

Daniel Kukla*

John de La Salle's Recommendations for the Contemporary School with Particular Emphasis on Teacher Authority

Rekomendacje Jana Chrzyciciela de la Salle (1651–1719) dla współczesnej szkoły ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem autorytetu nauczyciela

Abstract: This article presents the figure and pedagogical achievements of John de La Salle (1651–1719), founder of the Congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, in the context of contemporary strategies for building teacher authority. Much attention is devoted to the teacher model he developed and the principles guiding its implementation, with a view to its potential application in modern teaching practice.

Although de La Salle's pedagogical ideas are deeply rooted in religious values and the socio-cultural realities of his time, many of the principles he formulated are arguably universal and relevant to 21st-century education. Special emphasis is placed on his recommendations for establishing teacher authority, including the concept of the *Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher*, which remains central to Lasallian pedagogy.

The study draws on limited Polish research on this topic, alongside primarily English-language sources unfamiliar to Polish readers. These international studies on the history and contemporary thought and practice of de La Salle schools are referenced as a potential contribution to the development of Lasallian studies in Poland.

Keywords: John de La Salle, Lasallian pedagogy, teacher authority.

* Daniel Kukla (ORCID: 0000-0003-1907-0933) – *Doctor habilitatus*, associate professor at the Department of Educational Research, Faculty of Social Sciences, Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa; email: d.kukla@ujd.edu.pl.

Introduction

One hundred and seventy years ago, Adolf Diesterweg (1790–1866), a pioneering figure in democratic education, declared that ‘the school is worth precisely what the teacher is worth.’¹ These words still ring true today, for no matter how well-funded a school may be, the heart of education lies in the teacher: their qualifications, competencies, and personal commitment, as well as the respect society affords the profession. The latter point—status of teachers and their authority—merits renewed attention. Lech Witkowski, an expert on this topic, observes that in the postmodern era, the notion of authority is often viewed with suspicion: ‘The very word triggers reactions of stigmatisation and categorical rejection. ... The fear of authoritarianism drives proponents of individuality to call for the elimination of all authority.’² Yet, while postmodern thought and some educational theories challenge the need for authority in education, it continues to occupy a central place in modern pedagogy.³ In fact, the debate over its necessity and function has been reignited by the deepening crisis of authority in the 21st century. As Ewa Filipiak argues, this erosion of values also affects education⁴ as ‘young people today are in need of genuine authorities and true mentors’.⁵

In this light, it seems fitting to revisit the educational philosophy of John Baptist de La Salle (1651–1719). Although over 300 years have passed since he first formulated his ideas, they remain vibrant and continue to influence Catholic schools today.⁶ Today, his legacy lives through the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the direct custodians of his vision, who carry forward his educational

1 K. Denek, *Ku dobrej edukacji*, Toruń 2005, p. 213.

2 L. Witkowski, *Edukacja wobec sporów o (po)nowoczesność*, Warszawa 2007, vol. 1, p. 134.

3 For more on international research on teacher authority, see: S. Bendl, *Autorytet nauczyciela – wielki temat dla dzisiejszej pedagogiki*, „Studia z Teorii Wychowania”, 2 (2011) issue 1, pp. 80–89.

4 For example: Z. Frydel, *Upadek autorytetów*, „Nowa Szkoła”, 2000, issue 3, pp. 61; D. Wiśniewska, *Nieszczęsny los autorytetu*, „Wychowawca”, 2000, issue 2, pp. 10–11.

5 E. Filipiak, *Nauczyciel wobec wyzwań i zagrożeń edukacji XX wieku*, in: *Nauki pedagogiczne w Polsce: dokonania, problemy, współczesne zadania, perspektywy*, eds. J. Lewowicki i M. Szymański, Kraków 2004, p. 331.

6 A. Dymer, *Nauczyciel szkoły katolickiej w świetle dokumentów Kościoła*, „Pedagogika Katolicka”, 8 (2011) p. 57. The Polish translation of the works of de La Salle was pub-

philosophy and methods. Although the order's presence in Poland is relatively modest—currently limited to a handful of educational and care centres, with its headquarters in Częstochowa⁷—Lasallian pedagogy enjoys considerable popularity in France, its former colonies, Spain, and many South American nations. The Brothers now operate educational institutions in 79 countries on five continents.⁸ The historical and contemporary influence of de La Salle's thought and spiritual legacy continues to be a subject of study in leading international academic journals and publications by the order itself, such as *Lassalian Essays*, *Lassalian Studies*, *MEL Bulletin*, and *AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education* published by the Institute for Lasallian Studies at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota.⁹

lished in 2006; J. de La Salle, *Dzieła wszystkie. Reguły ogólne. Reguła brata dyrektora. Memoriał o ubiorze. Pisma osobiste*, trans. L. Kozłowski, Częstochowa 2006.

- 7 The origins of the Brothers of the Christian Schools in Poland date back to 1903, when the first members of the order arrived from Vienna to Lviv. The Lviv community cared for students of the teacher training seminary and, before the outbreak of the First World War, built their own school at 9 Lelewela Street. During the interwar years, a novitiate was founded in Częstochowa (1922), while the Brothers continued to operate a school in Lviv and an orphanage and vocational school in Lisków. Under Nazi occupation, they ran an orphanage and conducted clandestine teaching in Częstochowa. After the Second World War, they resumed their educational, caregiving, and catechetical mission across Poland, focusing particularly on children with special educational needs in locations such as Laski near Warsaw, Gdańsk, Sopot, Częstochowa, Łódź, Myszków, and Pabianice. S. R. Rybicki, *Jan de la Salle. Patron nauczycieli*, Warszawa 1989, pp. 227–232.
- 8 *St. John Baptist de La Salle*, <https://www.lasalle.org/en/lasallian-holiness/st-john-baptist-de-la-salle>, accessed: 2.12.2023.
- 9 For example: F. Assaf, *Jean-Baptiste de la Salle: un pédagogue humaniste chrétien au dix-septième siècle*, „Seventeenth-Century French Studies”, 26 (2004) issue 1, pp. 247–258, DOI: 10.1179/c17.2004.26.1.247; P. Dávila, L. Ma Naya, H. Murua, *Tradition and Modernity of the De La Salle Schools: the Case of the Basque Country in Franco's Spain (1937–1975)*, „Paedagogica Historica”, 49 (2013) issue 4, pp. 562–576, DOI: 10.1080/00309230.2013.799500; P. Dávila, L. Ma Naya, H. Murua, *The Educational Work of the De la Salle Brothers and Popular Education in Gipuzkoa in the Twentieth Century*, „History of Education”, 41 (2012) issue 2, pp. 213–233, DOI: 10.1080/0046760X.2011.582046; Â. E. Leubet, E. L. P. Valdir, L. da Silva, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle's Contributions for the Formation of the Modern School*, „Revista Brasileira de História da Educação”, 16 (2016) issue 4, pp. 64–93, DOI: 10.4025/rbhe.v16i4.699en.

This essay introduces readers to the life and educational model developed by John Baptist de La Salle, shedding light on his concept of the ideal teacher and its practical application for today's educators, particularly in building classroom authority. The study draws on limited Polish scholarship (as indicated by a comprehensive source search) and makes substantial use of little-known English-language research, a testament to the greater international interest in Lasallian studies, as evidenced by the breadth of publications on the history, philosophy, and practice of Lasallian schools.

The Concept of Teacher Authority in Selected Polish Literature

The question of teacher authority has been a subject of interest in Polish pedagogy since its inception in the 20th century. One of the earliest voices in this discussion was Henryk Rowid (1877–1944), who, in the spirit of the New Education movement, observed that:

Authority is vested in those who embody genuine ethical and intellectual values and possess considerable competence in a specific field of knowledge or professional skill. A teacher—good-natured, sincere, a true friend to children, and their companion in work and play, with advanced education and pedagogical ability—will naturally be seen as an authority by children and young people, not through fear or intimidation, but through sincere trust, friendship, and love. When combined with opportunities for independent learning, this form of teacher authority creates conditions for the development of an internal, lasting self-discipline.¹⁰

Elżbieta Więckowska defines authority as 'the recognition and prestige of individuals, groups, and social institutions, based on values esteemed by society'.¹¹ Similarly, Ryszard Stach describes it as stemming from 'skills and knowledge, personal characteristics, actions consistent with respected principles,

10 H. Rowid, *Szkoła twórcza. Podstawy teoretyczne i drogi urzeczywistnienia nowej szkoły*, edit. 3, Kraków 1931, p. 6.

11 E. Więckowska, *Czym jest autorytet?*, in: *O autorytecie w wychowaniu i nauczaniu*, ed. M. Bednarska, Toruń 2009, p. 11.

as well as social status or position'.¹² Contemporary literature distinguishes two paths to teacher authority: one derived from an official role or power, the other earned through personal qualities, knowledge, and traits that inspire trust and respect. In the first instance, compliance is imposed, while in the second, it is willingly granted. Both forms are present in teaching: formal authority positions the teacher as the organiser and leader of the educational process, who relies on their institutional role rather than personal characteristics. Personal authority, by contrast, arises when students acknowledge the teacher's knowledge and skills as superior to their own and recognise the teacher as a trusted guide who can support their academic progress and personal growth.¹³

When a teacher leans on the prerogatives of their formal position, they exercise what is known as external authority. Sometimes described as 'subjugating', this form of authority enforces compliance but stifles initiative and independence by imposing restrictive rules and prohibitions. It vanishes as soon as the student breaks free from the constraints of coercion and dependence. In contrast, internal authority, sometimes described as 'liberating', develops a sense of autonomy and self-agency. Rather than imposing obedience, it inspires students to act, think independently, and engage willingly in their learning. This form of authority is not enforced but earned, as it arises from a teacher's personal qualities, knowledge, and the trust they build with their students. Its foundations lie in the students' voluntary and conscious respect and a relationship built on goodwill and trust, which lead students to admire their teacher.

Dorota Łażewska captures this dichotomy through the metaphors of 'Dear Master' and 'Master Dear'.¹⁴ The title of her article, a play on words, encapsulates two contrasting models of teacher authority. 'Dear Master' represents a teacher admired for their personality, knowledge, and status, someone worthy of emulation. 'Master Dear, on the other hand, is a counsellor and guide who inspires thought, motivates action and supports the student's creative

12 Ibidem, p. 12.

13 I. Jazukiewicz, *Autorytet nauczyciela*, in: *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku*, vol. 1: A–F, ed. T. Pilch, Warszawa 2003, p. 254.

14 Ibidem, p. 303.

potential.¹⁵ Lech Witkowski, the author of the most comprehensive study on teacher authority in Polish educational literature, argues that it emerges from their personality traits, good manners, and ethical conduct. Teachers, he cautions, should ‘neither elevate themselves above students in arrogance nor assume the role of a “guru”. They should avoid being authoritarian (harsh) and authoritative (self-proclaimed experts)’.¹⁶

Małgorzata Zalewska-Bujak offers a classification that moves beyond the binary interpretations of teacher authority. She identifies three types: first, designated authority, which comes with the teaching profession itself; second, personal authority, which arises from the teacher’s character and relationships with students; and third, emotional authority, which may be based on pupils’ love and respect for the teacher—or, in some cases, their fear of them or for them.¹⁷ Scholars in the field of educational studies have also examined the factors that determine a teacher’s authority. Iwona Jazukiewicz outlines three key influences:

1. Global pedagogical model

On one end of the spectrum is traditional pedagogy, in which teachers wield unquestioned power and authority simply by virtue of their role. The opposite end is anti-authoritarian pedagogy, which encourages students to challenge imposed authority and favour a teacher who strives for partnership. Modern approaches seek to find a middle ground: a model in which authority retains its function in education, but results from mutual dialogue and understanding. The need for authority itself is not disputed.

15 D. Łażewska, „Drogi Mistrz” czy „Mistrz Drogi”. *Autorytet pedagogiczny w czasach postmoderny*, in: *Autorytet w wychowaniu i edukacji*, ed. D. Łażewska, Józefów 2013, pp. 59–60.

16 L. L. Witkowski, *Historie autorytetu wobec kultury i edukacji*, Kraków 2011, p. 688.

17 M. Zalewska-Bujak, *Nauczyciel – między autorytetem a autorytaryzmem*, in: *Nauczyciel i dziecko w dobie kryzysu edukacji*, eds. E. Ogrodzka-Mazur, U. Szuścik, B. Oelszlaeger-Kosturek, Kraków 2017, vol. 11, p. 14.

2. The status of the teaching profession in society and the local community

Authority is a historical and social construct, which evolves in response to educational awareness and access to educational institutions. Today, it is increasingly influenced by the internet and other media platforms.

3. The teacher's personal attributes

A teacher's authority is not only a matter of professional skills but also of personality, attitude, manners, and even appearance.¹⁸ Educators who command respect and trust are far better positioned to steer students toward growth, knowledge, and development. When teachers are looked up to as trusted figures, students are less susceptible to pseudo-authorities who often present a simplistic and distorted view of the world and human relationships, thus leading them astray and warping their personalities. Lech Witkowski, referenced earlier, warns that this threat is particularly dangerous for today's alienated and disoriented young generation. He describes how disdain for authority often manifests in the familiar refrain: 'Nobody tells me what to do.' At first glance, this might appear to be a declaration of autonomy and personal freedom. However, as he argues, it can just as easily lead individuals into a paradoxical trap:

If no one is deemed worthy of being taken seriously, listened to, or cared about, life becomes a creeping void ruled by nothingness, emptiness, and annihilation – even as we subconsciously suppress the fear that we, too, are becoming that same 'nothing'.¹⁹

18 I. Jazukiewicz, *Autorytet nauczyciela*, Kraków 1999, pp. 36–40.

19 L. Witkowski, *Historie*, p. 25. Lech Witkowski writes: 'Without the experience of encountering true authority (ideally, various authorities), a person becomes lost amid the multitude and clamour of false, superficial, and pretentious attitudes that disguise their flaws and make unwarranted claims. They become unable to distinguish wisdom, greatness, and value in human conduct.... They risk being satisfied with mediocrity, succumbing to superficial signs of status and importance, and becoming fascinated by trinkets and trivial tokens of success and influence, which abound in the media.'; *ibidem*, p. 689.

Rejecting authority creates a moral vacuum in which the 'free individual', though desperate for guidance and a way forward, finds no voice offering direction: 'nobody tells them what to do.' Witkowski's erudite work demonstrates the weight of authority, particularly within the realm of education.

John Baptist de La Salle and His Vision for Education

John Baptist de La Salle was born on 30 April 1651 in Reims, France. From a young age, he felt called to the priesthood, a path later followed by two of his younger brothers and his sister, who became a nun. De La Salle first studied theology in his hometown before continuing at the renowned Seminary of Saint Sulpice in Paris. He was ordained a priest in 1678 and earned a doctorate in theology from the University of Reims three years later. A turning point in De La Salle's life came when he met Adrien Nyel, a passionate teacher who persuaded him to assist in establishing a school. While Nyel recruited educators, De La Salle became their spiritual mentor, who shaped them into compassionate Christian teachers and role models. Over time, these enthusiastic yet inexperienced teachers formed a tightly-knit monastic community.

Noted for his humility and rejection of Church privileges, John Baptist de La Salle gave up his canon's position to fully commit to this mission. On 24 June 1684, he formally founded the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, a non-clerical religious congregation consisting of lay brothers rather than ordained priests. Central to their spiritual ethos was De La Salle's teaching that one must sanctify oneself 'for and through teaching'. He died on 7 April 1719 and was canonised by Pope Leo XIII in 1900. On 15 May 1950, Pope Pius XII declared him the patron saint of the Congregation of Christian School Brothers, Christian teaching, teachers and educators.²⁰ Beyond managing the school, John Baptist de La Salle's chief ambition was to train future educators, a mission to which he dedicated 40 years of his life. In 1684, he founded Europe's first

20 Z. Pomirska, *Pedagogika św. Jana de la Salle propozycją dla współczesnej szkoły*, „Język–Szkoła–Religia”, 3 (2008) pp. 237–238; J.-B. Blain, *The Life of John Baptist de La Salle, Founder of the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools A Biography in Three Books*, trans. R. Arnandez, Landover 2000, *passim*.

teacher-training college in Reims.²¹ This groundbreaking achievement brought to life the dreams of humanist thinkers like Erasmus of Rotterdam and John Amos Comenius –who had previously only theorised about the need for formal teacher training.

Antón Marquiegui, a contemporary scholar of John Baptist de La Salle's work, notes that the French educator advanced the concept of Christian schools staffed by 'professional, full-time teachers.'²² Based on his extensive experience, De La Salle became convinced that schools would only fulfil their purpose if teachers commanded respect from both students and parents. To this end, he believed educators required thorough training in teaching and moral instruction, as well as a strong ethical character. He demanded from educators an 'ardent zeal' for their work, born from accountability to the parents who entrusted their children to their care.²³ Yet he also urged teachers to temper firmness with kindness and love. 'If you show them the firmness of a father,' he advised, 'you should also show the tenderness of a mother in gathering them together, and in doing them all the good in your power'.²⁴

A defining feature of Lasallian pedagogy is the central position of teachers: not merely as instructors, but as role models and guides. In *The Conduct of Christian Schools*, De La Salle set out his educational philosophy on teachers' attitudes and practices. Though embedded in the religious²⁵ and social realities

21 Â. E. Leubet, E. L. P. Valdir, L. da Silva, *Jean-Baptiste de La Salle's Contributions for the Formation of the Modern School*, pp. 64–93. It should be noted that Jesuits were the first to recognise the importance of teacher training (for their own educational needs) as early as the 16th century.

22 A. Marquiegui, *Contribution of John Baptist de la Salle (1651–1719) to the Esteem for The Teaching Profession*, series: MEL Bulletin, vol. 52, Roma 2018, pp. 27–28.

23 Ibidem, p. 40.

24 John Baptist de La Salle, *Meditations for the Time of Retreat*, in: *Lasallian Studies 17*, ed. A. Marron et al., Rome 2019, p. 28; J. Sprutta, *Ideał nauczyciela według Jana Chrzciela de La Salle*, „Nauczyciel i Szkoła”, 2013, issue 1 (53), p. 24.

25 He asserted that dedicated teaching work was made possible through deep faith in God, who is the point of reference and the foundation of all educational efforts. Faith, he maintained, unifies personality, attitudes, and actions, provides motivation for work, and is the ultimate goal for students to achieve.

of its time,²⁶ this work offers timeless lessons for modern educators—whether religious or not—who recognise that authority in the classroom is not simply given but earned through effort and integrity. De La Salle's *Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher*, as described in *The Conduct of Christian Schools*, remains a universal code of professional conduct. William J. Merriman, another scholar of Lasallian thought, explains that a virtue is 'conformity of life and conduct with the principles of morality.'²⁷ Virtues, he adds 'are the practices and habits that are followed out in accord with these principles.'²⁸ In the late 18th century, Agathon Gonlieu, a superior of the congregation, elucidated the significance of these principles.²⁹ Let us now take a closer look at the twelve virtues that De La Salle considered fundamental for teachers striving to build professional authority:

- Gravity: an external demeanour of modesty, politeness, and decorum;
- Silence: the ability to discern when to stay silent and the courage to speak up when necessary;
- Humility: encouraging recognition of the authority of others, preventing displays of pride;
- Prudence: helping the teacher understand what actions to take and what to avoid, as well as selecting the right educational strategies to nurture students' minds and hearts;
- Wisdom: imparting knowledge of lofty truths and guiding the teacher in conveying not only the content but also the principles they themselves should embody;
- Patience: crucial for overcoming educational difficulties and maintaining composure, especially when repeatedly explaining the same concepts to students;
- Reserve: encouraging balanced, discreet, and modest thinking, speech, and action, particularly by controlling emotions in situations that could provoke anger;

26 De La Salle identified several methods for reprimanding and correcting pupils, including verbal admonition, penance, punishment, corporal discipline (the rod), and expulsion from school. J. B. de La Salle, *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, trans. F. de La Fontainerie, R. Arnandez FSC, ed. W. Mann, FSC, Maryland 1996, p. 137.

27 W. J. Merriman, *De La Salle's „Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher”: Still Relevant Today?*, „AXIS: Journal of Lasallian Higher Education”, 10 (2020) issue 2, p. 17.

28 Ibidem.

29 Ibidem, p. 16.

- Gentleness: urging teachers to display goodwill, kindness, and tenderness. De la Salle identified four types of kindness: of the mind, heart, manner, and conduct;

- Zeal: living by faith, setting a good example, teaching with dedication, and offering wise, appropriate corrections;

- Vigilance: diligently attending to tasks and maintaining constant oversight of one's own and students' conduct to pre-empt potential issues;

- Piety: performing duties towards God with dignity and showing great care for the religious education of students;

- Generosity: calling teachers to selflessly prioritise the well-being of others—particularly children and parents—by sacrificing personal interests to mould others' character.³⁰

Antón Marquiegui noted that, according to de la Salle's philosophy, a teacher's chief responsibility is to maintain order and create an atmosphere of mutual respect and engagement.³¹ One principle in achieving this is the practice of silence during lessons—not as a form of passivity, but as a space for active learning in which students remain focused on their tasks.³² Exercising the virtue of silence means understanding when to speak and when to listen, which helps to understand what the teacher, as well as the student, is saying.³³ De la Salle also warned teachers against behaviours that could undermine their credibility and respect. The list included traits such as verbosity, emotional instability, impulsive actions, overzealousness, harshness, impatience, partiality, laziness, procrastination, dejection, over-familiarity, sentimentality, inconsistency,

30 Ibidem, p. 16–17.

31 A. Marquiegui, *Contribution of John Baptist de la Salle*, p. 39.

32 Silence, according to de La Salle, was also a component of vocal hygiene, as vocal strain was the most common reason for teachers' absences from work. De La Salle provided several practical recommendations: ensuring fresh air in the classroom, introducing a system of predetermined gestures or sounds for communication, organising lessons in a way that encouraged active student participation, using teaching aids to support explanations, and avoiding the repetition of the same content by the teacher; *ibidem*, p. 46.

33 Ibidem, p. 39.

moodiness and a careless appearance.³⁴ He viewed acting under the influence of emotions as the gravest mistake in teaching. Such behaviour, he argued, is 'typical of animals, not humans'.³⁵ Regarding student discipline, de la Salle advised teachers:

If it happens that you have been aroused by some passion, avoid making any correction while you experience this emotion, because then the correction would be very harmful to your disciples as well as to you. In those situations, focus within and allow the time of anger to pass.³⁶

De la Salle's detailed advice on correcting pupils should not be mistaken for an endorsement of punitive teaching methods. To create a disciplined and respectful classroom, he urged teachers to use reprimands sparingly and resort to punishment only when necessary. He believed that a well-organised lesson plan, combined with the teacher's self-restraint and attentiveness, was far more effective in maintaining order. A skilled and creative teacher, he argued, can uphold discipline without resorting to correction.³⁷ Furthermore, de La Salle stressed that rewards are more beneficial than punishments in encouraging progress. However, for rewards to be impactful, they should not be too easily earned. When wisely granted, rewards signal a teacher's approval, motivate hard work and honesty, and provide an incentive for improvement. He believed that both talented, well-behaved students and those making efforts to improve their performance or conduct should be recognised and rewarded.³⁸

De la Salle cautioned against handing out rewards for trivial reasons, as this could breed student complacency and be perceived as a sign of weakness from the teacher, ultimately leading to sloppy work and disrespectful behaviour. He also pointed out several pitfalls that undermine teacher authority, such as focusing solely on major issues while neglecting secondary matters, failing to mon-

34 J. B. de La Salle, *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, pp. 255–261.

35 A. Marquiegui, *Contribution of John Baptist de la Salle*, pp. 39–40.

36 Tamže, s. 40.

37 Ibidem, p. 140.

38 J. Sprutta, *Ideał nauczyciela według Jana Chrzyciela de La Salle*, p. 22.

itor whether students are meeting their responsibilities, trying too hard to be liked by becoming overly familiar with students, showing bias, granting excessive freedom to favoured students, and failing to enforce expectations consistently.³⁹ According to de la Salle, teachers must avoid two extremes—being too harsh or too lenient—to maintain respect and order in the classroom.

According to de la Salle, being a teacher is not just a job for school hours—it is a calling and way of life. To gain students' respect, a teacher's words and actions must be coherent and carry moral weight. He wrote, 'Preach by example, and practice before the eyes of the young what you wish them to accept', and affirmed that 'the young should be able to see in your wisdom how they should behave'.⁴⁰ For de la Salle, authenticity was a crucial virtue—one shared by modern educators like Lech Witkowski, who asserts that 'a teacher must exemplify the value of what they do and who they are'.⁴¹ Similarly, John Paul II asserted that young people only respect authority when adults' lives mirror the values they espouse.⁴² Reinforcing this point, Jarosław Kordziński maintains that teachers must remain true to themselves and find fulfilment, passion, and authenticity in their profession to inspire respect and trust.⁴³

De la Salle's vision of the teacher as the heart of the school forms the foundation of five key principles of Lasallian pedagogy:

1. Community: A well-functioning school operates as a community—of teachers, students, and parents. Building this sense of belonging involves respecting shared rules of proper conduct and respectful interactions. Collaboration between home and school in a supportive environment of mutual respect, honesty and kindness is particularly important.

39 J. B. de La Salle, *The Conduct of the Christian Schools*, pp. 135–136. The qualities required of new teachers included: (1) decisiveness, (2) authority, (3) self-restraint (i.e., serious, thoughtful, and modest conduct), (4) vigilance, (5) self-care, (6) professionalism, (7) prudence, (8) good manners, (9) zeal, and (10) competence in both speech and behaviour; *ibidem*, p. 263–264.

40 A. Marquiegui, *Contribution of John Baptist de la Salle*, p. 39.

41 L. Witkowski, *Historie*, p. 688.

42 A. Dwyer, *Nauczyciel szkoły katolickiej w świetle dokumentów kościoła*, p. 58.

43 J. Kordziński, *Autorytet nauczyciela, czyli jak być skutecznym i zmotywowanym wychowawcą*, Warszawa 2020.

2. Understanding the Students: Recognising students as unique individuals contributes to educational success. By getting to know each student's character and needs, teachers can provide more personalised guidance.

3. Pedagogical Love: Teachers must accept each student, regardless of their flaws, and be ready to sacrifice themselves for their growth and well-being. This means striving for equality and inclusivity and treating both the group and individual students with fairness and without favouritism. True care demands thoughtful rules that honour students' autonomy, sensitivity, and individual potential.

4. Preventative Methods: Every student has their flaws and will inevitably make mistakes. Rather than punishing misbehaviour, teachers should guide and support students to help them avoid missteps by being attentive and intervening thoughtfully when needed. Shielding students from all negative influences is not realistic or helpful. Instead, they should be encouraged to develop moral resilience to resist harmful temptations. As students mature, they should learn to take responsibility for their moral decisions.

5. Educational realism: The knowledge and skills acquired in school should have real-world applications and contribute to students' professional success and social mobility. Educational realism also involves selecting teaching methods that yield optimal outcomes, making efficient use of educational materials, and preparing students for participation in society.⁴⁴

In de La Salle's educational philosophy, maintaining order and discipline starts with meticulous planning as a proactive way to prevent inappropriate behaviour. If a student missteps, the teacher should correct them in a way that is private, calm, and tactful—designed to demonstrate concern for the student's well-being rather than cause humiliation. Harsh punishment, according to de La Salle, diminishes the dignity of both teacher and pupil. He cautioned against the use of disparaging language or gestures that could alienate students. Instead of punishment, he advocated for religious education founded on Christian love and respect for human dignity.⁴⁵ He argued that the students would

44 For further details, see: *Pedagogika lasaliańska*, <https://www.lasalle.gda.pl/sp/pedagogika-lasalianka/>, accessed: 5.05.2023.

45 Z. Pomirska, *Pedagogika św. Jana de la Salle propozycją dla współczesnej szkoły*, p. 242.

thus exercise self-control, not out of fear of punishment, but out of a sense of shame brought on by the realisation of their wrongdoing. All school activities should contribute to an atmosphere of order and maximise learning time. This included teaching students to manage their emotions, prevent aggressive outbursts, stay focused, and communicate thoughtfully, with tact and respect. For de La Salle, the school was not just a place of learning but also a space for refining character and manners.⁴⁶

Conclusions

In John de La Salle's era, schools held a very different status in society compared to today. In the 17th century, teachers had to earn both the interest and respect of their students as well as the goodwill of parents. Many parents viewed schooling as a misuse of time, as they shortsightedly believed that young people would be better occupied contributing to the household income. Teachers, therefore, had to convince society that schools were the best places for intellectual, moral, and practical preparation for life.⁴⁷ Such were the challenges that de La Salle had to face when running schools in the 17th and early 18th centuries. To live up to these standards, he placed great emphasis on training teachers who would be looked up to by students and society.

Today, the status of the school is different. Education, once a privilege reserved for the wealthy or an act of charity, is now recognised as a constitutional right in most countries—a universal entitlement for all. Nevertheless, teachers, much like those in De La Salle's time, must constantly prove their relevance. Despite the nearly 300 years that separate us from his era, the fundamental nature of education—a relationship between teacher and student—remains unchanged. De La Salle used lofty metaphors and comparisons to elevate the status of teaching and remind educators of the nobility of their vocation.⁴⁸ He offered practical advice for approaching the role with joy, dignity, and responsibility. A pioneer of 17th-century education, de La Salle argued that a teacher

46 Ibidem, p. 241.

47 A. Marquiegui, *Contribution of John Baptist de la Salle*, p. 47.

48 He described teachers, for example, as 'apostles of childhood'. Ibidem, p. 51.

must command authority and offered practical guidance on how to achieve it. His educational philosophy may be of interest and inspiration to modern educators. As William J. Merriman noted, De La Salle's *Twelve Virtues of a Good Teacher* 'still provide an excellent list of virtues, dispositions, and habits for today's teachers to develop and embrace.'⁴⁹ It is therefore worth sharing these timeless ideas with a broader community of educators in Poland.

Streszczenie: W niniejszym artykule przybliżono postać i dorobek pedagogiczny założyciela Zgromadzenia Braci Szkół Chrześcijańskich Jana de La Salle w kontekście współczesnych poszukiwań dróg budowania autorytetu nauczycielskiego. Wiele miejsca poświęcono wypracowanemu przez niego modelowi nauczyciela oraz zasadom jego realizacji z myślą o potencjalnym wykorzystaniu w warsztacie pedagogicznym współczesnego pedagoga. Choć założenia pedagogiczne de La Salle'a są głęboko osadzone w religii i w realiach jego epoki, to wydaje się, że wiele przez niego sformułowanych myśli i zasad ma charakter uniwersalny i może być wykorzystane w szkole XXI w.

Szczególną uwagę poświęcono zaleceniom de La Salle'a dotyczącym budowania autorytetu nauczycielskiego, m.in. koncepcji 12 Cnót Dobrego Nauczyciela. Podkreślono tym samym, że filarem pedagogiki lasaliańskiej jest autorytet nauczyciela.

W opracowaniu wykorzystano nieliczne – jak wykazała kwerenda źródeł – polskie opracowania na ten temat, a przede wszystkim, nieznanne polskiemu czytelnikowi, opracowania anglojęzyczne (podano wskazówki źródłowe, badania międzynarodowe na temat historii i współczesnej myśli oraz praktycznych osiągnięć szkół de La Salle'a, mogące przyczynić się do rozwinięcia studiów lasaliańskich w Polsce).

Słowa kluczowe: Jan de La Salle, pedagogika lasaliańska, autorytet nauczyciela.

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49 Ibidem, p. 20.

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