the first half of the twentieth century. The second one results from non-directivity and freedom in the clear-cut pedagogical lines. The third one comes from principles of humanistic psychology and non-directivity effect of education and the last principle evolves the results of post-modernist thinking on authority conception.

**The authority in the context of pedagogical thinking of the first half of the 20th century**

The first decades of the 20th century are characteristic by movement of the so called new schools and paedocentric orientation of the reformatory pedagogical efforts. Partial concepts presented the conception of authority from the view which was based on several following important qualities: the school is paedocentric oriented, active, strive after complex education of a child, perceived as a „vital partnership“ on the principle „from life for life“.
Pedagogical thinking and its run through to the conception of authority was moreover influenced by a naturalistic conception of education which innate dispositions are considered as decisive factors of human being development and present variants of biological interpretation); by personalized conception of education when a person or personality is considered as a highest value at the same time as a source of value and emphasizes the idea of self-activity, self-determination and personality as an interaction of the natural individuality and cultural values. It pointed out to the danger of one-sided individualism and mentioned stream of pedagogical thoughts refusing the conservative authority conception of the so called old formalistic school; furthermore by a humanistic pedagogy which stresses the concept of „pedagogical relationship“ as well as the importance of the social context; criticizes the reformatory movements which prefer natural, undisturbed advancement of a child to his authoritative guidance and seeks a balance between „let grow“ and „guide“; and finally by a pragmatic pedagogy which seeks its position between education „influenced“ by child’s interests and the opposite approach of external authoritarian education. Pragmatic pedagogy refuses to make account of contrasts; it stresses the necessity to acquire knowledge of liberty as it is not the only matter of spontaneity or arbitrary behavior.

Non-directivity and liberty in the clear-cut pedagogical directions

At the end of the sixties of the 20th century came into existence lines of thought, strengthened by various social streams („youth movement“ in Europe). This era is characteristic by radical theories which refuse the legitimacy of authority in educational processes – whether it concerns the family, teacher or the school (the last being considered as a coercive institution). Another feature is revolt against every kind of authority and effort to disengage from it. Further it is criticism of the authoritarian effect of the school; or the emphasis on authentic personality advancement of a young man. Escalated requirements of the child’s freedom rights belong also to this era as well as opposition to suppression of the child’s personality; or striving for fundamental changes in relationships between educator, teacher, parents and child. Lastly could be named denial of so far existing education conceptions, which especially concerns opposition against coercion and pressure; emphasis on unbounded autonomy and boundless spontaneity in child’s behavior; extreme conceptions came into existence – for example the so called emancipation pedagogy and the so called anti-pedagogy. Critics of anti-pedagogical directions challenge and refuse anarchic aspects (in pedagogical theory and school practice) and also emphasize the need to create a
new relationship between the teacher and pupils, educator and children; and accentuate respect for children’s personality and deference to them; another point is also guidance of a young man to self-determination and own responsibility as well as the fact that the education cannot do without authority of an adult towards a child. Further also seeking an answer to the issue concerning legitimacy, on which the authority in the pedagogical context is based. A critical and analytical point of view on pedagogical streams of the first half of the 20th century presents by H. Arend (1994). A comprehensive point of view on education in connection with the view on the world in its entirety, while main feature of the modern world of the 20th century is a collapse of all traditional authorities that affected all spheres of the human life.

The main motto is: we are living in a society of people which is found between the past and the future; we are tied with the actions and works of our ancestors and our traditions; we have at the same time obligations towards our descendants; try to keep our common world human „friendly“; as well as human relationships being an important bridge to the relationship between the child and the world; and nothing, on which the education activity is based on, is problem-free („neither the old, nor the new“).

**Principles of humanistic psychology and effect of non-directivity in education**

Effects of humanistic psychology in the second half of the 20th century are put through in various pedagogical conceptions. Humanistic psychology and the so called integrative psychotherapy are important for the development of pedagogical thinking. They are stressing pupil’s inner activity, his creativity, spontaneity and freedom, advancement of individuality and the importance of inner experiences against the behavioral position. The terms „advancement“ and „self-realization“ are important in the context of authority (the interpretation of freedom and non-directivity is based on them). The quality of personal relationships which promotes advancement is important in therapeutic and pedagogical relationship. A teacher should be sincere (authenticity), truthful in relation to children (congruency), he should be sensitive and attuned (empathy). The critics of the extremely conceived principles of humanistic pedagogy point to the extreme subjectivism; dissolution of the education process in therapeutic procedures; it is not possible to identify each education effect of the teacher with coercion, enforced authority and a dogmatic-directive position.
Effects of post-modernist thinking on the conception of authority

The conception of authority in pedagogical continuity of the seventieth and the eightieth of the 20th century was considerably influenced by the period of post-modernism. It stressed the thesis that problems of children and youth must be assessed in relation to epochal changes of the present time and its concrete expression; refuses the general ideas, concepts (the idea of truth, welfare, progress, general goals and other ideas), as their unifying compactness suppresses the differentiation. The post-modernism counters this with singularity of events, discontinuity, critical moments, and uncertainty as a permanent relationship. It relativizes the up-to-date rationality, its entitlement to general validity and universality and points to the contradictory results of science and technology and crisis phenomena produced by the post-industrial society. Post-modernist thinking leads to an attitude to life here and now, to skepticism towards every authority and draws attention to the problems of a human being (a human being loses his autonomy, his power to construe, he moves around a world, where signs and symbols substitute the reality). It aims to free the individual in order to enable him to make a choice in the plurality of life forms and floods of information; emphasizes the orientation to emotional moments, to communication here and now, to irrational experiences.

Post-modernist position requires reduction of every coercion and unification. The initial effort for independence of a young man sometimes results in new addictions (alcohol, drugs, gambling and other addictions). The authoritative forms of family mechanisms towards the children which suppress, coerce, forbid and discipline, disappear to a certain extent due to the changing forms of family life. Increasingly lesser importance is attached to the formal conformity, order, accuracy, responsibility for partial duties in the family, namely in favor of peculiarity and individual autonomy of a young man. Young people acquire more rights, influence and freedom in the family, resulting in individualization of life relationships.

The types of authority and the term “global authority”

What are the types of authority? What are the problems of classifying authority? The most serious issue is the actual identification of valid classifying criteria. It is not a complete survey, which is our biggest concern and moreover, some classifying differences are mutually overlapping. Regarding the fact that we will use some terms in thinking about the problems of authority in education, it is inevitable to mention the criteria at least briefly.

The first criterion to consider could be genetic (possibly differentiates between the authority natural and authority gained). Another significant
criterion is generally the social point of view. According to social status, we can classify authority as personal, positional and functional. With regard to the effects in the behavior of social environment, we can determine real authority and apparent authority. In view of social prestige, authority is divided into formal and informal type. According to the bearer within a historic development we recognize parental authority, authority of the older, authority of governors, religious, official or scientific authority. Last but not least, we can speak about statutory, charismatic, special and moral authority.

A complicated task felt by each of us is to find the scope of the relations between the individual types of authority while using them in particular situations – in professional and personal life. The emphasis placed on proper links and balance in using statutory, expert, moral and personal (charismatic) authority becomes a challenge even in the school and family conditions. A person can represent a great degree of authority while another is respected due to his/her human and moral qualities where the others are recognized only by their statutory authority and consequently, his/her position of power. A good combination of all kinds of authority, although conditioned by individual situations as well as by time constraints, is labeled by the term ‘global authority’.

Authority can be generally determined as a significant form of realizing power which is based on more or less general recognition of authority, legality, certain influence of a person, institution or a group. It is a commonly accepted fact that authority differs from power which is based on direct enforcement, by its legalization – i.e. to a certain extent, a particular person, institution or group is entitled to carry out the power, especially stimulating, enforcing, organizing and controlling human activities as well as expressing and coordinating individual and group interests.

The looking of relation between education and authority

Each of us has encountered the terms “authority” and “education” in their mutual interaction during school attendance. However, they have not been discussed, so far, in this particular context. In relation to the innovative approach in pedagogical theory as well as in the actual process of education the problems of authority become the subject of attention of expert and layman public (especially when related to discipline, freedom, responsibility and moral).

Lately, we could notice how the idea of educational freedom renewed and reintroduced some reform pedagogical trends in the educational practice. A significant trend to enforce different alternative approaches in education now exists in the Czech educational system; various didactic concepts
are used, new variants of teaching models are verified. Several extreme
groups, however, understand authority as something odd in education be-
cause it destroys natural human need of self-regulation and self-confidence.
Actually, authority, in the opinions of these groups, is not accepted at all.
People should be given the opportunity to follow their interests and likes
from childhood. The process of self-challenging can be realized in this way
only – raising the tendency to remove the entire individual and social influ-
ence and any form of authority.

We have had hundreds of years of the conflict between both the con-
cepts of education: authoritative versus anti-authoritative education. The
conflict shows that the problem of proper form of education has been con-
tinuously dealt with and considered a significant matter even today with
regard to the democratic trends in our society. Numerous results of authori-
tative and anti-authoritative behavior have an impact on all areas of people’s
co-existence – in families, neighborhood, social life, state authorities, politi-
cal parties and social institutions and as far as the relations in work.

What is, thus, the relation between education and authority? The rela-
tionship can be looked at and discussed from three points of view, which
are interconnected, dependent on each other and similar in their contents:
macro-social which involves mainly the relation between authority and edu-
cation in a society, emerging from the relations of norms and values of a
family, school, society in the widest possible context; micro-social or inter-
individual which deals mainly with the values, norms, behavior, rules and
principles which are determined, for example, by family life or by the inter-
active scheme at school. Main goal is to discover particular situational beha-
vor; it is the level of everyday activities of educators and today’s young
people; and intra – individual which directed towards investigation of the
way in which the acting subjects (children, teenagers, students) acquire the
norms and value orientation from others; what are the means by which they
are influenced most and what is the way that determines the development
of an individual, character or individual behavior.

What is then the possible expression of the relationship between au-
thority and education? The norms and values of a society are fixed in au-
thority and enforced through it. The way of presenting the values is, at the
same time, the matter of the educational process reflecting the styles of
education, parental attitudes, ways of management and the scope of emo-
tional relationship between adults and children. Leaning on this theory, we
can contemplate that education and authority are of the same origin and
authority cannot be separated from education - in both cases it is a question
of the mediation of the society’s values and norms.
The authority as social relationship between adult and student

The above mentioned contemplation reflects the constant strive for finding an answer to one of the most essential questions: to what extent should the school, parents, adults intervene in a child’s development? Each type of education is, to a certain extent, authoritative in facilitating the young individual’s search for a place in the world of adults, teaching him/her to respect the rules which are important for his/her development and for the functioning of the social group. The practice – not only educational one – strongly indicates that school, family and society fail to complete its tasks without authority and reasonable rules thus, losing its value, firm position, securities and basic functions. People sometimes state that a person either has authority or lacks it. This opinion perceives authority as a human characteristic feature regardless of its dynamics and social aspects. Thinking of authority as of the mutual relationship between the bearer of authority (e.g. a person who influences people around him/her) and the receiver (e.g. the “addressee” of the influence, who respects the bearer and accepts him/her to a certain extent), we have to keep two basic aspects in mind: First of all the aspect of relativity, where an individual gains authority within a limited period, in relation to his/her social surroundings, towards certain people, particular groups (e.g. at work, in family, in a group of special interest). Not necessarily has the person the same “extent” of authority in different spheres of his/her influences, in different social groups, in limited time and towards particular members of the group. Social conditioning of authority casts doubt in understanding authority as a human feature which a person is endowed, regardless of his/her surrounding sphere (perhaps there exist such features which help a person to gain and keep authority). Second of all the aspect of asymmetry, where the bearer of authority has a decisive, overwhelming impact creating the relationship of superiority and inferiority, the dimension of leadership and following. The asymmetry of a relationship can originate in a formal position of the bearer as well as in his/her informal position, respectively in the combination of both. The receiver of authority conditions the existence of authority by respecting the bearer and by accepting his/her influence.

Tempting to understand authority as a social relationship we are perhaps able to better explain its links with education. However, authority can be interpreted as a “play” of social roles where one part of the relationship is formed by the “leading” role while the other by the “following” role (e.g. parent – child, teacher – pupil, lecturer - student). Both roles help to form each other, they tend to be mutually balanced, they are complementary, although asymmetrical (they cannot be identified with each other). Eventually, it is essential to respect the specificity of social roles and
competencies ensuing from these roles. The dynamics of relations in the educational process depends on a co-participation of all the present actors - teachers and students.

**Conclusion**

Hundreds years lasting conflict of contradictory authoritative and anti-authoritative forms of education shows that the issue of appropriate education is posed again and again and that nowadays it is of great importance in connection with democratic efforts. Educational practice unambiguously and constantly shows that a school and family without authority and meaningful regime does not suit the purpose, loses its value, firmness, certainty and basic functions. It seems that the authority did not by far disappear from the world – it is however perceived in different contexts and many alterations. The authority of the adults towards children did not disappear either but it only assumes new shapes and forms. The mentioned circumstances of course by no means facilitate seeking answers to the basic question: how the authority of an adult towards a child should be perceived, on what it should be based and how it should be used.

**Phenomenon of the authority and the recommended Decalogue:**

1. Authority as a multidimensional and multidisciplinary conception.
2. The conception of authority does not constitute an isolated problem.
3. Authority does not mean authoritarianism.
4. Authority is not in contradiction with criticism.
5. Authority does not necessarily lead to conformity.
6. Authority expresses relationship.
7. The aspect of relativity and asymmetry in perception of the authority.
8. Specifics of accepting and development of authority in different social environment.
10. Danger of relativization of the authority in social context.

The term authority is also in coherence with such expressions as discipline, power, freedom, responsibility, morality, law, duty, tolerance, and rule, fear… True authority, however, cannot be only sought in schools but also among parents, citizens, politicians, in the laws, legal system and in the social system. This is the only way in which young people can accept the faith and confidence in authority. School as an institution, school management and a team of educators can develop many positive features in young people but what they certainly cannot do is to replace the family and society. We think these are the problems actual not only in our country - in Czech Republic.