

Dorota Zdybel

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3322-7570>

e-mail: dorota.zdybel@ignatianum.edu.pl

Ignatianum University in Cracow, Poland

Introduction

The latest World Economic Forum (2025) report states that in the next 5 years the average employee can expect 2/5 of their existing skills (39%) to transform or become outdated. According to the majority of employers interviewed by the WEF, the rapid obsolescence of skills is a major barrier to the development of an efficient and sustainable economy. The WEF identified the following as the main reasons for the increasing pressure for continuous professional development: broadening digital access to information linked to the development of artificial intelligence and the consequent progressive robotisation and automation of work; climate change mitigation and the challenges of a green transformation of the economy; increasing costs of living, as well as inflation pressures with a slowing economy; demographic changes caused by the ageing of many societies and the reduction of the working population; and geopolitical tensions, increasing social unrest (2025, p. 6).

The macro-trends described by WEF allow to understand why so much importance is attached in contemporary pedagogy to reflect on the competences of the future. These competences are variously referred to in the literature as 21st century competences, STEAM competences, 4C competences (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity) or more recently as 7C competences (character, citizenship and computational thinking). Although the acronyms do not translate well into Polish, they perfectly capture the essence of the problem – we are talking about meta-competences that do not belong to any specific field of knowledge, but at the same time are ‘transversal’, universal (cross-functional) or otherwise ‘transferable skills’, underlying lifelong learning abilities and solving complex, interdisciplinary problems. Interestingly, recent research increasingly emphasises the realm of attitudes and values, which provide a moral compass for navigating a volatile and uncertain

world of data overload. Hence, in addition to intellectual qualities, such as the ability to self-regulate learning, undertake metacognitive reflection on one's thinking and the quality of knowledge acquired, non-intellectual (both intra- and interpersonal) qualities appear in lists of 21st century skills, such as: perseverance and resistance to stress (resilience), self-discipline and self-control (the ability to delay gratification), a sense of self-efficacy, conscientiousness and goal-determination (grit), a sense of responsibility for one's own actions or empathy (Lamb et al., 2017; OECD, 2018, 2019). According to many researchers, this combination of intellectual and non-intellectual dispositions is necessary for the development of an appropriate attitude towards learning or, more broadly, a growth mindset.

The development of such competences is possible and necessary from the earliest childhood and, according to many researchers, is also in line with the specificity of young children's learning – learning through discovery and exploration of reality, multi-sensory experience of the world, asking questions, testing hypotheses, formulating conclusions. However, it requires a reconstruction of the education system not only in terms of the way goals are formulated, curricula/basic curricula are constructed, educational methods are selected, standards for evaluating the child's achievements and educational efforts, but also in terms of creating an environment conducive to development and supporting the child's well-being. We should therefore start by finding an answer to the question: what kind of school is needed by children who enter adulthood in 2040–2050? Perhaps preschool and early childhood education is not at all about complex lists of competences or standards of achievement, but about providing children with valuable and personally meaningful experiences. For many years now, Lilian G. Katz has been advocating that, for young children, standards of achievement should be replaced by 'standards of experience' that a good education should provide children with. A young child should have the right to experience often at school (2010, p. 2):

- a sense of purpose and meaningfulness of learning;
- intellectual engagement, being absorbed by a problem, facing difficult intellectual challenges;
- a sense of satisfaction with one's own achievements, overcoming obstacles independently;
- opportunities to take initiative, make their own decisions and take responsibility for their own actions and achievements;
- a sense of self-efficacy, trust in their own abilities and their own questions;
- a sense of belonging to a peer group, being an important member;
- involvement in a variety of interactions (opportunities to talk, discuss, exchange ideas, argue with others and negotiate meanings);

- opportunities to help others discover knowledge and better understand the world, etc.

Is such a reorientation of pre-school and elementary education from textbooks and worksheets to children's holistic development and well-being possible in the Polish educational system, and how? How to prepare teachers for such a change? How do teachers themselves perceive the essence of the competences of the future? We invite you to read more!

References

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