

PROFESSIONAL FUNCTIONING OF TEACHERS IN A RURAL ENVIRONMENT IN THE LIGHT OF SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS. TEMPORAL PERSPECTIVE

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Keywords: teacher, education subjects, social expectations

Abstract. The article is an attempt to present the issues of social evaluation of teachers' professional work, with particular emphasis on the specificity of their functioning in a rural environment. The text presents the changes in social expectations towards teachers in rural areas in the light of literature and then shows the results of the author's own research on social expectations towards teachers' work in rural areas in a temporal dimension, which includes the presentation of how their work is perceived by education subjects of different age and, therefore, in different times of their lives (life cycle) and historical time (generation): pupils, students of teaching faculties coming from rural areas, parents and grandparents, as well as other inhabitants of rural areas.

FUNKCJONOWANIE ZAWODOWE NAUCZYCIELI W ŚRODOWISKU WIEJSKIM W ŚWIETLE OCZEKIWAŃ SPOŁECZNYCH. PERSPEKTYWA TEMPORALNA

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciel, podmioty edukacji, oczekiwania społeczne

Streszczenie. W artykule podjęto próbę przybliżenia problematyki społecznego wartościowania pracy zawodowej nauczycieli, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem specyfiki ich funkcjonowania w środowisku wiejskim. W tekście zaprezentowano przemiany społecznych oczekiwań wobec nauczyciela w środowisku wiejskim w świetle literatury, a następnie dokonano prezentacji wyników własnych badań nad społecznymi oczekiwaniami wobec pracy nauczycieli na wsi w wymiarze temporalnym. A zatem, jak praca ta jest postrzegana przez podmioty

edukacyjne będące w różnym wieku, a także, co się z tym wiąże, znajdujące się w innym usytuowaniu czasowym swego życia (cyklu życia), jak i czasu historycznego (pokolenia): uczniów, studentów kierunków nauczycielskich wywodzących się ze wsi, rodziców oraz dziadków i innych mieszkańców wsi.

Introduction

Henryka Kwiatkowska, analysing how teachers are identified socially, writes that the existing social expectations are “the basis for an individual to enter into specific roles”, they become “a reference for shaping the image of a socially approved self”¹. From the point of view of teachers, it is therefore important “to recognise social expectations in order to be able to meet them and gain social acceptance”².

Expectations towards school institutions and teachers vary from one culture to another and change with social transformations. However, as Zenon Gajdzica writes, they are always “a starting point for criticism or acknowledgement in a specific time and space”³.

It is worthwhile to get to know social expectations towards the professional functioning of teachers, as they are an important determinant of professional preparation and further education of this professional group.

Changes in social expectations towards teachers in a rural environment in light of literature

The image of social expectations towards a teacher in a rural environment has changed over the centuries. The determinants of these transformations were mainly political, social, cultural and educational changes taking place throughout the country, as well as changes in rural areas.

In the period after World War II, in neglected, backward rural areas, teachers were the main organisers of education, which in many regions of Poland was built from scratch. In this situation, teachers led the rural environment, both in terms of cultural and spiritual development. They inspired the social and cultural aspirations of the rural community. As Wanda Dróżka writes, “the teacher

¹ H. Kwiatkowska, *Tożsamość nauczycieli. Między anomią a autonomią* [The identity of teachers. Between anomaly and autonomy], GWP, Gdańsk 2005, s. 114.

² Ibidem, s. 115.

³ Z. Gajdzica, *Wstęp* [Introduction], „Studia Pedagogiczne” 2014, LXVII, s. 9.

was expected to promote education and culture, as well as activities in various areas of economic and social life”⁴. Teachers had a social mission.

The requirements set for teachers in the period of the People’s Republic of Poland concerned not only teaching and upbringing, but also organising social, cultural and educational life in the rural environment. Schools were leading centres of social life, and teachers provided a kind of social service to the rural community⁵.

In the 1980s, despite many positive changes in the rural environment, there were still rural areas which were less developed and were offered poor education and much lower possibilities of satisfying and shaping needs than a city. In the absence of educational and socio-cultural institutions and organisations, schools (and thus the teachers) had a duty to participate widely in the social life of the community and to interact in a structured way with parents and the community as a whole in order to contribute to a better exchange of views and information on various issues between the society and the school. The teachers’ task was to shape public opinion, inspire rural residents to actively participate in transforming their own environment and organise projects tailored to general and specialist education, individual needs, interests and aspirations. Due to these increasing social demands on teachers, their qualifications, attitudes to their own professional development and self-education gained in importance⁶.

The analysis carried out by W. Dróżka on teachers’ memoirs of 1992/93 shows that in the period after the political transformation, teachers noticed the need to rebuild basic values and create new ones through educational and cultural work⁷. Together with their pupils and parents, the teachers created the school as an institution extremely important for educational and cultural functioning in the local community⁸.

⁴ W. Dróżka, *Nauczyciel w środowisku wiejskim. Działalność społeczna i samokształcenie* [Teacher in a rural environment. Social activity and self-education], WSP, Kielce 1991, s. 8.

⁵ Ibidem, s. 9.

⁶ Ibidem, s. 83–84.

⁷ W. Dróżka, *Rola i pozycja społeczna nauczyciela w środowisku wiejskim – na podstawie pamiętników młodych nauczycieli* [The role and social position of teachers in the rural environment – based on memoirs of young teachers], [w:] M. Meducka (red.), *Wokół „szyfowych prac”. Problemy edukacji wiejskiej w Polsce w XIX i XX wieku* [Around “Labours of Sisyphus”. Problems of rural education in Poland in the 19th and 20th centuries], Kieleckie Tow. Nauk., Kielce 1999, s. 127–150.

⁸ Eadem, *Nauczyciel. Autobiografia. Pokolenia. Studia pedeutologiczne i pamiętnikarskie* [Teacher. Autobiography. Generations. Pedeutology and memoir studies], Akad. Świętokrzyska, Kielce 2002, s. 94.

As a result of educational and cultural transformations at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, social expectations towards teachers have changed. Teachers are, as W. Dróżka writes, “increasingly deprived of the formative influence that has always determined the teaching profession in our country, in accordance with the tradition of the Polish intelligentsia. Today, we need a teacher who is an instrumentalist, pragmatist, a person who teaches their pupils how to achieve financial success”⁹.

The memoir research conducted by W. Dróżka in 2002–2004 shows that as a result of social and political changes and the education reform of 1999, the traditional ethos of a teacher collapsed. Teachers were forced to fight to stay in the labour market and take care mainly of themselves¹⁰. The teaching profession began to undergo a process of specialisation, and there was a significant impoverishment of teachers’ cultural and environmental activities, with less and less attention began to be paid to upbringing.

As Tadeusz Lewowicki writes, social expectations towards teachers as tutors and masters have disappeared and have been limited to the transfer of information¹¹.

H. Kwiatkowska’s research, conducted in 2001/2002, also confirmed these trends. Among the social expectations towards their professions, the teachers surveyed indicated cognitive expectations first, the most important of which turned out to be “knowledge transfer”, which was ranked the highest on the scale of importance¹².

The disappearance of the idea of a teacher as a master as a result of the progressive professionalisation of teaching is noticed by Piotr Kostyło, who writes: “Being a master in teacher-student relations requires freedom. A master cannot be a specialist in the modern bureaucratic understanding of the word. He or she is a creator, and every act of creativity, for obvious reasons, violates the existing

⁹ Eadem, *Nauczycielska dojrzałość. Średnie pokolenie nauczycieli wobec zmiany społeczno-edukacyjnej w Polsce w świetle badań autobiograficznych*. [Teacher’s maturity. Middle generation of teachers in the face of social and educational change in Poland in light of autobiographical research], „Edukacja” 2003, 2, s. 95.

¹⁰ Eadem, *Generacja wielkiej zmiany. Studium autobiografii średniego pokolenia nauczycieli polskich 2004* [A generation of great change. Study of autobiographies of the middle generation of Polish teachers 2004], UH-P, Kielce 2008, s. 154.

¹¹ T. Lewowicki, *Problemy kształcenia i pracy nauczycieli* [Problems of teacher training and work], ITE PIB, Warszawa-Radom 2007.

¹² H. Kwiatkowska, *Tożsamość nauczycieli...*, s. 119.

order of things and binding norms. (...) Teachers are treated as officials and often behave like them”¹³.

Limiting the role of a school to the production of qualified specialists has triggered a wide wave of criticism of the school as an institution that separates itself from “real life”¹⁴. Society began to demand the greater involvement of teachers and their deeper commitment to local affairs¹⁵. Cooperation in the community is again becoming more and more important, and the obligation to initiate this is imposed on teachers. The process of bringing teachers closer to the local environment was also triggered by the decentralisation process. According to Alicja Kotusiewicz, “a teacher, who was once a state educational policy representative, a political centre representative and a general interest representative, has become a local representative, subordinate to local structures, customs and power systems”¹⁶.

According to Maria Mendel¹⁷, teachers are now also given the role of community animators and community leaders, while Joanna Madalińska-Michalak¹⁸ sees them as education leaders.

My own research confirms that teachers have an important role to play in equalising educational opportunities for students in many rural communities¹⁹.

When analysing the contemporary requirements for teachers, it should be noted that they are intrinsically contradictory. On the one hand, teachers have

¹³ P. Kostyło, *Wykluczanie jako problem filozofii edukacji. Komentarz do badań empirycznych [Exclusion as a problem of education philosophy. Commentary on empirical research]*, Impuls, Kraków 2008, s. 119–120.

¹⁴ T. Lewowicki, *Problemy kształcenia...*

¹⁵ M. Sielatycki, *Młodzi i starsi obywatele w polskiej szkole. Uwagi na rozpoczęcie Europejskiego Roku Edukacji Obywatelskiej w Polsce [Young and older citizens in Polish schools. Comments on the launch of the European Year of Citizenship Education in Poland]*, 2005, downloaded 7 September 2013, from: http://www.ereo.codn.edu.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=21&Itemid=58.

¹⁶ A.A. Kotusiewicz, *Nauczyciel w gminie. Metafizyka i empiria [Teacher in a commune. Metaphysics and empiricism]*, [w:] H. Kwiatkowska, T. Lewowicki (red.), *Społeczno-kulturowe konteksty edukacji nauczycieli i pedagogów [Social and cultural contexts of education of teachers and educators]*, WS ZNP, Warszawa 2003, s. 209.

¹⁷ M. Mendel, *Animacja współpracy środowiskowej na wsi [Animation of environmental cooperation in rural areas]*, [w:] M. Mendel (red.), *Animacja współpracy środowiskowej na wsi [Animation of environmental cooperation in rural areas]*, Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2005, s. 16–29.

¹⁸ J. Madalińska-Michalak, *Skuteczne przywództwo w szkołach na obszarach zaniedbanych społecznie [Effective leadership in schools in socially disadvantaged areas]*, UŁ, Łódź 2012.

¹⁹ J. Miko-Giedyk, *Zróżnicowanie funkcjonowania szkół wiejskich a udział nauczycieli w wyrównywaniu szans edukacyjnych. Studium empiryczne gmin wiejskich w powiecie kieleckim [Differentiation in the functioning of rural schools and participation of teachers in equalizing educational opportunities. Empirical study of rural communes in the district of Kielce]*, Uniw. Jana Kochanowskiego, Kielce 2015.

been pushed into the role of officials, who are increasingly controlled to meet all (often poorly conceived) requirements of the educational system. On the other hand, it is required that they act in the best interest of pupils, against the recommendations of the Ministry of Education. This is indicated by Dorota Klus-Stańska, who writes: “It is pathological that a teacher, in order to act for the benefit of the pupil, must fight against the demands of the educational system”²⁰. P. Kostyło also emphasises this contradiction of social expectations and points out: “We want the teacher to be a person of virtue, and, at the same time, we shape him/her as a professional; we expect him/her to be a master, and, at the same time, we strengthen official habits in him/her”²¹.

In the face of these ambivalent social expectations defined in literature, it seems justified to empirically recognise the contemporary expectations of the inhabitants of rural areas.

Method and test procedure

Empirical research was conducted in the years 2014–2015 among the rural population in seven voivodships of Poland (Świętokrzyskie, Małopolskie, Podkarpackie, Lubelskie, Śląskie, Łódzkie and Mazowieckie).

In the research, the method of a diagnostic survey using a questionnaire was used. In order to prepare the questionnaire, 250 written statements on “My expectations towards a school and teacher in a rural environment” were collected from pedagogical students, candidates for teachers, who were born and raised in the countryside, and then analysed. The aforementioned analysis made it possible to identify the following categories of expectations: personality-related, educational (related to upbringing), professional, managerial, leadership, playing field levelling and integrative.

Personality-related expectations concern the psychological understanding of the teacher as a person and understanding him or her as a structure of ideal traits. The latter include: optimism, objectivity, personal culture, diligence, forbearance, patience, sensitivity to others, openness, honesty, fairness, etc.

²⁰ D. Klus-Stańska, Dyskusja panelowa na VII Ogólnopolskim Zjeździe Pedagogicznym, Pozór w edukacji – dyskusja [Panel discussion at the 7th National Pedagogical Congress, Appearances in education – a discussion], [w:] M. Dudzikowa, K. Knasiecka-Falbierska (red.), *Sprawcy i/lub ofiary działań pozornych w edukacji szkolnej* [Perpetrators and/or victims of apparent activities in school education], Impuls, Kraków 2013, s. 439.

²¹ P. Kostyło, op. cit., s. 200.

The category of *educational* expectations is conditioned by the teacher's fulfilling the upbringing tasks and perceiving him or her as a role model, an authority.

Expectations related to teaching are called *professional competences*. Students listed a number of these, such as: pedagogical, psychological, methodical, regional, communication-related, competences in the field of technology and IT, innovative competences and competences in the field of vocational counselling, health education, etc.

Managerial expectations are related to the perception of a teacher as the manager of the school organisation.

Leadership expectations relate to the teacher's role as a "leader", motivating himself or herself, and others, to act for change.

Playing field levelling expectations are connected with equalising educational opportunities and overcoming educational barriers existing in the rural environment.

Integrative expectations concern cooperation with institutions located in the immediate vicinity of the school and with members of the local community, as well as activities for the benefit of common interests.

The survey covered 454 individuals living in rural areas in seven voivodships of Poland. The largest number of respondents – 43.83% – lives in the Świętokrzyskie voivodship, and the remaining voivodships are represented by smaller numbers. Table 1 presents the diversification of residence of the surveyed individuals.

Table 1. Respondents by place of residence

Place of residence (voivodeship)	N	%
Świętokrzyskie	199	43.83%
Małopolskie	42	9.25%
Podkarpackie	44	9.69%
Lubelskie	34	7.49%
Śląskie	41	9.03%
Łódzkie	44	9.69%
Mazowieckie	50	11.01%

Source: Own research.

The research population included people of different ages; the youngest were 15 years old and the oldest was an 80-year-old woman.

Most of the respondents go to school/study and do not work – 40.75%; a large group works: 23.35% – outside agriculture, 11.23% – in agriculture; and 3.74% of the respondents work in agriculture and outside agriculture at the same time. Data on the educational and professional activity of the surveyed individuals is presented in Figure 1.

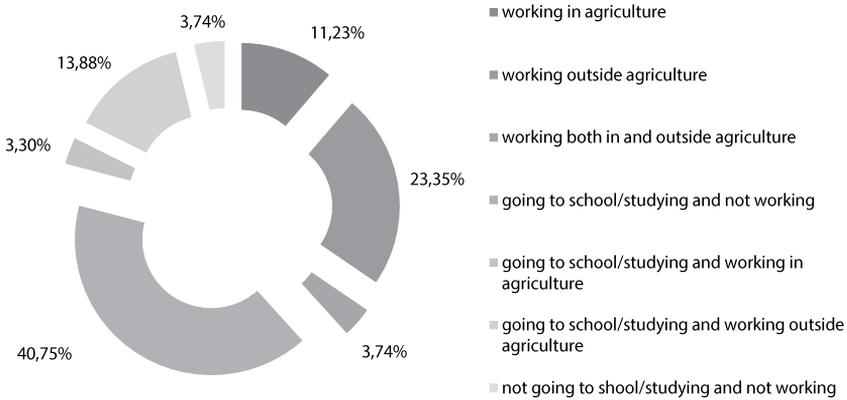


Figure 1. Presentation of the surveyed rural residents in groups of educational and professional activity

Source: Own research.

I assumed that an important factor differentiating the opinions of the surveyed rural residents concerning the most important tasks of a teacher is having children, grandchildren or siblings attending school. The data concerning these issues is presented in Figure 2.

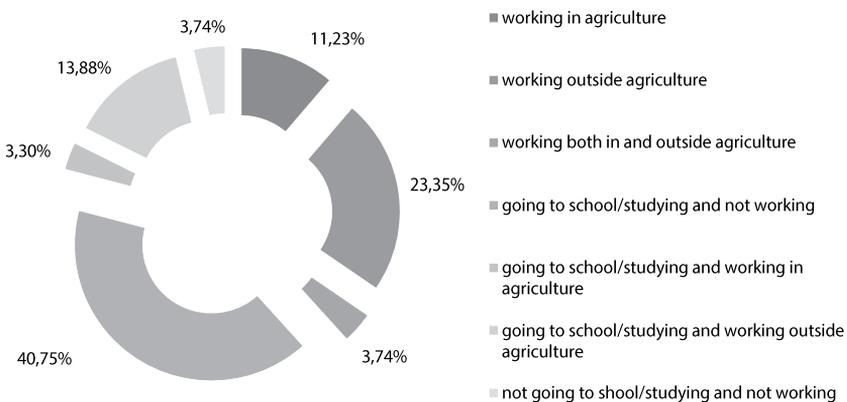


Figure 2. Presentation of the surveyed rural residents divided into groups having children, grandchildren, siblings

Source: Own research.

On the basis of the analysis of study results related to educational and professional activity and having (or not having) children and grandchildren, groups of different education subjects were separated comprising the analysed rural residents: pupils, students without children, students with children, parents (other than students), grandparents and other rural residents, i.e. people who do not have children or grandchildren and do not study.

The characteristics of these groups are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of the education subjects

Educational entities	Number		Gender		Age	
	N	%	F	M	interval	mean
Pupils	71	15.64%	57.75%	42.25%	15–19 years old	16.70
Students without children	167	36.78%	98.20%	1.80%	20–34 years old	23.31
Students with children	25	5.51%	96.00%	4.00%	22–46 years old	27.92
Parents	78	17.18%	56.58%	43.42%	23–64 years old	39.76
Grandparents	71	15.64%	69.01%	30.99%	40–80 years old	57.37
Other residents of rural areas	42	9.25%	57.14%	42.86%	20–56 years old	28.60

Source: Own research.

The largest group of the surveyed rural residents was students of pedagogy who did not have their own children yet; most of them were women at a young age – 23 years. The group of pupils amounted to about 16% of those surveyed, including 58% females and 42% males aged from 15 to 19 years.

Results

The analysis of pupils' expectations towards teachers' work in rural schools (presented in Table 3) shows that educational, playing field levelling and personality-related tasks and the traits of teachers are the most desirable. However, taking into account only the first rank of importance, the most important for the majority of the surveyed pupils are expectations related to equal educational opportunities – 43.66%.

This may indicate an increase in the awareness of young people in their efforts to overcome certain inconveniences or shortages due to their place of residence in rural areas.

Moreover, numerous indications for the personality-related and educational categories show that the personality and attitude of the teacher are very important for pupils.

Table 3. Pupils' expectations towards teachers

Students' expectations	General result	Ranks		
		I	II	III
Personality-related	22.07	18.31	33.80	14.08
Educational (upbringing)	31.46	26.76	16.90	50.70
Professional competences	2.82	4.23	1.41	2.82
Managerial	0.94	0	0	2.82
Leadership	3.29	1.41	2.82	5.63
Playing field levelling	22.54	43.66	16.90	7.04
Integrative	16.9	4.23	29.58	16.90

Source: Own research.

The indications of pedagogical students who do not yet have their own children differ slightly from the previous group. For them, the most important were educational expectations (30.54%) related to the perception of the teacher as an authority, a role model. A high percentage of people in this category appreciated personality traits – 21.56% and professional competences – 16.97% (Table 4). As students preparing for the teaching profession of a teacher-educator, educated according to current standards, they are aware of the importance of the knowledge and skills emphasised in the current teacher education system.

Table 4. Expectations towards teachers expressed by students of pedagogy without children

Expectations of students without children	General result	Ranks		
		I	II	III
Personality-related	21.56	19.16	16.77	28.74
Educational (upbringing)	30.54	41.32	32.93	17.37
Professional competences	16.97	23.35	16.77	10.78
Managerial	2	0	2.40	3.59
Leadership	3.99	1.8	4.19	5.99
Playing field levelling	11.38	11.38	10.78	11.98
Integrative	13.77	3.59	16.17	21.56

Source: Own research.

Students who have already become parents think in a very similar way, with the difference that they appreciate the importance of teachers' professional competences even more – Table 5.

Table 5. Expectations reported to the teacher by parent students

Expectations of students with children	General result	Ranks		
		I	II	III
Personality-related	18.67	28	12	16
Educational (upbringing)	28	20	32	32
Professional competences	18.67	32	16	8
Managerial	1.33	0	4	0
Leadership	6.67	0	12	8
Playing field levelling	10.67	16	0	16
Integrative	16	4	24	20

Source: Own research.

In the next table (Table 6), there is data showing the expectations towards teachers expressed by the parents of pupils.

Table 6. Parents' expectations of the teacher

Parents' expectations	General result	Ranks		
		I	II	III
Personality-related	19.66	19.23	15.38	24.36
Educational (upbringing)	27.78	30.77	26.92	25.64
Professional competences	17.95	25.64	23.08	5.13
Managerial	2.14	0	1.28	5.13
Leadership	3.85	0	2.56	8.97
Playing field levelling	14.53	20.51	11.54	11.54
Integrative	14.53	3.85	20.51	19.23

Source: Own research.

At the forefront of the ranks of importance there were educational expectations – 27.78%, followed by expectations concerning personality traits – 19.66%, and in the scope of professional competences – 17.95%. It can be seen that from the perspective of parents who are concerned about the welfare of their children,

it is essential that the teacher is a good educator, likes working with children and young people and has a high level of preparation for the teaching profession.

It is interesting to see what the expectations are towards teachers of the most “educationally experienced” residents of rural areas, who have already raised their own children, while their grandchildren now go to school. This data is summarised in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Grandparents’ expectations of the teacher

Grandparents’ expectations	General result	Ranks		
		I	II	III
Personality-related	14.08	11.27	14.08	16.90
Educational (upbringing)	18.31	18.31	14.08	22.54
Professional competences	20.19	11.27	9.86	39.44
Managerial	3.76	0	2.82	8.45
Leadership	2.35	2.82	1.41	2.82
Playing field levelling	20.66	15.49	40.85	5.63
Integrative	20.66	40.85	16.90	4.23

Source: Own research.

This shows that the grandparents primarily associate tasks in the field of integration and equal opportunities with teachers; they see a teacher as a person who should, through various initiatives, unite the whole rural community and actively participate in the life of the social environment.

The remaining individuals, qualified in the study as “other residents”, usually young, without children, considered educational, professional and personality-related expectations as the most important (Table 8). These results are the closest to the group of students – young parents. This convergence of views may be due to a similar age.

Table 8. Expectations of other rural residents towards teachers

Expectations of other residents	General result	Ranks		
		I	II	III
Personality-related	17.46	9.52	14.29	28.57
Educational (upbringing)	31.75	42.86	30.95	21.43
Professional competences	18.25	26.19	19.05	9.52
Managerial	3.97	0	2.38	9.52
Leadership	1.59	0	2.38	2.38
Playing field levelling	14.29	16.67	9.52	16.67
Integrative	12.70	2.83	19.05	16.67

Source: Own research.

Conclusions

The results of the research on social expectations towards teachers in rural areas have highlighted the importance of the educational (upbringing) role of schools and teachers. In all the surveyed groups, the most important category was the category of educational expectations, i.e. those related to the formation of pupils' personality, their moral and social attitudes, character, motivation and activity.

This means that teachers are perceived by the inhabitants of rural areas more traditionally, as moral models, role models and authorities. This may also indicate an increase in upbringing problems in schools, local communities, families and youth, where the help of a teacher is needed to solve these issues. Important expectations also concern the personality traits of teachers, i.e. issues that were emphasised at the beginning of the development of pedeutological thought by representatives of the so-called "personality trend", including J.W. Dawid, Z. Mysłakowski, M. Kreutz, S. Szuman and S. Baley.

In the older generation – grandparents – there is an image of a social teacher integrating the rural community around the school and supporting pupils in their various talents and interests.

In addition, the younger generations attach great importance to the good preparation of teachers in the *purely professional* field of teaching competences, which is related to the specificity of the school, numerous examinations and tests, as well as to the growing importance of education for success in life and in building one's own path and career.

The results of this research can be treated as premises for increasing the emphasis on the development of educational (upbringing) competences and the personality traits of teachers, as well as their ability to teach, in the process of recruitment, preparation for the profession and in further education, and these should be taken into account when hiring teachers to work in schools in rural areas.

It should be added that the issues of educational competences and the personality traits of teachers are completely ignored during the training or employment of candidates for the profession. As Stefan Kwiatkowski writes, the personality traits of teachers are not identified in any way²².

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