

# FAMILY, RELIGION, PEDAGOGY AND EVERYDAY EDUCATION PRACTICE

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## **PERFORMING THE PROFESSIONAL ROLE BY TEACHERS WHO EXPERIENCED REVERSING ROLES IN THE FAMILY<sup>1</sup>**

### **ABSTRACT:**

It is assumed that there is a relationship between the experience of parentification, i.e., the reversal of roles in the family, and the effects of relational trauma resulting from parentification, and the nature of professional work related to broadly understood assistance. Research confirms that people choosing, for example, the profession of a teacher, doctor, psychologist, psychotherapist or nurse, have often experienced parentification in their family of origin. The aim of the study is to draw attention to possible disruptions in performing the professional role by teachers who experienced the role reversal in the family in their childhood. Taking into account the social importance of education system, it seems necessary to carry out representative empirical analyses on the effects of parentification on performing the professional role of teachers and, consequently, undertaking psychoeducational activities.

### **KEYWORDS:**

parentification, family, teacher, professional role, interpersonal relations

<sup>1</sup> Originally published: Wiktor Żłobicki, "Wypełnianie roli zawodowej przez nauczycieli z doświadczeniami odwrócenia ról w rodzinie", *Wychowanie w Rodzinie* 2019, vol. XXI, no. 2, p. 301-314.

This study addresses the issue of parentification, or role reversal in the family, in the context of performing the professional role of a teacher, which has its justification in scientific interests in the overlapping areas of pedagogy, family pedagogy and psychotherapy. The target group of this study are in fact two subjects of the educational process, i.e. students and teachers who have experienced parentification in their families of origin. It should be added that this issue has been addressed primarily in the work of psychologists and, as it seems, should be presented more extensively in the educational reflection.

## PECULIARITIES OF THE CONTEMPORARY PROFESSIONAL ROLE OF THE TEACHER

Education is expected to cope with increasingly complex problems arising from dynamic changes in social reality. Sociologists of education and pedeutologists indicate that the ambivalence in educational work stems from the conflicting expectations attributed to the professional role of a teacher. Depending on the circumstances, a good teacher must be<sup>2</sup>:

- empathetic, yet distanced in their perception of the experiences of others;
- open to the world, but in some respects closed;
- demanding, but also 'soft' in assessing others' failures;
- socialized, but to some extent selfish;
- prepared for both distance and disengagement, as well as direct, good contact with the student;
- understanding but sometimes strictly demanding.

As Henryka Kwiatkowska emphasizes, paradoxically, the realization of these contradictory expectations is a condition of proper functioning in a professional role and becomes an unavoidable feature of many pedagogical situations<sup>2</sup>.

That is why, the process of teacher training is so important, as Kwiatkowska emphasizes, thus indicating the specific nature of preparation for this profession<sup>3</sup>:

<sup>2</sup> See H. Kwiatkowska, *Pedeutologia*, Warszawa 2008, p. 201-202.

<sup>3</sup> *Nauczyciele nauczycieli. Z teorii i praktyki kształcenia nauczycieli*, ed. H. Kwiatkowska, A. Kotusiewicz, Warszawa 1992, p. 4-5.

- preparing teachers is not limited only to mastering professional knowledge, but above all to using it efficiently in practice;
- in teacher education it is necessary to reject a purely cognitive approach to all problems related to teaching and upbringing;
- teacher qualifications cannot be determined by a specific model of professional activities.

In fact, practicing this profession requires the ability to have a complementary approach to knowledge, methodological and specialized skills. Educators are expected to move away from their traditional authoritarian role and become specialists in comprehensive human development, inevitably being confronted with the increasingly strong trends of contemporary education<sup>4</sup>:

- from imparting knowledge to learning cognitive and existential independence;
- from steering to inspiring development;
- from simple transmission of knowledge to introducing the student to its world;
- from the function of disseminating knowledge to ordering information;
- from the dominance of the intellect to the balance of thoughts and feelings in school education;
- from the teacher's monologue to a dialogue with students.

Therefore, in thinking about contemporary upbringing, the humanistic orientation gains particular importance. According to Stefan Wołoszyn this means, among others, that the educator - teacher<sup>5</sup>:

- perceives every teaching or educational situation as an encounter between self and the other;
- above all, he/she knows how to use himself;
- discovers his/her own unique personality and uses it skilfully as an instrument of pedagogical action;
- treats the acquired theoretical knowledge as an opportunity for personal development and improvement of his/her practical activities.

<sup>4</sup> H. Kwiatkowska, *Pedeutologia*, op. cit., p. 41-45.

<sup>5</sup> P. Wołoszyn, "Teoretyczne podstawy systemów kształcenia nauczycieli", [in:] *Nauczyciele nauczycieli*, op. cit., p. 71-72.

Krzysztof Konarzewski's socio-pedagogical narrative seems particularly inspiring from the point of view of this article, as it contains both a description and explanation of the peculiarities of the *teacher's professional role*, as well as reflections on the strategies of coping with the performance of this role. Konarzewski assumed that a social role is "a set of expectations shared by the majority of members of a given community"<sup>6</sup>. What is important is that these expectations define not only how a person belonging to a certain social category should think and what he or she should do, but also what they can demand from other people around them. According to the Author, a role understood in such a way becomes a fact in relation to which a person must take his or her own stance. This makes it possible not only to analyse various difficulties contained in the provision of the role itself, but also to study the ways in which people take a stand on a given role, assuming that the contemporary role of the teacher is "ambiguous, internally inconsistent, psychologically difficult and incompatible with his or her other important roles"<sup>7</sup>.

Taking up the theme of the indicated peculiarities of the teacher's professional role, Konarzewski carries out considerations that are very relevant to the topic of this study. For him, the *ambiguity of the role* is the deficiency and often the lack of agreed upon, concrete and measurable criteria of professional excellence. In other words, this ambiguity means not so much lack of knowledge about what a teacher should do, but rather lack of agreement about how to know that he or she is doing his or her job well. The quality of a teacher's work is not measured by the grades given to his or her students, as these are most often determined by the teacher herself/himself. Even more so, the quality of educational work is not assessed by any achieved results. For example, the independence of judgement inspired and developed by the teacher may be assessed differently by pupils themselves, by their parents, and by an examiner marking the school-leaving examination in the native language<sup>8</sup>.

Another peculiarity is the *internal inconsistency* of the role, which occurs when, under specific conditions, the fulfilment of some expecta-

<sup>6</sup> K. Konarzewski, "Nauczyciel", [in:] *Sztuka nauczania. Szkoła*, ed. K. Konarzewski, Warszawa 1998, p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151-152.

<sup>8</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 152-154.

tions hinders or precludes the fulfilment of others. Konarzewski points to three such groups of expectations: supporting the development of an individual student, reproduction of the social order, and introduction to spiritual culture. On the one hand, the teacher is required to have an individualized approach to each student in order to develop his/her potentialities, and on the other hand, the school and teachers select students, often hindering their development. The third group of expectations that the teacher must take a stand concerns the introduction of young people to such forms of spiritual culture as scientific knowledge, art, ethical patterns of life. It often happens that some spiritual values are appropriated in the name of current interests of various social groups and thus they may lose their universal character. The above examples lead to the conclusion that various requirements for the teacher make his/her professional role highly inconsistent<sup>9</sup>.

*Psychological difficulty* of the role is indicated by the attendant mental costs, for example<sup>10</sup>:

- bearing above-average responsibility for each student;
- unpredictability of situations that may arise in a group of students;
- risk of making mistakes and the burden of revealing and correcting them;
- relative irreversibility of the decisions made;
- feeling of helplessness in particularly difficult situations;
- performance of teaching duties at a pace and rhythm imposed by external circumstances;
- demanding attitude of some parents towards the school and the teacher;
- asymmetry in relations with pupils and parents;
- relatively low social status of the profession.

The professional role of the teacher is also characterized by its *incompatibility with other roles*, which particularly concerns women. The feminisation of the teaching profession means that there may be periodic disruptions to regular work with students due to a woman's role as a mother (maternity and parental leaves, sick leaves due to childcare). On

<sup>9</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 154-157.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 157-160.

the other hand, the fact that men practise this profession, due to relatively low salaries, may be at odds with the traditionally perceived role of the father (the so-called head of the family) who is socially expected to provide for the family<sup>11</sup>.

## PARENTIFICATION AS AN EXPERIENCE OF ROLE REVERSAL IN THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN

Katarzyna Schier, in her study of psychological role reversal, assumes after Nancy D. Chase that "Parentification in the family involves an action-related and/or emotional role swapping in which the child sacrifices his or her own needs for attention, security, and receiving developmental support in order to conform to and care about the instrumental or emotional needs of the parent"<sup>12</sup>.

Another researcher, Gregory J. Jurkovic, defines parentification as the child's experience of being cared for by family members in the following aspects: openness in defining the child's tasks, the type of work undertaken by the child, the amount of responsibility assigned to the child, the appropriateness of the tasks to the child's developmental stage, the person or persons to be cared for by the child, the child's level of internalization of the needs of his or her caregivers, the nature of boundaries within the family, and the social and ethical legitimacy of the child's actions<sup>13</sup>.

This author distinguishes two types of role substitution in the family: former and emotional parentification. The instrumental parentification consists, among other things, in a child taking over the care of such dimensions of family existence as earning money, caring for siblings or an ill parent, cleaning, shopping, cooking meals. The occurrence of this kind of parentification is fostered by contemporary social phenomena, for example: single parenthood, economic emigration or the appearance of

<sup>11</sup> See *ibidem*, p. 160-161.

<sup>12</sup> N. D. Chase, *Burdened Children. Theory, Research and Treatment of Parentification*, London, New Dehli 1999, p. 5, after: K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci. Psychologiczna problematyka odwrócenia ról w rodzinie*, Warszawa 2018, p. 22.

<sup>13</sup> See G. J. Jurkovic, *Lost Childhoodp, The Plight of the Parentified Child*, New York 1997, after: K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

a large group of families from across the eastern border. In single-parent families excessive responsibilities of the lone parent may be transferred to the child, economic emigration of one or both parents may lead to transferring part or even all of the parental duties to the child, and in the case of immigrant families the child may play a role of a guide, translator, or even a person co-responsible for economic well-being. On the other hand, a child experiencing emotional parentification may be cast in various roles: a caretaker of the parent suffering from depression or mental illness, as a confidant or comforter of one of the parents, a mediator or judge in marital conflicts, and a partner (also sexual)<sup>14</sup>.

It is worth noting that an important element of the intensification of the phenomenon of parentification in the family is the proportion between the child's involvement in adult roles and the clear and overt appreciation of the activities undertaken by the child. The excessive effort of the child, if it is noticed and appreciated, may not have such a destructive influence on its psyche and rather lead to the development of a sense of responsibility and psychological maturity<sup>15</sup>. However, more often than not, the role reversal is destructive, facilitated by the co-occurrence of disruptions both in terms of satisfying important developmental needs of children and the performance of parental roles. It is worth noting that this role swapping can go on for years in even more subtle and hidden forms.

A number of scientific reports indicate that in the family system the first-born children and only children are exposed to parentification, especially girls, because daughters, usually the oldest ones, are involved in performing parental functions, and helping others is inherent in the stereotype of the female role<sup>16</sup>. Thus, the feminization of the educational environment appears to increase the likelihood of

<sup>14</sup> See M. Kościńska, *Odpowiedzialni rodzice. Z doświadczeń psychologa*, Kraków 2011, p. 17-20; and also G. J. Jurkovic, A. Thierkield, R. Morrell, "Parentification of Adult Children of Divorce. A Multidimensional Analysis", *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 2001, vol. 30, p. 245-257, after: K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> See K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 280-281.

<sup>16</sup> See P. Zukow-Goldring, "Sibling Caregiving", [w:] *Handbook of Parenting, Mahwah*, New York 2002, after: J. Żarczyńska-Hyla, B. Zdaniuk, J. Piechnik-Borusowska, E. Karcz-Taranowicz, B. Kromolicka, "Uwarunkowania parentyfikacji doświadczanej w dzieciństwie i okresie dorastania z perspektywy młodych dorosłych", *Rocznik Andragogiczny* 2016, vol. 23, p. 203.

disruptions in occupational functioning as a result of parentification. Other studies have also recorded gender differences in the tasks that children are charged with, with boys more likely to earn money and be cast in the role of maternal confidants, while girls are more likely to care for family members and take care of the household<sup>17</sup>. In studies on adult children from families with alcohol problems, they were found to have experienced significantly higher levels of parentification than adults whose parents were not alcohol dependent<sup>18</sup>. Other researchers have also shown that daughters, rather than sons, were more likely to take on the tasks of alcoholic parents<sup>19</sup>. It is also worth mentioning that parentification in the family is not always experienced by all children, because often the most sensitive and responsive child is chosen for this role<sup>20</sup>. The studies also verified the high probability of parentification of a child in a situation of conflict between parents, when one parent withdrew from the marital relationship, the abandoned one sought attention and solace from the child<sup>21</sup>. It is also assumed that parentification is intergenerational and its mechanism should be considered in relation to at least three successive generations, and certainly role reversal with one's own parents<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> See L. Burton, "Childhood Adultification in Economically Disadvantaged Families. A Conceptual Model", *Family Relation* 2007, vol. 56, p. 329-345, after: K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> See N. D. Chase, M. P. Deming, M. C. Wells, "Parentification, Parental Alcoholism and Academic Status Among Young Adults", *American Journal of Family Therapy* 1998, vol. 26, p. 105-114, after: K. Gąsior, *Funkcjonowanie noo-psychospołeczne i problemy psychiczne dorosłych dzieci alkoholików*, Warszawa 2012, p. 87.

<sup>19</sup> See M. L. Kelley et al., "Parentification and Family Responsibility in the Family of Origin of Adult Children of Alcoholics", *Addictive Behaviours* 2007, vol. 32, p. 675-685, after: K. Gąsior, *Funkcjonowanie noo-psychospołeczne i problemy psychiczne dorosłych dzieci alkoholików*, op. cit., p. 80.

<sup>20</sup> See J. M. Ohntrup, E. Pollak, A. Plass, P. Wiegand-Greffe, "Parentifizierung – Elternbefragung zur destruktiven Parentifizierung von Kinder psychisch erkrankter Eltern", [in:] *Kinder mit psychisch kranken Eltern. Klinik und Forschung*, ed. P. Wiegand-Greffe, F. Mattejat, A. Lenz, Göttingen 2010, p. 375-398, after: K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> See J. Macfie, R. M. Houts, A. P. Pressal, M. J. Cox, "Pathways from Infant Exposure to Marital Conflict to Parent-Toddler Role Reversal", *Infant Mental Health Journal* 2008, vol. 29, p. 297-319, after: A. Łączyńska, "Zaburzenia procesu mentalizacji jako mechanizm wyjaśniający związek między tendencją do somatyzacji a odwróceniem ról w rodzinie pochodzenia", [in:] *Zapisane w ciele: związek ciało-psychika u dzieci i rodziców*, ed. K. Schier, Warszawa 2009, p. 42.

<sup>22</sup> See K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 280.

Based on Katarzyna Schier's review of research studies, higher risk groups include adults who experienced family history as children<sup>23</sup>:

- an alcohol or other substance abuse problem;
- a chronic physical or mental illness of the parents;
- disabilities of siblings;
- various forms of natural and social orphanhood;
- permanent conflict situations;
- divorce-related tensions.

While invoking numerous foreign publications on role reversal in the family, it is worth emphasizing the growing interest in the phenomenon of parentification also among Polish researchers. An exceptional contribution in this regard is the work of Katarzyna Schier, culminating in an excellent monograph, cited here many times *Dorośle dzieci. Psychologiczna problematyka odwrócenia ról w rodzinie (Adult children. Psychological subject matter of role reversal in the family)*<sup>24</sup>. There are also numerous theoretical, empirical and review works of other authors. The phenomenon of parentification of adults who grew up in families with alcohol problems was addressed by Iwona Grzegorzewska, this issue was also discussed by Krzysztof Gąsior in his monograph<sup>25</sup>. The topic of the mechanism of role reversal in the family from the intergenerational perspective was raised by Monika Wasilewska<sup>26</sup>. The relationship between family dysfunctionality and child parentification was presented in the article by Magdalena Błażek<sup>27</sup>. The overview article by Teresa Rostowska and Judyta Borchet focuses on the specificity and determinants of family roles, the dysfunctional process of role reversal in the family<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem, p. 19.

<sup>24</sup> See ibidem.

<sup>25</sup> See I. Grzegorzewska, "Parentyfikacja w rodzinach z problemem alkoholowym", *Alcoholism and Drug Addition* 2016, no. 29, p. 28-29; K. Gąsior, *Funkcjonowanie noo-psycho-społeczne i problemy psychiczne dorosłych dzieci alkoholików*, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> See M. Wasilewska, "Parentyfikacja jako efekt międzypokoleniowego dziedzictwa traumy", [in:] *Reflection on Psychological Mechanism of Trauma and Posttraumatic Development*, ed. D. Kubacka-Jasiecka, M. Kuleta, Kraków 2012.

<sup>27</sup> See M. Błażek, "Parental Attitudes and Parentification of Children in Families with Limited Parental Care Competencies", *Polish Journal of Applied Psychology* 2016, vol. 14, p. 93-108.

<sup>28</sup> See T. Rostowska, J. Borchet, "Proces parentyfikacji w kontekście teorii systemowej", *Roczniki Pedagogiczne* 2016, vol. 44, p. 5-21.

The results of a Polish-Canadian team of researchers who analyzed the phenomenon of parentification (frequency, types and determinants) in a group of 1,045 students of pedagogical faculties at the Universities of Opole and Szczecin seem relevant to the topic of this study. It turned out that parentification, i.e. the role reversal among future employees of the education system, correlates with the selected sociodemographic factors, unfavourable random events in the family as well as the features and behaviour of parents. The prevalence of the phenomenon is also surprising, as more than 70% of respondents experienced instrumental or emotional parentification of varying intensity, with one in five indicating a sense of harm because of it<sup>29</sup>. Role reversal was also qualitatively analyzed in the latest research presented in Barbara Chojnacka's monograph. The researcher, on the basis of adult narratives of people experiencing emotional and instrumental parentification in the family, has distinguished a whole range of roles undertaken in childhood: guardian, educator, servant, defender, advisor, decision-maker, partner, confidant, intermediary, culprit, organizer, and bread-winner<sup>30</sup>.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF PARENTIFICATION AND PERFORMING THE PROFESSIONAL ROLE BY TEACHERS

At this point, it should be noted that the attempt to present the multifaceted, complex nature of the phenomenon of determinants and potential effects of parentification among the teaching profession exceeds the framework of this study. Therefore, in this section I will refer only to some selected aspects of parentification as a source of interference in the performance of the teacher's professional role.

### PARENTIFICATION AND THE AMBIGUITY OF THE TEACHER'S PROFESSIONAL ROLE

If role ambiguity indicates lack of clear measures of the quality of teacher's work, then Katarzyna Schier points to the effect of parentification,

<sup>29</sup> See J. Żarczyńska-Hyla, B. Zdaniuk, J. Piechnik-Borusowska, E. Karcz-Taranowicz, B. Kromolicka, "Uwarunkowania parentyfikacji doświadczanej w dzieciństwie i okresie dorastania z perspektywy młodych dorosłych", op. cit., p. 212-213.

<sup>30</sup> See B. Chojnacka, *Doświadczenia parentyfikacji w perspektywie biograficznej*, Kraków 2021.

which manifests itself in adulthood as relative submissiveness in work relations at school and interpersonal relations with colleagues. The source of such behaviour lies in childhood and consists in internalizing the needs of the parentifying parent, which are considered an 'alien' part of the adult personality. The author concludes, based on her experience working with patients, that in childhood they experienced their parents' approval of certain attitudes and inhibition or exclusion of others. The external façade of a strong relationship of dependence on others can then be formed<sup>31</sup>.

The ambiguous definition of success inherent in the ambiguity of a teacher's professional role can make people with traumatic experiences of parentification (for example, ACA<sup>32</sup>) susceptible to such disturbances as: a tendency to persistent and psychologically burdensome seeking of approval, readiness for maximum loyalty, even towards people who do not deserve it, or an extreme tendency to take excessive responsibility<sup>33</sup>. As Krzysztof Konarzewski claims:

a teacher craving for knowledge about his own value finds it in the eyes of his headmaster, parents of his students, and finally the students themselves. This criterion condemns her/him to seek the respect of others, and thus makes him/her their client, and at the same time a competitor to his/her colleagues<sup>34</sup>.

In another dimension, this ambiguity is associated with an excessive experience of discord between the theory and practice of education and an ambivalent attitude towards knowledge and scientific authorities, which in turn can lead to strong frustration.

#### PARENTIFICATION AND THE INTERNAL INCONSISTENCY OF THE TEACHER'S PROFESSIONAL ROLE

Coping with internal role inconsistency can be very difficult for people with parenting experiences because of the emotion regulation disorders

<sup>31</sup> See K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 67

<sup>32</sup> ACA is a term used in addiction therapy to describe a person who grew up in a family with an alcohol problem as a child.

<sup>33</sup> See A. Klodecki, "Funkcjonowanie rodziny z problemem alkoholowym", [in:] *Rodzice i dzieci. Psychologiczny obraz sytuacji problemowych*, ed. E. Milewska, A. Szymanowska, Warszawa 2000, p. 183.

<sup>34</sup> K. Konarzewski, "Nauczyciel", op. cit., p. 154.

they often suffer from. This includes, for example, alexithymia, known as emotional blindness or emotional illiteracy<sup>35</sup>. Research indicates that alexithymics are often unaware of their feelings, are unable to distinguish and describe emotions, and their verbal and non-verbal expression of emotions is disturbed<sup>36</sup>. Thus, the above-described disturbance of emotion regulation may be of paramount importance when confronted with the conflicting demands of the role, for example, the student's signaled need to support his or her individual development, and the school's order to reproduce the social system, often contradictory to the individuality. This emotional blindness may have a destructive influence on the most important, from the pedagogical point of view, personal relationship between a teacher and a pupil and direct the teacher's activity mainly to the implementation of ideological guidelines or following the curriculum<sup>37</sup>.

#### PARENTIFICATION AND THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIFFICULTY OF THE TEACHER'S PROFESSIONAL ROLE

With regard to the psychological difficulty inherent in the professional role of a teacher, it is worth adopting the position of Lisa M. Hooper, according to whom destructive parentification should be classified as a traumatic experience that leads to long-term psychological and somatic changes of a person. Also, the results of research indicating that the experience of parenting trauma paves the way for increased reactivity to subsequent traumatic events in adulthood, for example in professional life, should be taken into account<sup>38</sup>.

The specificity of professions involving the personal use of one's own individuality to help others, allows us to assume, following Antonietta DiCaccavo, that also teachers with the experience of parentification may decide to choose the profession due to an unconscious "desire

<sup>35</sup> See E. Młozniak, K. Schier, "Aleksytymia, ciało, psychoterapia – nowa perspektywa badawcza i kliniczna", *Psychoterapia* 2012, vol. 161, p. 29-40, after: K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 109-110.

<sup>36</sup> See G. J. Taylor, R. M. Bagby, J. D. A. Parker, *Disorders of Affect Regulation. Alexthymia in Medical and Psychiatric Illnes*, Cambridge 1997; R. Pally, "Emotional Processing. The Mind-Body Connection", *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 1998, vol. 79, after: K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>37</sup> See K. Konarzewski, "Nauczyciel", op. cit., p. 165-172.

<sup>38</sup> Such research is invoked in: K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 59.

to work through scars and disappointments of their own childhood”, expecting recognition and approval from students and colleagues, which they often did not receive in their families of origin. Then, by becoming emotionally involved with other teachers, students, and their parents, they expose themselves to excessive stress on the one hand, while on the other, they may distance themselves and maintain control<sup>39</sup>.

#### PARENTIFICATION AND THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF THE TEACHER'S PROFESSIONAL ROLE WITH OTHER SOCIAL ROLES

In addition to the professional role, a teacher performs an array of other roles such as: a child of his or her parents; a student if he or she is completing his or her education; a spouse, a parent if he or she has a family of his or her own; a citizen, etc. According to Konarzewski, if the teacher's professional role interferes to a sufficiently serious degree with his/her other duties, which he/she cannot neglect, then this role can be neglected<sup>40</sup>. The experience of parentification may interfere with the updating of the hierarchy of roles depending on circumstances or flexibility in their implementation, as exemplified by submissiveness to the official ideological position formulated by school authorities, divergent from one's own beliefs, and personal civic awareness of a democratic nature. It may serve to maintain a relative status quo, as a disciplined employee, but result in a frustrating abandonment of one's beliefs.

Given the variety of roles assumed, destructive parenting in a feminized teaching environment can sometimes be linked to the phenomenon known as the *Impostor Phenomenon*<sup>41</sup>. Clinical analyses revealed that women who were actively able to demonstrate significant achievements were unable to internalize them. They attributed the occurrence of these achievements to various external factors: luck, chance, personal charm, good social contacts, and hard work. In doing so, they devalued their own skills, intelligence, and personal values.

<sup>39</sup> See A. DiCaccavo, “Working with Parentification. Implications for Clients and Counselling Psychologist”, *Psychology and Psychotherapy. Theory, Research and Practice* 2006, vol. 79, p. 470, after: K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 273.

<sup>40</sup> See K. Konarzewski, “Nauczyciel”, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>41</sup> See J. Langford, P. R. Clance, “The Impostor Phenomenon: Recent Research Findings Regarding Dynamics, Personality and Family Patterns and Their Implications for Treatment”, *Psychotherapy. Theory, Research, Practice, Training* 1993, vol. 30, p. 495-501; also: K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 34-35.

## SUMMARY

Summing up the considerations presented in this article, it is worth emphasizing that the reversal of roles between adults and children, which originates in the family, makes school an environment in which both parentified pupils and teachers can meet. Both groups need competent support, so sometimes professional help of a psychotherapeutic nature seems necessary. If researchers draw attention to the relationship between relational trauma resulting from parentification, and the nature of professional work related to the broader concept of helping, it should be made clear that the issue of parentification should become a subject of teacher education, as well as support in the process of practicing the profession.

While emphasizing the importance of the above strategy of psychotherapeutic support for adults who have experienced parentification in their family of origin, we cannot ignore the suggestion of prevention aimed also at parents and children. Katarzyna Schier emphasizes that these actions should be directed not only to people from risk groups, but also to the general public, because contemporary socio-cultural reality fosters the reversal of roles in the family<sup>42</sup>.

Although the educational system has not yet devised ways of recognizing the manifestations and consequences of role reversal, it seems necessary to develop professionally conducted psychoeducation with the use of workshop methods, mentalization, drama, computer programs, educational films, and special publications. It is also worth mentioning that teachers who are aware of the experience of parentification in their family of origin may decide to include psychotherapy in their personal and professional development.

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<sup>42</sup> See K. Schier, *Dorośle dzieci*, op. cit., p. 277-279.

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