

Promoting the value of education as a challenge to the contemporary school

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Abstract

Promoting learning is one of the most important challenges for the contemporary school. How to convince young people that science and learning are values? How to show that it is a pleasure and a necessity at the same time? How to develop positive attitudes towards learning individually and in cooperation with others? These are problems that are the subject of today's debate in the field of education. This publication is part of a debate on the development of positive attitudes among students towards learning. This paper presents the results of research on this issue, based on results obtained in external evaluations of schools.

Keywords: promoting education, lifelong learning

Promotion of education – why it is the challenge of modern times

Promoting education, learning, and knowledge is one of the key challenges that the modern school is facing (Townsend, 2012). How to convince young people that learning is a must, a pass to the world of the future, which is then likely to become more user-friendly, once we enjoy learning and accept its inevitability. As later, after graduation, one will need to continue learning. The twenty-first century, already christened as the age of science and education, cannot choose - the idea of "lifelong learning", proclaimed by the European Commission, is not just a pipe dream among officials. Transformations of the civilization: social, technological, and economic changes, with the transition from an industrial society to a knowledge-based society make it necessary for adults to learn new skills in their professional fields, but also quite often to learn new things, acquire new jobs and skills. Formal learning (and also, of course, informal and incidental learning) as necessary for one to maintain oneself on the labour market has already become part of the experience of life for thousands of people who finished their school careers a long time ago.

Developing a positive attitude towards school education will foster learning in adulthood. In the document "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. European Reference Framework", the learning skill has been identified as one of the eight skills that can to ensure personal fulfilment, active citizenship, social inclusion and increase the level of employment (Key Competencies, 2007). In this situation, emphasis put on thinking about the school as an institution primarily focused on student learning, on their ability to learn, is understandable (The Nature of Learning, 2010).

The concept of "learning" dominated concepts and discourses not only related to school education or educational policy. It is worth noting that even the latest theories and methods concerning management today are focused around the concept of learning among individuals and organizations - "learning organizations", the management of knowledge and information, benchmarking, total participation management, empowerment, and others. The primacy of the concept of learning in organizations reorganized ways of thinking about the management of not only companies, but also of public and non-governmental organizations. The challenge today is the ability to cooperate within the organization, but also cross-organizational cooperation, networking, various organization networks, clusters, virtual teams often appointed to conduct inter-organizational projects and ending their activities at the implementation. The implementation of these projects is also a continuous process of learning – joint creation, replication, learning to use a variety of data and the potential of different subjects, solving problems by searching for the most effective strategies for this purpose. It is also worth noting that today's organizations of a new type, organized and managed differently than they were a dozen-odd years ago, often with a flat organizational structure, put other requirements to their employees. In addition to the ability, willingness and desire to learn, they are expected to include self-reliance, creativity, active participation, responsibility, ability to cooperate with others – even in an intercultural environment, coping with stress, solving problems. These are competencies to be promoted at schools by means of positive experiences, thus learning to use them.

What is worth mentioning in the consideration of the promotion of education is, of course, the technological revolution, which has made access to different types of data almost immediate and often very easy. The Internet is widely used by students to obtain various types of information, becoming an important form of learning, but also promoting knowledge. Faced with technological changes, the school has lost its position as the "treasure-chest of knowledge." Another role in education is thus played by teachers. The question is still valid: how to take advantage of this great civilization change at school. On the one hand, there are demands to make schools free of modern technologies, on the other, their use is promoted by

importing latest technologies to schools, the usefulness of which in practice turns out to be disappointing. Examples are observed, when teachers prohibit the use of students' phones, smartphones, tablets, etc., while expecting from the teacher to be Internet-literate and use modern information technologies in the educational process (Crawford, 2012).

I have compiled this introduction in order to emphasize the importance of how difficult and responsible a role in the creation (restoration?) of positive attitude towards learning and knowledge is to be played by the modern school. To a large extent, it depends on the school whether young people will be infected with the bacillus exploration, experimenting and analyzing data, and whether learning will not be associated by them only with a dull and heavy duty, which will still need to be perfumed after graduation. The huge challenge is the fact that the need for learning for life, formal and informal, allowing the maintenance or obtaining a job, does not apply, as so far, to some groups, but to entire societies. The school is, for now, the institution educating people en masse and, so far, it seems irreplaceable in this role, so it is mostly the school that is facing the challenge of promoting the value of education.

What is promoting the value of education?

Promoting the value of education is, simply speaking, shaping a positive attitude towards learning, taking action to convince young people that learning is worthwhile, inspire learning, advising how to learn successfully and explaining what to learn for (Kołodziejczyk and Starypan, 2012). Here, it is important to demonstrate to students that learning is interesting, engaging, and needed. Thus, the essence of education promotion is the process of education itself, planned, organized and carried out in a way enabling the creation and maintenance of approval for learning among students, creating an environment in which it is possible to develop a positive attitude towards education. Everyday, students experience how they feel about the learning process at school. Thus, from day to day, they shape their opinion on education and its value. A positive perception of education will result from the daily students' acceptance of what happens at school, which is conditional upon a number of factors. Probably, we can speak of a holistic, multi-dimensional experience of school existence. For young people, the school is almost synonymous with "learning" because this institution is mostly associated with the term. However, we spend too little time on conscious shaping of positive attitudes towards education, as one of the most important issues faced by the modern school, as Anthony Townsend writes (2012, p. 116).

Among many factors that are worth taking into account in the process of promoting the value of education, affecting its reception, include, inter alia, the following:

- affirmative attitudes among students towards learning – individually and in cooperation with others; experiencing the excitement of learning, self-motivation to learn; appreciation by others, positive self-esteem;
- the opportunity to develop interests, individual abilities, aptitudes, talents, individualized learning, coping with problem solving, experiencing and awareness of own development,
- a feeling of meaning and relevance of acquired knowledge and skills, awareness of the connection of school knowledge with knowledge used at the workplace, information about graduate careers, clearly formulated goals and requirements; useful and formative feedback,
- activities of students, interesting and engaging content, methods and forms of work in the classroom, appropriate and adequate use of information technology,
- subjective treatment of students, knowledge of students' influence on the educational process, democratization of educational process, student participation, responsibility for themselves and others in decisions taken by students,
- school atmosphere conducive to learning, good relationships between students and between students and teachers, a sense of physical and mental safety, good interpersonal communication,

- partnership between the school and parents of students, parental support, positive feedback from parents about the school,
- influence of teachers and headmaster on the organization and process of education, positively evaluated by students and parents.

Research carried out by David Instance and Hanna Dumont (2010) was helpful in determining these factors; they point out seven characteristics of an environment conducive to learning. According to the authors, these are:

- treatment of pupils as the main participants, encouraging them to actively engage and develop their understanding of their role in the learning process,
- building on the social nature of learning and active endorsement of structured and collaborative learning,
- adjustment, on the part of teachers, to students' motivation and teachers' awareness of the role played by emotions in achieving results,
- sensitivity to differences between individual pupils, taking into account their prior knowledge,
- development of syllabuses that require hard work is a challenge, but they are not to be "overloaded",
- putting clear requirements and use of assessment strategies that are consistent with these requirements; emphasis is laid on formative feedback,
- combination of knowledge from different disciplines, emphasizing links with the local and global community.

While preparing the list of factors influencing the formation of a positive attitude towards learning, I used research varied out by John Hattie, which concludes that determinants that have the greatest impact on student's achievement, are, inter alia: the quality and consistency of provided feedback, teacher-student relationship, teaching based on problem solving, teaching strategies, challenging targets, peer influence, and parental involvement (Hattie, 2008). In another study conducted by Margaret C. Wang, Geneva D. Haertel and Walberg J. Hebert (1993-1994), to which I am also referring, the following are mentioned as key factors relevant to learning: the ability of pupils to acquire knowledge (cognitive and meta-cognitive processes), methods of organization of the school day, classroom management, relationships between students and teachers, home environment and parental support.

Considering the promotion of education, I omitted the marketing context, in my opinion applying more to the school promotion and offer. The aim of marketing is primarily attracting new students and this is the market-oriented character in activities carried out by the school, calling it a promotion (or elements of the so-called promotion mix, mainly in advertising and public relations), according to marketing nomenclature. Marketing instruments can of course be used to achieve the goal of promoting the value of education, especially as a modern means of communication. But then, these actions are defined as social marketing.

The aim and object of the study, analyzed persons, methods and research tools

Promoting the education is a complex process, multidimensional, and requiring an individualized approach to each student. The analysis that I conducted, shows only a fraction of a plethora of factors that influence the perception of school education by students. In the study, I chose questions addressed to students, concerning the indicated above factors combined in the perception of school education. The aim of this study was to obtain information on what, from the perspective of students, the process of education is like in the context of promoting its values at Polish schools. I concentrated on the following issues:

- whether students like to learn, and are able to learn,
- if the school can develop their interests,
- whether they receive support from teachers, whether they are valued and have the opportunity to present the results of their work,
- whether they have a sense of meaning and relevance of the acquired knowledge and skills,
- whether the atmosphere at school is conducive to learning.

I was also interested how students evaluate their activity and how it manifests itself, and how they evaluate the work of teachers. The last issue that I examined was whether in schools there is a dialogue with students about graduate careers, i.e. what is being done by those who graduated from the school.

In the study, I used the results of external evaluations conducted in Poland in April and May 2013. I used a questionnaire as the method of study. I carried out an analysis of students' answers to multiple choice, closed questions in electronic surveys of two types:

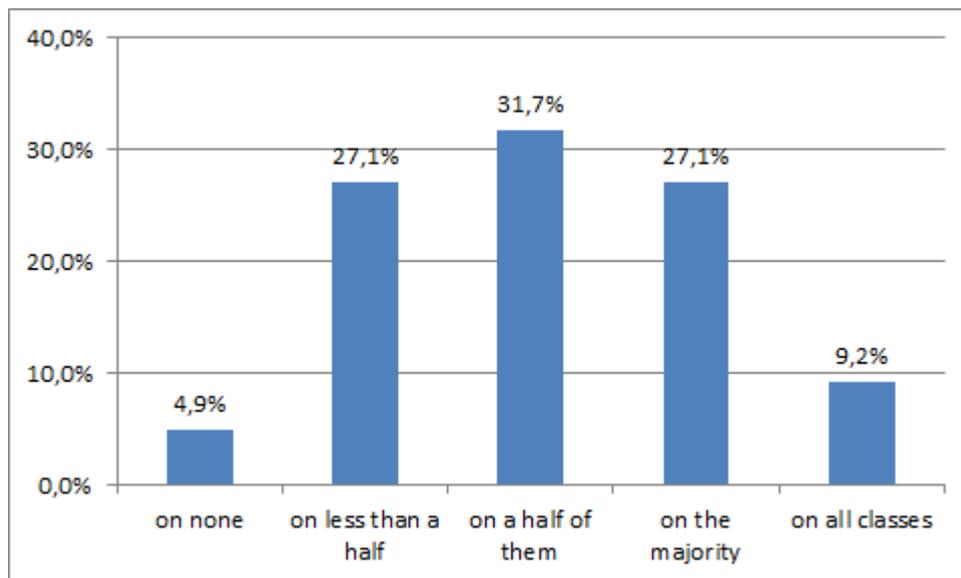
- survey, "My Day", addressed to the oldest pupils, students participating in the study were aged 13, 16 and 19 and 20 (depending on the school type)
- survey "My School", addressed to students in grades one year younger than the oldest, the study involved students aged 12, 15 and 18 or 19 (depending on the school type).

For this study, I chose some of the questions from both surveys. In the survey, students from different types of schools participated: primary, middle and secondary schools located throughout Poland.

The results of the study

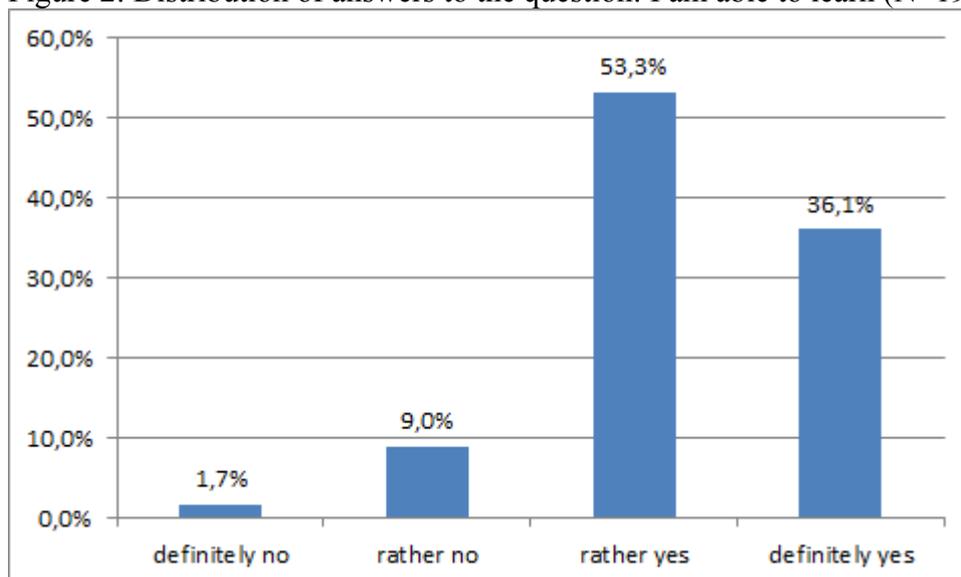
The analysis of the results will begin with the question of whether students like to learn and what part of the activities in which they participate they can define as such in which they enjoy learning (see Figure 1). The survey results show that only 36% of students stated that they enjoyed all or most of classes. A comparable percentage of respondents – 32% did not enjoy any classes or less than half of the classes. On average, almost every third student positively evaluates his/her attitude towards learning during half of the classes. It is worth noting that on the one hand, only 9% express wide acceptance for learning, and on the other hand, less than 5% declare they do not like at all to learn at school. Students also rated their skills as to whether they are able to learn (see Figure 2). Among them - 89% believe that they are.

Figure 1: Distribution of answers to the question: I enjoy studying (N=1969)



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

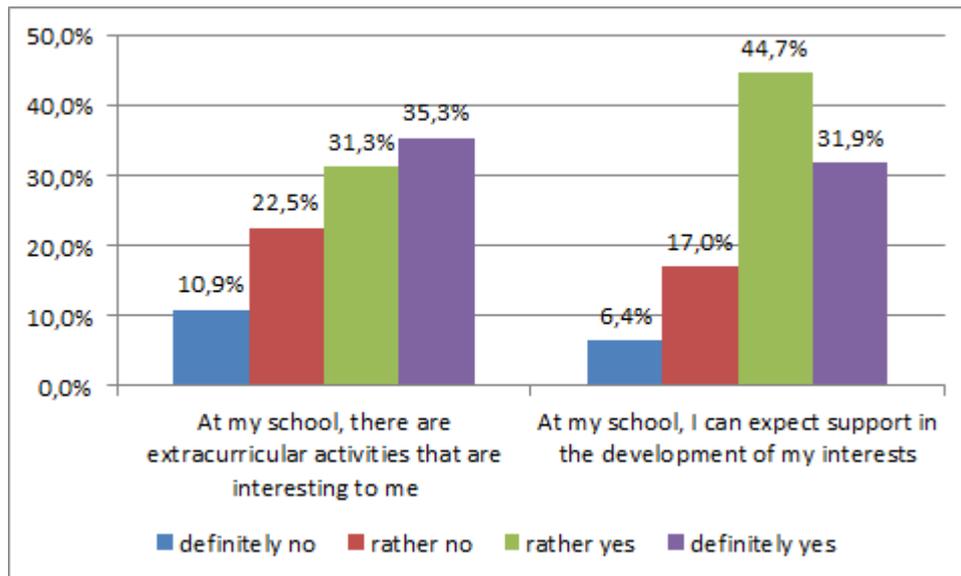
Figure 2: Distribution of answers to the question: I am able to learn (N=1963)



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

In shaping a positive attitude to education, it is important to experience the fact that the school offers the opportunity to learn interesting things and that students receive support from teachers in their development (see Figure 3). Students were asked what they think about the optional activities offered by the school as those that are meant to develop students' interest. Every third student did not find interesting suggestions for extra-curricular activities; for others (66.6%), extra-curricular activities are interesting. More than 76% of students believe that teachers are prepared to provide them with support in the development of their interests; almost every fourth cannot expect such support from teachers.

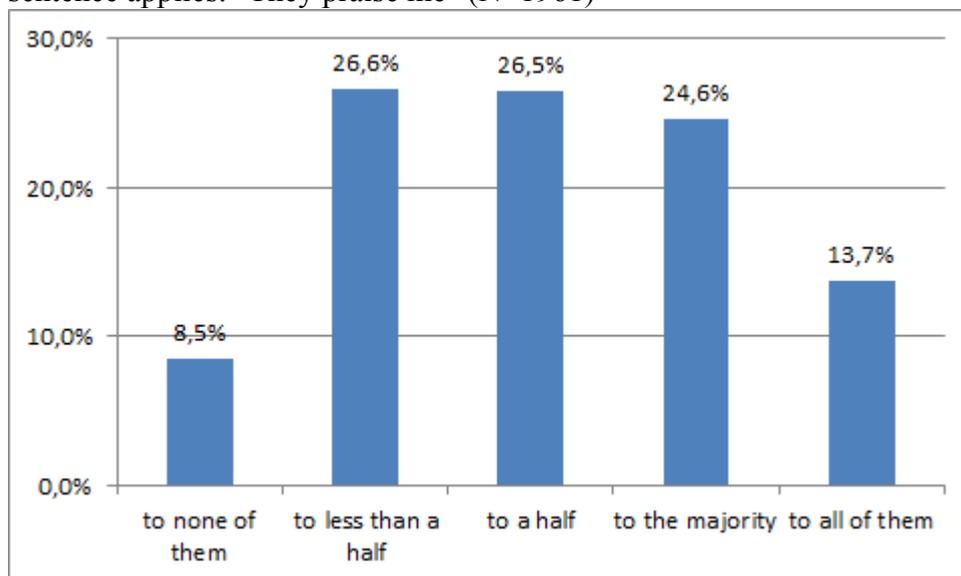
Figure 3: Distributions of answers to the question: At my school, there are extracurricular activities that are interesting to me (N=1976) and: At my school, I can expect support in the development of my interests (N=1977).



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

What is important in building a positive self-esteem, as an important factor influencing learning outcomes, is the element of students' being appreciated for their efforts by teachers and other students. Among the respondents, 8.5% did not experience any praises from teachers, and less than 14% of the students are praised by all teachers (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Distribution of answers to the question: To what part of the teachers the following sentence applies: "They praise me" (N=1961)

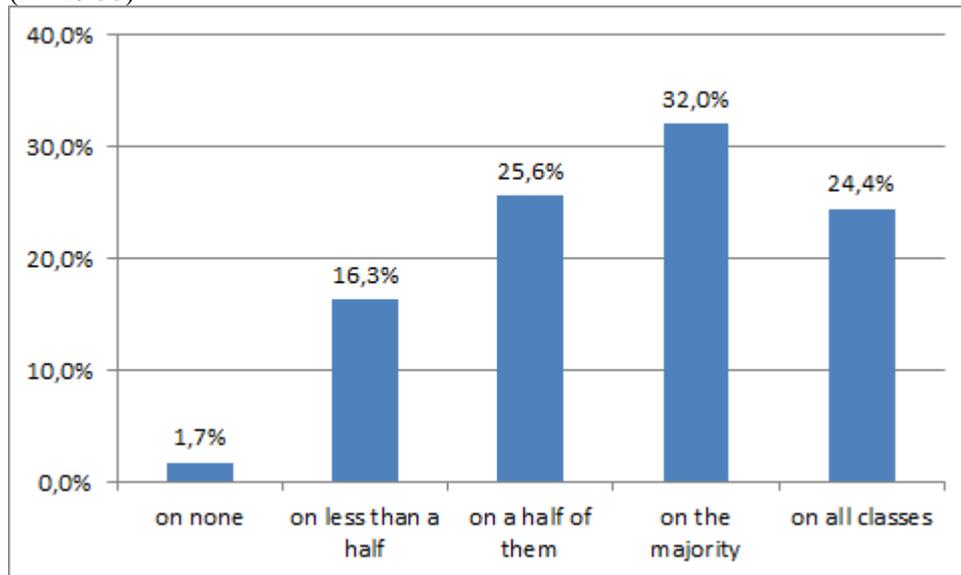


Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

Students also expressed their views on whether they have a sense of purpose, meaning and relevance of the acquired knowledge and skills (see Figures 5 and 6). Formulating objectives and explaining the reasons, what the usability of the content covered in class is happens, in the opinion of more than half of the students (56.4%) in most or in all classes. Every fourth student is aware of the purpose and meaning of learning in about half of the classes, and 16% of them – in less than half of the classes. 1.7% of respondents commented that they do not know what and why something is taught – in any class (Figure 5).

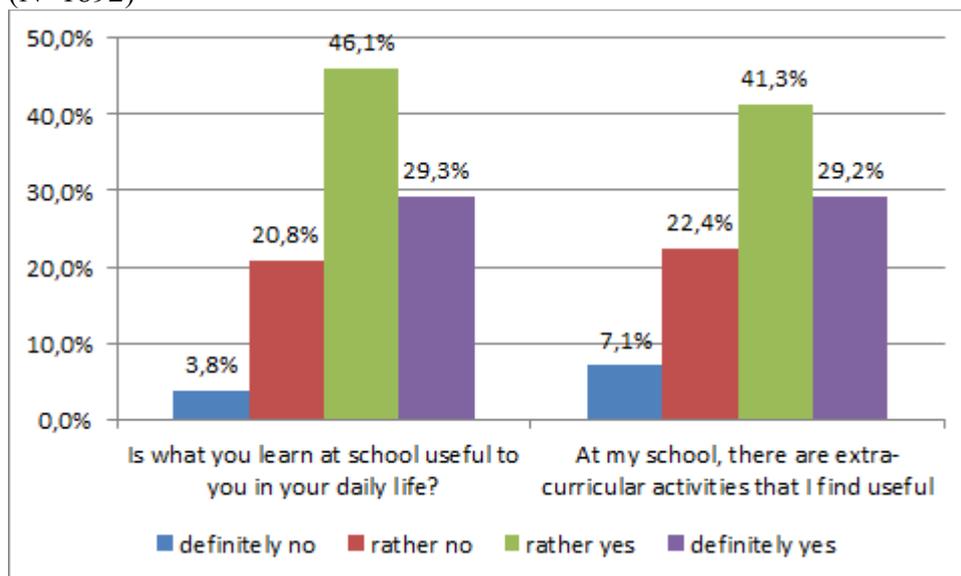
What does, from the perspective of students, the usefulness of the acquired knowledge look like? Every fourth student thinks that what is taught at school is not useful in everyday life; a similar percentage of pupils - 29.5% do not see the usefulness offered by the school's extracurricular activities. For about three-quarters of respondents, the connection of what they are learning in school and with the usefulness of this knowledge is more obvious (it is worth noting that for only slightly more than a quarter of the student's knowledge is "definitely" useful) - see Figure 6.

Figure 5: Distributions of answers to the question: I know why and for what I'm learning (N=1966)



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

Figure 6: Distributions of answers to the question: Is what you learn at school useful to you in your daily life? (N=1903), At my school, there are extra-curricular activities that I find useful (N=1892)

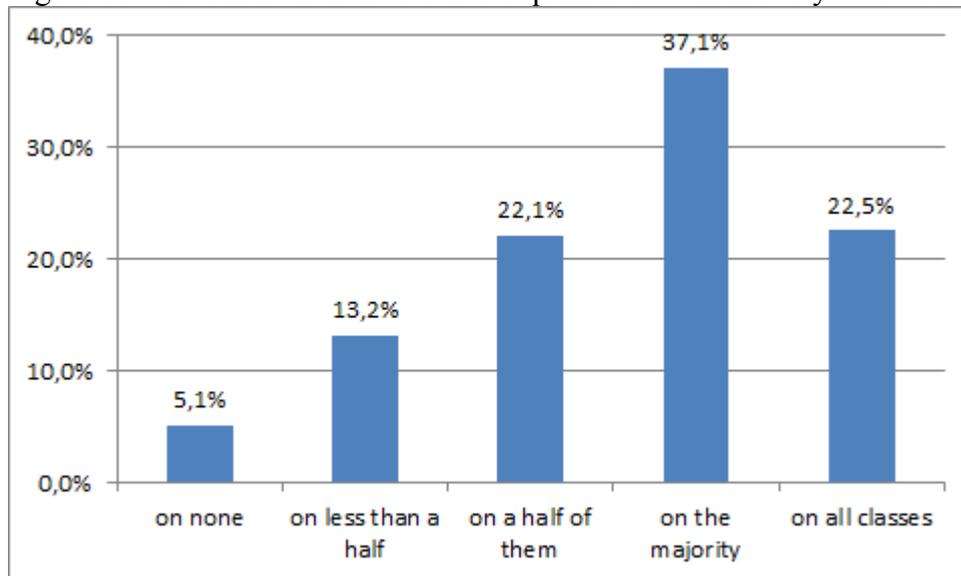


Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

Students also referred to their involvement in classes and types of activities in the classroom. Almost 60% said that on the study day, they were involved in the majority of

activities during most or all classes. 5% of the students do not engage in any activities at all, and just over 35% spoke about their commitment to during half or less than half of the classes (Figure 7).

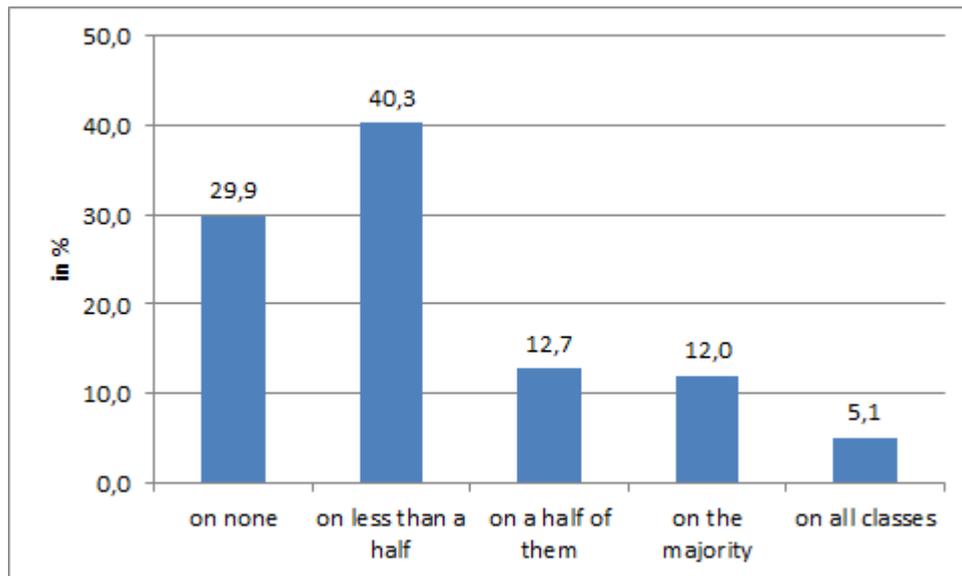
Figure 7: Distribution of answers to the question: I was actively involved today (N=1856)



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

Literature emphasizes the social nature of learning (Bandura, 2007). The positive results gives students working together in pairs and groups. In addition to becoming more involved in the work of the classroom, it is also an important element in the creation of cooperation among students, also useful later in their careers. Working in groups or in pairs may evoke emotions to a greater extent, needed in learning, help develop better memorizing skills, and cause more satisfaction from the tasks performed in the group, also because of better work results (synergy). Finally, it is an important tool enhancing the relationship between students and learning a variety of other skills (interpersonal communication, negotiation, respect for others, work organization, etc.). How does the school teach these competencies, in the opinion of students? According to nearly 30% of respondents, they did not work in pairs or in groups on any lessons on the study day, and 40% said it took place during less than half of the class. Only five percent of the students said that such work methods were used in all classes (see Figure 8).

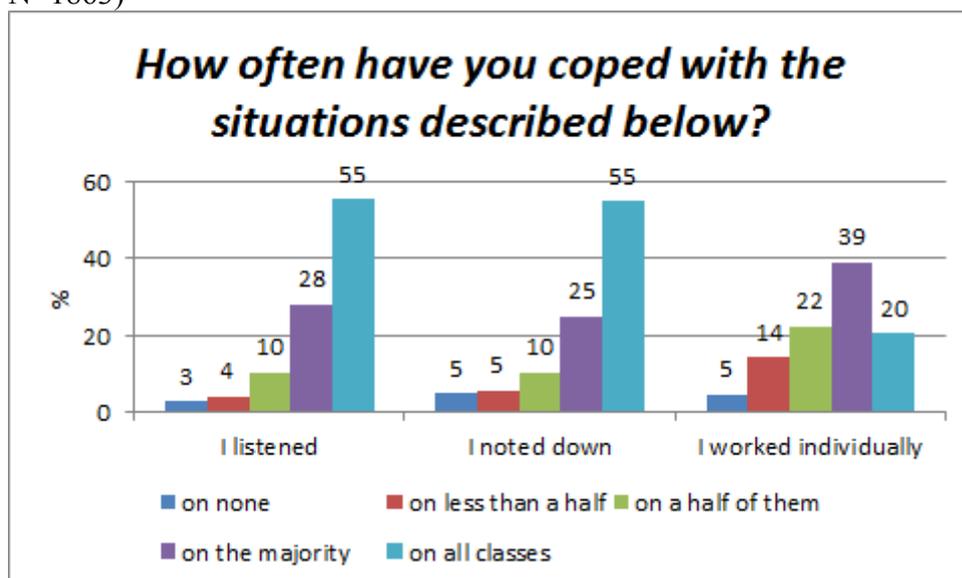
Figure 8: Distribution of answers to the question: Today, we had group tasks in class (N=1862)



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

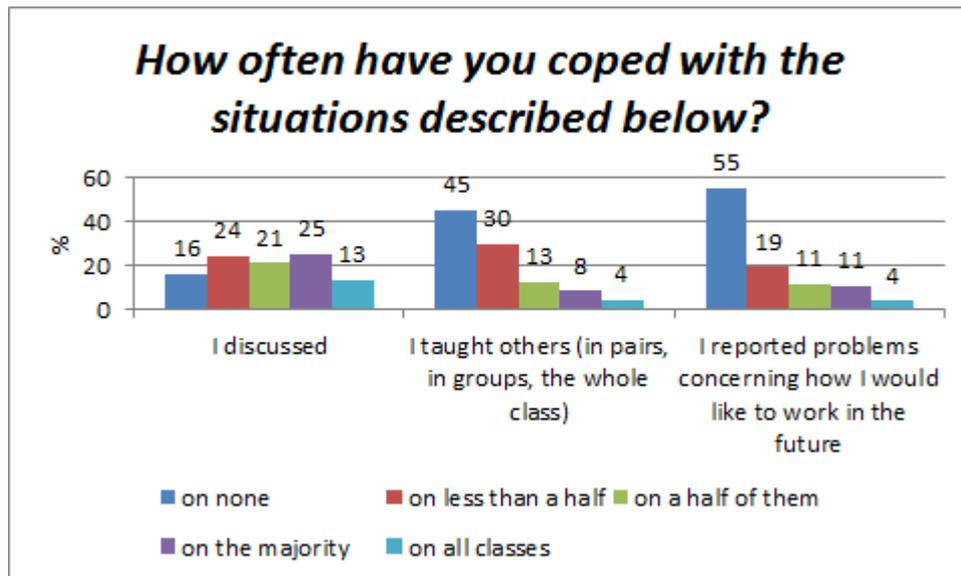
Answers to the question about working in pairs or groups are confirmed in the opinions of students concerning types of activities in the classroom. The survey shows an overwhelming predominance of passive forms of participation of students in classes, and of individual activities (see Figure 9). Students in oldest grades declared that on the day of survey, in all the classes or in most of them – they listened (83%), took notes (80%) and worked alone (59%). In contrast, they declare that they taught others much less (see Figure 10): in pairs, as a group, the whole class (12% - in all or most classes); they reported ideas about how they would like to work (15% - in all or most classes).

Figure 9: Distribution of answers to the question: How often did activities described below take place at school today (Listening - N=1858; Taking notes - N=1861, Working alone - N=1863)



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

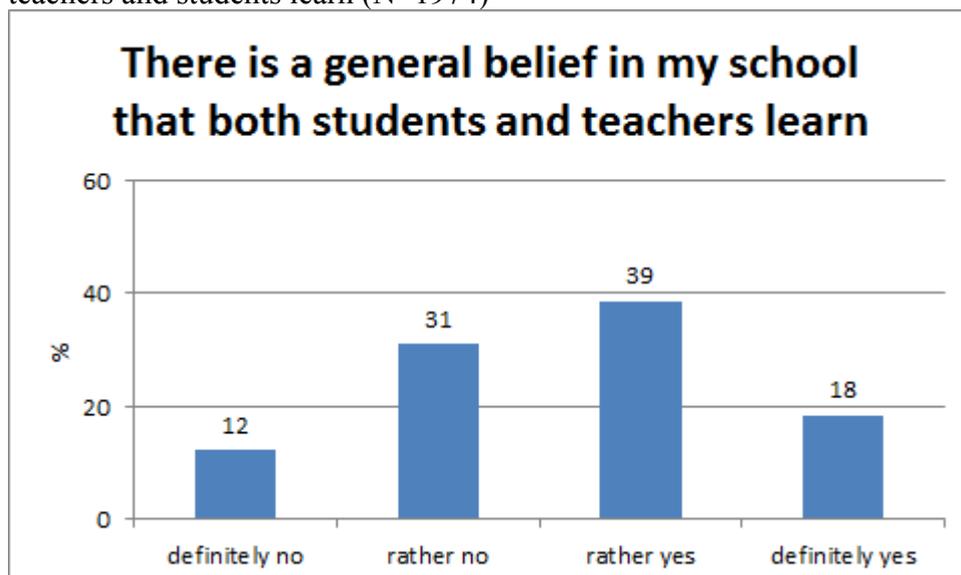
Figure 10: Distribution of answers to the question: How often did activities described below take place at school today (I discussed - N=1862 I taught others N=1860; Today I submitted ideas ...-N=1853)



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

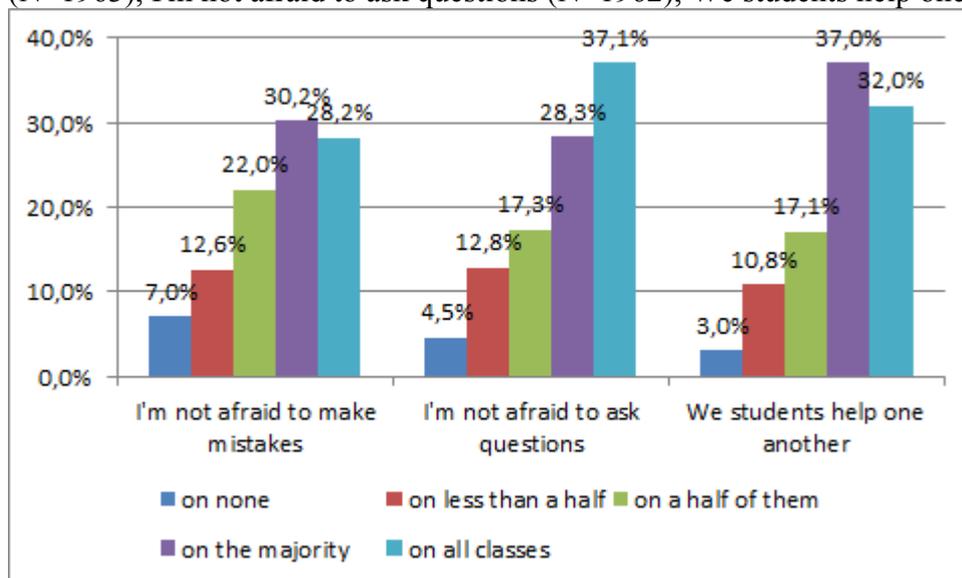
What is also important in the development of a positive attitude to learning is also the classroom and school atmosphere, conducive to learning among both students and teachers. It consists of a number of elements, including physical and psychological safety of students, standards existing at schools, knowledge of and compliance with the established rules, relationships between students and between students and teachers, the attitude of students and teachers to learning, etc.. The study shows that, according to more than half of the students (57%), at their schools, there is a belief that both students and teachers are involved in learning (Figure 11). 59% of students said they were not afraid to make mistakes in most or all of the classes, 65.4% - in most or all classes – are not afraid to ask questions. More than two thirds (69%) of respondents stated that in all or most classes, students help one another (Figure 12).

Figure 11 Distribution of answers to the question: In my school there is an opinion that both teachers and students learn (N=1974)



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

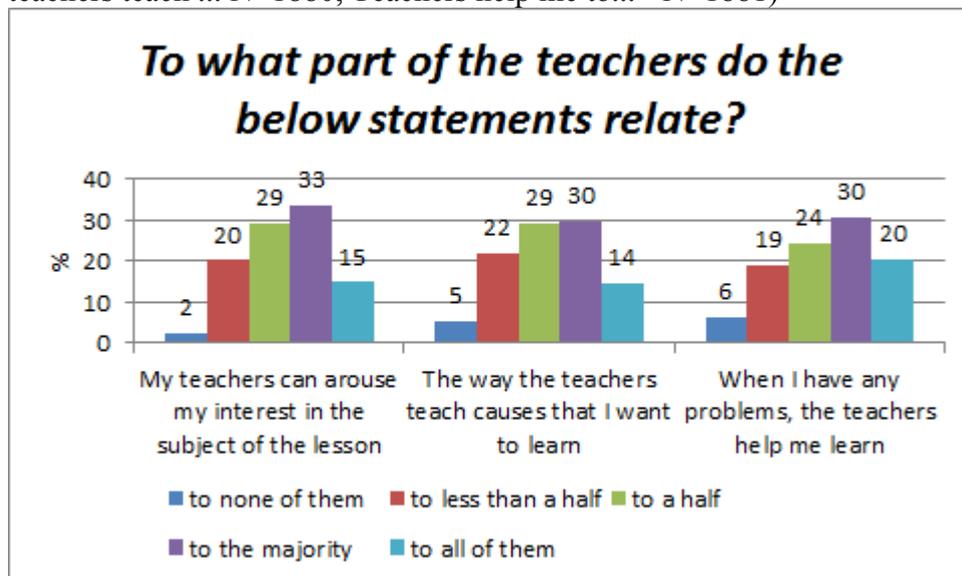
Figure 12: Distributions of answers to the questions: I'm not afraid to make mistakes (N=1963), I'm not afraid to ask questions (N=1962), We students help one another (N=1883)



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

Younger students responded in the survey to questions about how they perceive the influence of their teachers on learning. They referred to their experiences from the previous past year. The survey results show that every other student in Polish schools receives, in the event of difficulties, support from all or most of the teachers, for nearly one in two (48%), teachers can arouse interest in their lessons and make them want to learn (44%) – Fig. 15.

Figure 13: Distribution of answers to the question: What percentage of teachers can be associated with the following sentences? (My teachers are able to ... N=1883; Way in which teachers teach ... N=1880, Teachers help me to... - N=1881)

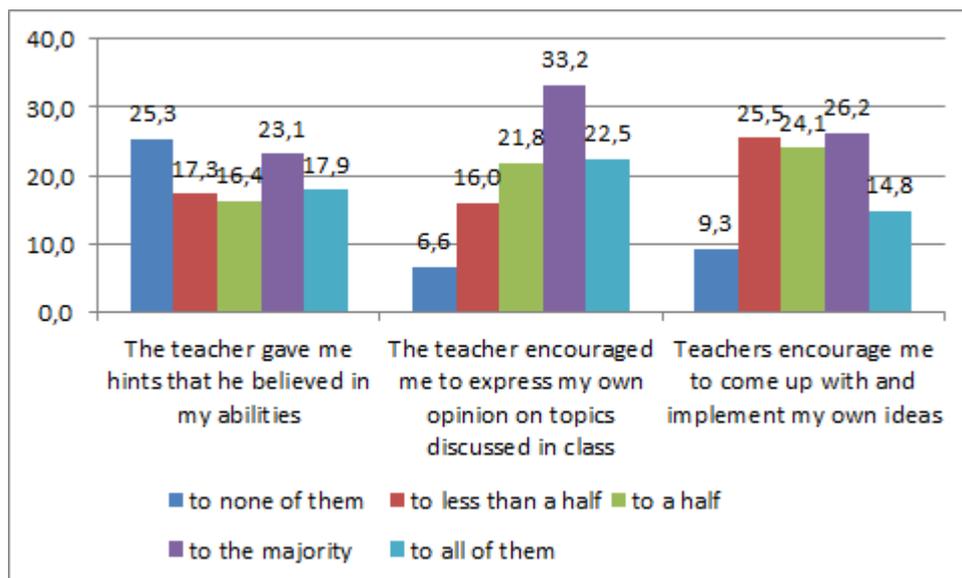


Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

Students also evaluated how teachers support them in the learning process: whether they believe in their capabilities, and encourage independence. A similar percentage as with the question whether teachers praise students – 41% stated that they felt that most or all teachers imply that they believe in their abilities and an identical percentage (41%) say that

teachers encourage them to come up with and implement ideas. 55.7% of students rated that all or most of teachers encourage them to express their own opinions in classes. It is worth noting that every fourth student did not experience a situation in which any teacher showed confidence in his/her abilities (see Figure 16).

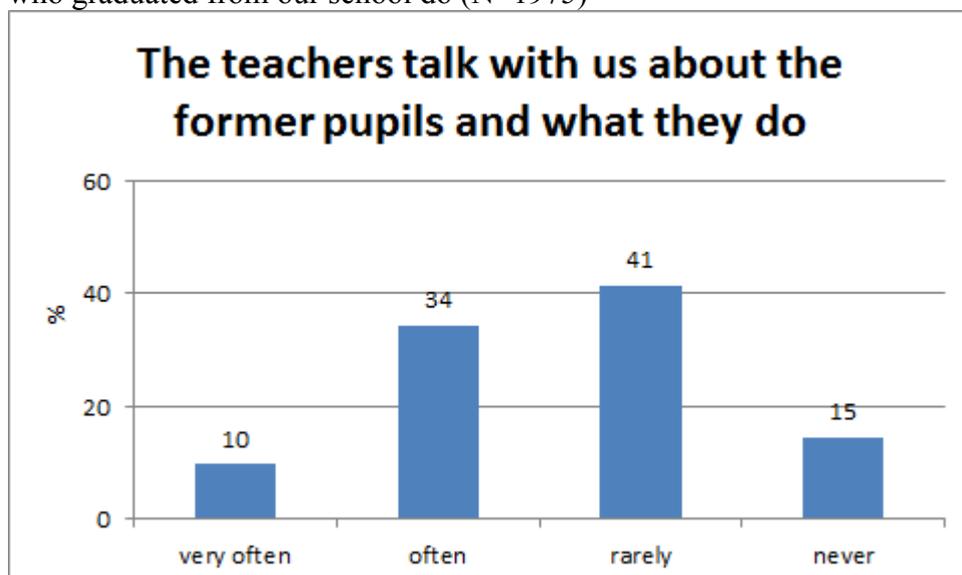
Figure 14: Distribution of answers to the question: What percentage of teachers can be associated with the following sentences? The teacher gave me hints that he believed in my abilities (N=1759), The teacher encouraged me to express my own opinion on topics discussed in class (N=1966) and Teachers encourage me to come up with and implement my own ideas (N=1962)



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

Students were also asked whether they are talked to about the careers of graduates. 56% of respondents said they teachers rarely or never talk to them about what graduates who have completed their high school do (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Distribution of answers to the question: Teachers talk to us about what students who graduated from our school do (N=1975)



Source: own study based on data from: http://www.seo2.npseo.pl/seo_stats_quality

Conclusions

The study involved an analysis of students' opinions about various factors that influence the perception of their school education.

The study shows that students are not active participants in the educational process and very rarely experience learning in direct interaction with other students. On the basis of collected data it can be concluded that, in school practice, teachers use theories associated with instruction-giving, conveying methods dominate in classes, not stimulating activities among the students themselves. The results show that this way of conducting classes by teachers can have a negative influence on the creation of affirmative attitudes towards learning.

Learning in pairs and groups is a method rarely used in the classroom. Despite this, almost 60% positively assess their involvement in classes (many of them believe that on the day of study they were involved in most and all classes). It is worth noting that the self-esteem of students declared in relation to the experience of how to work in classes they attend. As the survey results show – teachers use work methods that result in passive student involvement – students rarely work in pairs and groups, and mostly listen, record, and work individually; therefore, it is this types of activities that students refer to when thinking about their involvement in the classroom. This might cause that, despite a relatively high self-esteem concerning involvement in classes, a smaller percentage – less than half of respondents – is interested in lessons and eager to learn. On the one hand, students have the idea that they can learn and mostly are involved in classes, on the other hand, they do not feel as much interest in classes anymore – in order to change this image, more attention, as it seems, needs to be drawn to, inter alia, the creation of content interesting and engaging for pupils, methods and forms of work in the classroom.

Students evaluate extra-curricular activities better – for two-thirds of respondents, they are developing, so it can be concluded that, where students have the opportunity to develop their interests and learn important things for themselves – they have a more positive attitude towards learning. At the same time it is worth noting that one third of students do not, however, find at school additional offers, i.e. such activities that would be of interest to them.

Much less than half of the students (about 40%) experienced comprehensive support from teachers (most or all) – those surveyed feel that they are appreciated (praised, teachers believe in their abilities, encourage to come up with and implement ideas). What is worrying is that as many as one in four students does not receive signals from any of the teachers, confirming that they believe in his/her abilities. Every fourth student believes that he/she can not expect support from teachers in developing their interests. These results demonstrate the need for change in the consciousness of teachers, regarding their support to students in the educational process. Appreciation is one of the most important human needs, without positive reinforcement, it will be difficult to get good results in both learning and building good relationships between students and teachers, and as a consequence, also to build a conscious, positive perception of the school and learning by students (Crawford, 2012). This is even more important, as I wrote, given that the role of teachers at schools is changing; from the role of experts in the field, they assume a role of guides in the world of knowledge.

An important factor influencing the attitude towards learning is the belief in the relevance, need, and usefulness of acquired knowledge. For a large group of students – almost 44%, it is not clear why and how they learn certain content – this applies to opinions of students about half or less than half of the classes at school, and every fourth respondent does see practical application of knowledge acquired in the classroom. If students do not know why

they learn something and do not see the use of this knowledge, and its connection with life, they will not be interested in learning. It is, therefore, yet another area, without whose improvement it is difficult to expect that students at school will approach learning seriously.

In order to promote education, it is also important to raise awareness that learning is a process that does not end with the final school exams, but will continue after graduation. More than half of the schools formulate an effective message that also adults (teachers) learn; to a lesser extent, Polish school care for “exemplum” – showing examples of what their older peers, graduates are doing.

What is necessary in the learning process is a sense of safety and good relationships between students and between students and teachers. Then, students are not afraid to ask questions and make mistakes – natural in the educational process. Here, too, it is difficult to say that the school generally (in all classes) provides students with such conditions – let me remind the results of the study: only 59% of students said they were not afraid to make mistakes in most or all of the classes, and 65.4% – in most or all classes – were not afraid to ask questions.

The results enforce a reflection on how difficult it is to manage the process of school education in such a way that it would become a positive experience for students. The study draws a picture of a traditional school, which is not yet ready to cope with the task to promote the value of education with awareness, which encourages learning in adulthood.

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