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FEATURES OF 'NEW' STUDENTS AND THE POTENTIAL OF FUTURE TEACHERS: FIRST EFFECTS OF "THE UNTEACHABLES" INTERNATIONAL PROJECT

"Learn from them and you will see the new culture of high-performance work, the twenty-first-century school and college, the innovative corporation, a more open family, a democracy where citizens are engaged, and perhaps even the new, networked society."

(Tapscott 2009, p. 8)

Abstract: The problem of students with difficulties in functioning in a school environment is nowadays becoming significant, as the environment often does not respond to unique and complex needs of young learners, such as modern ways of exchanging experience and knowledge, or the possibility of active participation in the community of learners and support networks. This state of affairs dictates the need to create new educational resources (also developed in of cooperation of the academic community with secondary school teachers, or the cooperation of experts and practitioners from various countries) for future teachers who may face, for example, the problem of "burnt-out" young students. The main purpose of this paper is to share the first research results and reflections concerning the implementation of "The Unteachables" Erasmus+ project at the Faculty of Education and the Faculty of Biology and Environmental Sciences at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University in Warsaw (in cooperation with partners from Denmark – project coordinator, Iceland, Spain, Slovenia and Italy).

Keywords: 'new' students; future teachers; secondary schools; universities; cooperation; the Erasmus+ Project.

Introduction

The presented article is based, among others on experiences and selected research results concerning "The Unteachables"[1] innovative Erasmus+ project. One of its goals (and related problems) is to investigate to what extent the growing percentage of young reluctant learners in Europe can be transformed into a group of students capable of setting the course of the education process, who are also ready to co--decide, e.g. on goals and the use of educational methods or tools. So far, the project has identified profiles of the surveyed youth – paying attention not only to the shortcomings, but primarily to the strengths and potential of "new" unteachable young students (which is also the subject of analysis in this study) – as well as the didactic challenges emerging from the profiles.

We are talking about teaching and learning strategies, also included in the prepared guide in the form of the Learnable Platform (void of "rigid" guidelines), and their use in scheduled teaching processes, which will also be evaluated by all project partners over a six-month period of practice. Importantly, the above activities will be attended by students – future teachers for whom the project constitutes an opportunity to acquire knowledge and skills (also in real working conditions) from people who have already practised their profession, as well as from domestic and foreign researchers and experts. In addition, it is a good opportunity to understand the learning process and the role of good school, where the teacher should be "an experienced companion in the learning process," (Salcher, 2009, p. 36) viewed by the students as an interesting person, who is strongly involved in activating young people and supporting the development of their talents, engaged in the undertaken activities and willing to learn. We should also not forget about schools included in the project, their teachers and their vast experience.

Today's students (including the unteachables) in literature – an attempt to sketch their profile

According to Jean M. Twenge (2019), professor of psychology and influential research, the features of the "new generation"[2] are global and affect various environments, and today's students seriously challenge education. Unfortunately, school is becoming an increasingly less important place for young people, who often pursue their goals outside its premises. Similar opinions can be found among others in

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1 Information about the institutions and persons participating in the project, the effects of the teams' work can be found on "The Unteachables" Erasmus+ project website: https://theunteachableserasmus.blogspot.com.

2 Also described by J. M. Twenge (2019, p. 13) as the Internet Generation – iGen (abbreviation for iGeneration starting with post-millennials born in 1995): "iGen is the first generation that entered adolescence with a smartphone in hand".

Rick Wartzman's text (2014). Referring to the *Intelligence Group* analyses, he drew attention to the critical approach of Generation Z[3] to spending time in a traditional classroom. It is a generation that primarily values passion, experience and the opportunity to influence the world, even at the expense of formal education (Tapscott, 2010; Wartzman, 2014). At the same time, young learners (the following statements apply mainly to college and university students, but according to the author of this text they can also refer to secondary school students) want safe educational spaces where they can also "shelter" from confrontation with other opposing views. This may result, among others due to the fact that people grown up "in the web" often lack traditional social training and the ability to react in various situations, e.g. when receiving critical comments. "Generation Snowflake" (the term used by columnist Claire Fox) is particularly sensitive to negative assessments, ideas that are in conflict with their beliefs, and they are usually not prepared to take risks, which builds up young people' insecurity.

Further features and expectations of the "new generation", also related to its educational activity, have been presented in the text[4]: "Interests and their participation in the activity of young people. Experiences gained from, among others 'The Unteachables' Erasmus+ project", referring to theoretical analyses and empirical research by such authors quoted below as: Agnieszka Cybal-Michalska, Natalia Hatalska, Mariann Hardey and Marc Prensky. It is worth adding that these features are also becoming part of the national, social debates about good school (and the accompanying reports[5]) the project may be coherent with.

Among unteachable young students there may be people who are not interested in learning because of, for example, too high peer pressure to take up studies; who have problems with independent learning (commitment) or adapting to school/class rules; who do not enjoy learning and do not expect positive results from their activities; or who are afraid of failure (Hashim & Hussain, 2006; Khondaker, 2007; Szcześniak & Rondón, 2011).

According to Ken A. Robinson (2015), a specialist in the development of creativity and innovation, many modern students believe they have learning difficulties, also associated with the lack of motivation, and in fact they have problems with

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3 According to Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak (2010, p. 56), the scale and pace of change are the basic attributes of modern times: "The subsequent letters of the alphabet: X, Y, Z indicate the dynamics of the change in the specifics of generations."

4 This publication (submitted for printing) is also related to author's (A. Kulpa-Puczyńska) participation in the work of *the Youth Pedagogy Panel* (including the working group: the Youth – between education and the labour market, headed by Professor Magdalena Piorunek) operating at the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Information about *the Youth Pedagogy Panel* can be found, among others on the website: http://zpm.home.amu.edu.pl/

5 An example is the analysis of the Educational Research Institute, including the report of A. Nowakowska and J. Przewłocka (2015).

the commonly required way of learning. Don Tapscott (2010) adds that students forgo learning because they often suffer from passive participation and become bored during school hours. They do not have any influence on what, when, where and how they learn. A solution for these students may be a system based on real aptitudes and interests of young people, also creating opportunities to learn at their own pace, interact with other people and use interactive methods, e.g. the flipped classroom method described by K. A. Robinson (2015). Unfortunately, today we do not exploit schoolchildren's potential – according to M. Prensky (2016, p. 4): "We should ask them not to improve the world someday, when they become adults, but now, while they are still in school, and still students." The above-mentioned issues will be the subject of an analysis undertaken in the next text, also referring to one of the goals of "The Unteachables" Erasmus+ project – searching for the best forms and methods to use the potential of 'new' students.

### Features of unteachable students in analyses by the Polish project team

The introduction to this part of the article should start with information that the research (quantitative and/or qualitative) concerning problems raised in the project were conducted, among others in partner schools in countries involved in project activities, and the results of preliminary research and their analyses were presented and discussed also during team meetings in Ljubljana in April and in Warsaw in September 2019. The national research was conducted with the help of the diagnostic poll method, survey technique (online) developed for the purpose of the research, which allowed to present the main problem in a broader context. A tool, prepared also for secondary school students, is the result of the project team's work (with the active participation of school principals, teachers and students) and of pilot studies conducted in the cooperating schools, in selected classes. In turn, in the case of qualitative research, the project partners decided to collect stories of individual students, future teachers and practising teachers, observations of surveyed students, personal narratives of teacher-researchers.

This article focuses on unteachable students' strengths that can constitute an opportunity for learners (e.g. with the support of creative and open teachers[6], who can pick out the needs, passions of their students and help realise them, which also stood out during the analysis of data obtained from students from native, cooperating schools, as well as the dialogue with project partners from other countries). This also seems relevant in the context of one of the problems raised here, which has already been stressed in the title of this article. We are talking about the potential

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6 Also taking into account the fact that an increase in the number of authorities in school relations has been observed. "Over three-quarters of students declare that they have a teacher whom they particularly value, respect or like." 82% of public secondary school students claimed so, after: M. Bożewicz (2019, pp. 46–47).

Chart 1. Respondents' answers to the question about the motivation to acquire knowledge and its sources (related to the school environment). Respondents could select more than one answer
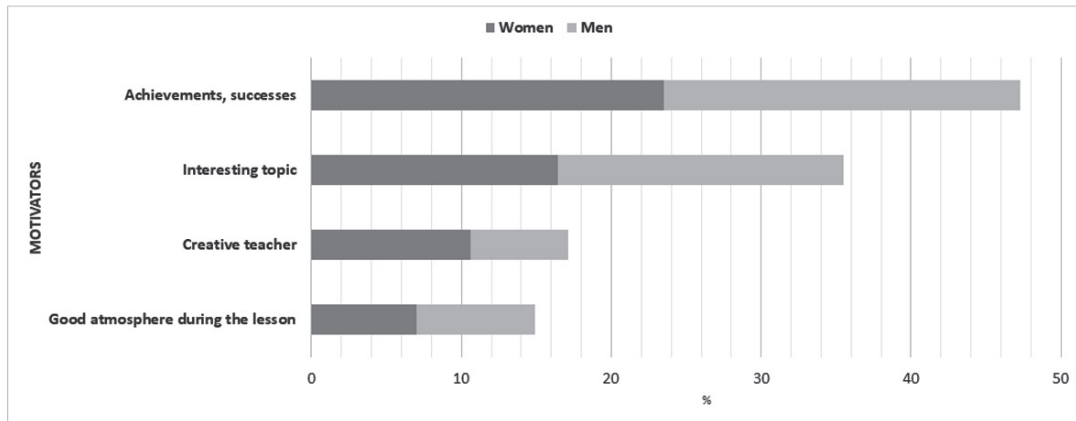
Source: An own study based on the results of research conducted by the Polish team as part of "The Unteachables" Erasmus+ project.

Chart 2. Respondents' answers to the question about obstacles in school learning (concerning the cooperation between student and teacher). Respondents could select more than one answer
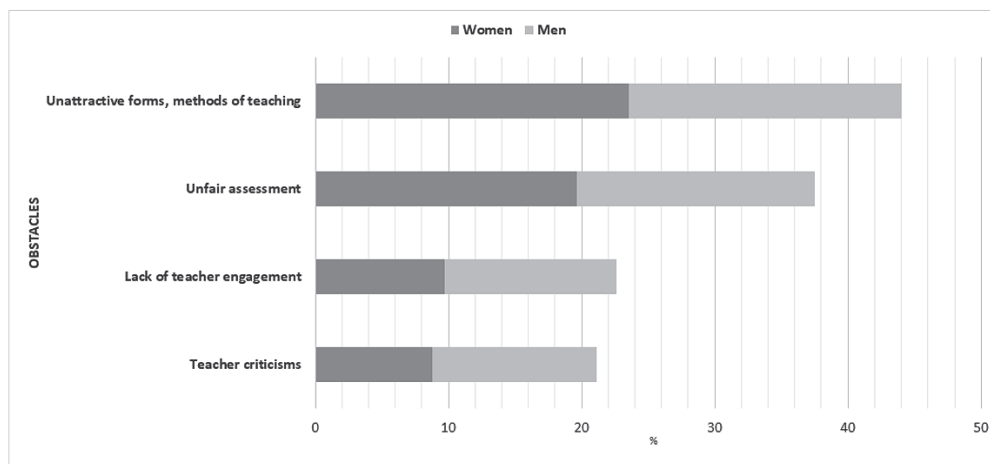
Source: An own study based on the results of research conducted by the Polish team as part of "The Unteachables" Erasmus+ project.

of future teachers who may become also specialists for the 21st century education. What else can be a guideline for young educators – working with "new" students, including probably the "unteachable" ones?

In turn, among the characteristics of the surveyed people[7], attention was paid, among others to the following interconnected preferences:

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7 The group of respondents included 172 men and 169 women. Students between 12–16 years (this age range is important for "The Unteachables" Erasmus+ project) accounted for the total of 83%.

- Openness to "new" learning places, which is displayed in Chart 3 (characteristic to over one third of respondents) – outside the school classroom, learning in the open air, experiencing the world in the field, during trips. Together with the very welcome and popular learning at home, in an own room (286 students replied so) – supported by, for example, e-learning;
- The need to work on projects the respondents find interesting; taking part in experiments ("definitely yes" was marked by 217 surveyed students, "rather yes" – 90[8]). It can also be associated (projects) with the willingness of respondents to learn/self-study in the so-called third places: libraries, reading rooms, bookshops, cultural institutions;
- Having many interests and passions, which the respondents devote a lot of time to, often at the expense of studying individual subjects. Here, it is worth mentioning about almost 74% of answers suggesting low interest in school activities[9]. Students realise themselves mainly after school, also spending time on the Internet, e.g. in the world of games.

Chart 3. Respondents' answers to the question about the environment/place where they prefer to learn/study (outside the traditional classroom). Respondents could select more than one answer.
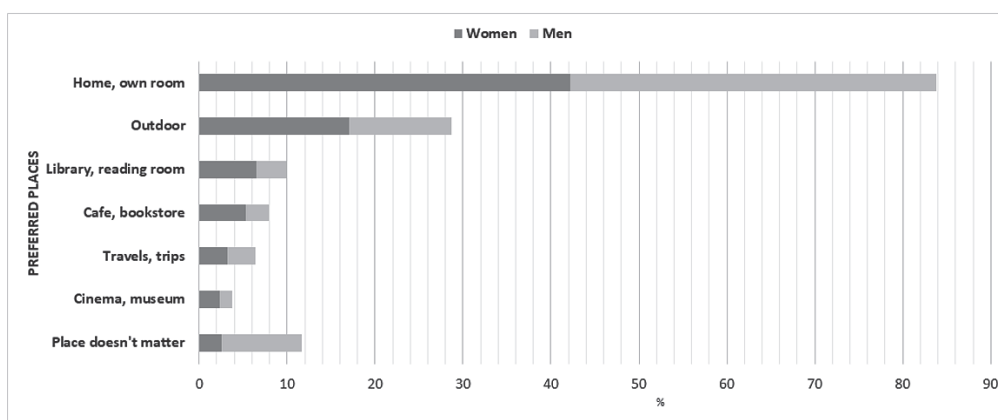
Source: An own study based on the results of research conducted by the Polish team as part of "The Unteachables" Erasmus+ project.

The above data may indicate that the respondents need more flexibility and diversity in relation to standard time and place of learning, organisation of a routine school day. They expect learning opportunities in multiple circumstances,

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8 Detailed data can be found on the project website (Results), in the document: Profiling students. Step 1.

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not just in the classroom, but preferably outside of it. Inspiration here can include, e.g. a student-centred method of teaching art, which activates students through watching, analysing artistic works, but also creating art in various situations, individual practice (Beech, 2014; Hjelde, 2015), as well as other types of projects (e.g. local, team), which take into account the ideas and experiences of young people and include their out-of-school initiatives. An interesting issue provides a boost in students' motivation to acquire knowledge (Chart 1), while uninteresting topics and difficult, extensive material can pose significant obstacles in the learning process. The presented results constitute part of the portrait of modern young learners, which is also outlined in the theoretical part of the study. They emphasize the importance of "safe" learning space (such as an own room).

The above features and the accompanying author's reflections (created on the basis of 341 responses obtained from students) require further evaluation, not least because they concern other cognitively interesting problems, e.g. the organization of today's school spaces, or ways to create an appropriate atmosphere in schools/ classes – which would favour various educational activities, interactions and exchange of knowledge between learners as well as between teachers and students. They are also important due to the fact that the youngest generation (brought up in an environment of digital technologies) highly values flexibility and mobility, also in relation to study and work places (Tapscott, 2010), striving – in the abundance of many classes, passions – for a certain balance between various spheres of their activity (Kulpa-Puczyńska, 2018; Wysocka, 2011). In addition, the features of unteachable young students, highlighted by the Polish project team[10], do not make a finite list. The problems raised in the project are complex, hence the team members consider the so-far-obtained data as a starting point for further research and evaluation, also in relation to profiles of unteachable learners. They have also been the subject of analyses conducted by researchers and experts from various countries. Nevertheless, "The Unteachables" project has let these problems resound also in the opinions of "new" students.

Conclusions and project plans made with the participation of young teachers

Summing up the earlier considerations, it is worth adding that the described project is future-oriented and also towards an emerging group of students and teachers. It should also be recalled that from November 2019 new learning strategies and

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10 They have been subjected to preliminary analyses (quantitative and qualitative) also in "*PROFILING STUDENTS first draft for project discussion and consultancy review,*" Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University 2019, available on the project website. The report is based on the responses of 121 respondents and comments of participants of the Polish project team, collected and described by its coordinator – Artur Baranowski, Faculty of Biology and Environmental Sciences at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University.

tools for students will be tested, based, among others on the use of new technologies ("The Unteachables" Erasmus+ project concludes in August 2020). Digital technologies, their advancement and accessibility, have changed teaching and learning methods, offering e.g. new working methods, programs and platforms adapted to the individual needs of students, transferring education to previously inaccessible places (Price, 2013; Robinson, 2015). In addition, the project activities include:[11] academic teachers and secondary school teachers who have only started their professional careers, also secondary school students and university students – near-future teachers[12] preparing to cooperate with the new generation of students. At this point, it is required to emphasise once again that the goal of the project is also to help young teachers "transform" the increasingly more unteachable young students into young learnables. Hence the commitment of students and teachers (in their workplace) to participate in various project tasks, including, among others: planning and conducting research; analysing the obtained results, which can also be used to identify, evaluate and present effective "learnables" strategies with relevance to secondary schooling; as well as developing guiding principles for the above-mentioned school experiments. In the case of the last two actions, the above was implemented mainly during a working meeting of all project teams in Warsaw in September 2019, organised by the Mazovian Self-Government Teacher Training Center (MSCDN). This workshop meeting ensured a convenient space for the presentation of diverse views and common positions on teaching and learning, including in the opinion quoted by K. A. Robinson (2015, p. 98) that "the best place to start thinking about how to change education is exactly where you are now." When writing about the significant participation of students in the project – giving them the opportunity to experiment and cooperate – but also about the participation of external stakeholders of the university, the author of the paper also meant the concept of a committed university, described more broadly (including in relation to the Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University's activities) in the publication *The model of cooperation with employers as the support measure for the development of entrepreneurial university potential* (Kulpa-Puczyńska, 2015).

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11 Information about the members of the Polish project team, cooperating general secondary schools and activities carried out so far can be found on the project website and the websites of the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Biology and Environmental Sciences at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University.

12 The author of the paper encountered the term "near-future teachers", well fit to the described situation, among others during the 10th National Pedagogical Congress "Pedagogy and education in the face of the crisis of trust, community and autonomy" held on 18–20 September 2019, in the title of the speech by Anna Weissbrot-Koziarska, titled: "Alexa, Siri, Cortana – near-future teachers."

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CECHY „NOWYCH" UCZNIÓW I POTENCJAŁ PRZYSZŁYCH NAUCZYCIELI. PIERWSZE WYNIKI MIĘDZYNARODOWEGO PROJEKTU „THE UNTEACHABLES"

Streszczenie: Znaczący staje się dzisiaj problem uczniów z trudnościami w funkcjonowaniu w środowisku szkolnym, które często nie odpowiada na unikalne i złożone potrzeby młodych osób uczących się, dotyczące np. nowoczesnych sposobów wymiany doświadczeń oraz wiedzy czy możliwości aktywnego uczestnictwa we wspólnocie uczących się i sieci wsparcia. Oznacza to m.in. konieczność tworzenia nowych zasobów edukacyjnych (powstałych także na bazie współpracy środowiska akademickiego z nauczycielami szkół średnich, kooperacji ekspertów i praktyków z różnych krajów) dla przyszłych nauczycieli, którzy będą musieli stawić czoła np. problemowi „wypalonych" uczniów. Głównym celem tekstu jest podzielenie się pierwszymi wynikami badań oraz refleksjami związanymi

z realizacją na Wydziale Nauk Pedagogicznych oraz Wydziale Biologii i Nauk o Środowisku Uniwersytetu Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie (we współpracy z partnerami z Danii – koordynator projektu, Islandii, Hiszpanii Słowenii i Włoch) projektu Erasmus+ „The Unteachables".

Słowa kluczowe: „nowi" uczniowie; przyszli nauczyciele; szkoły średnie; uniwersytety; współpraca; projekt Erasmus+.

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