

THE INFLUENCE OF TEACHERS' PROMOTION ON THE QUALITY OF TEACHING – CASE STUDY

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Abstract:

The article presents the problem of teachers' professional promotion and its influence on the quality of teaching in one of the Silesian secondary schools. Therefore a survey was made among the teachers' working in one of the secondary schools in the district of Silesia. The results of the research make us think about this problem, incline to reflection and deeper analysis. All the results are being and will be verified.

Key words: quality, education, survey, teachers' professional promotion

Słowa kluczowe: : jakość, kształcenie, ankieta, awans zawodowy nauczycieli

INTRODUCTION

According to Total Quality Management (TQM) philosophy, quality is something that makes the client do with it, even makes him delighted. When the idea of customer is concerned, it means that education stops to be a mission or vocation and it starts to be considered as a market category and it starts to be a service.

The teacher stops to be a master for his students. His/her aim is not only to give them his/her knowledge, but he/she becomes their service provider, who takes care of their needs.

The customer is a student, his/her parents, and the whole society, and they want the young people to be well educated. Of course not always they all have the same ideas and achievements.

The term education means not only intellectual growth, it is also building students' attitudes that are connected with utility development and functioning in society. The quality of school work and the quality of teaching are almost the same.

We can form a definition of it: the quality of teaching, or the quality of school work is a degree of using students' and teachers' possibilities in different operations connected with pedagogical, educational and organizational things and material and organizational conditions used for students' promotion. We should not consider students' final results as a mirror of the quality of school because the measurements results, for example the students' final results, do not give us any information about their starting abilities and possibilities of beginning the school and about the conditions in which the process of education was taking place. We also know nothing about other components and educational backgrounds.

Quality of teaching is one of the components of the quality of school. Traditionally, it was the quality of teaching that was the main interest of pedagogical supervision, in comparison to psychological or motivational conditions. It is student's development that is considered to be the most important element of the educational process, it is learning, not being taught that decides about the degree of teacher's activities and their effectiveness of students' learning process. School rankings make the quality of schools lower. The schools with high enrolment do not have any motivation for using all possibilities because the students will always have relatively good results in their final exams or in their entrance exams to the universities. False information flowing from rankings makes harm to everybody – the society, students and schools. That is why the knowledge about the quality of teaching is so important and that is why it should be known by everybody.

In 1999, in Poland the reform of education was introduced. It became the aim of surveys and the point of interest of many researchers. Its creators wanted to make changes in educational process and they wanted to improve the quality of teaching. It is of course functioning till now, but it is still very controversial. There are a lot of mistakes and shortcomings in it.

CURRICULUM REFORM IN POLAND [12]

Since April 2000, the teachers of all the public schools are subjected to the system of promotion. According to the Teachers' Charter, a teacher can obtain the following professional promotion grades:

- trainee teacher
- contract teacher
- appointed teacher
- chartered teacher

A possibility of granting an honorary title of education professor is also envisaged for chartered teachers with outstanding professional achievements.

For the last 10 years, Polish educational system has been undergoing crucial changes. These were initiated in 1999, when a major reform was carried out, involving profound changes in the school structure, curricula, grading system, and requirements towards students, but also the system of teachers' professional development and promotion. The initiative for that reform derived from a combination of a number of significant social and political events:

The first and most important of these was the transformation of the Polish political system, which began in 1989. Legislative solutions introduced during that period enabled the creating of the first non-public (private) schools and universities. At the same time, they exposed the weaknesses of the Polish education system and its extreme subservience to the short-term political interests of consecutive Governments. A national debate on the quality of education system in Poland, which was then initiated, could not be separated from reflecting on the state of the teacher's trade and the question of whether teachers were prepared to work in the Europe of the day;

Another important reason for introducing these reforms was the acceptance of the Bologna Declaration by the Republic of Poland and the process of adjusting higher education to the requirements specified in this document, i.e. developing such methods of cooperation between academic circles in Europe that would account for the differentiation and autonomy of particular countries and schools. In this way, Polish higher education was included in the trend of thorough structural and content reforms, a process which has not yet ended.

In order to produce a sensible description of teacher training in Poland, pointing to both its advantages and drawbacks, one should start with a short introduction of the school system structure, together with its formal foundations. The functioning of schools and teachers in Poland is regulated by two groups of laws. The first is only concerned with compulsory education, and encompasses the period from pre-school to the Matura examination. The most crucial Parliamentary Acts for the organization of this area of education are:

- The Education System Act of 7 September 1991 (with further amendments);
- The Act of 8 January 1999 on the Implementation of the Education System Reform (with further amendments);
- The Act of 26 January 1982 – Teachers' Charter (with further amendments).

A separate group of Acts specifies the functioning of education on higher level. Of these, the following are to be mentioned:

- The Act of 27 July 2005 – The Law on Higher Education;
- The Act of 14 March 2003 on Academic Degrees and Title and on Degrees and Title in the Area of Art;
- The Act of 8 October 2004 on the Rules of Financing Research;
- The Act of 17 July 1998 on Loans and Credits for Students (with further amendments).

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL PROMOTION DEGREES [12]

Polish system of teachers' professional promotion is slightly complicated, and closely interconnected with the

system of monitoring and evaluating the quality of school-work. To make this description comprehensible it is important to understand how the responsibilities for organizing and administrating the education are distributed on different levels. The figure below illustrates the structure of that system.

The system of teacher promotion in Poland has been grounded on those presumptions, with the last being the most important one: permanent training, an active participation in post-diploma studies and other forms of self-improvement is an important requirement for getting promoted in teacher's career in Poland. An important role in that system (or rather on two lower levels of the system) plays a colleague, whose responsibilities are, among others (Teachers Charter 2004):

- a) to explain the official regulations concerning teacher promotion system;
- b) to help in the practical part of preparing a plan and timetable for personal professional development;
- c) to monitor the process of executing that plan, especially by:
 - presenting examples of good practice (both, by inviting to observe one's own lessons and by organizing the so-called "open days" in mentor – a more experienced teacher, more competent in other classes – an invitation to observe other teachers' work;
 - evaluating the classes given by the trainee teacher and suggesting possible ways of improvement;
 - meeting with the trainee teacher at least once a month to diagnose his needs and interests, to consult lessons plans and possible methods of conducting them, to present new and valuable literature and to give workshops in a particular area of interest;
- d) to prepare a first draft of trainee's professional development evaluation;
- e) to help in preparing all the necessary documents required for the legal process of promotion.

Polish system of teacher promotion (professional titles and requirements).

TRAINEE TEACHER

- 9 months (under the supervision of mentor),
- evaluation of professional development,
- qualification in front of special Committee (internal),
- title awarded by the head of school (director).

CONTRACT TEACHER

- 2 years and 9 months (under the supervision of mentor),
- evaluation of professional development and achievements,
- exam in front of external Committee (including 2 experts from Ministry of Education),
- title awarded by local bodies responsible for running the school.

APPOINTED TEACHER

- 2 years and 9 months (no mentor – self responsibility),
- evaluation of professional development and achievements,

- qualification in front of external Committee (including 3 experts from Ministry of Education),
- title awarded by local office of Educational Superintendent.

CHARTERED TEACHER

Teachers with a significant and widely appreciated achievements as well as with more than 20 years of professional experience in teaching (including no less than 10 years from the last level of promotion) can be awarded the honoured title of "School Professor" by the Ministry of Education (note: "School Professor" is not the position, rather a kind of diploma with no financial consequences).

A teacher who just begins his/her professional career can be employed by a school at the position of a trainee teacher (although his contract can be only temporary, no longer than 1-2 years). The most important responsibilities of a beginning teacher/pedagogue are the following:

1. to get acquainted with the school's internal structure, tasks and rules of daily functioning, including especially:
 - a) educational acts, as well as other regulations (on national and local level) concerning school work,
 - b) documentation of school work – official reports, plans, scenarios, etc., that are used to prove the quality of education,
 - c) rules of ensuring safe and healthy learning environment;
2. to observe classes conducted by their mentor and/or other more experienced teachers (at least 1 hour a month) and discuss their structure and quality afterwards;
3. to conduct his/her own classes under the supervision of the mentor or/and the Head of school, and actively discuss/ evaluate their quality with the supervisor (again, at least 1 hour per month);
4. to participate actively in the school's internal system of permanent professional training, forms of which should be strongly connected with the type of his work.

The internship lasts for nine months and is supervised by a specially selected mentor, from whom a relevant professional experience is required (it can be an appointed or chartered teacher). It is important to notice, that trainee teachers' responsibilities are very similar to a regular teacher's job: he conducts 18 class hours a month and only a small part of those would be closely monitored and supervised. Other than conducting classes, however, the trainee teacher is obliged to prepare and consistently implement a plan of his/her own professional development. The assessment of the teacher's professional achievements for the period of internship is made by the Head of the school, having acquainted himself/herself with the assessment project prepared by the mentor, and having consulted with the parents' council. The assessment should be in written form and include an instruction on how to appeal against it. Should the final assessment of professional achievements be negative, a re-assessment can be made only after completing an additional period of nine months of internship. After receiving a positive assessment, the trainee teacher has fourteen days to file an application to the Head of the school for qualification procedures before a commission especially 164 EUROPEAN DIMENSIONS OF TEACHER EDUCATION – Similarities and Differences appointed for this purpose. Members of the commission inclu-

de the Head of the school, the head of the subject team, the internship mentor and a representative of the teachers' union.

If the teacher is approved by the qualification commission, he/she receives the act of granting a promotion in rank to a contract teacher from the Head of the school. In case of a negative assessment, the trainee teacher may apply for permission to repeat the internship in the same school (available only once), otherwise his/her contract would expire.

Another promotion in rank is that of an appointed teacher. Qualification procedures at this stage last two years and nine months. They are also based on the plan of personal scientific development and under the supervision of a more competent mentor with greater professional experience.

The principal difference in the procedure consists of the necessity to take qualification examinations before the commission especially appointed for this purpose, whose members include a specialist outside the school. These are: a representative of a local body running the school, the Head of the school, three experts from the list of the Ministry of Education, and a representative of the teachers' union. Passing the examination results in the acquisition of the rank of an appointed teacher, which is granted by the authority of local bodies responsible for running the school.

The highest rank in professional promotion is that of a chartered teacher, the acquisition of which is conditional on completing post-graduate studies and re-assessment of the teacher's professional achievements by the qualification commission. The title is awarded by the local office of Educational Superintendent.

The system of teacher promotion described here is more and more frequently under criticism. Its major setback is a high degree of formalization and bureaucratization. The number of documents which the teacher must prepare at each stage of professional promotion is very large and the requirements regarding their content and layout are very detailed, but its usefulness in practice is very small. In addition, too much documentation leads to a situation where the most important issues, that is the child and its development, become hardly noticeable. The basis for the assessment of the teacher's professional achievements is neither the quality of classes provided by him/her nor what is going on in the classroom, but the quality of the academic achievements of the pupils. Furthermore, the system has little influence on providing remuneration for teachers, and differences between particular stages of the teacher's career are small. Teachers themselves criticize the fact that the promotion route is too short – opportunities are available only for a short period of time, and after the acquisition of the rank of chartered teacher, there is in principle no possibility for further development, neither in terms of professional titles, nor in terms of financial profits. Although permanent training is an important condition for professional career, after achieving the highest rank of chartered teacher, further training has no impact on wage grades. This has a detrimental effect on the motivation for professional improvement and is conducive to the phenomenon of occupational burnout.

PROBLEMS IN POLISH EDUCATION [3, 4, 5, 9, 10, 12]

Based on the review of the available literature relating to rating the quality of teachers' work and quality of tea-

ching we can say that this problem is being analyzed by many researchers.

A painful problem of teacher training in Poland is the lack of proper balance between theory and practice: Polish teachers are well equipped with general, scientific knowledge, but their ability to put that knowledge into practice is rather low [6]. The problem grows into a critical level in secondary school. While elementary education is far more advanced in building the connections in students' minds between theoretical concepts and practical skills, the training of subject teachers obviously fails to fulfill its aims. The source of that phenomenon is neither the lack of methodological preparation, nor the ability to use modern, innovative methods, or construct lessons plans with respect to students' needs. The problem is rather grounded in a great shortage of "psychology in practice", e.g. understanding psychological sources of pupils' behavior, ability to deal with "difficult" students, etc. Subject teachers are often aware of this gap in their qualifications; when searching for educational support, they often come to their maternal universities for counseling in a particular case. Overly theoretically oriented training results in a great deal of academic, declarative knowledge, which, unfortunately, is not embedded in procedural and context knowledge [7, 8]. In everyday school life, when put in front of aggressive student's behavior, Polish subject teachers often become unable to react in a quick and effective manner. Trying to save their own identity, they would take an escaping or self-protective attitude; activate "survival rituals" becoming the unhappy prisoners of their own occupation [6]. In secondary school, where students are in a risky stage of psychological development, being able to sense intuitively the fear or weakness of pedagogues, such teacher's attitude may cause many additional problems.

Education or school administration, oblige teachers to engage in many activities which are not strictly related to teaching. No other professional group is under so many compulsory obligations in respect to lifelong learning, planning their own occupational development and "producing" a number of administrative documents. At the same time, the teaching profession has considerably lost its social prestige. Populist comments on teaching as being a supposedly easy and privileged profession are not only hurtful for teachers, but also cause additional, overwhelming strain. The Polish teacher becomes more and more tired, bitter, and depressed.

Not surprisingly, over 52% out of 1000 active teachers seriously considers leaving the profession [11]. Almost the same number expressed the opinion that nowadays it is not worth to be a teacher. The lack of professional advice and help for teachers suffering from occupational burnout is severe in Poland.

The only way of supporting teachers in dealing with permanent stress and tiredness is a sabbatical year guaranteed by Teachers' Charter (once every 5 years of teaching work).

On top of that, in Polish pedagogical literature, many examples of after-conference books can be found. Their content, however, though inspiring, is rather difficult to present in a brief way. Most of the chapters provide a description of a narrow piece of research, often conducted with self-constructed, not standardized methods, and ba-

sed on small group of respondents. Here are few examples of such material:

- Adamek and Żmijewska (ed.) [1] – "The teacher in educational system. Present and future". The book presents the most updated picture of pedagogical research in Poland. Apart from the examples of surveys on the level of teachers' competencies or effectiveness of their work in classroom, possible methods to improve the system were selected and described. How to support teachers in realizing their own scripts, schemas of activities or stereotypes? How to stimulate the attitude of a reflective practitioner? How to develop the teachers' ability to reflect on their own thinking? How to modernize the system of elementary teachers' training to fulfill the requirements of the newest reform? These are the questions brought up during the conference. The authors stress that it is a higher education responsibility to prepare teachers of high level of professionalism who will be able to act effectively in future, more advanced school.
- Bartkiewicz, Kowaluk and Samujło (ed.) [2] – "Competent teacher – the present and future of the profession." The book presents a set of key competencies necessary for an effective teacher. What kind of competencies are expected and required in contemporary Europe from a professional teacher? To what extent do teachers use information technology in a classroom, and how it may be used in teaching? The book combines the survey results with didactics, making the content comprehensible and useful not only for academics, but also for primary and secondary school teachers.

SURVEY RESULTS

At one of the secondary schools in the district of Silesia, there was made a survey entitled: "The influence of teachers' promotion in the quality of teaching".

The survey took place in the school where there are 61 teachers, 38 of them are working as a full-time workers. In the survey, there were 15 questions connected with teachers' professional promotion and its influence on the quality of teaching.

This article presents the most crucial results (in the author's opinion).

One of the questions was connected with the reasons of teachers' promotion. The results are shown in the bar chart (fig. 1).

As we can see, 80% of teachers said that the reason of their promotion was the money. Only 6% said it was a way of self-improvement and 12% considered promotion as a way of responsiveness.

Another question was connected with the stabilization of teachers' life and profession. The results are presented in fig. 2.

Looking at the diagram we can see, that 90% said that teachers' promotion was not a way of getting stabilization. Only 4% said "yes", and 6% had no opinion about it.

One more example shows that teachers' promotion is not the prime mover of teachers' activity and it is not the source of improvement of the quality of teaching. The results are shown in fig. 3.

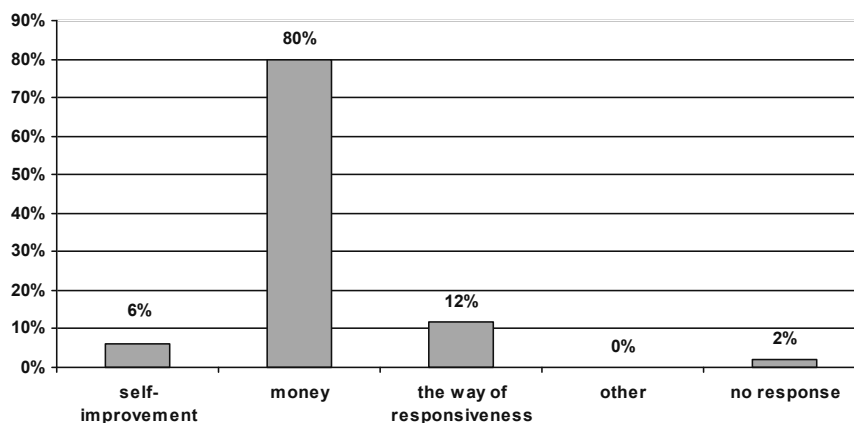


Fig. 1. The reason of teachers' professional promotion

Rys. 1. Przyczyny ubiegania się nauczycieli o kolejne stopnie awansu zawodowego

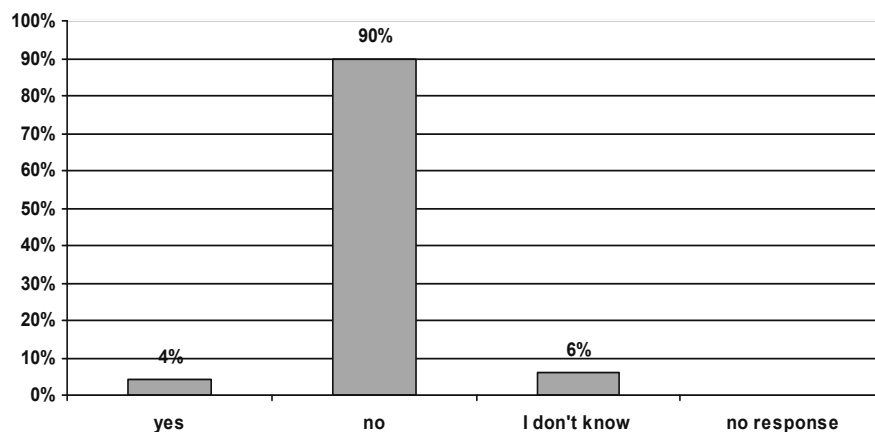


Fig. 2. Teachers' professional promotion vs. stabilization of teachers' life and profession

Rys. 2. Awans zawodowy nauczycieli a poczucie stabilizacji życiowej i zawodowej

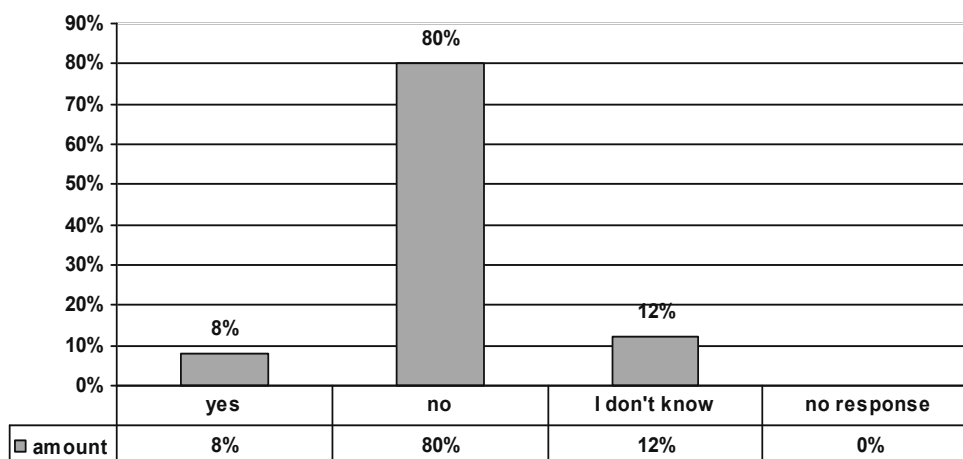


Fig. 3. Teachers' Professional promotion as the prime mover of teachers' activity and the source of improvement of the quality of teaching.

Rys. 3 Awans zawodowy nauczycieli jako motor aktywności i źródło podnoszenia jakości pracy szkoły

This question also showed the drawbacks of teachers' promotion system. Here, 80% of surveyors said that this system was neither the prime mover of their activity, nor the source of improvement of the quality of teaching. 12% had no opinion about it, and only 8% answered "yes".

Another question is concerned with the problem of existing professional promotion in teachers' job and its influ-

ence on the quality of education process and school's achievements (fig. 4).

Over a half (54%) of the respondents do not notice any influence on the quality of education process and school's achievements.

The last question is connected with quality standards and their influence on the teaching quality. The answers are shown on fig. 5.

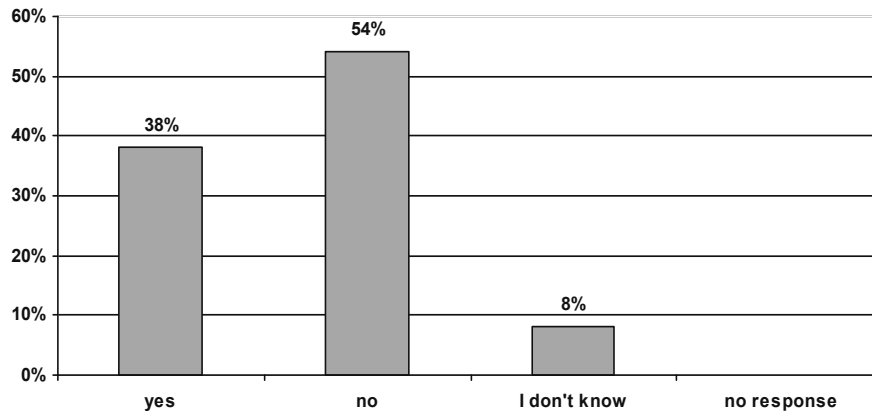


Fig. 4. Professional promotion in teachers' job and its influence on the quality of education process and school's achievements
Rys. 4. Awans zawodowy nauczycieli i jego wpływ na jakość, efekty edukacji i osiągnięcia placówki

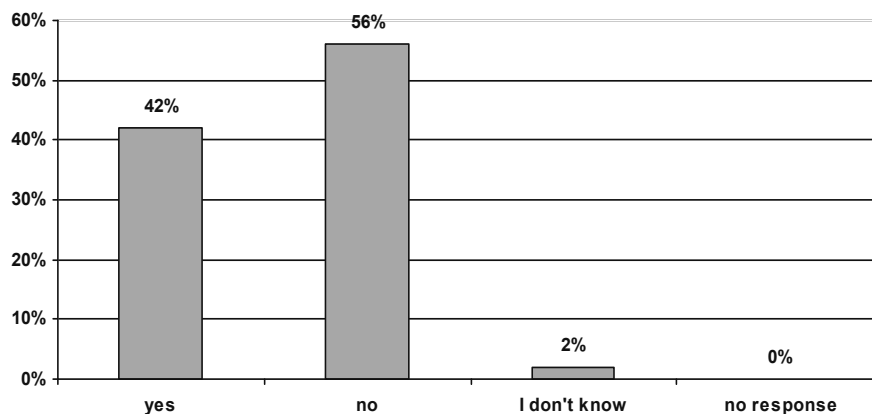


Fig. 5. Quality standards and their influence on the teaching quality
Rys. 5. Wpływ posiadania przez szkołę norm jakości na jakość nauczania

In this question 56% respondents answered that having quality standards by school does not have any influence on the quality of teaching and the process of education.

SUMMARY

The research made in one of the Silesian secondary schools shows that the teachers think there is no connection between the quality of teaching and the teachers' promotion system. The system is not a source of improvement of the quality of teaching and the school work. We can't say that the system is a kind of motor having the influence on teachers' activity.

Because of the bureaucracy and collection of different "papers", teachers' activity is reduced. There are a lot of different courses, conferences, etc., that teachers' have to take part in. Unfortunately, there is no use in it and it has not any influence on the quality of teaching and the school work. It is worthless. Teacher's promotion has nothing in common with stabilization in life and profession. Teachers' are worried that they can loose their job that is why they are trying to fight for another degree.

The survey presents the results from only one school. It should be continued in many schools in order to say, if the results are true or false.

It is very hard to avoid a slightly bitter ending – the situation of the Polish teacher at the beginning of XXI century still resembles the one described by Kobo Abe, a Japanese

[13] writer in his famous novel "The Woman in the Dunes" (1953):

„Rarely will you meet anyone as jealous as a teacher. Year after year students tumble along like the waters of a river. They flow away, and only the teacher is left behind, like some deeply buried rock at the bottom of the current. Although he may tell others of his hopes, he doesn't dream of them himself as worthless and either falls into masochistic loneliness or, failing that, ultimately becomes suspicious and pious, forever denouncing the eccentricities of others. He longs so much for the freedom and action...”

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