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## School Tutoring as a Concept and a Support Method in Student's Development

**ABSTRACT:** We aim at describing the concept and method of school tutoring based on experiences of College of Tutors running a program financed by the local authorities. Tutoring has academic roots as a method of individual collaboration between a student and a professor focused on student's development. We also mention the philosophical background of tutoring (Socrates, philosophy of dialogue, personalism). Subsequently, we describe the foundations of the school tutoring program including the variations of its methods. Experiences of Wrocław secondary education schools prove the changes induced by few-year tutoring practice: in social relations, in the teachers self-image, in the way students feel at school. School tutoring focuses on responding to student's needs, experiences, plans and an occasion to reflect on the very nature and value of pedagogical activity. The text is concluded by a few remarks of the future of school tutoring.

**KEYWORDS:** development, school tutoring, student, support method, tutor, tutoring.

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An issue of tutoring has been studied more extensively in recent years. A number of institutions developing this method introduce it in various environments: academic, school, non-governmental as well as professional. However, for many people, the meaning of this word remains unclear but still brings to mind mentoring or coaching, currently equally popular and used in similar contexts. The aim of this article is to describe what school tutoring actually is as a concept and a method (i.e., its philosophical background), where and how it is used, what are its aims and, lastly, an introductory evaluation of its effects in schools. We will base our thoughts predominantly on the experiences of the College of Tutors located in the city of Wrocław (our own reflections and data collected in the report prepared in the end of 2011; Zembrzuska, 2011), which as the first institution in Poland having the support of the local authorities, has been introducing tutoring in the secondary school environment.

#### WHAT IS TUTORING? PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND OF TUTORING

Tutoring refers to the master and disciple relationship, in which the older and more experienced person takes up a role of supporting and leading the younger and less experienced one. We see such relationships in ancient Greek schools with the best example in dialogues between Socrates and his disciples, described so well by Plato in his texts. The essence of Socratic dialogue was an investigation of the meaning of commonly used notions, by many considered as 'obvious' (Krokiewicz, 1995, p. 251). By using questions, Socrates invited interlocutors to reflect on the philosophically (and vitally) important ethical issues represented by such notions as: good, beauty, love or truth. While asking others to define the notion, Socrates also asked about the meaning they themselves associate with it, what makes them formulate decisions, and what values they recognize as important in their lives.

It is only one out of many philosophical resources for tutoring. The contemporary concept of tutoring refers predominantly to the philosophy of dialogue developed by the 20th century philosophers, such as: Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Levinas or Józef Tischner. The main message of the philosophy of dialogue has been the concept of the meeting and the dialogue founded on the relation between 'I' and 'You.' This relation has strong ethical character described by such philosophers of dialogue as Martin Buber (1992), Emmanuel Levinas (2002), Franz Rosenzweig (1998),

and in Poland—Józef Tischner (1990, 2003). Without the direct relation of two people, meeting and dialogue would not be possible. The meeting opens an ethical space, which makes it possible for our being to become a human being itself. Liabilities, commitments, a sense of responsibility for the other are only possible when we truly meet with the other, which means, when we are open and ready to recognize and listen to the other. The spiritual patron of the Wrocław tutoring was the priest Janusz Tarnowski, who died in 2012. He focused on the development of the theory and practice of the pedagogical dialogue. He was the author of personalistic-existential pedagogy and his texts reveal interest in and a deep reflection on the nature of meeting and dialogue (Tarnowski, 2005).

On the other hand, tutoring as a method was shaped and developed in the 18th century at English universities, such as Oxford and Cambridge, where each student is given an opportunity to study in an individualized way directly under the supervision of the tutor—professor. This relation assumes that the student is in the process of learning and developing,<sup>1</sup> while the professor acquires deeper knowledge and experience. He is ready to share all of this with the student, inspiring him and accompanying in the process of intellectual development. With time, the model was adopted at these universities as a standardized model of academic work—one professor has a few students, makes arrangements with them for the current semester and regularly meets them at so-called tutorials. The students read recommended texts, discuss them during tutorials and write their own academic texts under the professor's supervision.

Such an individualized model of tutoring later on found its followers in various milieus. For example, in Poland it has been introduced in non-governmental organizations (Polish-American Freedom Foundation [PAFF], 2013),<sup>2</sup> at the universities<sup>3</sup> and middle and secondary schools (adequately, *gimnazjum* and *liceum*).

#### TUTORING AS A CONCEPT AND ITS VARIATIONS

Despite the fact that currently the number of institutions is growing each year, it is beyond any doubt that school tutoring was commenced in Wrocław educational milieu. More than 15 years ago, Autorskie Licea Artystyczne, non-public secondary schools, developed a model of individual care of the student, which replaced the traditional model of one leading teacher for the whole class. This was subsequently transformed into a form of individualized school tutoring by the College of Tutors (Kolegium Tutorów, <http://www.tutoring.pl>), a part of The Open Education Association (Towarzystwo Edukacji Otwartej). The program of school tutoring was preceded by the public program 'Safe and Friendly School' ('Bezpieczna i przyjazna szkoła') led by the Centrum Metodyczne Pomocy Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznej and financed by the Ministry of National Education. The aim of this initial program was substantial, organizational and financial preparation of the school tutoring program, as well as its promotion. One of the effects of this preparatory phase was a book entitled *Tutoring w szkole – między teorią a praktyką zmiany edukacyjnej* (Czekierda, Budzyński, Traczyński, Zalewski & Zembruska, 2009). Since 2009, the College of

Tutors in collaboration with the Department of Education of Wrocław Municipality has been carrying on a project of school tutoring consisting of several elements: year-long trainings for teachers-tutors, tutorials for students, consultations for teachers-tutors, as well as follow-up courses in tutoring. It has been accepted, and is worth mentioning here, that each tutor is also working with his/her own tutor, that is an advisor, whom she/he meets regularly (every month or every other month) to discuss tutoring experience. On the other hand, tutors' advisors also have regular meetings during which they discuss issues specific for individual work of the teachers-tutors, as well as issues important for the overall functioning of the school.

After five years of experience,<sup>4</sup> one can observe that tutoring may have several variations, depending on students' needs—the form of developmental tutoring in the case of students which require support in further steps of future education and personal development; a form of academic tutoring for students having very concrete interests and wishing to improve in particular fields of study; and a form of educational tutoring for students needing support in coping with various problems and hard life situations (e.g., intergenerational relations, a sense of being different and outside of the mainstream, family problems like a loss of a relative, addictions in the family, unemployment, Euro-orphanhood). Often these problems go beyond the narrowly conceived school situation (while influencing it at the same time), and the role of the tutor is to give feedback, advice where to go, with whom to talk to, and to get any kind of help and support. Undoubtedly, the key issue in such vulnerable situations is an ability to build and maintain confidence by the tutor and a delicacy in taking up any action. It is worth mentioning that these forms of tutoring (developmental, academic and educational) are yet in the process of developing and derive more from the practice, from observations of subjects involved in tutoring at schools.

The aim of tutoring in the context of the school is to support the student's development—a tutee—by building an individual relation between her/him and a teacher-tutor. The method that is at stake here is getting to know the tutee's interests, expectations and needs, recognizing his/her situation (at school, and when necessary private situation, which has been mentioned above). The assumption is that the tutor should be an experienced person in both senses—professionally and personally, should command esteem and respect making up a positive authority and should know how to build individual relations with others, support them in reflective development, be open to share his/her experience and knowledge and how to apply it in life.

Depending on needs, the tutors get individual support based on the principle that 'every tutor has his/her own tutor' and have an opportunity to participate in trainings (regular workshops), whose goal is to model a new attitude based on the philosophy of dialogue, enriching the tutor's personal professional workshop of supporting the development of students by ideas and methods used in positive psychology and strengthening supporting students in the learning effort and process by the use of up-to-date knowledge on learning and cognition. Further stages of tutors' development of the training offer include reinforcing skills related to developmental and academic tutoring.<sup>5</sup>

## THE METHOD OF SCHOOL TUTORING

The declared aim of the programs being carried out by the College of Tutors is the strengthening of interpersonal relations at school by the modification of the school model—instead of one educator<sup>6</sup> per class (approximately 30 students) we have three tutors per class (each having approximately 10 tutees). The necessary condition of successful tutoring is a transformation of the very relations between a teacher-tutor and a student as far as his/her education (in moral sense) is concerned and ways of educational care. We mean here relations that result in feeling more secure at school, having a sense that the student can have an influence on what is going on at school and a sense of responsibility for his/her own development, readiness to learn and flexibility when facing new situations. The whole program lasts three years for the tutees, which is the period they spend at middle school.

As it was mentioned, the basic organizational modification is based on introducing two more teachers-tutors to a class run so far by one educator. In this way, each one of them takes care of about 10 students, while one of the tutors also keeps the role of the official educator responsible for the whole class (this is more like an administrative role), as well as a leader of tutors. All three tutors have regular meetings with their tutees paying attention to the relations the tutees have among them and their well-being in the class. The regularity of meetings is once a week for a shorter time (10 minutes), and once a month for a longer time (30-40 minutes). The first semester is focused on getting to know each other, learning the needs, expectations and interests of tutees with the focus on their strengths, potential, limitations and difficulties as regards knowledge, skills, attitudes and external conditions. The meetings give an opportunity to develop and reinforce skills of self-esteem and self-analysis, the skills that are necessary to face the challenges put forward by the cautious tutor aware of the tutees' possibilities. Therefore, the next step is focused on tasks, the change in respect to behavior, ways of learning, responding to challenges, looking carefully what works and what does not, solving the emerging problems. This time serves to ensure the tutee in his/her sense of agency and autonomy. The third step is concerned with the values declared by the tutee as vital in his/her life, on an ability of determining goals, planning activities, making corrections to these plans, as well as evaluating efficiency and effectiveness of the undertaken activities. This is a time of working on a sense of authorship in activities and a sense of responsibility for oneself. The steps in the tutoring process do not necessarily coincide with the subsequent years of learning at school. Each tutee is different, representing various moments of development and maturity, hence, it is the wisdom of the teacher-tutor, his/her experiences and sensibility, which define the speed and character of the tutor-tutee relation. The task of the tutor is, together with the tutee, creating a work plan, monitoring the progress and the situation the tutee is currently in at school, keeping in touch with his/her parents, making final evaluations and encouraging self-reflection in the tutee. The total time of tutor-tutee meetings is two hours per month.

## THE FUTURE OF SCHOOL TUTORING

The experience of school tutoring gathered so far in Wrocław schools proves that this method can bring essential changes at school and in the activities of its subjects: students, teachers, and even parents. The report prepared in 2012 by the College of Tutors summing up the whole 3-years-long cycle of tutorials (which coincides with the length of students' study on this particular stage of education) in a few Wrocław middle schools, shows that the program has been accepted by both parties: teachers-tutors and students-tutees. The students in fact report observing a noticeable difference in the teachers-tutors attitudes and activities. They comment that the possibility of individual (or sometimes in pairs or small groups) meetings based on dialogue made talking about problems much less stressful, based on mutual respect and self-esteem, building emotional relations and closeness. The students can enlist many features represented by tutors that enabled creation of such relations and support for their development. These are the following: frankness, kindness, acceptance, showing interest in another person, readiness to assist in difficulties.

Many underline the value of individual contact as the basis for educational aims achieved through tutoring. Both students and teachers notice and are able to name benefits of the program focused on helping students in learning, solving problems, making friends with their peers and adults, as well as discovering personal talents. The teachers appreciate better relations with the students, are more understanding and sensitive to the students' needs, and find a new sense and satisfaction of their work. The original reluctance of students, even the fear and negative connotations (they were afraid of stronger control of their progress), gradually changes into satisfaction and a sense of benefit. Only few students were disappointed by the program and sustained their negative attitude.

According to various parties involved in the program, tutoring has the potential of changing attitudes of both teachers and students. It teaches mutual respect and understanding, responsibility and constructive ways of solving problems. It changes relations based on dependence, distrust, control and settling of the obligations into partnership relations based on listening, cooperation and support. It makes it possible to get to know students and teachers and a better understanding of one's own needs, possibilities and limitations. Tutoring as a method brings about such results as: openness for sincere discussion, an increased sense of security, an increased activity and involvement both—as far as one's own development is concerned, as well as the matters of the school. More and more often students declare that school does not necessarily have to be a place that 'one wants to get out of as soon as possible.' They underline their satisfaction about taking part in the program, the nice atmosphere, a possibility of having some fun and satisfaction from taking part in some workshops (e.g., integration) or joined outdoors activities.

Other parties, like school directors and school educators,<sup>7</sup> also notice the changes in the behaviour and attitudes of the students having tutorials. The program deepened the collaboration and joint activities of the teachers, and also of tutors and class

educators, readiness to exchange experiences and share learning and improvement of competences. At the same time, the teachers stress the fact that engagement of the school director, interest of other teachers and class educators and a possibility of tutor's development are a valuable support strengthening their competences and stimulating reflection on the personal development and the condition of the school system in the context of a possibility of introducing changes.

Difficulties reported by the program participants refer mainly to organizational issues and lack of time for regular tutor-tutee meetings.<sup>8</sup> Very strict program frameworks which make it impossible for a tutee to freely choose a tutor has been considered an obstacle that needs to be challenged. Also, giving up collaboration with unwilling tutees, however rare, and compulsory participation in the program, are issues that need to be reconsidered and worked out again.<sup>9</sup>

In the conclusion to the report, it was stated that the program 'Tutor in Wrocław Middle School' has enriched systemic thinking about the school by the value of educational work being undertaken and has also made it possible to initiate specific activities favoring students' development and improvement of educational skills of the teachers. Being aware of the values, an experience of sense and practice of individual, partnership teacher-student relations, seems to be particularly valuable and reshapes a hitherto image of middle school and strengthens attitudes of collaboration and engagement. Competences of tutors have been highly estimated, as far as building relations and creating friendly and partnership atmosphere is concerned, as well as supporting skills, such as expressing one's needs and interests, articulation of aims, making plans or an ability to making up decisions. All these are necessary for personal development of the student. The benefit of the program is applying various organizational solutions that make the school reality better. One that should be mentioned here is joining the roles of the tutor of the whole class with the role of the tutor of particular student, which gives a much more coherent ways of working with the student. The program participants suggest that tutoring should be introduced gradually in all classes and be available to everyone.

Activities and research done by the College of Tutors enables the constant reflection on the program both in the context of positive changes at schools, as well as organizational obstacles and mental barriers, which restrict the possibility of achieving the aims of the program. Discussions with education decision-makers, continuous improvement of teachers-tutors competence and introducing modifications, are and will be a stable practice in shaping the educational role of the school.

The future of tutoring in this environment depend on several factors: personal features, substantial preparation and motivation of teachers-tutors, support and encouragement from school directors and education authorities, as well as building of the support system for tutors, creating of particular organizational structure at school that would include tutorials, the acceptance on the part of students themselves and their parents, an finally, financial funding. What the teachers who are not tutors think is equally important, as they can support or undermine the idea and the method of tutoring. On the other hand, experiences of a few schools that decided to introduce

tutoring in all classes and for all students, may serve as an experiential model to be worked on in order to work out the best practices to be applied elsewhere. Tutoring is not a golden means serving to solve all problems the school might have. However, it can make it possible for the teacher's and tutor's work to gain a new dimension, which is often forgotten in mass schools, and it can give a student a sense of subjectivity and agency, a sense of being an individual with particular interests, needs and plans, not only a member of a given class.

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#### TUTORING SZKOLNY JAKO KONCEPCJA I METODA WSPARCIA ROZWOJU UCZNI

**ABSTRAKT:** Celem artykułu jest dokonanie opisu koncepcji i metody tutoringu szkolnego w odniesieniu do kilkuletnich doświadczeń programu Kolegium Tutorów realizowanego przy wsparciu lokalnych władz oświatowych. Tutoring ma korzenie akademickie jako zindywidualizowana metoda pracy studenta z profesorem, jego istotą jest otwarcie na potrzeby drugiego człowieka i wspieranie w rozwoju. Można wskazać kilka źródeł filozoficznych, które dookreślają czym współcześnie jest tutoring (sokrateski dialog, filozofia dialogu, filozofia personalistyczna). Przedstawiono założenia programowe tutoringu szkolnego oraz opisano odmiany tutoringu, które kształtują się w praktyce szkolnej. Doświadczenia wrocławskich szkół średnich, które zdecydowały

się wprowadzić tutoring jako metodę pracy wychowawczej pokazują zmiany, jakie zaszły w relacjach w szkole, jak i zmiany w samych nauczycielach, którzy przewartościowują rozumienie swojej roli/ról oraz myślenie o uczniu. Zmiana dotyczy również myślenia uczniów o szkole i nauczycielach. Tutoring szkolny jest przykładem tego, że indywidualny kontakt z uczniami pozwala na poznanie ich potrzeb, doświadczeń, oczekiwań i planów, uruchamia pytania do refleksji nad sensem i wartością pedagogicznego działania oraz inspiruje do podejmowania działań sprzyjających rozwojowi uczniów. Tekst kończy refleksja nad przyszłością tutoringu szkolnego.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** metoda wsparcia, rozwój, tutor, tutoring, tutoring szkolny, uczeń.



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1. Today we would equally mention: herself.
  2. Polish-American Freedom Foundation has been running a PAFF Leaders Program, whose objective is 'support the development of qualifications and skills by individuals involved in community efforts' and tutoring is a basic method incorporated to achieve this objective.
  3. At Pedagogical University in Warsaw, at the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław.
  4. The school year 2012/2013 has been a fifth year of the program in Wrocław.
  5. In 2012 a new follow-up courses have been launched by the College of Tutors for those who would like to develop their tutoring skills.
  6. Typically in the Polish school each class is run by one educator who usually also teaches the class a particular subject. Once a week there is a 1-hour meeting of the educator with the students that is devoted to educational as well as organizational issues.
  7. Each Polish school hires at least one specialist who graduated from pedagogy department. The role of such person is to give educational support to students, help them solve problems and represent their interests in relation with some external institutions. Also to help teachers in their daily challenges at school. In reality that means that each educator (who is not a teacher) has to take care of several dozens of students. That makes it impossible for him/her to get to know better everyone at school.
  8. The problem that has not yet been solved is introducing tutorials to the weekly schedule of the classes in such a way that both a tutor and a tutee would be able to meet at the same time and place. It is worth mentioning that currently a few schools are working on best solutions which later on could be copied as best practices with respect to the specificity of each school.
  9. As far as the change of the tutor is concerned, the flexibility of the schools may vary. On the other hand students are not given the right to decide about the participation in the tutoring program (if it was decided in advance that the whole class will participate). In such way tutoring becomes a form of educational program.