



Pedagogical Authority in a Changing World.

The Contemporary Portrait of a Master

Władysław Duczko (1946–2025)

Autorytet pedagogiczny w procesie przemian.

Współczesna sylwetka mistrza

Władysława Duczko (1946–2025)

ABSTRACT

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: This study aims to examine evolving perceptions of authority, with particular emphasis on educational authority figures, and to contextualize these changes through a case study.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS: The central research question is: *What factors lead young people to perceive a contemporary teacher as a pedagogical authority?* The study employs the analysis of existing literature, ethno-historical and memorial sources, as well as a case study approach.

THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION: Beginning with a reflection on the historical perception of authority figures, the discussion moves toward processes of change and the modern expectations placed on individuals acting as educational authorities. In this context, the late Professor Władysław Duczko is presented not only as a distinguished archaeologist but, above all, as a mentor to his students.

RESEARCH RESULTS: Individuals recognized by young people as mentors play a crucial role in self-discovery, as well as in expanding and reshaping their frames of reference. Personal development under a mentor's guidance promotes self-education, self-improvement, and provides the skills necessary to navigate contemporary challenges.

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF RESEARCH: Reflecting on authority figures in the context of ongoing socio-cultural transformations allows for

a deeper understanding of how living conditions and social expectations toward pedagogical authorities have changed over time. Learning from concrete examples of mentors encourages aspirations for self-development among students and today's educators.

→ **KEYWORDS:** **AUTHORITY, PEDAGOGICAL AUTHORITY, SOCIO-CULTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS, TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION, WŁADYSŁAW DUCZKO**

STRESZCZENIE

CEL NAUKOWY: Celem rozważań jest poruszenie kontekstu przemian w postrzeganiu autorytetów, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem autorytetów pedagogicznych (docelowo w odniesieniu do studium przypadku).

PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE: Dążono do odpowiedzi na główne pytanie: Jakie czynniki wpływają na postrzeganie współczesnego nauczyciela w kategoriach autorytetu pedagogicznego? Zastosowano następujące metody: analizę źródeł zastanych, memorialnych oraz *case study*.

PROCES WYWODU: Począwszy od refleksji nad historycznym postrzeganiem autorytetów, skupiono się na procesach przemian i współczesnych oczekiwaniach stawianych osobom pełniącym funkcję autorytetów pedagogicznych. W tym kontekście zaprezentowano postać śp. profesora Władysława Duczko, który był nie tylko wybitnym archeologiem, ale przede wszystkim mentorem dla swoich uczniów.

WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ: Wpływ jednostek uważanych przez młodych ludzi za mistrzów pomaga w samopoznaniu, poszerzaniu i transformacji ich ram odniesień. Rozwój pod skrzydłami mentora wspiera procesy samokształcenia, samodoskonalenia, ale też radzenia sobie z wyzwaniami współczesności.

WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPŁYWU BADAŃ: Refleksja nad autorytetem pozwala zrozumieć, jak bardzo zmieniły się realia życia w stosunku do nieodległej przeszłości – w tym także oczekiwania wobec pedagogicznych autorytetów. Poznawanie konkretnych przykładów mistrzów pozwala rozwijać dążenia do samodoskonalenia nie tylko u uczniów, ale również współczesnych pedagogów.

→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** **AUTORYTET, AUTORYTET PEDAGOGICZNY, PRZEMIANY KULTUROWO-SPOŁECZNE, KSZTAŁCENIE TRANSFORMATYWNE, WŁADYSŁAW DUCZKO**

Introduction

Compared with the past, traditional cultural interpretations are undergoing a process of deconstruction, and the very notion of *authority* has acquired a new meaning. In earlier times, authority was largely imposed by social norms and accepted without question. Today, however, there is a clear crisis of such externally imposed authority, which is particularly visible among younger generations. Young people no longer accept teachers' authority unquestioningly, but only after making their own conscious decision to do so. Unlike in traditional conceptions, pedagogical authority today is not given but earned in recognition of the teacher's individuality and distinctive qualities. In seeking such figures, young people look for genuineness, dialogue, respect, passion, opportunities for self-fulfillment, and pathways for personal development under the guidance of mentors.

One such figure was the late Professor Władysław Duczko, who was not only an outstanding archaeologist but also a dedicated teacher and mentor to many young people who proudly refer to themselves as belonging to the "School of Professor Duczko." In this context, it is worth considering the following questions: Who, in contemporary times, can be regarded as a pedagogical role model? Who truly deserves this title, and what qualities make someone a mentor to others? This study draws on an analysis of existing and memorial sources and employs the case study method.

Authority in the Changing World

In traditional cultural and social models, authority was typically granted or even inherited. This phenomenon was linked to clearly defined social divisions determined by "birth, gender, and family status, which resulted in a rigid social hierarchy and limited opportunities for advancement" (Sztompka, 2002, p. 221). Hierarchical structures were also embedded in certain professions and maintained through everyday interactions, including those in social institutions. Teachers, in particular, were held in high esteem; as Śliwowski observed, a teacher "did not have to build authority but simply possessed it" (2002, p. 45), a notion which corresponds with the transmission model of education (see Perkowska-Klejman, 2022, pp. 477–494). Meanwhile, the upbringing and education of younger generations rested on more stable and coherent axionormative foundations, transmitted through the processes of socialization by families, schools, and the Church.

Over the past few decades, we have witnessed rapid and multidimensional cultural and social transformations. Their causes and consequences are complex and varied, which manifests in shifts within normative and axiological systems (Anasz, 1995). There is a growing emphasis on individual freedom of choice and self-expression, alongside a visible expansion of cultural pluralism. At the same time, the rise of mass media has spread new models of social relations: constructed, fragmented, inconsistent, and often marked by aggression (Rawecka, 2020, pp. 142–143).

Another defining trend is the dominance of consumer culture, in which social status is increasingly measured by economic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). This has given rise to a display of material symbols of prestige and a conformist lifestyle centered on physical attractiveness. These processes are reflected in peer groups, in which marginalization and acts of violence against less affluent or less popular students have become increasingly common (Sitarczyk & Dudziak, 2024, pp. 43–59).

Today, the strongest influence on younger generations comes from the digitalization of social life, especially through widespread access to global communication and the vast resources available online. Knowledge is no longer transmitted solely through hierarchical systems as it is easy to find and instantly accessible though often disorganized, and its quality depends on the reliability of the source. Through digital media, young people frequently express critical opinions about the education system, including teaching methods and approaches to upbringing (PAP, 2025). A growing distrust of socially imposed authorities is also evident.

Unlike in the past, “authority is not power but influence based on recognition and trust” (Melosik, 2013, p. 101). Authority rests on experience and wisdom but also reflects a value system and ethical principles. Contemporary research shows that young people expect their mentors to build relationships founded on partnership, authenticity, and emotional engagement (Melosik, 2010). These transformations can generate anxiety, resistance, and social tension, yet they also create opportunities to search for new, democratic models of education based on dialogue, empathy, equality, and shared responsibility (Hooks, 1994). What is increasingly sought, therefore, is a relational model of education, and one of upbringing, which recognizes that “we do not educate for obedience but for responsibility” (Rogers, 1969).

According to Jack Mezirow, the next stage should be transformative learning, which applies to adults, including, for example, university students. A key element of this model is the process of becoming aware of one’s own frames of reference and patterns (those internalized from early life) in relation to one’s mental habits and perspectives. In simple terms, these refer to unexamined attitudes, judgments, beliefs, and expectations: mental predispositions that shape how we evaluate, categorize, and interpret experiences and other people. Without an awareness of one’s own assumptions, mental habits, and simplifications, it is impossible to genuinely understand and successfully adopt another person’s point of view (Mezirow, 2000, p. 18; Pleskot-Makulska, 2007, pp. 87–88), particularly when that person is marked by stigma or perceived as different. This form of learning can occur as a result of one’s own pursuit of self-education as well as through the influence of mentors who help us transcend personal barriers and limitations. Mentors guide learners toward changes in thinking by broadening and transforming their frame of reference, which can be both liberating and motivating for self-improvement. For many of his students, the late Professor Władysław Duczko was undoubtedly such a mentor.

The Contemporary Understanding of Authority: The Late Professor Władysław Duczko

The late Professor Władysław Duczko was regarded by many as a true Master. His deep expertise, extensive knowledge, and exceptional scholarly intuition played a decisive role in shaping this perception. These qualities enabled him not only to identify complex cultural phenomena, but also to connect them in original and unexpected ways. He recognized the importance of crossing disciplinary boundaries and of embracing innovative tools and research methods.

Professor Duczko often stressed that when studying the past, particularly in the face of scarce written sources, archaeology becomes indispensable, especially when discoveries are supported and verified through specialist analyses employing the latest technological advancements. He was one of the pioneers of Polish archaeometry, and in collaboration with Ewelina Miśta-Jakubowska and Renata Czech-Błońska, he developed methods for analyzing early medieval silver hoards, linking them to the history of the early Piast dynasty (Duczko et al., 2022).

He was unafraid to contest the boundaries imposed by dominant historical discourses, emphasizing that such narratives are often shaped by simplifications and even founding or national identity myths. He deconstructed these myths both in Polish history – for instance, by questioning the very existence of the Polans tribe (see Pławski, 2008) – and in the history of Rus', where he provided evidence that Scandinavians – the Rus – played a vital role in its formation (Duczko, 2025). He consistently maintained that “the goal of science is to seek truth, not to perpetuate stereotypes” (Duczko, 2013–2021).

Students – and not only students – attended Professor Duczko's lectures in large numbers. They came not out of obligation or because they had to pass an exam, but out of shared passion and the desire to meet with the Professor. As his former student Anna Śnieżko recalled, during the pandemic:

His lectures drew entire families to their computers, utterly captivated by his unconventional perspective on human history, the wisdom of his thoughts, and the originality of his views. Your refusal to conform to patterns and your aversion to stereotypes were so distinctly yours: your rich personality could never fit into any mould (Śnieżko, 2025).

Professor Duczko was an erudite with a rare gift for sparking curiosity in his audience – who, in truth, were never mere listeners. His lectures were vibrant dialogues, animated by a stream of questions from students that he always welcomed and addressed. For him, this interaction was not a distraction or a disruption – quite the opposite. It proved his students' deepening passion for exploring history and archaeology: whether the world of the Vikings and the Slavs or the ways in which understanding the past can illuminate the present. He often said that students needed dialogue as much as they needed water. Recalling one of his lectures on identity, he once remarked:

We simply couldn't finish; we couldn't leave [the class – BJC]. They were so eager to keep discussing that I had to set points around which the debate could focus. In the end, I even prepared a presentation on everything we hadn't had time to talk about (Duczko, 2013–2021).

In Professor Duczko's view, conversations with students often revealed that certain topics were underrepresented, insufficiently emphasized, poorly explained, or entirely overlooked in academic discourse. For that reason, he frequently discussed such issues in his own publications. His classes were characterized by an atmosphere of joy in the meeting itself and in the mutual inspiration shared between teacher and students. The sense of openness stemmed from the fact that Professor Duczko never created distance between himself and others (see Historyczny Top, 2024), despite being held in the highest esteem. Although he formally observed polite forms of address such as *sir* and *madam*, he preferred to avoid them. This was not only because he had spent much of his adult life in Sweden,¹ but also because he recognized that such conventions created unnecessary distance and were remnants of an era marked by rigid social divisions. He also regarded academic language as a form of exclusion and dominance. Duczko believed that scholars should write in a way that is clear and accessible to all, describing overly technical academic language as a "terrible affectation" that isolates researchers from the broader public. As he once observed:

Polish history is incredible. Even teachers don't understand it; they don't teach early Polish history, the early Piasts, yet it's essential to understanding everything that follows. When I appeared on Maria Giza's radio programme, there were so many comments and questions: 'Why don't they teach this in schools?' There's a huge demand. People want to learn; they're hungry for knowledge. We can't lock it away in the academic world (Duczko, 2013–2021).

He rejected any attitude of superiority toward others, especially when it limited the potential of emerging scholars. Taking students and younger academics under his wing, he nurtured their confidence, affirmed their agency, and helped them recognize their own worth. He encouraged courage and independence, often saying, "Don't be afraid; just do your thing," or "You have to be independent." He inspired his students to form hypotheses, pursue their goals with persistence, and challenge intellectual boundaries. At the same time, he guided without providing ready-made answers. When he recognized true passion in his mentees, he mobilized his network of contacts in Poland and abroad to help them test their ideas and develop their research projects. Many recalled his characteristic encouragements: "If I can help, I will... I'll start asking around tomorrow... I'll send you that book... You have to read this... It's worth exploring more deeply."

The exceptional quality of Professor Władysław Duczko's presence lay in the fact that everyone who met him felt equally valued. He cared about the well-being of those around him and embodied authentic humanity: compassionate, attentive to others' needs, and

¹ "The change in language signifies a change in how we think about relationships. Wherever the word *you* appears, responsibility and authenticity appear as well" (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2006, p. 112).

always willing to offer support, even in personal matters. He believed that many young people possess great potential, yet it is too often lost due to circumstance and, above all, social pressures. He sought to create equal opportunities for his students, teaching them how to build an academic community grounded in the ideals of *universitas*, and he constantly emphasized the importance of collaboration over competition. These qualities – his attentiveness, ability to listen, generosity with his time, and disarming humility – earned him a wide circle of devoted friends.

Equally remarkable was his strong moral compass, which guided him consistently in both his personal and professional life. He was distrustful of politicians with extreme views, regardless of nationality, and valued dialogue and compromise over polarization. He believed that these same skills, together with the ability to identify misinformation and fake news in digital media, should be integral to young people's education. He opposed hatred and discrimination in all their forms, viewing them as forces that inevitably lead to the escalation of violence. These convictions were not abstract as he had personally experienced such injustices, which were interwoven with his own family history.

Born shortly after World War II, he grew up in Warsaw, for many years unaware of the complex and difficult past of his family, who had survived the war. At a young age, he experienced the profound loss of his father's death. After completing his early education, he became a student at the University of Warsaw, where he earned his master's degree in archaeology in 1969. The joy of this achievement was, however, overshadowed by events that had begun a year earlier (Eisler, 2006). Because of his family's Jewish heritage, they were forced into exile and stripped of their Polish citizenship. From that point, he continued his academic journey in Sweden, studying Scandinavian archaeology, art history, and – out of personal fascination – numismatics. He earned his doctorate and later joined the faculty at Uppsala University, where he devoted himself to research and to expanding his intellectual and methodological horizons. His curiosity often led him beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries; for instance, his fascination with Viking jewellery inspired him to learn goldsmithing techniques.

Despite the difficult experiences that had marked his relationship with Poland, Professor Władysław Duczko remained connected to his homeland and followed its political and social developments. He was moved by the rise of the *Solidarity* movement, observing that its activities had transformed Western Europe's perception of Poland. When martial law was declared, international aid efforts quickly mobilized – with Sweden among the first to respond – and the Professor personally took part in organizing humanitarian assistance. Obtaining permission to enter Poland, however, was not easy:

At that time, countless people were without passports – they called them Nansen passports – and visas were required. The Polish Embassy was full of dreadful types, but I managed to get a visa. The Swedes were supportive. In the very first week of martial law in Poland, the Swedish Postal Service announced that parcels could be sent to Poland free of charge, and before long they had even created ready-made gift packages that could be purchased and sent – and Swedes were mailing them in droves [...]. We brought food, children's clothes, diapers... We unloaded donations in churches across Warsaw, one of the main

centers was St. Martin's Church in the Old Town, and later in Olsztyn and Gdańsk. We had a van. Everything was wonderfully organized (Duczek, 2013–2021).

He later recalled the shock of seeing a country so different from the one he had remembered:

For sentimental reasons, I went to a supermarket in Warsaw. It was absolutely appalling – there was no food at all. We drove on to Wrocław, and the roads were completely empty – it was 1982. The atmosphere was oppressively bleak. In the morning, we went to unload medicines at a hospital, and that was a harrowing experience... We entered the hospital, and along the corridor people sat in total silence, utterly motionless. It felt like a waiting room for death... We met some doctors and told them we had brought medicine. The doctor said, 'Why did you even bring this? Let it all collapse – it would be better to die.' We were completely stunned, deeply shaken (Duczek, 2013–2021).

The loss of his homeland due to his "undesirable origins," together with his awareness of the consequences of authoritarian rule, including the manipulation and mythologization of history, shaped Professor Władysław Duczek's worldview. While living in Sweden, he actively supported not only Polish but also Russian scholars who, for a time, were permitted to travel to foreign universities.² When those colleagues suddenly disappeared from international academic exchanges, he realized that they had been forbidden from maintaining contact with him and other researchers abroad.

In the preface to the reissued edition of his monograph *Viking Rus*,³ he wrote with sorrow about the plight of scholars in the Russian Federation who still live under state control:

In complete dependence on the state, which dictates the scholarly visions of the past for those working at state universities, Russian historians and archaeologists now find themselves in the same position as during the Soviet era: they do not dare to write freely (Duczek, 2025, p. 10).

Professor Duczek also warned of the grave danger inherent in the use of a distorted "history" by authoritarian regimes: a tool that can be used to justify, for instance, territorial expansion. In this context, he referred to the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine. He noted that, in the years leading up to the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the Kremlin had shown a growing interest in Prince Vladimir the Great of Kyiv, particularly through state-controlled public discourse.⁴ Statues commemorating Vladimir were

² "My old friends – historians and archaeologists from Moscow and St. Petersburg who used to come to Uppsala in the early 1990s, and whom we kept working with regularly for the next ten years, publishing their work in Sweden – suddenly turned out to be Great Russians" (Bartnicki, 2015).

³ The reissue of the monograph *Rus' of the Vikings...*, published just before the Professor's death, is owed to the tremendous work and dedication of Beata Jankowiak-Konik, who was also among the Master's closest friends.

⁴ "In national propaganda, it was decided that the figure best suited to promote patriotic visions was Prince Vladimir the Great of Kyiv" (Duczek, 2025, p. 10).

erected across Russia, and a large exhibition titled *The Vikings: The Road to the East* was organized at the State Historical Museum in Moscow. The exhibition, however, falsified the historical record by depicting the Varangians as “servants of the Rus,” that is, the Eastern Slavs. Only a month after the exhibition closed, Russia launched its attack on Ukraine (Duczko, 2025, p. 11). Reflecting on these events, Professor Duczko wrote: “Since then, the war has continued, becoming ever more brutal and increasingly dangerous, not only for Europe, but perhaps for the entire world” (Duczko, 2025, p. 11).

He was a man of independent thought, both in life and in scholarship, who worked with a sense of responsibility and a conviction that his mission was to promote humanity, as well as guide and inspire students to expand and transform their own “frames of reference.” Professor Duczko became a true mentor not only because he imparted knowledge, but also because he embodied wisdom, integrity, and compassion. For many young people, he was a teacher as well as a guide and companion on their intellectual and personal journeys: someone who inspired, supported, and helped mold their values and outlook, while awakening in them a desire to seek truth and pursue self-education (in line with the principles of contemporary pedagogical authority; see Olender-Jermacz, 2024, pp. 126–135).

In the final six months of his life, as he battled illness, dozens of people regularly reached out to ask about his condition. In response, his son created a message group of fifty of the Professor’s closest friends and former students to share updates (through text messages). Throughout that time, he was visited by his students, alumni, colleagues, and friends. After a cancer illness, Professor Władysław Duczko passed away on March 11, 2025, surrounded by the devoted care of his family and the warmth of those dearest to him: his friends and his students. A testament to the importance of his legacy was the funeral ceremony, during which ten people spoke, most of them his protégés.

Conclusion

The meanings associated with the concept of authority, viewed against the backdrop of cultural and social transformations, reveal how fundamentally the realities of life have changed compared to the past. The world no longer appears normatively coherent, and the traditional values and norms that once regulated social life have, in many cases, lost their relevance. We are witnessing a crisis of trust; particularly a decline in confidence toward individuals who, in the traditional social order, were vested with considerable authority. This also applies to teachers, who have largely lost the status that was previously granted to them by virtue of their role.

In the twenty-first century, the notion of pedagogical authority has required redefinition. It has been recognized that a teacher should be “a witness, a companion, and a negotiator of meaning” (Melosik, 2013, p. 78). The focus has shifted from a transmission-based model of education toward one that is relational, or even participatory. In the relational model, a teacher who may be regarded by students as an authority figure must demonstrate not

only professional and intellectual competence but also emotional, ethical, and personal engagement in the process of advancing students' growth. Such a teacher teaches actively, without coercion, and remains present in the educational encounter.

For adult learners, transformative learning, as described by Mezirow (2000), is especially significant. The ideas and goals underlying this approach are well illustrated by the example of the late Professor Władysław Duczko, who embodied the ability to "teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls [...] of our students – this is essential if we are to create the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin" (Hooks, 1994, p. 13). He exemplified the role of a true mentor who supports the learner in self-discovery and in developing the awareness needed to transcend personal limitations and culturally "imprinted" patterns of thought which hinder the perception of the world's and humanity's complexity. This, in turn, becomes the foundation for living according to ethical principles and for a lifelong pursuit of self-education and self-improvement.

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