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## Teachers' Participation in School Daily Life

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to show the scope of teachers' participation in school daily life. Teachers' participation in school daily reality may have many different forms and different objectives. Teachers mostly participate in various interactions. The key kind of activity is teaching, being the core of the construction of school work schedule. In addition, they participate in unpredictable, unplanned situations and bureaucratic activities. Teachers' days at school are a complex network of activities, which may be taken on their own initiative, ordered, required externally or resulting from interpersonal sphere events on that day; they may be planned or unpredictable.

### KEYWORDS:

school, time, teacher, participation

## Introduction

Teachers' participation in school daily life is an important indicator of the quality of the school's functioning. The goals of school as an institution can only be achieved if they are based on long-term, lasting and positive participation of teachers. Involvement and effective participation are an example of upholding democratic principles at school. Teachers' participation may be motivated externally (e.g., by superiors' orders) or internally (by subjective desire to take part in school life), oriented at particular goals or at the achievement of the school's mission and vision. It may have various forms, scope and quality (cf. Pérez-Expósito, 2015). We can identify direct (individual) and indirect (representative) participation, as well as formal and free participation (Sekuła, 2015, pp. 5–7).

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Direct participation occurs in the areas of activity resulting from Article 6 of the Teacher's Charter (Journal of Laws Dz. U. of 2018, items 967 and 2245). Teachers are obliged, among others, to: "diligently perform tasks connected with their job and the basic functions of school: didactic, educational and teaching, including tasks connected with ensuring students security during all activities organized by the school, support the development of each student and pursue complete personal development ...". As part of performing those tasks, teachers deal with information, communicate with many entities, consult and negotiate with them (Sekuła, 2015). Apart from the above-mentioned areas, school principals require teachers to perform a number of organizational, bureaucratic and other activities.

Each day, the teacher acts so as to carry out their own plans and/or obligations to others, creating the daily world in cooperation with them. That world is "the whole sphere of everyday experiences, orientations, and actions through which individuals pursue their interests and affairs by manipulating objects, dealing with people, conceiving plans, and carrying them out (Wagner, 1970, pp. 14–15). Teachers' participation can be regarded as high quality if they participate in different forms in many areas of school daily life, have their own motivation and engage in the achievement of school mission and vision. If teachers work incidentally, without a long-term plan, if they perform tasks they are required to do, or they are oriented at their individual benefits, the participation is of low quality. The aim of the article is to show the scope of teachers' participation in school daily life. Based on the results of my study, I will try to answer the questions: what do teachers participate in on the daily basis, what activities do they perform, and what image of school results from this participation? I am going to use a fragment of research concerning teachers' activities, described in detail in the book *Codzienny czas w szkole. Fenomenograficzne studium doświadczeń nauczycieli* [Daily Time at School. A Phenomenographic Study of Teachers' Experiences] (Korzeniecka-Bondar, 2018).

### **Benefits from teachers' participation in school daily life**

Teachers' participation causes various benefits: for teachers themselves, for students, for the principals and for the school as a whole. When performing certain tasks, teachers acquire considerable knowledge, skills and competence. Participating in school daily life contributes to the development and improvement of teachers' social and interpersonal competence. Participation gives them the opportunity to express their thoughts, take part in decision-making (Tyree, 1969; Conley, 1991), and have an influence on school work and development. It helps develop the ability to identify and resolve problems, create action plans and delegate tasks to colleagues and students, which enhances their responsibility for certain areas of school functioning. It strengthens teachers' sense of self-efficacy, which contributes to greater engagement in teaching (Coladarci, 1992).

Teachers who participate in school activities also include students in them, which allows both groups to perceive each other in roles different from those assumed during classes. This offers the opportunity to recognize different skills, both of students and of teachers, e.g., negotiation, managerial skills etc. which helps learn more about each other, build deeper interpersonal relations and greater mutual tolerance and solidarity. Students have the opportunity to learn teachers' perspective and share their own perception of problems and potential solutions to them (Mitra, 2003; Pérez-Expósito, 2015). This strengthens their motivation to work and contributes to making changes at school with consideration of perspectives beyond the perception of adults (Mitra, 2003). Analyzing the outcome of the available studies, Dana L. Mitra concludes that: "Consulting with students on their views of teaching and learning has improved students' understanding of how they learn, helped students to gain a stronger sense of their own abilities, and improved instruction so that teachers do a better job of meeting student needs" (Mitra, 2003, p. 290).

Smylie (1992) suggests that teachers' enthusiasm concerning participation depends on their relationships with the school principals. More partnership and open relationships are conducive to teachers' activity. If the person has the sense of influence on their environment, he or she feels more motivated to participate (Johnson, 1991). It allows to develop a shared concept of school work, recognize the goals teachers set themselves, and the ways to attain them. It gives the opportunity to listen to teachers' opinions, problems, expectations and plans related to their own development. If the principal notices and appreciates teachers' work, their engagement is likely to grow. It encourages teachers to engage in school affairs and think about their participation from a long-term perspective. Teachers take into consideration the school's needs and objectives as they plan to improve their own competences, thus strengthening their own position as well. Teachers' participation in school events, related to better understanding of how school works, strengthens their sense of competence and effective use of resources. It may include i.a., planning the vision and development of school, active implementation of certain activities and evaluation of the results. Thanks to such participation, their identification with the school and their role increases. They can participate more fully in what occurs at school on the daily basis and represent the school in the environment.

## **Methods**

As part of the project concerning teachers' experience of daily school time, the research was carried out in accordance with the phenomenographic research practice. The aim of such research is to describe, analyze and understand people's experiences; it is oriented at the creation of empirical description of the way people experience phenom-

ena (*experiential description*) (Marton, 1981, p. 180). In order to explore the problem of daily school time of teachers, I observed what happens at school on the daily basis (the content of daily events at school) and I investigated the daily time in terms of: pace, planning, control, variety and filling the time (Popiołek, 2000). I applied triangulation in data collection (Flick, 2009, p. 448), using two subsequent ways of collecting data: *the Form of describing one's day* and a semi-structured individual in-depth interview. In the study I used triangulation in time sequence, intertwining the methods in time (Flick, 2011, p. 183): first, the respondent completed the *Form* for a week, describing their own activities, thoughts and feelings. Then, the phenomenographic interview was conducted. Such a twofold way of data collection allowed me to collate varied and multi-aspect information concerning the ways of experiencing daily school time by teachers. In the text I will mostly focus on teachers' daily activities, because this reflects their direct participation.

## Participants

Participants are selected for phenomenographic studies on the basis of their relevance to the study objective, which means people who have experienced the investigated phenomenon (Green & Bowden, 2009, p. 60). In order to show different ways of conceptualizing daily time, I tried to use diverse key cases (Kubinowski, 2010, p. 282). The basic criterion was the teacher's consent to participation in the study. The choice of the sample overlapped with the preliminary analysis of research results, which allowed me to identify other selection criteria, especially the criterion of higher intensity of certain characteristics (intensity sampling) (Patton, 1990, p. 171) and contrasting cases (Patton, 1990, p. 169). Twenty teachers participated in the study. The group included eighteen women and two men, specialists in different subjects, who represented different types of school (two individuals from a school run by an association, two individuals from a private school, and eighteen from a public school) and different education levels (all levels except elementary education). The group was also varied in terms of work experience: 3 people were beginners, 4 had work experience up to ten years, 8 people – up to twenty years, and 6 teachers – more than twenty.

## Results

Each teacher is responsible for a specific fragment of work, which is an expression of direct participation (Sekuła, 2015). The activities described by the teachers are "the photography of time and status", which is own their selection of objects and way of

presenting the analyzed reality, an expression of cultural experiences and acquired cognitive instruments (Ferenz, 2003, p. 8). Each day at school is a composition of teachers' various activities with different character, importance and status. Teachers' activities can be placed on a continuum specified by the dimensions of daily time:

- pace – from activities carried out quickly to ones performed slowly;
- time organization – from carefully planned activities to acting *ad hoc*, without any plan;
- control of duration – from controlled activities to events with uncontrolled duration;
- variety – from varied activities to monotonous, schematic and boring ones;
- filling – from time completely filled with action to empty time (cf. Popiołek, 2000).

Only two of the respondents declared that the daily pace at school differs depending on the day. Most teachers experience the quick pace of action. Teachers hurry during the lessons (so as to manage to include all the core curriculum and planned content), during breaks (when they need to move from one classroom to another, perform duties on the corridor etc.); when talking to students or colleagues and when carrying out other tasks requested by the principals (e.g., organizing placement tests, class trips etc.). The pace of teachers' daily functioning increases even more in the case of situations that change the rhythm and order of daily reality, e.g., the need to substitute for an absent teacher, principals' needs or incidents that change the normal order of events. "The planned schedule of the day needs to be immediately changed and adjusted to the present needs in order to restore the normal order of events" (Korzeniecka – Bondar, 2018, p. 190). Teachers' quick activity is reflected in hurrying, shortage of time, compression of time, and constantly being on the move.

The analysis of teachers' organization of daily time leads to the identification of the following kinds of activity:

- "planned, necessary and countable in terms of duration and number;
- planned, necessary and uncountable in terms of duration and number;
- planned, unnecessary and uncountable;
- unpredictable in terms of occurrence, course and duration" (Korzeniecka-Bondar, 2018, p. 202).

When planning their day, the respondents devote most attention to planned, necessary and countable activities, such as lessons, work at the common room and duties. Lessons are the core of teachers' work, and other activities are added to them. The group of planned and necessary activities includes ones with unpredictable duration, e.g., meetings with parents, staff meetings, meetings with the student board, preparing for classes etc. The boundary between working time and leisure time becomes blurred, because after working hours teachers still do things for the school. After classes they perform for free a number of various informal activities for the benefit of

their school/community. It is often the source of their frustration, affects their family functioning and the way they spend their free time (Michalak, 2007, pp. 383–387).

The third group is planned, unnecessary and uncountable; activities, such as preparing students for contests, artistic events, or informal activities with students. I considered these activities as unnecessary, because they are not part of teachers' obligations, and each teacher can decide whether to do them or not. Teachers engage in them for two reasons: to enhance students' resources (knowledge, skills, social capital), and to provide the opportunity to open, autonomous and creative teacher-student relationships (Korzeniecka-Bondar, 2018, p. 205). Such activities are mostly done by teachers who treat the routine, repeatable rhythm of teaching as something arduous, which prevents them from pursuing their vision of relationships with students.

Unpredictable activities are e.g., incidents, tasks delegated by the principals, emergencies etc. The teacher cannot control their occurrence, course or duration. They change the course of planned events and engage teachers because an immediate reaction is usually needed. All the respondents assume that something unpredictable may occur during the day. The analysis of their various ways of reacting to them shows the regularity: the tighter is the adopted schedule, the more negative emotions and irrelevant actions occur on the part of the teachers. Teachers who plan flexibly (including some space for changes and modifications) incur less emotional costs and more efficiently choose the proper direction of activity (Covey, Merrill & Merrill 2005, p. 188).

Teachers' time at school is not planned and organized by them only. Teachers engage in whatever is necessary at the particular time and place. This requires of them great flexibility and awareness of the direction of their actions. Otherwise, they experience chaos, the lack of control of the course of events, and as a result, frustration and being treated like objects. "Temporal regulation of behavior during the day is very complex" (Popiołek, 2000, p. 90).

Teachers experience the control of daily time at school. Every day, they are subject to temporal orders (personalized and institutionalized) as well as short-term (clock-measured) and long-term (calendar-measured) synchronization of time (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 496). The duration of the teacher's key activities (conducting a lesson, duty during the break etc.) is controlled precisely. The majority of teachers' activities at school are determined by the organization of quantitative time and controlled using the clock. Planned, routine activities (e.g., a lesson) are especially subject to control. Teachers can neither lengthen nor shorten such activities without synchronization with other people, even if it was beneficial for the school mission or students' development. Teachers' time is controlled by top-down requirements (by superiors – personalized, and by the abstract system – institutionalized). Teachers follow the existing rules of time division, although they have an ambiguous attitude to them. On the one hand, they perceive them as a condition of existence of daily order at school, and on the

other hand, they can see their inefficiency and instrumental character" (Korzeniecka-Bondar, 2018, p. 211). People who do not control time just follow the course of events at school. They perform activities as long as it is necessary, but it is only possible after the implementation of the planned, necessary and countable activities.

Most teachers experience variety at school; only three respondents declare their activities are repeatable and schematic. The same areas (e.g., lesson) are perceived by some teachers as monotonous and by others as varied. Teachers who feel weary because of the repeatability of the teaching cycle have the sense of being limited by an external framework. They attribute the lack of variety to external factors – the system, superiors, the top-down framework etc. They use protective attributions explaining that they would like to act but external determinants are an obstacle. They feel discomfort in the present situation but they do not feel empowered to change it. They adopt a passive attitude to what happens at school. "This attitude does not depend on work experience (since in the group there are teachers with two, eighteen and thirty years of experience), the subject taught (they teach mathematics, Polish and English), or the place where the school is (it occurs in rural areas, small towns and big cities alike). ... They are not the agents, creators of the reality. but passive (and dissatisfied) consumers of what they are offered (due to insufficient skills, powerlessness, fear, opportunism?). They are not active, because activity is connected with reduced peace and having to part with the belief – or even myth – that it is impossible to engage in attractive activities because of external limitations." (Korzeniecka-Bondar, 2018, p. 219).

Teachers who experience variety usually attribute it to the interactive character of work at school. Apart from that, expectations and needs of students and teachers are the source of differences in daily time at school. The higher complexity and/or level of students' needs and expectations, the higher the sense of diversity of daily routine. Teachers who engage in different activities with students and for their benefit feel that their time becomes diversified. Students mobilize teachers to diversify their daily time, to overcome the monotony and transform daily routine into something extraordinary (Bauman, 2009). Diverse activities allow teachers to satisfy their own needs of novelty and freshness. They are the source of arousal, activity, an antidote for routine, negative experiences and reflections. Diversity is constant movement, which requires of teachers greater amount of work and effort. Teachers who are not afraid to function this way derive a number of (mostly psychological) benefits from it: they have the sense of autonomy, influence on the course of school events and being "up to date". Additionally, their work is visible at school, the superiors begin to notice them, students want to cooperate, and this way they gain recognition and become important (Korzeniecka-Bondar, 2018, p. 222). However, permanent strive for diversity makes it difficult for teachers to perform planned activities and follow the school schedule.

This leads to the belief about chaos at school, which nobody can control. In the pursuit of attractive present, they fail to achieve the set goals and are not future-oriented.

The maximum filling of time and intensively experiencing each day is currently a kind of obsession for many people, especially young ones. It is the expression of consumerist lifestyle: you desire something all the time, but when you attain it, it only gives you satisfaction for a moment. The concept of constant activity and mobility also permeates schools. Activities which fill teachers' days can be categorized using many different criteria, e.g., the place of performance (in or out of school), the impression concerning their duration (dragging or passing quickly), importance (sustaining the daily routine; necessary and important; necessary but not so important; unimportant and unnecessary; or empty time) (Korzeniecka - Bondar, 2018, p. 225). I will elaborate on the latter.

Every day, teachers perform a number of minor activities to sustain the daily routine (Krajewski, 2009, p. 181; Korzeniecka-Bondar, 2016), for example they prepare teaching materials, which nowadays mainly includes searching, sorting, printing, copying, cutting out etc. Activities considered by teachers as meaningful, important and necessary are those that promote students' development and give effects measured by their development (not only grades), as well as activities that help build and strengthen interpersonal relationships. In the sequence of teachers' daily activities there are also ones regarded as necessary but unimportant (and often even disliked), such as obtaining sponsors, running the school's website or caring about noticeboards and exhibitions. Days are also sometimes filled with activities teachers find meaningless and unnecessary (a waste of time), which is mostly connected with high bureaucratization of school work. Teachers also experience "empty time" (Flaherty, 2003, p. 22), when they wait for an event, such as a meeting with parents or a duty in the afternoon. In such situations, they usually "rip out free time at work" (Szlendak, 2009); they try to rest for a moment, doing some activities that do not require intellectual engagement, such as cleaning the classroom, sorting documents, or just chatting with their workmates.

## Conclusions

Teachers' participation in school daily routine may have many different forms and different objectives. It is much more than just being at school: it is conscious participation in school events. Teachers are engaging in more and more activities and newer actions. Teachers first of all take part in various interactions (with students, other teachers, superiors, parents, non-educational workers etc.). Another key kind of activity is teaching, being the core of the construction of school work schedule. Events at school are often disturbed by unpredictable situations that disrupt the daily schedule. Incidents, sudden substitution for an absent teacher, tasks ordered by principals etc.,



disturb the order of daily functioning, engaging teachers (especially emotionally). Such events mean that teachers are obliged to act in a hurry, compress time and control the duration of each activity.

School days are filled with various bureaucratic activities. Teachers participate in the preparation, performance and development of many questionnaires, tests which they perceive to be meaningless and which are externally imposed (e.g., by school supervisory bodies). They perceive such things as meaningless, depriving them of time for doing what is important. Teachers hate those activities; yet, they perform them because they are expected to do so. Apart from such activities, we can also point out teachers' own initiatives for the benefit of students, e.g., leading a drama group. Teachers engage in them to satisfy their passions and needs (of open relationships with students, creation or autonomy), which cannot be pursued because of the strict didactic process.

Teachers' days at school are a complex network of activities, which may be taken on their own initiative, ordered, imposed from the outside or resulting from what happens in the interpersonal sphere on that day; they may be planned or unpredictable. In other words, teachers participate in whatever the day brings. School is the area that is created every day anew by people's interactions. The adopted plans, schemes of activity are disrupted by events that are unpredictable and absorbing (e.g., incidents). They usually trigger the sense of insecurity and a quick pace, as well as the need to do more and more tasks in a shorter time. Teachers have the increasing sense of "tightening the temporal loop" (Szlendak, 2009, p. 209), being overwhelmed by the pace and number of things to do. Sociologist Elise Boulding calls this state "temporal exhaustion": "If one is mentally out of breath all the time from dealing with the present, there is no energy left for imagining the future," (Boulding, 1978, p. 7).

At school different approaches to time (quantitative and qualitative, present- or future-oriented) clash, which has an influence on the specificity of teachers' participation. On the one hand, school is an institution that works in accordance with the requirements of quantitative time. Each participant of school daily routine is obliged to comply with schedules and externally determined temporal frames. Both the teacher and the students act following external temporal rules, their activities take place in the rhythm determined by the need to synchronize the activity of the whole institution. Thus, teachers are the executors of an externally designed project. On the other hand, school is a unique cultural environment "formed on the basis of the form of what happens (Anttila, 1982, quoted in Rokoszowa, 1989, p. 53): time experienced variously in terms of quality. School daily reality is composed of regular events and situations, as well as singular, incidental and irregular ones. This the result of including the present, the past and the future, as well as memory (conceptualization, record), motion and motionlessness, and change and the lack of change (Rokoszowa, 1989, p. 53). Acting only upon quantitative time requirements teaches us indifference and

explaining ourselves with temporal orders (the lack of time, hurry, deadline etc.), the lack of engagement and involving in the creation of the community, initiating educational activities or supportive social relationships. Acting upon qualitative time does not exclude noticing and engaging in purposeful activities, but does not stop there. Important is what preceded these activities, what they stemmed from, what were their intended (and unintended) results, and in what contexts they functioned. Activities are the manifestation of decisions that are open to the essence of events and negotiated with others. Events occurring at school require teachers to be involved and engaged in them individually and/or collectively.

Teachers' daily experiences lead to reflection, asking questions about what the contemporary school is like, what is its purpose, what happens at school and how teachers experience it, what experiences are built from those events and how they affect the teacher's educational practice, what the teacher learns from their own school experiences and how it affects their teaching work. We can see mutual influence of what happens in the school reality on the experiences and personality of the teacher, and further, on their reflections and activities (Milch, 2011). To conclude, we may say that teachers' participation is the product of their past and present experiences and the reflection for the future they will draw from those experiences.

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