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## **ARTICLES**

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URSZULA BARTNIKOWSKA,  
KATARZYNA ĆWIRYNKAŁO

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland

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## The resources of adults taking care of their elderly parents at home – a research report

**ABSTRACT:** Urszula Bartnikowska, Katarzyna Ćwirynkało, *The resources of adults taking care of their elderly parents at home – a research report*. Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy, no. 29, Poznań 2020. Pp. 7–23. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-391X. e-ISSN 2658-283X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ikps.2020.29.01>

Considering the increased demographic aging and system changes in the welfare system in Poland, home care became one of the most important forms of taking care of disabled or elderly persons. Although the country is rooted in the idea of a nanny state, based on large institutions and providing minimum income, for a long time now family has been considered as the basic provider of informal care to the elderly. The aim of the present study is to give some insight into the resources of adult children providing care to their elderly, disabled parents. In order to acquire a comprehensive perception of the phenomenon, the authors chose an interpretivist paradigm and applied a phenomenographic method. 21 participants, aged 41–65, who were caregivers of their parents, took part in semi-structured interviews. Two main research problems were formulated: (1) How do the participants perceive their resources as caregivers of their elderly, disabled parents? (2) What kind of support related to the care of their parents do they consider essential? Results: The participants distinguish two main kinds of resources: internal (e.g. values, passions, feelings for parents, economic situation) and external (e.g. parents, family, friends, professionals, medical equipment and centers they have access to). The narratives of the participants also indicate a number of needs they experience. Implications for practice are discussed.

**KEY WORDS:** home care, elderly parents, caregivers, resources, needs

## Introduction

The increased demographic aging is the phenomenon that can be observed around the world, including Poland.<sup>1</sup> Generally, there are three sectors implementing social policy in Poland: 1) public entities implementing social policy, 2) a market sector operating on a commercial basis (there is a possibility for these organizations to obtain public resources), 3) a non-government, non-profit sector, whose aim is the implementation of various social goals.<sup>2</sup>

An overview of aged care support and services shows that there are both institutional (day, temporary or permanent stay) and family forms of caring for the elderly in Poland:

- 1) Daily support facilities: 1) daily support houses (places of daily support for the aged, conducted by public or non-public entities: associations, church organizations, social cooperatives). Seniors spend 8 hours a day on weekdays there. In 2013 there were 226 such facilities and this number is steadily growing (in 2017, when the Senior+ government program was launched, it started supporting the foundation of such institutions), 2) multifunctional social service centers – there are not many of them in Poland, although they show that support for older people can be comprehensive, 3) Daytime Homes and Clubs ‘WIGOR / Senior +’.
- 2) Residential aged care facilities: 1) Social Support Houses – permanent residence for the elderly in a large institution, 2) Family Support Houses – smaller facilities for 3–8 elderly persons (less common than social support houses), 3) long-

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<sup>1</sup> H. Wang, Y. He, Y. Li, F. Wang, *Study on the Home Health Caregiver Scheduling Problem under a Resource Sharing Mode considering Differences in Working Time and Customer Satisfaction*, “Discrete Dynamics in Nature & Society”, 2020, 5/11, pp. 1-11.

<sup>2</sup> B. Szatur-Jaworska, *System wsparcia społecznego osób starszych w Polsce*, [w:] *System wsparcia osób starszych w środowisku zamieszkania przegląd sytuacji propozycja modelu. Raport Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich*, red. B. Szatur-Jaworska, P. Błędowski, Warszawa 2016, <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/System%20wsparcia%20os%C3%B3b%20starszych.pdf>, 9.07.2018.



- term care institutions – care and nursing facilities created at health care institutions, 4) hospices – for terminally ill people.
- 3) Family support: 1) supported and assisted living (Social Welfare Act allows to offer this type of services to certain groups of people (e.g. children who lived at orphanages, the disabled, the aged). They need support in independent functioning, but do not need 24-hour care, 2) support for seniors in their place of residence.

Poland is rooted in the idea of a nanny state, based on large institutions and providing minimum income.<sup>3</sup> Actually, the percentage of GDP used for social expenditure that comprises cash benefits, direct in-kind provision of goods and services, and tax breaks with social purposes, is still relatively high, thanks to which the country can be considered a nanny state.<sup>4</sup> The number of people in social support houses is actually still growing and using other forms of support (e.g. supported living) is very rare. For example, in 2015 there were 815 of such houses and 86,502 persons lived there. Overall, one in 450 people lived in a social support house and one in 15,000 used supported living services.<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, family is considered to be the basic provider of informal care to the elderly.<sup>6</sup>

As far as the home care for seniors is concerned, there are several forms of support available in Poland:

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<sup>3</sup> C. Aspalter, K. Jinsoo, P. Sojeung, *Analysing the welfare state in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia: An ideal-typical perspective*, "Social Policy and Administration" 2009, t. 43, nr 2, pp. 170-185; M. Ciczowska-Giedziun, M. Zmysłowska, *The family and child welfare system in Poland: Family assistantship as a new solution in social work with families*, "Child Care in Practice" 2017, t. 24, nr 1, pp. 29-42.

<sup>4</sup> J. Sawulski, *Czy Polska jest państwem opiekuńczym?*, 2017, <https://ibs.org.pl/publications/czy-polska-jest-panstwem-opiekunczym/>, 18.07.2020.

<sup>5</sup> A. Bodnar, *Apel Rzecznika Praw Obywatelskich w sprawie deinstytucjonalizacji systemu wsparcia dla osób z niepełnosprawnościami i osób starszych*, 2016, <https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/Apel%20do%20Prezes%20Rady%20Ministr%C3%B3w%20w%20sprawie%20deinstytucjonalizacji%2011.2017.pdf>, 11.07.2018.

<sup>6</sup> M. Sierakowska, H. Doroszkiewicz, H. Markowska, J. Lewko, E. Krajewska-Kulak, *Factors determining satisfaction of elderly people's caregivers with the home care they provide*, "Progress in Health Sciences" 2014, t. 4, nr 2, pp. 82-86; M. Szweda-Lewandowska, *Opieka nad osobami starszymi. Wspierający i wspierani*, UŁ, Łódź 2017.

- financial support for the family and a dependent person (care payments and care allowances) – unfortunately, they are very low (much lower, for example, than care payments for people who acquired disability before the age of 25),
- environmental care minder's support after submitting an application to a local support centre – available for people who cannot afford to pay for private care (usually 2 hours a day, the scope and frequency of support is defined by support centres),
- nurse's support for people with chronic diseases (treatments that bring relief to suffering, e.g. pressure ulcer care, injections),
- home hospice: doctor's visits (once a week), nurse's visits (2-3 times a week), other specialists and volunteers' visits (depending on the needs),
- payments offered specifically to the aged community: age pensions (for men – from the age of 65, for women – 60), rent assistance/ disability payments,
- free equipment rental, e.g. an anti-bedsore mattress, a wheelchair, free medicines for people over the age of 75.<sup>7</sup>

Although home care for the elderly became one of the most important forms of taking of elderly or disabled individuals, there seems to be lack of Polish literature on the subject, especially concerning the situation of family caregivers. In this article we attempt to fill this gap, paying attention to the resources of the caregivers. In the current research we will refer to Conservation of Resources Theory by Stevan E. Hobfoll. Hobfoll distinguishes two kinds of resources: internal (available directly, e.g. optimism, self-confidence,

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<sup>7</sup> K. Klukowska, *Opieka nad osobami starszymi. Co robić, gdy nie da się jej pogodzić z pracą zawodową?* „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 27.07.2017. <http://wyborcza.pl/7,97654,22153742,opieka-nad-osobami-starszymi-co-robic-gdy-nie-da-sie-jej.html>, 11.07.2018; M. Topolewska, *Podwyżka zasiłku pielęgnacyjnego: Od kiedy opiekunowie dostaną więcej pieniędzy?* „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 17.05.2018. <http://praca.gazetaprawna.pl/artykuly/1124373,podwyzka-zasilku-pielegnacyjnego-od-kiedy-opiekunowie-dostana-wiecej-pieniedzy.html>, 11.07.2018.

competences) and external (social support, employment, socioeconomic status). The author also divides resources into: (1) material (e.g. a house, a car, valuable possessions), (2) personal (skills, personality features), 3) resources of state (structures or situations which enable access to resources, e.g. health, employment, marriage), (4) resources of energy, which can be exchanged into other resources (e.g. money, knowledge, time).<sup>8</sup>

## Design

The results presented in this paper are a part of a larger research project designed by Beata Antoszevska, Urszula Bartnikowska and Katarzyna Ćwirynkało and conducted from 2016 to 2018. The project explored the situation of adult children who take care of their elderly parents. For the purpose of this paper, two main research problems were formulated: (1) How do the participants perceive their resources as caregivers of their elderly, disabled parents? (2) What kind of support related to the care of their parents can be considered essential?

## Method

In order to help to understand the perception of resources and needs of the caregivers in all their complexity and variability, the study reported in this paper is of qualitative character based on an interpretivist paradigm<sup>9</sup> and a phenomenographic method.<sup>10</sup> Based

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<sup>8</sup> S.E. Hobfoll, *Stres, kultura i społeczność. Psychologia i filozofia stresu*, GWP, Gdańsk 2006, pp. 70–76.

<sup>9</sup> E. Husserl, *Nastawienie nauk przyrodniczych i humanistycznych. Naturalizm, dualizm i psychologia psychofizyczna*, [w:] *Fenomenologia i socjologia*, red. Z. Krasnodębski, PWN, Warszawa 1989, pp. 53–74.

<sup>10</sup> R.G. Paulston, *Pedagogika porównawcza jako pole nakreślenia konceptualnych map teorii paradygmatów*, [w:] *Spory o edukację. Dylematy i kontrowersje we współczesnych pedagogiach*, red. Z. Kwieciński, L. Witkowski, IBE, Edytor, Warszawa-Toruń 1993, pp. 25–50.

on the assumptions of phenomenography, the authors focus was on second-order perspective and different ways that individuals can experience the same phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> Individual interviews were used as a method for data collection, which allowed the authors to gather participants' thoughts, beliefs and experiences.<sup>12</sup> The interviews were semi-structured (consisted of open questions and followed a guide created by the authors) and were conducted in a number of towns and villages in north-eastern Poland between 2016 and 2017. Each interview was previously arranged and lasted approximately from one to three hours and took place either at participants' or researchers' homes. A total of thirty two hours of recording was collected and transcribed verbatim. All participants gave written consents to record, transcribe the interviews, code and store the data and use it for scientific purposes.<sup>13</sup> Afterwards, interview transcripts were encrypted, encoded and anonymized. The data analysis was conducted using the guidelines for coding and categorization proposed by Flick<sup>14</sup>, Kvale<sup>15</sup> and Gibbs.<sup>16</sup> In this process the following steps can be distinguished: (1) coding words generated from verbatim data, (2) categorization – grouping generated codes from verbatim data into broader textual categories, (3) comparing categories and examining their relation to the research problems, (4) categorization – segmentation the verbatim data from transcripts according to research questions, (5) presenting the results in a diagram and text.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> F. Marton, *Phenomenography – describing conceptions of the world around us*, “Instructional Science” 1981, t. 10, pp. 177–200; A. Assarroudi, A. Heydari, *Phenomenography: A Missed Method in Medical Research*, “Acta Facultatis Medicae Naissensis” 2016, t. 33, nr 3, pp. 217–225.

<sup>12</sup> H.F. Hsieh, S.E. Shannon, *Three approaches to qualitative content analysis*, “Qualitative Health Research” 2005, 15, pp. 1277–1288.

<sup>13</sup> T. Rapley, *Analiza konwersacji, dyskursu i dokumentów*, PWN, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>14</sup> U. Flick, *Projektowanie badania jakościowego*, PWN, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>15</sup> S. Kvale, *Prowadzenie wywiadów*, PWN, Warszawa 2010.

<sup>16</sup> G. Gibbs, *Analizowanie danych jakościowych*, PWN, Warszawa 2011.

<sup>17</sup> S. Kvale, *Prowadzenie wywiadów*, PWN, Warszawa 2010.

## Participants

The selection of participants of the study was deliberate and took place according to the following criteria: 1) being an adult person, 2) taking care (currently or in the past) of a sick or disabled parent for a period of minimum 6 months, 3) giving written consent to participate in the research. Overall, 21 participants, aged 41–65, who were caregivers of their parents, took part in semi-structured interviews.<sup>18</sup>

## Results

The analysis of the content of the interviews shows that the participants distinguish two main kinds of resources that help them take care of their sick or disabled parents: internal and external.

### 1. Internal resources

Four main resources described by the interviewees were classified as internal: their values, passions, economic situation, and physical strength (fitness).

#### Values

The values were often revealed by the interviewees when they were discussing the motives of taking care of an elderly person. Several subcategories were distinguished: 1) high position of family care in the hierarchy of values of the interviewees, 2) feelings towards the parent, 3) faith in God. They all seem to be connected and interlinked.

The high position of family care in the hierarchy of values often stemmed from the parents' contribution to the upbringing of children and a deliberate transfer of a caring attitude perceived as

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<sup>18</sup> H.F. Hsieh, S.E. Shannon, *Three approaches to qualitative content analysis*, "Qualitative Health Research" 2005, 15, pp. 1277–1288.

something desirable and worthwhile. Some of the interviewees also emphasized that it was also important to them that their parents treated them kindly and friendly in their childhood.

*In our early childhood, youth [...], our parents told us all sorts of fairy tales and stories. They often referred to situations in which children help parents. (Alicja)*

*[Mum] brought me up that way. She kept telling me that it should be like that [that children are responsible for their parents when they grow old and need help]. (Ewa)*

*It must be worked out, maybe a relationship with family, with children, to have that feeling, desire and not even to think about it. (Cecylia)*

*I like helping people. (Filip)*

The system of values along with the position of home care is sometimes strengthened by a social cultural message referring to the obligations of a young generation towards an older one and a commitment to gratitude for the effort of upbringing.

*You just felt this duty that you have to help. (Krystyna)*

*How could I not take care? [...] I was expected to do this. (Leszek)*

*This is my duty... Well... It's so natural. (Maria)*

In many cases, these messages are also accompanied by positive feelings towards a parent, which make it easier to overcome everyday difficulties related to looking after the parent. This element facilitates the empathic understanding of the parent and the inner desire to satisfy his / her needs.

*[Mum] is an important person in life. Someone for whom you should do a lot. She nursed me, took care of me, raised me. (Jowita)*

The common hierarchy of values with the closest family members also turns out to be important. This is essential in those cases where a sense of duty is accompanied by the need for cooperation / mutual support.

Some of the interviewees emphasized the role of faith in God as an important element of motivating specific care activities.

[Faith] *helps in my opinion. It helps because it explains many things.*  
(Ewa)

*As a Christian, I've never thought of being just self-satisfied [...] I just know that having no strength isn't an excuse for God.* (Nadia)

Some people emphasized that the duty of caring for parents and for exercising their power derive from religion.

### Passions

In several cases passions as internal resources have been emphasized. They mainly referred to traveling. It is possible that this passion, which can be interpreted as the opposite of being on the spot and caring for a person – often immobilized – gave them a sense of freedom and an opportunity for self-realization. In their narratives, those people who liked travelling, emphasized the possibility of pursuing this passion even when they were taking care of a dependent person. It enabled them to regain their strength and balance.

*I am a person who likes travelling and exploring, and riding a bike, and exploring the world.* (Alicja)

*And I like traveling with my daughter, Asia very much. We go for a drive from time to time and often go for walks.* (Filip)

For some interviewees, the implementation of this type of 'escape' from everyday life was impossible. In such cases, several caregivers used a symbolic 'escape', e.g. into the world of literature or films. An example of such a person is Maria:

*Sometimes I turn myself off, take a book, turn on a movie, close the door and I'm just gone for everyone.* (Maria)

### **Economic situation**

Family's financial resources also turned out to be an important factor which helps both in the pursuit of passion and daily care of a sick or disabled parent. For some people reality in Poland is not optimistic. Families taking care of an elderly, dependent person often face economic hardship. On the other hand, families who have a stable financial situation and good sources of income, mention these elements in their statements:

*We could afford to spend a lot of money on hygiene measures so that she wouldn't suffer. (Alicja)*

*When I was building a house, I always dreamed about having a multi-generational home [...] It was very important for me so that there was one floor only and there was no need to climb the stairs. (Hanna)*

Having more material and economic resources is an important resource that enables more effective care for an elderly person, gives greater comfort both to the dependent person and his or her caregiver.

### **Physical strength**

Taking care of an elderly, dependent person requires commitment on many levels. The interviewees emphasized the special importance of physical strength that helped them do certain tasks:

*Most difficult? The nightly getting up, I think, and also raising grandma, because it was hard... there were both of us [the interviewee and her husband] and we hardly managed to get along. (Krystyna)*

*When my mother was already a person who really needed help – such huge physical support, then, if my husband was not there, then there was my brother who lives next door. He always helped me here, always. (Alicja)*

The physical strength of these people was essential to take care. It was often a resource that was shared with other family members.



On the one hand, it was important to have your own resources of fitness and physical endurance, on the other hand, the possibility of getting physical help from others (in the cases from this study – other family members) was sometimes also necessary.

## **2. External resources**

External resources can be divided into two subcategories: personal and non-personal resources. The first group includes: family, friends, professionals and parents themselves, the other consists of places (e.g. health service facilities) and equipment that supports the functioning and rehabilitation of a sick or disabled person.

### **Parents**

The analysis of the interviews shows that the physical and mental state of the parent could be perceived by some research participants as a resource. The better an older parent functions, the greater the resource understood as the strength of the elderly person. Moreover, the interviewees valued the words of gratitude expressed by their parents:

*Once she kissed my hand and said with tears in her eyes, 'thank you'. Maybe even several times. I did not want that, I just kept saying, 'Stop it, you know I love you'. (Jowita)*

Emotional attachment, feelings expressed by a parent, words or gestures expressing gratitude were important elements facilitating the process of providing care by the interviewees.

### **Family and friends**

In most cases that we studied, the caretakers of an older person were children or sons-in-law and daughters-in-law of this person. People supporting the main caregiver were usually their family members (in order of frequency: husband / wife of the caregiver, his / her children, siblings of the guardian, siblings of the depend-

ent person. Among non-family members (apart from professionals) there were: friends, acquaintances and neighbours.

The interviewees, apart from defining the group of people involved in care, also gave examples of situations in which they could count on them as well as described the activities that they performed.

*My husband did everything around his mother [...] he even changed the nappies. (Barbara)*

*I cannot always take her to the doctor, then this family help is very important. (Alicja)*

*I really, really enjoyed talking to my friend. It helped me a lot. [...] when I really felt so tired of all this, I talked and talked and in a way get rid of this burden. I charged my batteries and could continue working. (Ewa)*

The involvement of friends and family included providing various types of support. Sometimes it was a physical relief in the form of taking temporary care of a dependent person, in other situations it could be material or financial support as well as mental or spiritual support. Family members and friends provide informal support, which is an important resource for dealing with the hardships of care.

### **Professionals and access to facilities**

The interviewees indicated that from time to time their parents received some support from such institutions as: hospitals, hospices, home hospices, associations (e.g. Association for Quality of Medical Care). Access to facilities / institutions involves access to various types of professionals: doctors, nurses, family assistants, hospice employees, but also MOPS/GOPS (city or council centres of support) employees, social activists from associations and charities (e.g. Caritas). In their narratives, however, they did not appear frequently, because the families were determined to have an aging

family member at home. Therefore, contact with professionals was limited to incidents of hospital stays and very limited opportunities to receive their support in the family home. Unfortunately, there are hardly any good solutions in this area in Poland. The interviews show a great need to change and improve the system of professional institutional support for older people. A few examples of positive experiences include only help from associations and charities. Beneath we present the examples of these statements:

*Caritas helped us a little when she broke her leg [...] the girls from Caritas are cool. (Łucja)*

*There is a group of nurses in this Association for Quality of Medical Care and they also called me to ask how they could help me. And, for example, there was Marysia who taught us how to wash my Mum [...] It turns out that nurses have their own methods, they have their own ways how to wash a disabled, elderly person without too much strength. (Alicja)*

## **Equipment**

Nowadays two aims of using technical equipment can be distinguished: 1) to improve the functioning of dependent people by facilitating them doing certain activities, 2) to support the activities of caregivers. The interviewees talked about the equipment, but only in the context of improving the functioning of the elderly. To give an example, there were references to wheelchairs and other orthopedic equipment, hearing aids, devices such as a glucometer or a blood pressure meter. The analysis of the interviews shows that there are still no devices in the living space of these families that would facilitate the process of care of a dependent person (e.g. lifts).

Only one person describes the adaptation of her home space to the needs of a person losing her fitness:

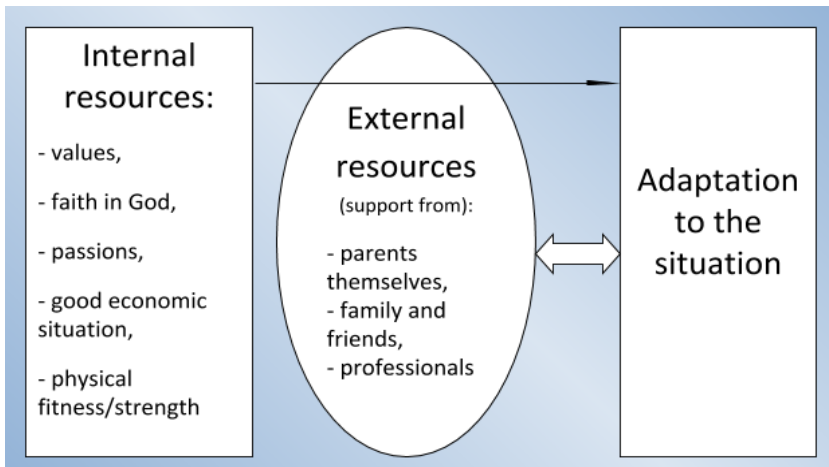
*The bathroom is adapted so that there were a lot of handles to make her feel safe. Antiskid in the bathtub and next to it as well. (Hanna)*

Sometimes, as the interviewees convinced, technical equipment they bought or received turned out to be useless or unsuccessful. For example, one of the participants received a glucometer, although her mother did not have a diabetes, another one bought a hearing aid which the parent refused to use. In other cases, a participant received a wheelchair which was broken and another interviewee got a corset (for her mother) which was so heavy that she did not manage to wear it.

## Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the narratives show that adult children who take care of their elderly parents distinguish two types of resources which help them perform this task: internal and external. They are presented in Diagram 1.

According to the interviewees certain internal resources (system of values, faith in God, passions, good economic situation) and



**Diagram 1.** Meanings given to resources of adult children taking care of their elderly parents

external resources (support received from others) help them cope with the process of taking care of an elderly, dependent parent, which means it leads to the adaptation to the difficult situation. What is also worth noting, is that in each of the areas in which interviewees indicated the existence of resources, there are also huge needs, which may suggest implications for practice. Clearly, as other authors (Li et al., 2017) suggest, due to a greater longevity and changes in family structure, the need for formal care has also been increasing. The needs are particularly noticeable in case of professional (medical, palliative) support that would help the family members who decided to take care of an elderly, dependent person. We believe that there is a huge demand for the state to provide support and assistance to carers of the elderly, both in the form of support payments (carer payments or carer allowances, which should be more adequate to the needs and available also for family members who are employed) and support services (e.g. funding for home help, health promotion programs, dementia support programs, rehabilitation and medical equipment rental, carer respite centres and carer resource centres).

## **Limitations**

Clearly, several limitations to this study should be taken into consideration. First, general limitations of research referring to opinions might be emphasised, particularly when subjects like values, feelings, needs and difficulties are concerned. It is possible that interviewees wanted to report socially correct responses (connected, for example, with the position of family care in the hierarchy of values, feelings towards parents) and their nonverbal attitudes remain unknown. Observations of children taking care of their parents as additional research methods could fill this gap. Second, the qualitative character of the study does not allow any generalisations. The interviewees who took part in this study constitute a relatively small (21 persons) group of adult carers of elderly parents in

north-eastern Poland. It is plausible that the results of the research conducted among people taking care of parents in other communities, regions and countries could be different.

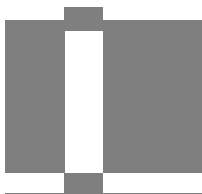
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## The place of the family of origin in romantic relationships of adults with intellectual disabilities

**ABSTRACT:** Agnieszka Żyta, *The place of the family of origin in romantic relationships of adults with intellectual disabilities*. Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy, no. 29, Poznań 2020. Pp. 25–44. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-391X. e-ISSN 2658-283X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ikps.2020.29.02>

The family in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities is not only their closest and most essential social group, but often also their basic or even the only source of support in everyday life from childhood to the late old age. In a situation of adults with intellectual disabilities who start a new romantic relationship (of a formal or informal nature), the family of origin may play different roles and occupy different places in their everyday lives. The research using the phenomenographic method of qualitative research on experiences related to being in long-lasting romantic relationships conducted with adults with intellectual disabilities allowed the author to show the place of family members (parents, siblings, extended family) in their everyday lives and in their relationships with partners.

**KEY WORDS:** Intellectual disabilities, adults, families, romantic relationships

### Introduction

Enjoying, building and maintaining good emotional relationships make an important aspect of human life that positively contributes to happiness and psychological well-being. For people with

intellectual disabilities, as with others, such relationships are one of basic needs. Many adults seek close intimate contacts and build friendly and romantic relationships that may or may not involve sexual contacts. Some of them marry each other, others simply live together, and still others (the biggest group of all) have girlfriends or boyfriends. Not every romantic relationship entails sex. For some individuals, just being 'a boyfriend/girlfriend', meetings, holding each other's hands and hugging are enough; others make serious efforts to move in together, marry and/or have children.<sup>1</sup> Their families of origin, especially parents, and therapists from institutions in which they study, work or sometimes live play an important role in helping them to prepare to be in and maintain a relationship. Families are the foundation and core of each society as a source of support for their members. For people with intellectual disabilities, their families' providing emotional and physical support is of essential importance throughout their lifetimes. Parents are usually concerned about any manifestations of sexuality of their children with intellectual disabilities. This fear is connected with the lack of self-reliance, potential abuse, pregnancy and the need to take care of the baby.<sup>2</sup> In this light, many families are anxious about relationships of their intellectually disabled adolescent and then adult children with the opposite sex and oppose marriages or civil unions.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, regardless of their relatives showing approval or not, adults with intellectual disabilities form more or less formalized or lasting relationships, sometimes involving cohabitation or having children. It seems essential to investigate the role families of origin

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<sup>1</sup> L. Walker-Hirsch, Building relationships/social and sexual development, In: W.I. Cohen, L. Nadel, M.E. Madnick (ed.), *Down Syndrome. Visions for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, A John Wiley&Sons, Inc., New York 2002, pp. 310–312; K.D. Keith, R.L. Schalock, People speaking for themselves. In: R.L. Schalock, K.D. (ed.), *Cross-cultural quality of life: Enhancing the Lives of People With Intellectual Disability*. American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Washington, 2016, p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> A. Krause, A. Żyta, S. Nosarzewska, *Normalizacja środowiska społecznego osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne Akapit, Toruń 2010.

<sup>3</sup> J. Kruk-Lasocka, W. Antosz, *Koszula i krawat. Obrazki wyłaniającej się dorosłości*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2018, p. 58.

play in building and supporting romantic relationships of adults with intellectual disability, especially with respect of the latter becoming independent actors in their own lives.

## **Families in the context of romantic relationships of those with intellectual disabilities**

Empirical research shows that intimate human relationships, including romantic relationships with a various degree of intensity, from friendly feelings to long-term relationships to marriages, play an important role in the lives of those with intellectual disabilities and the way they function psychosocially.<sup>4</sup>

Conducted by B. English and associates<sup>5</sup>, a meta-analysis of the scholarship on romantic relationships in individuals with intellectual disability has revealed certain external limitations and factors that support formation and existence of such relationships. These include attitudes of the families of origin. Research results point to both prohibitions from carers, who thwart romantic relationships, and actions that help those with intellectual disability play the role of a girlfriend/boyfriend/partner or a husband or wife.

Those without disabilities have a huge impact on romantic relationships in question, including by permitting their relatives to pur-

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<sup>4</sup> R. Kijak, *Dorośli z głębszą niepełnosprawnością intelektualną jako partnerzy, małżonkowie i rodzice*, Wydawnictwo naukowe UP, Kraków 2016; M. Parchomiuk, *Seksualność człowieka z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2016; B. English et al., *Views and Experiences of People with Intellectual Disabilities Regarding Intimate Relationships: A Qualitative Metasynthesis*. “Sexuality and Disability” 2018, No. 36; D. Krzemińska D., *Być parą z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną. Studium mikroetnograficzne w kontekście teorii postkolonialnej Homiego K. Bhabhy*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2019; A. Żyta, K. Ćwirynkało, *Związki uczuciowe osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, Olsztyn 2020 (paper in press).

<sup>5</sup> B. English et al., *Views and Experiences of People with Intellectual Disabilities Regarding Intimate Relationships: A Qualitative Metasynthesis*. “Sexuality and Disability” 2018, No. 36.

sue a relationship (if it is thought of as needed and appropriate) or forbidding this if it seems threatening or dangerous. In this respect, a particular role is played by families of origin, especially parents, who are usually reluctant towards long-term relationships or legal formalization of such relationships and, most of all, possible parenthood. They are mostly concerned about the future and consequences of romantic relationships (having sex, procreation, social stigmatizing, their child being hurt by their partner). This kind of attitude also results from one's being incompetent to assess the real capacity of the disabled and the stereotypical approach to the capabilities of these individuals as regards their understanding of love and the capacity of being in a long-term relationship is concerned. The significance of romantic emotions and feelings and the need for love and sexual needs as well as parenthood needs in those with intellectual disability is belittled and repressive practices are used by the relatives, including forcing them to end the relationship or forbidding them to resume it.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile – as stressed by I. Myśliwczyk in his research projects<sup>7</sup> – recognition, acceptance and approval from relatives positively contributes to the involvement in social life and helps individuals improve their social and civic competence. Arguably, this also has a positive impact on personal relationships, including romantic relationships, as it creates a climate marked by a sense of safety, eliminates the sense of solitude and supports self-appraisal and self-esteem of an adult with intellectual disability.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> M. Parchomiuk, *Seksualność człowieka z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*. Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2016.

<sup>7</sup> I. Myśliwczyk, *Uznanie dorosłości człowieka z niepełnosprawnością. Studium socjopedagogiczne narracji osób z głębszą niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu głębszym*. Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2019, p. 263.

<sup>8</sup> L. Walker-Hirsch, Building relationships/social and sexual development, In: W.I. Cohen, L. Nadel, M.E. Madnick (ed.), *Down Syndrome. Visions for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, A John Wiley&Sons, Inc., New York, 2002; K.D. Keith, R.L. Schalock, *People speaking for themselves*, [in:] R.L. Schalock (ed.), *Cross-cultural quality of life: Enhancing the Lives of People With Intellectual Disability*. American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Washington 2016; A. Żyta, K. Ćwirynkało, *Związki*

R. Kijak<sup>9</sup> argues that what plays a significant role in relationships pursued by individuals with intellectual disability are family ties and the sense of warmth and comfort of home along with the attitude the family of origin has towards the individual's building a romantic relationship and becoming a parent. He also argues that the support from the closest ones, including the family, is more conducive to the sustainability of a relationship than the partners' personality traits. Now, the couples who live together with their families of origin enjoy a lower degree of independence, decision-making capacity and capacity to plan their autonomous future.

The experience of those with intellectual disability in the context of sexuality and personal relationships, also addressing contacts with their families of origin, has been addressed by scholars such as E. White, R. Barnitt<sup>10</sup> and K. Johnson and collaborators.<sup>11</sup> E. White and R. Barnitt argue that parents do provide guidance to couples regarding daily challenges (such as chores, expenses and care for others), but they do not talk about sexuality to them.

Since relationships with families of origin are so important in building and sustaining romantic relationships, it seems essential to look into the experience of adult individuals with intellectual disabilities and see how they view the presence of their closest ones in the context of their romantic relationships.

## Methodology of author's own research

The present inquiry looks at experiences among adult individuals with intellectual disabilities as regards romantic relationships

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*uczuciowe osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, Olsztyn 2020 (paper in press).

<sup>9</sup> R. Kijak, *Dorośli z głębszą niepełnosprawnością intelektualną jako partnerzy, małżonkowie i rodzice*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe UP, Kraków 2016, p. 155.

<sup>10</sup> E. White, R. Barnitt, *Empowered or Discouraged? A Study of People with Learning Disabilities and their Experience of Engaging in Intimate Relationships*. "British Journal of Occupational Therapy" 2000, No. 63(6), pp. 270–276.

<sup>11</sup> K. Johnson et al., *Living safer sexual lives: research and action*. Tizard Learning Disability Review, 2002, No. 7(3), pp. 4–9.

and the significance they attach to those experiences. The present research report is part of a broader study.<sup>12</sup>

This research has been aimed at demonstrating the specific nature of experiences among adults with intellectual disabilities regarding their intimate relationships in the context of their contacts with their families of origin and to reveal the significance the respondents attach to those experiences.

The research has been driven mainly by this question: What are the experiences related to initiating and functioning in romantic relationships among those with intellectual disabilities in the context of their contacts with their families of origin and what is the significance attached to those experiences among those individuals?

Specific problems have been as follows:

- What is the role played by both partners' families of origin in their daily life?
- What are the relations between those with intellectual disabilities and their families where the former are in romantic relationships?
- What do adults with intellectual disabilities think of the level of support they and their intimate relationships receive from their extended families?

To pursue these research goals and address the research questions, the phenomenographic qualitative research method has been used.<sup>13</sup> "Phenomenography is concerned with various qualitatively

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<sup>12</sup> The research concerns emotional and intimate relationships in those with intellectual disabilities and has been presented in: A. Żyta, K. Ćwirynkało, *Związki uczuciowe osób z niepełnosprawnościami intelektualną*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, Olsztyn (paper in press). The aspect in question, that is the role of the families of origin in the lives of both partners of a romantic relationship, including one with intellectual disability, has not been discussed in the said monograph.

<sup>13</sup> F. Marton, *Phenomenography – describing conceptions of the world around us*, "Instructional Science" No. 10, 1981, pp. 177–200; F. Marton, *Phenomenography – A research approach to investigating different understandings of reality*, "Journal of Thought", vol. 21, No. 3, 1986, pp. 28–49; F. Marton, *Phenomenography: Exploring different conceptions of reality*, [in:] D.M. Fetterman (ed.), *Qualitative approaches to evaluation in education: The*

different ways used by individuals to experience phenomena and think about them and to think about mutual relationships between humans and the world".<sup>14</sup> The analysis of the collected content has been based on elements of theory driven by Katy Charmaz<sup>15</sup>, with respondents' statements analyzed against their context and based on the procedure of the phenomenographic procedure.<sup>16</sup>

Partially structured interviews have been conducted with 35 adults with intellectual disability (mild to severe), who have been in an intimate relationship with another person for at least 12 months. The research covered a total of 14 couples and 7 individuals (6 women and 1 man), in case their partners could not take part in the research project, who at that time were or previously had been in long-term relationships. Some of the respondents included individuals married, living together as well as those living separately who considered each other as partners of a lasting romantic relationship. The individuals subject to this research project lived in the Warmian-Masurian Region and were aged between 23 and 61 (15 men and 20 women).

The research project took into consideration the guidelines for interviewing those with intellectual disability and ethical principles regarding anonymity, subjectivity and proper interview conditions.<sup>17</sup>

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*silent scientific revolution*, New York, Praeger, 1988, pp. 176–205; F. Marton, *Phenomenography*, [in:] T. Husén, T.N. Postlethwaite (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Education*, Issue 2, vol. 8, Oxford, Pergamon 1994, pp. 4424–4429; R.G. Paulston, *Pedagogika porównawcza jako pole nakreślenia konceptualnych map teorii paradygmatów*, [in:] Z. Kwieciński, L. Witkowski (ed.), *Spory o edukację. Dylematy i kontrowersje we współczesnych pedagogiach*, Wyd. IBE-Edytor, Warszawa-Toruń 1993, pp. 25–50.

<sup>14</sup> R.G. Paulston, *Pedagogika porównawcza jako pole nakreślenia konceptualnych map teorii paradygmatów*, [in:] Z. Kwieciński, L. Witkowski (ed.), *Spory o edukację. Dylematy i kontrowersje we współczesnych pedagogiach*, Wyd. IBE-Edytor, Warszawa-Toruń 1993, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> K. Charmaz, *Teoria ugruntowana. Praktyczny przewodnik po analizie jakościowej*. PWN, Warszawa 2009.

<sup>16</sup> A. Męczkowska, *Fenomenografia jako podejście badawcze w obszarze studiów edukacyjnych*, „Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny” No. 3(189), 2003, pp. 71–89.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. A. Żyta, K. Ćwirynkało, *Związki uczuciowe osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego, Olsztyn 2020 (paper in press).

## **Analysis of author's own research**

The analysis of interviews conducted with adults with intellectual disability who are in formal or informal romantic relationships points to several types of relationships based on the role of the family in the lives of the individuals in question and acceptance or rejection perceived by the individuals in question. The results of the conducted research have been presented in the form of quotes of respondents' statements, accompanied by interpretations. This study has aimed to delineate an overall pattern indicated by investigation of a specific phenomenon, that is the role of the family of origin in romantic relationships pursued by those with intellectual disability.

### **Relationship as a way to escape the family of origin**

The analysis of several respondents' relationship history has shown that they often recalled their family members in a negative way - due to parents' wrong behaviour (alcohol abuse, domestic violence) or a sense of having been treated unfairly or rejected (unfair treatment compared to one's siblings, and material and mental needs not having been met). At times, respondents observed that their having been put in a special institution with a dormitory and having rare contacts with their carers is a symptom of poor treatment. Those with such views of their family situation would avoid contacts with their families of origin and focus on their partners, instead.

Poor childhood experience often causes resentment towards parent(s) and dissatisfaction with one's past and is used to justify life decisions. Some of the respondents would recall some pathological behaviours of their closest ones (alcoholism, psychological and/or physical violence), and view their life (for example completion of a special school) as a result of inadequate support as children. In such situations, families are not regarded as a source of any kind of support, and the respondents stress the absence of ties and



unwillingness to maintain the relationships with their families of origin. Their partners became the closest one and, in many cases, the only person who satisfies their physical and psychological needs.

*My mum would drink a lot. She drank daily. She didn't care if was hungry or not. They laughed that I could feel my father coming. I would open my eyes upon his arrival; contrary to my mother's arrival [she clenches her eyes]. My father was always cool. He bought me a lot of stuff and spoiled me all the time... [...] Should I argue with my mum, we would have killed each other. I would argue with her all the time. When I grew older, I didn't let her push me around. I didn't get to live with her for too long. I spent a lot of time at the dormitory. I would see her on holidays. Not always. Once, I went to see her on a weekend and came back right away. She can throw a tantrum. (1/1/K)<sup>18</sup>*

Besides the pathological behaviour, the lack of good interpersonal contacts and a sense of being treated unfairly within families of origin (e.g. being abused financially) make those individuals avoid contacts with their families. In such situations, a new relationship (especially a formal one) comes as a source of additional problems as far as relationships with families of origin are concerned. This can exacerbate conflicts and increase the sense of unfair treatment, and individuals in question might also break close contacts.

*I used to visit her every week, twice a week; now, I see her when I have to. My mum was so good to me that she made me give her some of my disability pension. She threatened to sue me. Some time ago, I learned that my mother allocated this house to my brother in her will. She has donated the house to my brother without telling me anything. I learned about that from my nephew. I was pissed off and cut any contacts with my brother and my mum, but then, a few months later, we needed help with placing tiles and refurnishing the house (2/4/M)*

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<sup>18</sup> All statements made by the respondents are quoted in an original form.

In the reported situation, the male respondent feels he has been treated unfairly compared to his brother and feels that he is used financially.

In this group of relationships, respondents do not expect any kind of support from their extended families and they do not feel the need to maintain contacts with them. Their partner and, sometimes, their partner's family became their closest individuals. The analysis of their statements helps us observe that the relationship is often meant to compensate for the sense of rejection and solitude.

### **Relationship as a difficult situation for the family of origin (a source of ambivalent feelings)**

Rarely are romantic relationships in those with intellectual disability entirely accepted by the closest ones. Besides attitudes that show acceptance and willingness to provide support or even joy at the disabled family member finding a close person and building a relationship with them, the reluctance and fear of potential problems often crop up (pregnancy, financial problems, the closest one being abused etc.). In many cases, the responses from the relatives vary a lot and are heterogenous. Sometimes, the acceptance grows as a romantic relationship develops, especially when it turns out that the relationship is sustainable and a couple copes well with daily demands. Not all family members are happy with their child/brother/sister forming a relationship (especially when they think that their partner is an irresponsible person or their closest one may be abused in that relationship).

*Certainly, the husband's brother and sister-in-law, and the children, came to accept it fairly quickly. Things were not so easy with the mother. By now, she has come to accept that. She had no choice. I took her son, who was supposed to live with her to the end of his life. My own family approaches this in a variety of ways. They seem to pretend something in a way. Sometimes they accept that, and then they don't – when they see something they don't like. (2/3/K)*

In the case of families that show inconsistent attitudes towards relationships formed by their disabled family members, various kinds of dynamics emerge – from avoidance of contacts and reluctance to rare contacts to relationships based on expression of positive emotions and involvement in daily life. Usually our respondents describe most willingly those family members who seem dearest to them.

*He has a nice sister. She always greets me with a kiss in a cheek. She hangs out with me and then we go somewhere together. We have a walk or something. We go to the beach together (11/18/K).*

This kind of dynamics may be marked by certain ambivalence in the way various family members approach the relationships and their hesitation and attitudes changing based on the duration of relationships and additional external factors. Under such circumstances, individuals with intellectual disability do not feel confident and experience no support from their relatives. Their sense of connection with their extended family and a sense of safety may be disturbed. Sometimes, families' attitudes to relationships may be inconsistent. Their changeability may be taken for attempts to manipulate a given individual and interfere with the life and matters of a given romantic relationship. In the case of such family dynamics, our respondents tend to focus on relationships with those family members who are kind to them – they regard them as the closest individuals and seek to stay in touch with them, and when needed ask them for advice or support. Such persons become significant individuals to them; they are authorities or role models in various critical situations or problems in romantic relationships.

### **Relationship as a way to expand the group of informal support**

Another kind of relationship, where individuals who are part of a relationship are accepted, liked and supported by their relatives, is **a relationship as a way to expand the group of informal support.**

Our respondents talk about their positive feelings towards their closest ones (including their partner's family) and a sense that they are positively received and treated by those people. The respondents generally feel close affinity with members of the families of origin, have good childhood memories, appreciate their help and support and are happy to be part of their lives. In this way, the circle of individuals who are significant to them and who they think of as sources of possible support is being extended. They enjoy the dynamics with their own family and one of their significant others and are happy to spend their free time with them.

*My parents like [...] a lot. His mother as well. We hang out with Justyna a lot since she has a boyfriend, too. We refer to her as <a mother-in-law>. Michał sometimes refers to my mother as his mother-in-law, too. (3/5/K)*

As with the previous group, the sense of acceptance is not always present – in this case from the partner's family – from the very beginning. Our respondents claim that the beginnings were difficult. Some reserve or even aversion might be felt by them during the early days of a relationship, but their dynamics significantly improve as the relationships unfold and the contacts grow more intimate.

*Later, I learned that his mother had not wanted that. Because I am illiterate. So she said: "Why do you want someone like that?" But I learned about that later on. He later told me about that, he didn't tell me early on. It happened a year into our relationship. Now, my mother-in-law is better than my own mother. She has little money to buy things, but she always buys a little Christmas gift. She is so... you know what I mean? (14/22/K)*

Building good dynamics is equally about receiving support and giving it. Besides using their family support, the disabled have an opportunity to be a source of support for others and contribute to good ties by a range of activities that are part of their daily lives.

Undoubtedly, this positively contributes to their romantic relationships and also improves the sense of safety and supports these individuals' self-determination and their identity of being an adult person who is useful, responsible and fully contributes to a family life.

*M.'s mother likes me a lot. She likes to approach me with many matters. I refer to her as my mother because she asked me to. She asked me for that in the very beginning. And she is like a mother should be. She's good, she helps me. My sisters are jealous of my good mother-in-law [she is laughing]. Theirs are not so good. I don't know why it is so with me. My [partner] says I am kind-hearted. Because I like to share things with others; whenever I have a cake, I will share it. I share it with my mother... my mother-in-law. (15/24/K)*

This kind of relationships point to high significance of good dynamics with families of origin of a given individual and their partner. This has a positive impact on the wellbeing of those individuals and facilitates better functioning of their relationship. In difficult situations, the respondents of this group feel they are supported and accepted and want to be the source of support for their closest ones.

### **Thwarted/ruined relationship as a result of extended family's actions**

Two persons, a woman who divorced her husband and a woman who broke up with her partner and a father to her child, claimed, while discussing the main roles of their families in their romantic relationships, that their families were the main or one of the major reasons behind their break-ups. One can refer to these relationships as **thwarted or ruined**.

The two female respondents recall family's aversion (families of male partners in both cases), manifesting itself with critique, teasing or even physical violence. They provide detailed descriptions of teasing, and stress that these people were main reasons behind break-ups.

*They said that I didn't care about the house at all, that I didn't clean the house, didn't cook, that his mother did everything; how come his mother, I thought? Initially, I cooked as well as I could, I cannot say I am good at it. I cannot cook as well as his mother does. Not everyone can do that so well. I would cook as well as I could, but it was not tasty... My ex-mother-in-law would pour the soup under my blouse and throw pierogis on my head. My ex-husband said... That they were in the fridge for too long, but they were not...*

*After the wedding, I just faced prohibitions and punishments. His mother and his family were behind that... She destroyed our marriage, she just did that, in this way... The ex-mother-in-law said that she would not let anyone break a marriage, and then she did it herself... If we lived separately, it would be the same... She would interfere with us; she would certainly visit us or my ex-husband would call and report things to her... (18/29/K)*

A similarly difficult situation is revealed by another narrative, from a woman who gave birth to a child that was taken from her by the court. Presently, the childcare is provided by her ex-partners' parents.

*As I'd given birth in G., the District Family Support Center arrived and took it from me. Otherwise, the child would face an orphanage. They knew my conditions as they had checked things before. I wanted to keep the baby. Of course. But I did not have proper conditions to do that. His mother took it [...]. They are so mean, both him and her (author's note: the girl's carers). My partner lives with his parents. Where should he live? But if they die, the child will be taken from him... Because he doesn't work [...]. Nobody helps me. Who should help me? I don't want anybody. People are mean here. (5/8/K)*

Women in both cases view their partners' families in a very negative way. Not only do they complain about the lack of support from them, but they also accuse them of actions that had adverse impact on their own functioning (this is especially the case with the first woman) and broke their relationships.

To sum it up, the analysis of the statements regarding those with intellectual disability with their generational family members allows us to distinguish between three basic types:

- Symbiotic relationships, based on constant presence and support (characterized by close physical contact, e.g. living together or in one neighborhood, constant involvement in daily life, support in daily and emotional lives – frequent conversations, expression of mutual feelings and mutual concern);
- *Formal relationships*, based on sporadic contacts with insignificant emotional charge (oftentimes, the reason for this is both the geographical distance between individuals and the lack of strong emotional ties or the fact that the partner of an adult child with intellectual disability is not accepted);
- *Unrealized relationships*, marked by the lack of close bond or personal contacts or even virtual ones. This is mostly due to the relationship having been broken before, the child with intellectual disability having been ‘rejected’.

The way our respondents have assessed the support they or their partners receive from their closest ones varies, too. In the light of their subjective assessments, the respondents can be divided into two basic groups:

- Those who notice the presence of their families of origin in the life and functioning of their romantic relationships (these are the people who describe the mutual contacts in detail, are generally happy with them, regard their closest ones as authorities in many daily life matters);
- Individuals who have a negative view of the support they receive from their family of origin (two sub-groups can be distinguished in this case: those whose relatives are involved with their lives, but their efforts are not aimed at providing support or are aimed at obstructing or compromising the romantic relationship in place, and those who do not have relationships with their families of origin and do not feel they receive any kind of support from them).

## Discussion

Families of origin are individuals of great significance in the adult lives of those with intellectual disability and usually have a high bearing on those individuals' attitude to pursuing a romantic relationship, sustainability of that relationship (by providing support, facilitating or hampering the romantic relationships) and the individuals in question playing their role as partners with some degree of success. They are a kind of role models and points of reference for how to play the role of a girlfriend/boyfriend/partner/wife/husband or a parent and – with the lack of nationwide system solutions – often also the source of financial, organizational, informational and emotional support. Additionally, good contacts with one's family of origin improve the wellbeing and self-esteem in those with intellectual disability. This research project has demonstrated that the range of attitudes of the family members seem very broad: from devaluating one's being in a relationship (obstructing emotional and intimate relationships; interfering with relationships; forcing individuals to end the relationship or, in the case of a pregnancy, to abort a child or give it up for adoption) to disablism and discrimination (treating the disabled as dependent and needing constant care and support and required to justify all of their decisions) to attitudes marked by acceptance and rational support (a family member being receptive to the needs of those in romantic relationships, providing support where needed without interfering with a relationship or doing a task for a given person where not necessary).<sup>19</sup>

The intense presence of families of origin in the relationships of the adult relatives with intellectual disability is definitely due to the nature of this group. Since they are closely connected to their families (which results both from emotional conditions and practical requirements), they rarely feel they are independent or emancipated

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. M. Parchomiuk, *Seksualność człowieka z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2016, p. 142.



enough to 'break away' from their parents and siblings. Family is constantly present in their lives.<sup>20</sup> On the one hand, their relatives see no chance for their disabled adult children or brothers/sisters to become a fully self-reliant and independent individual, which stems from their view of how these individuals function cognitively and socially and the state support system in place. Their concern is often a manifestation of a strong bond and fear that their son or daughter can be hurt or abused. On the other hand, the adults with intellectual disability are in many cases not ready in emotional, social and behavioral terms nor, in fact, do they see the need to emotionally and practically separate themselves from their families of origin, even though they often voice the significant need to become independent and self-reliant while pursuing a romantic relationship. They have not been prepared or taught to be individuals who can make decisions for themselves, who can make choices and impact various matters. Their experiences vary enormously, depending on the way the functioning of the whole family system, the presence of additional disorders or factors that have negative impact on the mental wellbeing of the family members in question (alcoholism in one of family members, domestic violence, conflicts with law and financial helplessness). In those families, disability of a family member is usually an additional factor that obstructs proper relations. Other families cope with daily life problems more or less successfully, adapting to the situation where their adult son or daughter with intellectual disability comes to pursue a romantic relationship. Sometimes, this is a difficult or even unacceptable situation to them, but there are also examples of families adapting to a new form of contacts, consisting in support provided to the couple (both in organizational, financial and emotional terms). Statements provided

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. A. Krause, A. Żyta, S. Nosarzewska S., *Normalizacja środowiska społecznego osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne Akapit, Toruń, 2010; J. Kruk-Lasocka, W. Antosz, *Koszula i krawat. Obrazki wyłaniającej się dorosłości*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2018; D. Krzemińska, *Być parą z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną. Studium mikroetnograficzne w kontekście teorii postkolonialnej Homiego K. Bhabhy*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2019.

by those experiencing such acceptance and support from their families of origin show that it means a lot to them and is an important factor that boosts their sense of self-determination and mental well-being.

Being an example of interpretative inquiry into the role of subjectivity and emancipation of the marginalized individuals, the inquiry into experiences and the significance attached to them within the group of individuals with disability shows not just their potential and needs but also large heterogeneity of those with intellectual disability and the need to constantly support their self-determination.

## Summary

The present study seeks to demonstrate the place of the family of origin within romantic relationships among those with intellectual disability. On the one hand, the adopted research perspective and method have revealed personal experiences and their perceived significance and, on the other, has come with some limitations. Other research projects might want to use the method of biographical inquiry to provide a fuller picture of other aspects of the lives of individuals with intellectual disability or show the dynamics with families across various stages of relationships in question.

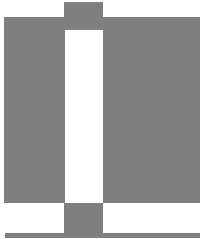
The analysis of the author's research and literature helped us to confirm the significance of the family of origin in the adult life of those with intellectual disability. Due to close emotional contacts, cultural customs (whereby it is the family that bears the greatest responsibility and is the source of support and care in the event of a disease, disability or dependability of its family member) and financial and sociological conditions (cohabitation, financial dependence), their relationships and bonds are particularly strong. It is very rare for these individuals to break away from their parents practically and mentally. Such a separation is usually due to the fact that parents are no longer alive or family members have drug or alcohol problems or violate law or suffer from disorders that pre-

vent them from functioning properly in interpersonal relationships. Undoubtedly, to support independence and decision-making capacity in individuals with intellectual disability and promote their wellbeing and quality of life, their families of origin should be taken into account. Special education has an important mission to show the real capacity of those with intellectual disability to their families, debunk stereotypes and support them in addressing the challenges of raising a child with intellectual disability and preparing them for adulthood.

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## **Educating teachers of the visually impaired in the context of educational and social changes – a research report**

**ABSTRACT:** Kornelia Czerwińska, Kamila Miler-Zdanowska, *Educating teachers of the visually impaired in the context of educational and social changes – a research report*. Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy, no. 29, Poznań 2020. Pp. 45–73. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-391X. e-ISSN 2658-283X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ikps.2020.29.03>

Changes in the ways of performing professional roles of special education teachers entail the need to develop new solutions for academic education for teachers of the visually impaired. The assessment of the content and forms of the previously proposed education for teachers of the visually impaired from the perspective of the usefulness of their professional competencies may be helpful in the determination of the needed directions of changes in this respect. The aim of the article is to describe and analyse the results of comparative research on visual impairment pedagogy graduates educated in the system of 5-year uniform master's studies and 3-year bachelor's studies, concerning the course of their educational and professional paths.

**KEY WORDS:** special education teacher, teacher of the visually impaired, professional roles

## Introduction

Nowadays, the requirements and expectations for the profession of a teacher of the visually impaired are high because of a significant broadening and diversification of fields of special education. This education has lost its status of an exclusively school education, concerning primarily special school and education centres educating children and youth with a specific type of disability. A number of tasks in the field of special education are currently performed in numerous centres and institutions of different type operating outside the education system, because the area of interest of this sub-discipline of education includes the full life cycle of people exposed to exclusion because of physical impairment.<sup>1</sup> In turn, supporting the development of these people during childhood and adolescence more and more often takes place in public schools resulting from the popularization of the idea of inclusive education.

The constantly growing catalogue of professional tasks assigned to special education teachers implies the need to modify the system of preparing this group for work and to provide conditions favouring the effective improvement of competencies during its execution. The review of pedagogical texts<sup>2</sup> proves that as early as in the 1980s, the need to introduce changes in the national model of education of special education teachers, which would enable the acquisition of interdisciplinary knowledge and development of skills necessary in new forms of work, was recognised. Gradual transformations within the population of people with disabilities was foreseen and it was postulated to depart from academic background focused only on performing the basic functions of a teacher within a school facility.

The systematic reduction of segregation in the education of students with disabilities has intensified the process of developing

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<sup>1</sup> M. Kupisiewicz, *Pedagog specjalny – człowiek o wyjątkowych predyspozycjach osobowościowych, profesjonalista posiadający rozległą, interdyscyplinarną wiedzę i umiejętności*, „Studia z Teorii Wychowania” 2016, no. 4(17), pp. 173–174.

<sup>2</sup> K. Parys, S. Olszewski, *Ewolucja poglądów na temat kształcenia pedagogów specjalnych w Polsce*, „Niepełnosprawność. Półrocznik naukowy” 2009, no. 1, pp. 103–112.

a new strategy for the education of special education teachers, as the available forms of teaching this group of students constitute one of the main determinants of the formation of the labour market for educators.<sup>3</sup> Preparing educators to perform numerous key functions within integrated and public schools (including the role of a support teacher, a consultant, an assistant, a diagnostician, an expert conducting rehabilitation and therapeutic activities)<sup>4</sup>, in which both highly specialised professional qualifications related to the specificity of a given disability, and the ability to work in groups with a significant degree of diversity are important, has become crucial. Working in non-segregated conditions require the special education teacher to be particularly competent in coordinating diagnostic and rehabilitation activities, as well as use multi-specialised knowledge to satisfy special educational needs of students. The effectiveness of such work depends largely on the level of interpersonal skills, including the ability to interact with other people and cope with difficult situations, as well as to be empathic to understand the situation of pupils and their families.<sup>5</sup> Reflectiveness, flexibility in the use of various didactic strategies, readiness to use the experience of other teachers, desire to constantly improve professional skills are some of numerous features that should characterise future teachers of inclusive education.<sup>6</sup> Because of the dynamic changes in the socio-educational space generating new functions for schools, contemporary concepts of teaching educators are constantly evolving in the search for optimal solutions, the development of which is extremely difficult as a result of the number and variety of services in the field

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<sup>3</sup> J. Pańczyk, *Kształcenie pedagogów specjalnych w Polsce*, [in:] *Historyczne dyskursy nad pedagogiką specjalną*, ed. J.J. Błeszyński, D. Baczała, J. Binnebesel, Wydawnictwo Naukowe WSEZ, Łódź 2008, pp. 52–53.

<sup>4</sup> D.D. Smith, *Pedagogika specjalna*, volume I, Wydawnictwo APS, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2009, pp. 85–87.

<sup>5</sup> M. Chodkowska, *Razem damy sobie radę! W drodze do zintegrowanego społeczeństwa*, WSiP, Warsaw 2009, pp. 33–40.

<sup>6</sup> I. Chrzanowska, *Edukacja włączająca – wyzwanie dla kompetencji pedagogów specjalnych*, „*Studia Edukacyjne*” 2018, no. 48, pp. 27–28.

of special education provided to many entities. From 1981, academic education in the field of special education was carried out in the form of 5-year uniform master's studies, and since 1999, in accordance with the assumptions of the Bologna Process, a modification of uniform studies into two-level studies, carried out in the form of a 3-year first cycle degree program (bachelor's degree) and a 2-year second cycle degree program (master's degree) has been introduced. Although the adoption of this new education model was aimed at providing high quality education, increasing the employment rate of graduates and their mobility, the introduction of pro-Bologna changes in preparing special educators and teachers for the profession was criticised in the environment. The lack of attention to clear program separation between the two levels of studies related to different areas of graduate competencies was emphasised. The schematism of the adopted National Qualifications Framework and excessive focus on the effects of the didactic process expressed in the form of operationalised messages and skills, and as a consequence significant difficulties in the development of a reflective, critical and creative approach to future professional activities were pointed out. For the fear of too low competencies acquired at individual cycles of studies in relation to the constantly expanding scope of professional activity of special educators, a postulate to restore 5-year uniform master's studies was put forward.<sup>7</sup>

Problems with the elaboration of curriculum content taught at bachelor's and master's studies in a manner corresponding to the current requirements of the labour market were noticed especially in those specialities where the priority issue in the acquisition of professional skills are numerous practical, simulation, out-of-classroom activities in small groups and the opportunity to learn the skills of experienced teachers and rehabilitators as part of lesson observation, study visits, student internships. This category of specialisa-

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<sup>7</sup> Z. Janiszewska-Nieścioruk, *Trudności związane z implementacją probolońskich zmian w kształceniu pedagogów i nauczycieli*, „Niepełnosprawność i Rehabilitacja” 2013, no. 1, pp. 42-53.



tions includes visual impairment pedagogy, which includes specialists involved in education, rehabilitation and multi-aspect support for the development of children, adolescents and adults with visual impairment. Teachers of the visually impaired work with a wide range of people with high heterogeneity of educational and developmental needs<sup>8</sup>, undertaking various roles in different types of school institutions, rehabilitation centres, and non-governmental organizations. In some cases, a teacher of the visually impaired is the main specialist working with a blind or partially sighted person and coordinating the activities of other professionals, while in others he acts as a consultant, advisor, expert conducting rehabilitation activities, belonging to an interdisciplinary team.<sup>9</sup> The roles and responsibilities of teachers of the visually impaired are considered unique and require special predispositions enabling the effective use of a wide base of professional knowledge in everyday practice, including the ability to flexibly respond to the changing conditions and needs of pupils and the ability to use highly personalised educational and rehabilitation strategies.<sup>10</sup>

Uniform master's studies lasting 5 years allowed for the understanding of current state of scientific knowledge regarding individual aspects of psychosocial functioning of the blind and partially sighted of various ages, as well as equipped students with practical

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<sup>8</sup> K.E. Wolffe, S.Z. Sacks, A.L. Corn, J.N. Erin, K.M. Huebner, S. Lewis, *Teachers of students with visual impairments: What are they teaching?*, "Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness" 2002, no. 96, pp. 293-303.

<sup>9</sup> S.M. Correa-Torres, J.J. Howell, *Facing the challenges of itinerant teaching: Perspectives and suggestions from the field*, "Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness" 2004, no. 98(7), pp. 420-433.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. M. Zaorska, *Tyflopedagog wobec problemu aktywności życiowej – zawodowej i prozawodowej osób dorosłych z niepełnosprawnością wzrokową*, Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne „Akapit”, Toruń 2015, pp. 93-98. S.J. Spungin, K.A. Ferrell, M. Monson, *The role and function of the teacher of students with visual impairments*. Position paper of the Division on Visual Impairments, Council for Exceptional Children. Arlington, VA 2016. M. Zaorska, *Aktywność społeczna osób dorosłych niepełnosprawnych wzrokowo – możliwości i ograniczenia*, [in:] *Wybrane konteksty i wyzwania współczesnej pedagogiki specjalnej*, ed. K. Barłóg, Wydawnictwo URz, Rzeszów 2017, pp. 27-35.

skills in making functional diagnosis and conducting therapeutic classes in the field of spatial orientation and mobility, vision rehabilitation, Braille learning, graphic education, everyday activities, and use of assistive technology. The number of workshop classes carried out at the university and in institutions specialising in the work with people with visual impairment created the opportunity to learn the specific nature of didactic and rehabilitation activities with this group and to test acquired praxeological skills in practice. The introduction of a two-stage study model has caused a number of problems in providing future teachers of the visually impaired with full theoretical and practical background to take up employment in various environments, including in particular the reduction of the scope of curriculum content related to individual visual impairment pedagogy subdisciplines and limitation of student internships in continuous form. It should be noted that the lack of development opportunities of broad competencies in the field of rehabilitation of people with visual impairment may hinder graduates from effective execution of more and more professional tasks, especially in integrated and public schools.<sup>11</sup>

Academic centres preparing future teachers of the visually impaired for work have developed a diversified educational offer at individual levels of study. For example, the Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw, which constitutes the area of research presented in this article, allowed for the acquisition, as part of the bachelor's degree, in addition to the qualifications in early childhood education, of full visual impairment pedagogy competence and skills in the area of spatial orientation and mobility of people with visual impairment. At the 2-year master's studies, curriculum content focused primarily on issues related to vision rehabilitation of partially sighted people. The multitude of currently available forms of education for teachers of the visually impaired education,

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<sup>11</sup> K. Czerwińska, *Nauczyciel ucznia z niepełnosprawnością wzroku – kierunki zmian w polskim systemie edukacji*, [in:] *Nauczyciel we współczesnej edukacji. Diagnoza – Rozwój – Zmiana*, ed. M. Kamińska, Z.P. Kruszewski, A. Gretkowski, B. Skalbania, Oficyna Wydawnicza Szkoły Wyższej im. D. Kukła, Difin, Warsaw 2016, pp. 351–365.

and the considerable program diversification of individual educational offers (bachelor's degree, master's degree, postgraduate education, qualifying courses) resulted in the fact that teachers of the visually impaired currently active on the domestic labour market, form a group with different professional qualifications and competencies.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it is fully justified to undertake scientific analyses concerning the professional situation of teachers of the visually impaired with different educational background, including learning their opinions on the importance and usefulness of knowledge and skills acquired during academic education. Exploratory research devoted to these issues are conducted in numerous countries<sup>13</sup>, and they indicate, among others, the problems related to: the need to expand university curricula with the content related to work with blind and partially sighted students with additional dysfunctions, the need to increase the quantity and number of types of practical classes, the development of interpersonal skills crucial in teamwork, discussing issues related to cultural, ethnic and cultural diversity to a greater extent than previously. The proposals submitted by professionally active teachers of the visually impaired included also the need for permanent organisation of short trainings, workshops, courses and thematic panels regarding selected, detailed problems in the field of education and rehabilitation of people with visual impairment.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Dycht, *Edukacja włączająca uczniów z dysfunkcją wzroku w Polsce – wdrażanie zobowiązań i analiza wątków zaniedbanych*, „Niepełnosprawność i Rehabilitacja” 2015, no. 2, p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Dote-Kwan, D. Chen, M. Hughes, *A national survey of service providers who work with young children with visual impairments*, “Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness” 2001, no. 95(6), pp. 325–337. N. Griffin-Shirley, A.K. Koenig, C.A. Layton, R.C. Davidson, L.K. Siew, A.R. Edmonds, M.C. Robinson, *A survey of teachers of students with visual impairments: responsibilities, satisfactions, and needs*, “RE:view” 2004, no. 36(1), pp. 7–20. P.A. Suvak, *What do they really do? Activities of teachers of students with visual impairments*, “RE:view” 2004, no. 36(1), pp. 22–31. A.D. Kesiktaş, A.G. Akcamete, *The relationship of personnel preparation to the competence of teachers of students with visual impairments in Turkey*, “Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness” 2011, no. 105(2), pp. 108–124.

Because of the great practical usefulness of this type of analysis, as well as the currently ongoing changes in the national model of education of special educators, including the reintroduction of 5-year uniform master's studies in this field, a survey in two groups of graduates of visual impairment pedagogy who acquired professional qualifications as part of their bachelor's or master's degree was conducted.

### **Methodological foundations of own research**

In order to analyse the professional situation of teachers of the visually impaired with different educational backgrounds, the following research questions were formulated:

- Are there any differences in the course of the career path of 5-year studies graduates and 3-year studies graduates of visual impairment pedagogy and if so, which issues do they include?
- Are there any differences in the evaluation of the usefulness of the professional competencies acquired during studies in the current job between 5-year studies graduates and 3-year studies graduates of visual impairment pedagogy and if so, which issues do they include?

In order to answer the posed research questions, a comparative analysis of the results of survey responses of two groups of graduates specialised in visual impairment pedagogy (5-year studies graduates and 3-year studies graduates) was conducted. To this end, statistical analyses using the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 package were performed. It was used to conduct chi square tests of independence and correlation analyses with Kendall's tau-b coefficient. The significance level was assumed as  $\alpha = 0.05$ , although  $p$  values in the range  $0.05 < p < 0.1$  were interpreted as indicating significant results at the level of statistical tendency.

In the study, the diagnostic survey method was used, while the authors' version of the survey questionnaire, which was sent to respondents electronically as an online form was applied as the research tool.

The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions, including 15 closed-ended and 3 open-ended questions. The thematic scope of the questions covered two groups of issues: the first concerned the evaluation of the quality of education within the specialisation of visual impairment pedagogy, the second focused on questions related to the professional career of graduates of this specialisation.

The study included 102 people, graduates specialised in visual impairment pedagogy of the Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw. Two groups were distinguished based on the type and form of completed studies. The first one, consisting of 68 people, included graduates who were educated in the system of uniform master's degree (5-year studies). The second group consisted of people who acquired professional qualifications as part of their bachelor's degree (3-year studies) and it included 44 people. Because of the nature and subject of the study, the selection of the sample was a nonprobability sampling and the size of groups resulted from the number of people who specialised in visual impairment pedagogy within a specific form of education.

Based on age, four subgroups have been distinguished. The largest subgroup, both among 3-year and 5-year studies graduates, were people between 26–30 years of age (60.3% for 5-year studies, 72.7% for 3-year studies), and the smallest one, people between 36–40 years of age (10.3% for 5-year studies, 0% for 3-year studies). Another category describing the study group is the work experience with people with visual impairment. In this, also four subcategories have been created. Among the respondents, both in the group of 3-year and 5-year studies graduates, more than half of the respondents were people working with blind and partially sighted people for less than 5 years (66.2% for 5-years studies, 56.8% for 3-year studies). The smallest group among graduates of 5-year visual impairment pedagogy were people who had no professional experience. The analysis of the professional activity of the graduates specialised in visual impairment pedagogy showed that the majority of people after graduation improved their professional compe-

tencies. Among the 5-year studies graduates, the most popular were courses and trainings (51.47%), qualifying courses (42.65%) and postgraduate studies (10.59%). In turn, among the 3-year studies graduates, the most popular were master's studies (77.3%), followed by courses and trainings (31.1%), and qualifying courses (18.2%). The presented data demonstrate that graduates of visual impairment pedagogy, regardless of the type of completed studies, are very active in broadening and developing their professional competencies. Detailed data is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Research sample characteristics

	5-year studies graduates		3-year studies graduates	
	N	%	N	%
Age				
Under 25 years old	11	16.2	11	25.0
26-30 years old	41	60.3	32	72.7
31-35 years old	9	13.2	1	2.3
36-40 years old	7	10.3	0	0.0
Work experience with people with visual impairment				
No experience	0	0.0	16	36.4
1-5 years	45	66.2	25	56.8
5-10 years	17	25.0	3	6.9
11-15 years	6	8.8	0	0.0
Total	68	100	44	100
Forms of professional development				
Master's degree	0	0.0	34	77.3
Postgraduate education	14	20.59	8	17.8
Qualifying courses	29	42.65	9	18.2
Courses, trainings, workshops	35	51.47	14	31.1
Other	18	26.47	0	0.0

Source: own research.

## Results of the study

Education for the profession of a teacher of the visually impaired, apart from the necessity to learn theoretical knowledge, is also characterised by the need to master key practical skills needed in working with blind and partially sighted people (including the ability to read and write Braille, the ability to correctly adapt educational materials, the ability to conduct functional assessment of vision, the ability to teach methods and techniques of sightless movement, etc.).

The respondents were asked about the usefulness of visual impairment pedagogy competencies acquired during the studies in their professional work. Analysis of the responses of both groups of graduates showed that there are statistically significant differences

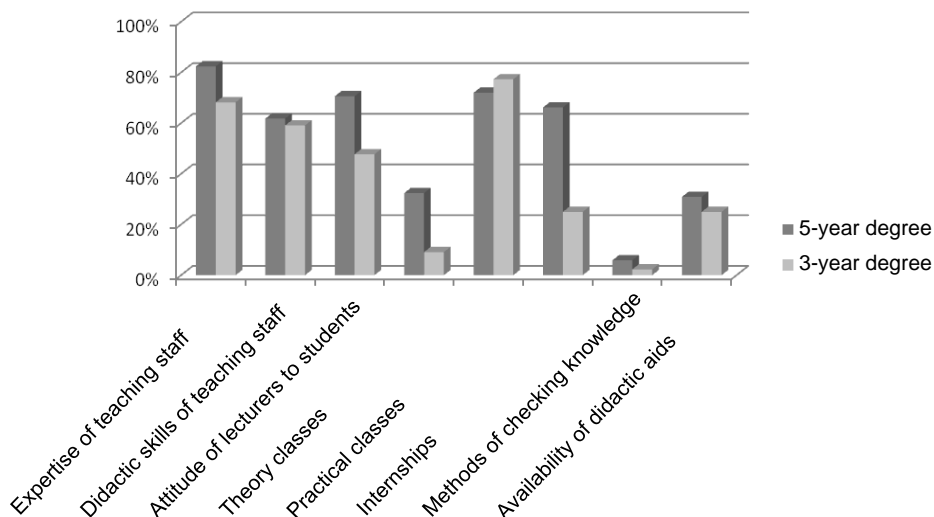
**Table 2.** A contingency table with the results of the chi square test for the relationship between the type of university education and opinion concerning visual impairment pedagogy competencies acquired during the studies

Did visual impairment pedagogy competencies acquired during the studies prove sufficient in your professional work?	Group		Likelihood function	P	Cramér's V
	5-year studies	3-year studies			
Definitely not	N	0	8.80	0.066	0.27
	%	0.0			
Rather not	N	2			
	%	3.0			
Difficult to say	N	7			
	%	10.6			
Rather yes	N	45			
	%	68.2			
Definitely yes	N	12			
	%	18.2			

Source: own research.

between the study groups. Among 5-year studies graduates there is a higher percentage of people agreeing with the statement that the competencies acquired during the studies are sufficient to perform professional work compared to 3-year studies graduates. This relationship turned out to be significant at the level of statistical tendency. It is a relationship of weak correlation. Detailed answers of the respondents are presented in Table 2.

Graduates of visual impairment pedagogy participating in the study were also asked to identify strong and weak points of education during their visual impairment pedagogy specialisation. Both 5-year and 3-year visual impairment pedagogy graduates have indicated the expertise of teaching staff and practical classes as the strongest elements of their education. Opinions of graduates in both groups of surveyed students are presented in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1.** Elements of education constituting the strongest point of the specialisation in visual impairment pedagogy based on the opinions of 5-year and 3-year studies graduates

Source: own research.



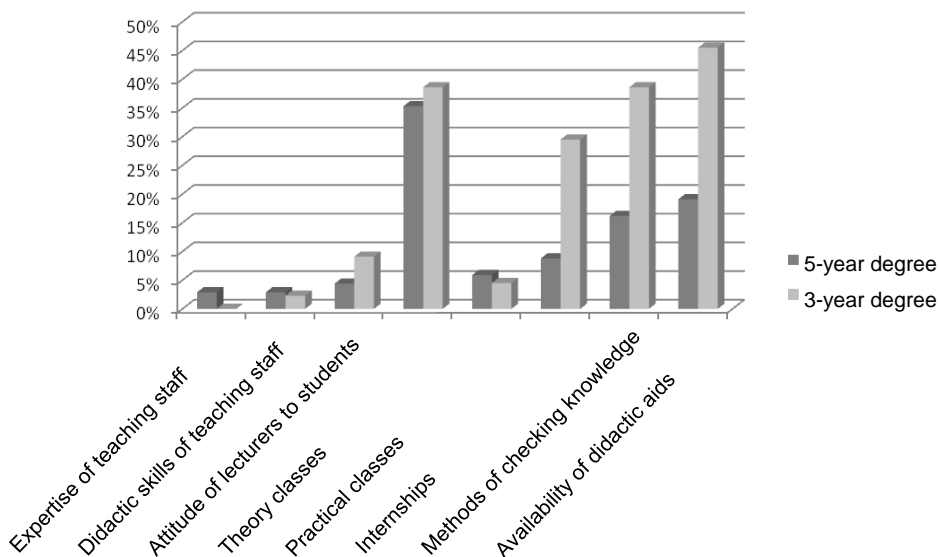
**Table 3.** A contingency table with the results of the chi square test for the relationship between the type of university education and opinion of the graduates concerning strong points of the specialisation in visual impairment pedagogy

Which elements of the study were the strongest points of the specialisation in visual impairment pedagogy?			Group		X <sup>2</sup>	p	phi
			5-year studies	3-year studies			
Expertise of teaching staff	no	N	12	14	3.01	0.083	0.16
		%	17.6	31.8			
	yes	N	56	30			
		%	82.4	68.2			
Didactic skills of teaching staff	no	N	26	18	0.08	0.777	0.02
		%	38.2	40.9			
	yes	N	42	26			
		%	61.8	59.1			
Attitude of lecturers to students	no	N	20	23	5.90	0.015	0.23
		%	29.4	52.3			
	yes	N	48	21			
		%	70.6	47.7			
Theory classes	no	N	46	40	8.11	0.004	0.26
		%	67.6	90.9			
	yes	N	22	4			
		%	32.4	9.1			
Practical classes	no	N	19	10	0.37	0.538	0.05
		%	27.9	22.7			
	yes	N	49	34			
		%	72.1	77.3			
Internships	no	N	23	33	18.11	0.000	0.40
		%	33.8	75.0			
	yes	N	45	11			
		%	66.2	25.0			
Methods of checking knowledge	no	N	64	43	0.81	0.366	0.08
		%	94.1	97.7			
	yes	N	4	1			
		%	5.9	2.3			
Availability of didactic aids	no	N	47	33	0.45	0.501	0.06
		%	69.1	75.0			
	yes	N	21	11			
		%	30.9	25.0			

Source: own research.

In addition, it was found that among graduates of 5-year studies, a higher percentage of people who believe that the attitude of lecturers to students, theory classes and internships are the strongest elements of the specialisation in visual impairment pedagogy was observed, compared to 3-year studies graduates. These relationships turned out to be statistically significant. They are relationships of weak correlation. The answers of both study groups are presented in Table 3.

In turn, in terms of identifying the weakest points during their visual impairment pedagogy specialisation, both groups of students indicated theory classes. On the other hand, among 5-year studies graduates, a lower percentage of people who believe that internships, methods of checking knowledge and availability of didactic aids are the weakest elements of the specialisation in visual impairment



**Figure 2.** Elements of education constituting the weakest point of the specialisation in visual impairment pedagogy based on the opinions of 5-year and 3-year studies graduates

Source: own research.

**Table 4.** A contingency table with the results of the chi square test for the relationship between the type of university education and opinion of the graduates concerning weak points of the specialisation in visual impairment pedagogy

Which elements of the study were the weakest points of the specialisation in visual impairment pedagogy?			Group		X <sup>2</sup>	p	phi
			5-year studies	3-year studies			
Expertise of teaching staff	no	N	66	44	1.31	0.251	0.10
		%	97.1	100.0%			
	yes	N	2	0			
		%	2.9%	0.0%			
Didactic skills of teaching staff	no	N	66	43	0.46	0.831	0.02
		%	97.1%	97.7%			
	yes	N	2	1			
		%	2.9%	2.3%			
Attitude of lecturers to students	no	N	65	40	0.99	0.318	0.09
		%	95.6	90.9			
	yes	N	3	4			
		%	4.4	9.1			
Theory classes	no	N	44	27	0.12	0.720	0.03
		%	64.7	61.4			
	yes	N	24	17			
		%	35.3	38.6			
Practical classes	no	N	64	42	0.09	0.759	0.02
		%	94.1	95.5			
	yes	N	4	2			
		%	5.9	4.5			
Internships	no	N	62	31	8.14	0.004	0.27
		%	91.2	70.5			
	yes	N	6	13			
		%	8.8	29.5			
Methods of checking knowledge	no	N	57	27	7.18	0.007	0.25
		%	83.8	61.4			
	yes	N	11	17			
		%	16.2	38.6			
Availability of didactic aids	no	N	55	24	8.91	0.003	0.28
		%	80.9	54.5			
	yes	N	13	20			
		%	19.1	45.5			

Source: own research.

pedagogy, was observed, compared to 3-year studies graduates. The observed differences turned out to be statistically significant. They are relationships of weak correlation. Detailed responses of the respondents are presented in Figure 2 and Table 4.

The period of university education, apart from the acquisition of praxeological competence, is also a period in which moral and personality competencies of future educators are formed. The surveyed graduates specialised in visual impairment pedagogy were also asked about this issue. As a result of the analyses, no statistically significant difference was observed between the responses of 5-year studies graduates and 3-year studies graduates concerning the question of whether the university education had a positive impact on their personal development. In both groups of surveyed graduates, an overwhelming majority confirmed that the university education had a positive impact on their personal development (93.4% of 5-year studies graduates, 97.8% of 3-year studies graduates). The data are presented in Table 5.

However, a statistically significant difference was observed in the scope of personality traits listed by the respondents, which in their opinion developed significantly during their study of visual impair-

**Table 5.** A contingency table with the results of the chi square test for the relationship between the type of university education and the impact of visual impairment pedagogy studies on the personal development of graduates

Did the studies in visual impairment pedagogy positively affect your personal development?		Group		Likelihood function	P	Cramér's V
		5-year studies	3-year studies			
Difficult to say	N	5	1	3.44	0.179	0.17
	%	7.%	2.3			
Rather yes	N	32	16			
	%	47.1	36.4			
Definitely yes	N	31	27			
	%	45.6	61.4			

Source: own research.

**Table 6.** A contingency table with the results of the chi square test for the relationship between the type of university education and the opinion of graduates concerning the development of their personality traits during their studies

Which traits were influenced by visual impairment pedagogy studies?			Group		X <sup>2</sup>	p	phi
			5-year studies	3-year studies			
None	no	N	66	43	0.04	0.831	0.02
		%	97.1	97.7			
	yes	N	2	1			
		%	2.9	2.3			
Assertiveness	no	N	44	38	6.39	0.011	0.23
		%	64.7	86.4			
	yes	N	24	6			
		%	35.3	13.6			
Thoroughness	no	N	30	18	0.11	0.738	0.03
		%	44.1	40.9			
	yes	N	38	26			
		%	55.9	59.1			
Sensitivity	no	N	24	22	2.38	0.122	0.14
		%	35.3	50.0			
	yes	N	44	22			
		%	64.7	50.0			
Resourcefulness	no	N	34	25	0.49	0.480	0.67
		%	50.0	56.8			
	yes	N	34	19			
		%	50.0	43.2			
Other	no	N	52	44	12.07	0.001	0.32
		%	76.5	100.0			
	yes	N	16	0			
		%	23.5	0.0			

Source: own research.

ment pedagogy. Among the 5-year studies graduates, a higher percentage of people who believe that the studies had an impact on their assertiveness was noted, compared to 3-year studies graduates

(this is a weak correlation). On the other hand, no such difference was observed concerning the remaining listed traits. Detailed statistics are presented in Table 6.

Subsequent questions included in the survey focused on the professional career of graduates. The surveyed respondents were asked whether they have ever worked and whether they currently work as a teacher of the visually impaired. The analysis of the provided answers demonstrated that in the group of 5-year studies graduates there is a higher percentage of teachers of the visually impaired (both of people who currently practice this profession and those who have ever done it), compared to 3-year studies graduates. This relationship turned out to be statistically significant. It is a relationship of moderate correlation. The answers of both study groups are presented in Table 7.

The graduates specialised in visual impairment pedagogy were also asked to provide information on the nature of their current or previous work as a teacher of the visually impaired. The obtained information demonstrated that there is a statistically significant difference in this respect between both groups of graduates. Among

**Table 7.** A contingency table with the results of the chi square test for the relationship between the type of university education and the experience of work as a teacher of the visually impaired

			Group		X <sup>2</sup>	p	phi
			5-year studies	3-year studies			
Do you currently work as a teacher of the visually impaired?	no	N	17	24	10.05	0.002	0.30
		%	25.0	54.5			
	yes	N	51	20			
		%	75.0	45.5			
Have you ever worked as a teacher of the visually impaired?	no	N	7	18	14.44	0.000	0.35
		%	10.3	40.9			
	yes	N	61	26			
		%	89.7	59.1			

Source: own research.

**Table 8.** A contingency table with the results of the chi square test for the relationship between the type of university education and the nature of work executed as a teacher of the visually impaired

Which is/was the nature of your work as a teacher of the visually impaired?			Group		X <sup>2</sup>	p	phi
			5-year studies	3-year studies			
A teacher in a special educational institution	no	N	56	37	0.57	0.811	0.02
		%	82.4	84.1			
	yes	N	12	7			
		%	17.6	15.9			
A support teacher in an integrated or public educational institution	no	N	57	41	2.13	0.144	0.13
		%	83.8	93.2			
	yes	N	11	3			
		%	16.2	6.8			
Vision therapist/ vision rehabilitator	no	N	43	41	12.77	0.000	0.33
		%	63.2	93.2			
	yes	N	25	3			
		%	36.8	6.8			
Spatial orientation teacher	no	N	30	39	22.34	0.000	0.44
		%	44.1	88.6			
	yes	N	38	5			
		%	55.9	11.4			
Therapist in an early support team	no	N	60	43	3.25	0.071	0.17
		%	88.2	97.7			
	yes	N	8	1			
		%	11.8	2.3			
Boarding school teacher	no	N	58	43	4.66	0.031	0.20
		%	85.3	97.7			
	yes	N	10	1			
		%	14.7	2.3			
Other	no	N	50	44	13.87	0.000	0.35
		%	73.5	100.0			
	yes	N	18	0			
		%	26.5	0.0			

Source: own research.

5-year studies graduates, there is a higher percentage of people who work as a vision therapist/vision rehabilitator, spatial orientation teacher and boarding school teacher than among 3-year studies graduates. However, no such difference in terms of other employment opportunities as a teacher of the visually impaired (teacher in a special school, a support teacher and a therapist in an early support team) was observed. The data are presented in Table 8.

**Table 9.** A contingency table with the results of the chi square test for the relationship between the type of university education and the satisfaction with the choice of and graduation from visual impairment pedagogy, and with the course of the previous professional career.

			Group		Likelihood function	p	Cramér's V
			5-year studies	3-year studies			
Are you satisfied with the choice of and graduation from visual impairment pedagogy?	definitely not	N	0	1	2.64	0.619	0.14
		%	0.0	2.3			
	rather not	N	2	1			
		%	2.9	2.3			
	difficult to say	N	6	4			
		%	8.8	9.1			
Are you satisfied with your previous professional career?	rather yes	N	24	12	0.41	0.937	0.061
		%	35.3	27.3			
	definitely yes	N	36	26			
		%	52.9	59.1			
	definitely not	N	1	1			
		%	1.5	2.3			
Are you satisfied with your previous professional career?	rather not	N	6	5	0.41	0.937	0.061
		%	9.0	11.4			
	difficult to say	N	34	23			
		%	50.7	52.3			
	rather yes	N	26	15			
		%	38.8	34.1			
Are you satisfied with your previous professional career?	definitely yes	N	1	1	0.41	0.937	0.061
		%	1.5	2.3			

Source: own research.



In order to check whether the surveyed 5-year studies graduates differ from 3-year studies graduates in terms of satisfaction with the choice of and graduation from visual impairment pedagogy, as well as with the course of their previous professional career, an analysis using the chi square test was performed. It showed that the correlation of both variables is not statistically significant. Both surveyed groups of graduates present the same level of satisfaction with the choice of and graduation from visual impairment pedagogy and with their previous professional career. Detailed answers of the surveyed respondents are presented in Table 9.

The surveyed respondents were also asked if they would choose the same studies in visual impairment pedagogy again. The obtained data demonstrated that among 5-year studies graduates, the percentage of people who would make such a choice again is higher than among 3-year studies graduates. This relationship turned out to be statistically significant. It is a relationship of moderate correlation. Detailed statistics are presented in Table 10.

**Table 10.** A contingency table with the results of the chi square test for the relationship between the type of university education and reselection of studies in visual impairment pedagogy

Would you choose studies in visual impairment pedagogy?		Group		Likelihood function	P	Cramér's V
		5-year studies	3-year studies			
Definitely not	N	0	3	12.31	0.015	0.31
	%	0.0	6.8			
Rather not	N	6	1			
	%	8.8	2.3			
Difficult to say	N	9	11			
	%	13.2	25.0			
Rather yes	N	25	9			
	%	36.8	20.5			
Definitely yes	N	28	20			
	%	41.2	45.5			

Source: own research.

In the course of the conducted analyses, it was also checked whether the surveyed groups of graduates differ in the level of identification with the profession of a teacher of the visually impaired. The obtained data demonstrated that among 5-year studies graduates, the percentage of people who identify with the profession of a teacher of the visually impaired is higher compared to 3-year studies graduates. This relationship turned out to be statistically significant. It is a relationship of weak correlation. The data are presented in Table 11.

**Table 11.** A contingency table with the results of the chi square test for the relationship between the type of university education and identification with the profession of a teacher of the visually impaired

Do you identify with the profession of a teacher of the visually impaired?		Group		Likelihood function	p	Cramér's V
		5-year studies	3-year studies			
Definitely not	N	0	2	7.90	0.048	0.25
	%	0.0	4.5			
Rather not	N	2	5			
	%	2.9	11.4			
Difficult to say	N	23	16			
	%	33.8	36.4			
Rather yes	N	43	21			
	%	63.2	47.7			
Definitely yes	N	0	2			
	%	0.0	4.5			

Source: own research.

## Discussion of results

Based on the analysis of the obtained research results, it can be observed that there are differences between graduates in visual impairment pedagogy educated in the system of 3-year and 5-year

studies. These differences occur both in the evaluation of the usefulness of the professional skills obtained for the needs of the currently performed work during visual impairment pedagogy studies, as well as in the course of the professional career of both groups of graduates. The differences observed in the conducted research may result from a different study curriculum and may also be related to changes in the labour market. Graduates in visual impairment pedagogy educated in the system of uniform master's studies during their studies gained broader competencies in the field of supporting education and rehabilitation of people with visual impairment. In addition to basic visual impairment pedagogy competencies, they also obtained those which allow them to work as a teacher of spatial orientation and a vision rehabilitator. In contrast, graduates of bachelor's studies did not acquire competencies to work as a vision rehabilitator. Both groups of students also differed in terms of the number and duration of student internships (5-year studies graduates had more internships than 3-year studies graduates, in case of 5-year studies graduated, they were also offered within a longer period). Therefore, the offered curriculum and the competencies acquired as part of the studies in two groups were slightly different. The variables mentioned above probably had an impact on the differences in the answers given to the question concerning the usefulness of the professional competencies acquired during the education, where the majority of 5-year studies graduates (86.4%) confirmed their usefulness for the currently performed work. However, among those who graduated in 3-year visual impairment pedagogy, apart from people who recognised the usefulness of acquired competencies (72.8%), there were also those who thought that they were definitely useless (4.5%). Differences were also observed in the evaluation of student internships. Graduates of 5-year studies indicated them as one of the strong points of the specialisation (66.2%), while graduates of 3-year studies did not share their opinion (only 25% of graduates recognised internships as a strong point of the specialisation).

The results of the study conducted among Polish teachers of the visually impaired correspond with the research conducted by American researchers. Teachers of the visually impaired belonging to the

Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) evaluated their curricula in terms of the usefulness of preparation for work with blind and visually impaired people. Among 392 respondents, 65% of teachers of the visually impaired were satisfied with the competencies obtained during their university education (30% were very satisfied and 35% were rather satisfied) and only 2% were of a different opinion.<sup>1</sup> In turn, Korean researchers conducting research among 190 teachers of students with visual impairment obtained different results. The authors of the study noticed a clear discrepancy between the evaluation of the importance of given professional competencies and their real application in visual impairment pedagogy practice.<sup>2</sup>

Differences resulting from different methods of education of teachers of the visually impaired among both groups of graduates are also evident in their decision of undertaking a job of a teacher of the visually impaired. As many as 75% of 5-year studies graduates currently work in their profession, and 90% of respondents in this group have experience of working in this area. However, among 3-year studies graduates, only 45.5% of the surveyed people currently work in their profession, and 60% have ever had such experience. In terms of the nature of a professional career undertaken by graduates, there are also visible differences between teachers of the visually impaired graduated from 5-year and 3-year studies. People who graduated from uniform master's studies usually undertake a job as vision therapists, spatial orientation teachers and boarding school teacher. Because of the dynamic socio-cultural changes and the change in the disability paradigm, the labour market for special educators, including teachers of the visually impaired is expanding. Their tasks are not only limited to supporting education (a job of

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<sup>1</sup> N. Griffin-Shirley, A.K. Koenig, C.A. Layton, R.C. Davidson, L.K. Siew, A.R. Edmonds, M.C. Robinson, *A survey of teachers of students with visual impairments: responsibilities, satisfactions, and needs*, "RE:view" 2004, no. 36(1), pp. 7–20.

<sup>2</sup> H.-G. Lee, J.-H. Kim, J.-G. Kang, *The Assessment of Professional Standard Competence of Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments*, "International Journal of Special Education" 2008, no. 23, 2, pp. 33–46.

a teacher at school), but more and more often they participate in the process of supporting the rehabilitation of people with visual impairment, providing specialised services in this area (teaching spatial orientation, teaching Braille, vision rehabilitation, etc.). Graduates of 3-year studies not equipped with this type of skills have fewer opportunities of the employment as a teacher of the visually impaired outside the education system. Differences in employment opportunities between two groups of graduates may also have an impact on the identification of respondents with the profession of a teacher of the visually impaired and the declaration of reselection of studies in visual impairment pedagogy. Among the 5-year studies graduates, as many as 63% of the respondents identify with the profession of a teacher of the visually impaired and 78% would reselect studies in visual impairment pedagogy. On the other hand studies, among 3-year graduates, 52% declare their identification with the profession, and 66% of the respondents would choose their studies again. Graduates of uniform master's studies specialised in visual impairment pedagogy declare greater satisfaction with their studies, stronger identification with the profession and more often start a job corresponding to their education than graduates of 3-year studies (bachelor's degree).

However, both groups of graduates in visual impairment pedagogy (both 3-year studies graduates and 5-year studies graduates) are similar in terms of the level of satisfaction with the choice of studies in visual impairment pedagogy (88.2% of 5-year studies graduates, 86.4% of 3-year studies graduates) and their professional careers (40.3% of 5-year studies graduates, 36.4% of 3-year studies graduates). In addition, both groups show similarity in undertaking activities to improve their professional competencies. Respondents, regardless of the level of completed education, undertake professional improvement, most often based on short forms of development such as courses, trainings, workshops, but also on longer forms such as postgraduate studies. The results of the study conducted among Polish graduates in visual impairment pedagogy correspond to some extent to the results of the study conducted

among Turkish and American teachers working with people with disabilities. In the study conducted by Nora Griffin-Shirley et al.<sup>3</sup> most American teachers of the visually impaired declared participation in various forms of professional development. However, the actions they undertook had slightly different forms than those chosen by Polish teachers. Most often, they developed their professional competencies by reading professional publications (95%), participation in conferences (89%) and workshops (84%), as well as trainings (67%). On the other hand, post-graduate studies (28%) were a less popular form of professional development. The differences between Polish and American teachers regarding the choice of forms of professional development may result from different systems of improving professional qualifications. The Polish system of teacher professional development is still mainly based on qualifying courses and postgraduate studies, as a result of which the teacher obtains various types of qualifications confirmed by an appropriate formal certificate. In western countries, however, more attention is paid to self-improvement and personal development through participation in conferences and reading professional publications. Nevertheless, both groups of teachers point to the usefulness of short forms of education such as trainings or workshops. Also in the study conducted by Ayse Dolunay Kesiktaş and Ayse Gonul Akcamete<sup>4</sup> the surveyed teachers (the study included 224 teachers working with people with visual impairment) suggested the necessity and need for short forms improving professional competencies, with particular attention given to issues of working with people with multiple disabilities.

The professional situation of teachers of the visually impaired in the Polish education system is rarely a subject of scientific analysis.

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<sup>3</sup> N. Griffin-Shirley, A.K. Koenig, C.A. Layton, R.C. Davidson, L.K. Siew, A.R. Edmonds, M.C. Robinson, *A survey of teachers of students with visual impairments: responsibilities, satisfactions, and needs*, "RE:view" 2004, no. 36(1), pp. 7–20.

<sup>4</sup> A.D. Kesiktaş, A.G. Akcamete, *The relationship of personnel preparation to the competence of teachers of students with visual impairments in Turkey*, "Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness" 2011, no. 105(2), pp. 108–124.

The empirical data presented above has allowed for the identification of numerous interesting relationships between the course of academic education and professional activity of teachers of the visually impaired. Despite the significant cognitive and application-related value of the study, it is also necessary to emphasise its limitations, mainly in terms of a relatively small sample. Because of the fact that the conducted study concerned only a selected group of Polish teachers of the visually impaired – graduates of the Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw (this is one of several academic centres in Poland which educates teachers of the visually impaired) there is a need for further research of this type among a wider group of Polish teachers of the visually impaired.

## Summary

The study conducted among graduates of 3-year and 5-year studies specialised in visual impairment pedagogy shows that the two studied groups differ in terms of the course of their educational and professional paths. The results of the study favour uniform master's studies, during which the student was provided with favourable conditions for the gradual acquisition of full specialist visual impairment pedagogy competencies. As a result of the introduction of the Bologna process and two-stage university education, it has become impossible to prepare a first-cycle education curriculum in such a way that the graduate obtains full professional theoretical and practical background to professionally support the development of people with visual impairment. The consequences of these changes in the area of academic education are evident in the presented research results both in terms of the number of people undertaking work as a teacher of the visually impaired, the nature of the undertaken professional activity, and the evaluation of the education system by the graduates in visual impairment pedagogy.

The constantly growing catalogue of professional tasks assigned to special education teachers implies the need to modify the system

of preparing this group for work and to provide conditions favouring the effective improvement of competencies during its execution. Since 2019, universities in Poland have been implementing a 5-year special education teacher education system based on unified standards of teacher education. Based on the presented results of comparative research, the introduction of another modification in the field of educating special education teachers and the reintroduction of 5-year master's degree studies seems desirable and perfectly justified.

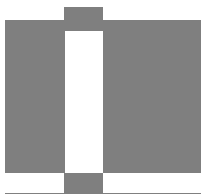
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## **The opinions of foster parents on the personal level of cooperation with teachers in the context of children's special educational needs. A scientific report**

**ABSTRACT:** Katarzyna wiryнкаo, Urszula Bartnikowska, *The opinions of foster parents on the personal level of cooperation with teachers in the context of children's special educational needs. A scientific report.* Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy, no. 29, Pozna 2020. Pp. 75–95. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-391X. e-ISSN 2658-283X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ikps.2020.29.04>

Children from foster families are a specific group of students because they are often disabled, have special needs, difficulties and experienced violence or neglect. Foster parents have to face challenges related to their upbringing. The text is a scientific report presenting the opinions of foster parents on their cooperation with teachers. For this purpose, an interpretative paradigm was adopted and phenomenography was applied. The subjects (21 foster parents of school-age children) participated in three focus group interviews. Qualitative data analysis was used to identify positive and negative aspects of the foster parents' experiences in cooperation with the school. The article is focused on the personal level of this cooperation. The answers provided by the parents in the study reveal predominance of negative experiences and emotions in this respect. The subjects pointed to such problems as: failure to notice and understand children's problems/difficulties, the lack of individualization, maladjusted requirements, incompetence of teachers and the absence of informational feedback from the school. However, some respondents noticed positive elements of cooperation with teachers, such as the ability to recognize the child's needs and problems by teachers and educators, sharing information about the child, taking into account the information provided by parents and adapting requirements

to the child's abilities. The results were used to develop recommendations aimed at improving cooperation between the school and foster parents.

**KEY WORDS:** children from foster families, special educational needs, foster parents, cooperation between parents and the school

## Introduction

Foster families give children deprived of their biological parental care a chance to be brought up in a safe, stable and stimulating family environment.<sup>1</sup> Children with a difficult situation in their biological family may (by court's ruling) be directed to foster families or – if their parents are deprived of parental rights – to adoptive families. Foster parents do not have full custody and biological parents may regain parental rights. There are several types of foster families: relatives, non-professionals and professional (serving as emergency family shelter or professional foster family for a disabled child or a child placed on the basis of the Act on Juvenile Delinquency Proceedings)<sup>2</sup>, all of which can be supported by the foster care coordinator.<sup>3</sup> However, despite proper care, developmental

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<sup>1</sup> L.K. Leslie, J.N. Gordon, K. Lambros, K. Premji, J. Peoples, K. Gist, *Addressing the developmental and mental health needs of young children in foster care*, "Journal of Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics: JDBP" 2005, 26(2), pp. 140-151; E.C. Stein-Steele, *Perspectives of foster parents on parental roles and involvement in their foster children's academic work*, "Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research" 2005, 9(4), pp. 317-332; H. Jacobsen, H. Brabrand, S.M.M. Liland, T. Wentzel-Larsen, V. Moe, *Foster parents' emotional investment and their young foster children's socio-emotional functioning*, "Children & Youth Services Review" 2018, 86, pp. 200-208; L. Zajac, M. Dozier, K.L. Raby, *Receptive vocabulary development of children placed in foster care and children who remained with birth parents after involvement with child protective services*, "Child Maltreatment" 2019, 24(1), pp. 107-112.

<sup>2</sup> Journal of Laws of 8<sup>th</sup> May 2020, item 821, Announcement of the Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 16<sup>th</sup> April 2020 on the publication of the uniform text of the Act on supporting the family and the system of foster care, article 39 and article 54.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* article 77.

and adaptation difficulties may persist in children from foster families.<sup>4</sup> Children directed to foster families often suffer from health problems (somatic diseases, as well as mental health, dental, developmental, behavioural and psychosocial problems) which were not properly diagnosed and treated, usually due to inadequate medical care, poor access to preventive health services and social deprivation experienced in their families of origin.<sup>5</sup> A comparison of children from foster families and those having biological parents also reveals in the former a greater incidence of disabilities, emotional disorders, behavioural problems<sup>6</sup>, dangerous sexual behaviours and a tendency to commit an offense (e.g. shoplifting).<sup>7</sup> In Poland, it is estimated that 10.5% of children from foster families have a medical certificate of disability (in biological families, this value amounts to 3%).<sup>8</sup> It is worth emphasizing that developmental and emotional difficulties, sleep and behavioural problems, etc. do not only in-

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<sup>4</sup> A.M. Maaskant, F.B. Van Rooij, J.M. Hermanns, *Mental health and associated risk factors of Dutch school aged foster children placed in long-term foster care*, "Children and Youth Services Review" 2014, 44, pp. 207-216; A. Goemans, M. Van Geel, P. Vedder, *Over three decades of longitudinal research on the development of foster children: a meta-analysis*, "Child Abuse & Neglect" 2015, 42, pp. 121-134; A. Goemans, M. Van Geel, P. Vedder, P., *Foster children's behavioural development and foster parent stress: testing a transactional model*, "Journal of Child & Family Studies" 2018, 27(3), pp. 990-1001.

<sup>5</sup> K.L. Hodges, D. Manda, M.L. Nugent, P.M. Simpson, P.M., *A Triage Tool to Assess Unmet Health Needs for Children Entering Foster Care*, "Journal of Child & Family Studies" 2018, 27, pp. 475-482.

<sup>6</sup> L.B. Silver, *Frequency of Adoption of Children with Learning Disabilities*, "Journal of Learning Disabilities" 1989, 22(5), pp. 325-328; J.A. Rosenthal, V. Groze, G.D. Aguilar, *Adoption Outcomes for Children with Handicaps*, "Child Welfare" 1991, 70(6), pp. 623-636; J.A. Rosenthal, V. Groze, H. Curiel, *Race, Social Class and Special-needs Adoption*, "Social Work" 1990, 35(6), pp. 532-539; H. Minnis, K. Everett, A.J. Pelosi, J. Dunn, M. Knapp, *Children in Foster Care: Mental Health, Service Use and Costs*, "European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry" 2006, 15(2), pp. 63-70.

<sup>7</sup> J.C. Makhubele, E. Mdhuli, *Impact of drug-use amongst children in foster care placement: implications for policy considerations and practice*, "Gender & Behaviour" 2018, 16(1), pp. 10902-10916.

<sup>8</sup> Social assistance, child and family care in 2015, Statistics Poland, Warsaw 2016, [https://www.domydziecka.org/uploadUser/files/pomoc\\_spoleczna\\_i\\_opieka\\_nad\\_dzieckiem\\_i\\_rodzina\\_w\\_2015.pdf](https://www.domydziecka.org/uploadUser/files/pomoc_spoleczna_i_opieka_nad_dzieckiem_i_rodzina_w_2015.pdf), 31.07.2018.

involve children with special educational needs, although the percentage in this group is much higher, as shown in particular by qualitative research methods.<sup>9</sup> The problems of children in foster families may arise, among others, from more frequent problems of previous poor living conditions, neglect, violence or trauma.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, living in a foster family does not always provide a child with a sense of stability, security<sup>11</sup> and increase self-esteem.<sup>12</sup>

All these difficulties along with a frequent need to change schools (due to changes in the educational environment)<sup>13</sup> cause that children from foster families usually achieve lower educational results than their peers brought up in biological families<sup>14</sup> and they more often quit school before graduation. Meanwhile, adequate education provided to all students, regardless of their abilities and

<sup>9</sup> U. Bartnikowska, *Special educational needs of children from foster families-scientific report*, „Disability. Discourses of Special Pedagogy” 2018, vol. 31, pp. 11-23.

<sup>10</sup> M. Kolankiewicz, *Children deprived of parental care*, [in:] *Children from risk groups*, ed. J. Szymańczak, „Studia BAS” [Sejm Analysis Office] 2009, 1(17); S.G. Stanley, *Children with disabilities in foster care: the role of the school social worker in the context of special education*, “Children & Schools” 2012, 34(3), pp. 190-192; Bartnikowska U., Ćwirynkało K., *Functioning of a disabled child in an adoptive and foster family in the context of prior experience of child abuse in the opinion of parents*, [in:] *Inclusion – marginalization – exclusion and the quality of life of disabled people. Challenges of the present day*, ed. U. Bartnikowska, A. Zyta, S. Przybyliński, ed. UWM, Olsztyn 2016, pp. 85-100.

<sup>11</sup> V. Welch, Ch. Jones, K. Stalker, A. Stewart, *Permanence for disabled children and young people through foster care and adoption: A selective review of international literature*, “Children & Youth Services Review” 2015, 53, pp. 137-146.

<sup>12</sup> J.C. Makhubele, E. Mdhuli, E., *Impact of drug-use amongst children in foster care placement: implications for policy considerations and practice*, “Gender & Behaviour” 2018, 16(1), pp. 10902-10916.

<sup>13</sup> L. Fries, S. Klein, M. Ballantyne, *Are foster children’s schools of origins always best? School quality in birth vs. foster parent neighbourhoods*, “Child & Family Social Work” 2016, 21(3), pp. 317-327.

<sup>14</sup> D.T. Skilbred, A.C. Iversen, B. Moldestad, *Successful academic achievement among foster children: What did the foster parents do?*, “Child Care in Practice” 2017, 23(4), pp. 356-371; J.C. Makhubele, E. Mdhuli, *Impact of drug-use amongst children in foster care placement: implications for policy considerations and practice*, “Gender & Behaviour” 2018, 16(1), pp. 10902-10916.

difficulties, is the goal of initiatives and legal solutions in many countries.<sup>15</sup> Polish law also guarantees all students an access to education as well as psychological and pedagogical help – in the event of difficulties such as disability, educational failure, social maladjustment or the risk of social maladjustment, behavioural and emotional problems, crisis or traumatic events, social neglect, adaptation difficulties and others.<sup>16</sup> It should be noted that the risk of these difficulties – as indicated by the analysis described above – is higher in students from foster families than in the general population. The task of the school is to develop a strategy in such a way as to increase the educational success of all students<sup>17</sup>, especially those at risk of marginalization. The cooperation with caregivers increases the effectiveness of actions. Integrated activities of parents and teachers can bring benefits to each of the three entities: a child, parent and teacher, improving the quality of didactic and educational work, a more thorough recognition of the student's needs, mutual understanding, strengthening of ties, raising the parent's pedagogical culture and improving the teacher's competences.<sup>18</sup> Collaboration between foster parents and professionals is also crucial to maintaining foster families (avoiding their dissolution) and reducing developmental retardation in children.<sup>19</sup> Given the above, it is im-

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<sup>15</sup> UNESCO 1994 The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education. World Conference on Special Needs Education, Access and Quality. Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994, UNESCO, Paris 1994.

<sup>16</sup> Regulation of the Ministry of National Education of 9<sup>th</sup> August 2017 on the rules of organization and provision of psychological and pedagogical assistance in state schools, kindergartens and institutions, Journal of Laws of 2017, item 1591.

<sup>17</sup> M. Ainscow, T. Booth, A. Dyson, *Inclusion and the standards agenda: negotiating policy pressures in England*, "International Journal of Inclusive Education" 20016, 10(4-5) pp. 295-308.

<sup>18</sup> M. Loboeki, *Cooperation between teachers and parents in the process of education*, Nasza Księgarnia, Warsaw 1985; Loboeki M., *Out of concern for upbringing at school*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2007.

<sup>19</sup> L.K. Leslie, J.N. Gordon, K. Lambros, K. Premji, J. Peoples, K. Gist, *Addressing the developmental and mental health needs of young children in foster care*, "Journal of Developmental and Behavioural Paediatrics: JDBP" 2005, 26(2), pp. 140-151;

portant to conduct research on cooperation between the school and parents, paying attention to the specificity of functioning of certain types of families who may face specific challenges.

## Research methodology

The aim of the study was to recognize the opinions of foster parents on cooperation with the school staff (mainly teachers). The main research problem was formulated as follows: how do foster parents raising a school-age child perceive cooperation with school employees? How they understand the meaning of this cooperation?

In order to thoroughly investigate these issues, the research was embedded in an interpretative paradigm<sup>20</sup> and carried out with the use of phenomenography which allows to learn about different ways in which people experience and think about phenomena.<sup>21</sup> In phenomenography, the emphasis is placed on the secondary perspective<sup>22</sup>, i.e. not necessarily understanding a phenomenon, but recognition how it is experienced by subjects.

The data was collected using focus group interview<sup>23</sup> which allowed for a deeper understanding of the research subject and going beyond the usual description.<sup>24</sup> The interviews were conducted in

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A. Steenbekkers, I.T. Ellingsen, S. van der Steen, H. Grietens, *Psychosocial Needs of Children in Foster Care and the Impact of Sexual Abuse*, "Journal of Child & Family Studies" 2018, 27, pp. 1324-1335.

<sup>20</sup> N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln, *Introduction. The theory and practice of qualitative research*, [in:] *Methods of qualitative research*, vol. 1, ed. N.K. Denzin, Y.S. Lincoln, PWN, Warsaw 2009.

<sup>21</sup> R.G. Paulston, *Comparative pedagogy as a field of conceptual maps of paradigm theory*, [in:] *Disputes over education. Dilemmas and controversies in contemporary pedagogues*, edited by Z. Kwieciński, L. Witkowski, IBE, Editor, Warsaw-Torun 1993.

<sup>22</sup> A. Assarroudi, A. Heydari, *Phenomenography: A Missed Method in Medical Research*, "Acta Facultatis Medicae Naissensis" 2016, 33(3), pp. 217-225.

<sup>23</sup> D.L. Morgan, *Focus Groups*, "Annual Review of Sociology" 1996, 22, pp. 129-152.

<sup>24</sup> R. Barbour, *Focus group studies*, PWN, Warsaw 2011.



2018 in three groups, ranging from 5 to 9 foster parents. They were recorded and transcribed. The analysis was based on coding and categorization according to U. Flick<sup>25</sup> and G. Gibbs.<sup>26</sup>

The following study inclusion criteria were adopted:

- being an adult,
- being a foster parent,
- bringing up at least one school-age child in a foster family,
- consent to participate in the research (including, a consent to recording of the interview, transcription and being quoted during research).<sup>27</sup>

Ultimately, 21 parents participated in the interviews, including 12 mothers and 9 fathers. The age of the subjects ranged from 34 to 64 years old. Most subjects (14 people) were related foster parents (grandmothers/grandfathers, aunts/uncles of a child in foster care). The rest (7 people) were unrelated families, including 2 – professional foster families for a disabled child. Most of the respondents also had biological children (usually adult) and 2 people had adopted children. Some parents brought up foster children with special educational needs (6 people) or with the opinion from a psychological and pedagogical counselling centre (6 people).

The research was carried out in places appropriately prepared in cooperation with district family support centres located in two district towns and in one capital of province located in north-eastern Poland.

In the analysis, the method of identification of the respondents was adopted, in which gender was marked with the letter M (male) and K (female), the type of foster family with the symbol RZS (related foster family) and RZN (unrelated foster family: professional or non-professional), the number of the person participating in the focus group interview was also given.

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<sup>25</sup> U. Flick, *Designing a qualitative research*, PWN, Warsaw 2010.

<sup>26</sup> G. Gibbs, *Analyzing qualitative data*, PWN, Warsaw 2011.

<sup>27</sup> T. Rapley, *Analysis of discourse conversations and documents*, PWN, Warsaw 2010.

## Results

The data analysis allowed to distinguish two levels of experience in cooperation between foster parents and the school: personal (relating to teachers and educators – their activities, attitudes, characteristics and skills) and organizational (relating to functioning and structure of the school/facility). This article focuses on the personal level.

**Table 1.** Positive and negative aspects of cooperation between foster parents and school/teachers at the personal level

Positive aspects	Negative aspects
Recognition of the child's needs/problems	Failure to notice and/or understand the problems/difficulties of a child
Setting common goals with parents	Ignoring individuality
Sharing information about the child	Maladjusted requirements
Taking into account parents' knowledge about the child	Applying "double standards"
Adapting the requirements to the child's abilities	The lack of competence/knowledge among the school staff
Teacher training	The absence of informational feedback from the school
	Teachers' reluctance to change the way they work

Source: own research.

The negative aspects of cooperation dominated the opinions of a large group of respondents which were suffused with violent emotions. At the personal level, the negative opinions concerned an inappropriate – according to the respondents – approach of some school employees: teachers, headmaster or educator. The parents considered the lack of empathy on the part of the school staff to be a significant problem. This was expressed by not recognizing child's problems or ignoring its difficulties:

*The teachers have serious problems ... They have problems with acceptance, with ... They prefer very good conduct in students. I realized*

*that at the parents' evening. [...] I can see that she is trying very hard, but nobody cares ... It is a catastrophe for teachers when a problematic student appears in the school, just like here, children who have an individual teaching program. K7, RZN*

Another problem noticed by parents is ignoring child's individuality. This is failure to respect individual needs of the child and the use of the same teaching methods, requirements and assessment system, including rewarding, for all students, as evidenced by e.g. K4, a professional foster mother of four children, the woman has a daughter with Asperger's syndrome:

*I am telling you that you need to explain to her that there is a break in the school, during which we eat our meals, she will remember that. To no avail. There were terrible incidents ... [...] I couldn't sleep at night! It was unimaginable for me that she did not go to the toilet for so long ... [...] We moved the child to another school ... K4, RZN*

On the other hand, according to the focus group, some teachers overly focused on otherness or situation of the child (resulting from being in a foster family and the need to cooperate with the district family support centre), which influenced the requirements applied to the child (they were underestimated or overstated), and controlled material and living conditions (double standards used for students from biological and foster families). Rigid standards in assessment involved, for example, the lack of flexibility in giving students the option of a written or oral form of answering questions, or strict adherence to the evaluation criteria without taking into account individual abilities (hence overstating or underestimating of the requirements):

*They kept telling me "she will not adapt". I say that she will not adapt because she is disabled [moderate intellectual disability - author's note] and she has to learn less. I asked many times to give her a better grade, just for her willingness to learn ... No! F, F, F, F, F! I saw her falling, falling ... Always the last one ... K2, RZN*

*Here [in the state school – author’s note] the requirements were too high, the teachers did not want to lower them a bit, and there [in a special needs school – author’s note] they are too low and they do not want to raise them a bit ... But when we brought her and talked to the headmaster, we were assured that she would have a higher level and that she would be in a class with less handicapped children ... When we arrived, she was with boys with whom she had no contact [...] I am so dissatisfied that she could have learnt at school with healthy children, because here the level is too low for her [...] She had and still has private lessons at home, because the level here is too low ... K3, RZN*

Unfortunately, reporting problems to teachers did not improve the situation, sometimes caused even greater conflict, because we felt like rebels and completely helpless. Such a situation was described by M5, a professional foster father raising three children with his wife:

*She suffers from FAS, she failed in adding ... When we found out that she had difficulty with addition we told the teachers about that, but they said that they knew better. We had a meeting in the district family support centre on this matter, the school was invited – but nobody appeared. We say that she can not add, the school claims that she can. M5, RZN*

An interesting issue highlighted by the subjects was the use of double standards with respect to students from biological and foster families. As K3, K7 and M5 described:

*When our biological child and foster child went to the same class, everything was fine – the same trips, everything. When they stayed in the day-care room, they always stayed together, so nobody bothered that “our” biological child stayed there, but they asked questions “why does your foster child stay in the day-care room?” I said, “You know, because sometimes I can not be in two places at the same time, with two children at home, and take these two quickly from school” K7, RZN*

*In our school, the teacher looked into our daughter’s sandwiches. Three [2 adopted children, 1 foster child – author’s note] went to the same*

*school, but the teacher always looked into the sandwiches of our foster daughter. What does she have sandwiches with? And she had them with butter, one slice was smaller, the other bigger, because they were preparing sandwiches themselves, one after another. The teacher asked "Why do these sandwiches look like that?" "Because we did them ourselves ..." "Do you prepare sandwiches yourself? Your aunt does not prepare them for you?" K3, RZN*

*They control how we fulfil our duties as foster parents ... M5, RZN*

Such situations do not have a positive impact on the quality of relationship between teachers and parents who feel controlled. The point is not to negate any control, but it seems that – if it occurs – it should equally apply to children from biological families as much as to foster children and be used to constructively solve problems. Meanwhile, as K7 argued, the cooperation between schools and district family support centres (in the case of foster families) is limited to the teachers passing the information only about "things that they do not like", e.g. the lack of school equipment, staying in the day-care room or "inappropriate" sandwiches.

Some respondents also mentioned the absence of informational feedback from the school as a negative aspect of cooperation. For example, this is the way in which one of the focus group couples described how an individual teaching program for their disabled child was developed:

*We were there and we signed the program – all the things to be done at school and outside it – the fact that we ride horses, go to a psychologist – all this was lumped together in this one program, but we did not know what it going on, so we signed it all [...] It has been presented to us on so many pages ... I have read it all ... nothing was done at school. The information that I travelled to Olsztyn, about Rehabilitation and Educational Center we attend, all this was lumped together. It was me who realized the individual educational and therapeutic program, not the school. K5, RZN*

*We didn't know anything about preparing the program ... [...] They included all the things we do with our child! M2, RZN*

Some of the respondents also mentioned incompetence of some teachers and the lack of knowledge about disorders.

*Besides, in the teacher's opinion, Asperger's syndrome is not a disease. "What kind of illness is that?" says M3, RZN*

Some of the foster parents also indicated the rigidity in the teaching style and reluctance to introduce changes that are necessary in children with special educational needs:

*The teacher straight out said that the person sitting in the classroom [supporting teacher, for whom the parents asked – author's note] will disturb her lessons. [...] "I have 30 years of experience, and here some-one questions my competences" [ironically]. M3, RZN*

Some descriptions of school incidents were particularly critical, showed violence and unprofessional methods of punishment used by the school staff.

*[...] there were two ladies ... for whom this [working with a disabled child – author's note] was a very heavy burden ... They made fun of her in the classroom during lessons and breaks ... Because she has epilepsy, her movements are slow, she needs more time, it is difficult for her ... She was always the last one, the last one, the last one. The teachers did not understand it ... [...] The kids copy teachers when he/she says "Now for Ola, I have to ... Wait, I have to ... because she has a different teaching mode ..." They make fun of her, these kids. They always make fun of such a child. K9, RZN*

Some of the respondents indicated positive aspects of cooperation with the school. In this case, the personal level is understood as a highly empathic approach or activities (recognizing/understanding child's problems and needs), adherence to the principle of individualisation (adapting the requirements to individual abilities) and treating parents as partners whose knowledge is valuable for the process of education and who participate in setting educational goals.

An example of model and constructive cooperation can be the situation described by K10 – a woman, who together with her husband, creates a foster family for her eight-year-old granddaughter, whose biological mother has limited custody due to her alcohol addiction. From the moment the woman was granted foster care of the child, K10 regularly met the school educator who step by step showed her how to react to child's problems:

*I am very satisfied with cooperation with the school, with my granddaughter's class tutor, and the school educator in particular. She helped us a lot. She led both Ola and me by hand. [...] It was the educator who taught us to talk to the child in this way. Mrs. A. taught us how to rebuild trust, so that Ola would not be afraid that we would leave her and simply disappear, like her mother. Ola was as regular as clockwork and it was the educator who told me: When you hear "no" for the first time, it means that Ola is finally recovering. We were so much waiting for this "no". After 3 months I said, "Come on, let's tidy up the room", and Ola said "I don't feel like it now, wait a minute, please" and I said "Oh Jesus, finally!" I would never have thought that such a trifle ... can make me happy, and we were happy, both of us.*  
K10, RZS

According to the respondents, acceptance is the key value which foster parents expect from the school staff – acceptance both for the parent and the child who should feel safe at school. As described by e.g. K8:

*The first day was the most important, when I took her to school, the headmaster went with us to the classroom, the children circled her so nicely, "Oh, Ania, you came back to us". One or two girls cried with happiness, and the class tutor came up, introduced herself and said "Well, Aneczka, we don't know each other, but we'll get to know each other". It was so nice and Ania grew fond of her right away.* K8, RZS

According to the respondents, a positive aspect of cooperation is also sharing information about children by teachers and taking into

account knowledge and opinions of parents. This allows to set common goals (e.g. when preparing an individual educational and therapeutic program) and gives parents the feeling of being equal partners. It is worth noting that receiving information from school was easier for related foster parents who tried to cooperate with the school before they were legally granted with childcare. An example can be the case of K11, who was a foster mother for her 8-year-old grandson for several months, but earlier – being aware of her daughter’s alcoholism and the consequent difficult situation of her grandson – tried to obtain the information about the child from the school:

*They said "Mrs. Iwona, you are doing everything to take this child from the mother". And that was enough for me [...] because I knew what to do. That this is an alarming situation and that it needs to be pushed further. K11, RZS*

The respondents who positively described their relationships with school employees pointed to the readiness of teachers to minimize the requirements (taking into account the child’s abilities):

*Their approach was as follows "You have to understand that you demand too much from him, you have to go down. Daniel won't get a C in math, because he doesn't deserve it, he just can't do it. He will never learn the multiplication table. He will never learn ... He has serious problems with science. I liked the teacher's attitude. I had to explain to my husband that, unfortunately, he cannot demand math from the boy ... K6, RZS*

The respondents, for example M8, also appreciated the involvement of school employees in improving their own knowledge and skills in order to prepare themselves for work with their children:

*He has a class tutor, a lady who finished postgraduate studies especially for my son, so that she knew how to work with him. M8, RZS*



The research shows that for the respondents cooperation with the school had different meanings. According to the respondents, cooperation is:

- a mission of telling the truth about their child (its needs, the specificity of development and functioning);
- fight (for equal treatment of a child from a foster family, for the unification of standards applied to children from foster families and other children, for understanding child's situation by others);
- pseudo-cooperation where parents actually experience non-cooperation;
- a satisfying experience of working together on a common cause of supporting a child.

## Discussion and implications

The collaboration between foster families, teachers and other school staff is extremely important. Educational staff may be part of interdisciplinary teams established under the Act on Counteracting Domestic Violence.<sup>28</sup> Due to the frequent contact with children, their opinion can be relevant to seeking the best support for children. Therefore, cooperation between school staff and foster parents is important. The opinions of the foster parents on the personal level of cooperation with school staff present a complex, multi-faceted picture of this problem. The positive aspects of cooperation with teachers included recognition of the child's needs and problems by teachers and educators, sharing information about the child, taking into account the information obtained from parents and adapting the requirements to the child's abilities. On the other hand, the negative elements are ignoring or misunderstanding child's problems/difficulties, the lack of individualization, maladjusted re-

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<sup>28</sup> Journal of Laws 2020, item 218, Announcement of the Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of 9<sup>th</sup> January 2020 on the publication of the uniform text of the Act on counteracting domestic violence, art. 9.

quirements, teachers' incompetence and the lack of informational feedback from the school. Unfortunately, the analysis of parents' opinions suggests predominance of negative experiences and emotions. It is worth mentioning that the previously analyzed<sup>29</sup> fragment from the same research project, but concerning cooperation at the organizational level also showed the prevalence of negative experiences. However, the results of other studies are not consistent with the outcomes of our study. For example, the results of quantitative research<sup>30</sup> – conducted among parents of children with special educational needs – indicate high satisfaction with the support received from the school. On the other hand, the results of qualitative research<sup>31</sup> suggest the existence of two types of relationships between foster parents and the school staff: positive (active participation of the parent in the process of education) and negative (suffused with a sense of anger, the lack of trust, hostility or related to parents who are passive and do not engage in cooperation with the school). The results of this research allow to extend this typology, because also foster parents committed to (or at least declare commitment in the research) education and rehabilitation of their children experience negative relationships in cooperation with the school. It seems that in this case, care and responsibility for the child's welfare forces parents to demand a lot from themselves and others so as to the greatest possible extent meet the needs of a disadvantaged child. These parents feel that school staff (mainly teachers) do not perform their duties properly or are not empathic.

The research indicates the need for training of teachers in order to bring them closer to the specificity of functioning of children

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<sup>29</sup> K. Ćwirynkało, U. Bartnikowska, *Children from foster families at school. Report on the cooperation between foster parents and the school staff*, "Problems of Early Education" 2018, vol. 43, No. 3, pp. 77–85.

<sup>30</sup> K. Ćwirynkało, M. Włodarczyk-Dudka, A. Arciszewska, *Parents' satisfaction with the support provided by schools to disabled children*, „Every day upbringing” 2015, No. 3 (252), pp. 47–55.

<sup>31</sup> C.B. Mires, D.L. Lee, *Every child that is a foster child is marked from the beginning: The home-school communication experiences of foster parents of children with disabilities*, „Child Abuse & Neglect” 2018, No. 75, pp. 61–72.

from foster families and specific difficulties (e.g. post-traumatic disorders, attachment disorders, FAS) that such a child may have to deal with. Such training would help not only understand the child's situation, but also the situation of foster parents. Secondly, if a child from a foster family appears at school, it would be worth launching a support system dedicated not only to the child, but also to caregivers. It may include – depending on the needs – for instance, individual and group counselling (e.g. in order to facilitate contacts between the child and peers, and develop a sense of self-confidence), establishing close cooperation with the family through individual meetings or telephone calls (in order to work out ways to support the child, but also parents in coping with difficulties – preparation of a booklist for parents would be useful), as well as consultation for teachers and other school staff (in order to raise awareness of the special needs of children in foster care). We are aware that the intention of the school should be (is) the best interest of the child, however, we believe that control exercised by the school should equally apply to biological and foster parents. Meanwhile, as shown by the study results, it is much more severe over foster parents, in particular professional foster families. Parental empathy plays a key role in successful foster parenting: empathy with the child, with biological parents and with social workers.<sup>32</sup> In our opinion, also people cooperating with foster parents (e.g. school employees) should be empathic, both with children and foster parents.

The conditions necessary for effective cooperation between foster family and the school include: (1) conviction of both parties about the need for cooperation, (2) systematic exchange of information about the child, its progress, difficulties and ways of overcoming difficulties, (3) commitment of both parties to create a friendly atmosphere in the class, at school and in the peer group, (4) joint care for ensuring optimal material conditions for learning.<sup>33</sup> Good coop-

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<sup>32</sup> J. Geiger, M. Piel, C. Lietz, F. Julien-Chinn, *Empathy as an essential foundation to successful foster parenting*, "Journal of Child & Family Studies" 2016, 25(12), pp. 3771–3779.

<sup>33</sup> M. Banasiak, *Cooperation between parents and school in the context of education reform in Poland*, UMK, Toruń 2013.

eration is possible thanks to appropriate teachers' competences<sup>34</sup>, among which communication skills<sup>35</sup> are of particular importance. The inspiration may come from descriptions of good practices in cooperation between teachers and parents presented in the scientific literature.<sup>36</sup> School staff should initiate good cooperation with a foster family and create a friendly atmosphere in contact with parents, as well as a climate of sharing by refraining from judgment, adapting requirements to the abilities of the child and the foster family and respecting other (non-educational) needs of the child, which – often – may be more important than school achievements (e.g. good adaptation in the peer group, well-being and a sense of security at school, taking into account emotional instability resulting from contacts with the biological family or the necessity of changing place of residence and school).

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<sup>34</sup> E. Westergård, *Teacher Competencies and Parental Cooperation*, "International Journal about Parents in Education" 2013, 7(2), pp. 91-99.

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<sup>36</sup> E.g. Rasfeld M., Bredendach S., *The Awakening School*, ed. Dobra Literatura, Slupsk 2015.

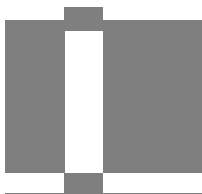
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## Teachers' aggressive and violent behaviours towards students with mild intellectual disabilities in three forms of education

**ABSTRACT:** Marzena Buchnat, *Teachers' aggressive and violent behaviours towards students with mild intellectual disabilities in three forms of education*. Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy, no. 29, Poznań 2020. Pp. 97-115. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-391X. e-ISSN 2658-283X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ikps.2020.29.05>

Aggression and violence has become a regular part of school reality. The ongoing legal changes in the education system have provided children with mild intellectual disabilities the opportunity to study in three forms of education: mainstream schools, integration classes and special schools. Unfortunately, the results of many studies have revealed that students with disabilities are more likely to be subject to peer victimization, particularly in various forms of inclusive education. In view of such facts, the question arises whether, and if so, how and with what frequency students with mild intellectual disabilities in various forms of education experience aggression and violence perpetrated by teachers. This seems particularly important because of the role that teachers play in building a sense of security in students, especially those with mild intellectual disabilities. The results of the study revealed a much higher level of aggression and violence experienced by students with mild intellectual disabilities perpetrated by teachers working in mainstream schools compared to those working in special schools. This fact raises great reservations regarding the teachers' attitude towards students with mild intellectual disabilities and the level of their preparation for effective work with such students.

**KEY WORDS:** aggression and violence, teacher, school, student with mild intellectual disabilities

## Introduction

School is one of the most important social spaces where children and young people experience aggression and violence. The negative impact of experiencing such behaviours on the development of every person has made school aggression and violence one of the most pressing contemporary educational problems. Many variables influence the risk of becoming a victim of school aggression and violence. On the one hand, individual factors concerning the students themselves, such as their gender, age, character traits or their family homes play an important role, which is confirmed by numerous Polish and international studies.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, environmental factors, which are closely linked to the characteristics of the school, are also of great importance.

In the case of the causes of school aggression and violence, teachers play a special role, as they should prevent these behaviours from happening. Unfortunately, sometimes they not only do not fulfil their duty to prevent such behaviours, but also become perpetrators themselves, which leads to far-reaching negative consequences for the functioning of the student. The worst situation is faced by students who expect support from the teacher, for example due to peer victimisation due to their disability. In such a situation, the teacher, as the person who should help to instil a sense of security in the student, destroys it even further.

### Causes of school aggression and violence

The causes of school aggression and violence can stem from a number of factors, the sources of which can be divided into three

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. D. Schwartz, K.A. Dodge, & J.D. Coie, "The emergence of chronic peer victimization in boys' play groups", *Child Development*, 1993, 64(6), 1755-1772; A. Komendant-Brodowska, A. Baczko-Dombi, A. Giza-Poleszczuk, *Przemoc w szkole. Raport z badań*, 2011, [www.szkolabezprzemocy.pl](http://www.szkolabezprzemocy.pl) [retrieved on: 28.11.2019]; J. Przewłocka, *Bezpieczeństwo uczniów i klimat społeczny w polskich szkołach. Raport z badań*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Edukacyjnych, Warsaw 2015.

basic groups: related to the school as an institution, improper relations between teachers and students, as well as improper relations between students themselves.<sup>2</sup>

The first key area is school as an institution, and at the same time a source of psychological, symbolic and structural violence. Its various elements which may lead to the incidence of aggressive and violent behaviour include school space, which is usually too small, the number of students and teachers, equipment, educational curricula taught at school, limited ability to meet the need for physical activity, noise, as well as a particular way of spending time, which significantly limits the independence of children and youth, as well as their ability to make choices, work overload, incorrect assessment process and anonymity of participants.

The second area, focused on the analysis of the relationship between students and teachers, issues concern primarily the lack of respect for the dignity of the students. This includes the way a teacher communicates with a student based on humiliating, ridiculing and mocking in front of other people, as well as intimidating and showing authority. This also concerns establishing relationships based only on requirements without positive reinforcement or rewarding, acknowledging the student's achievements, as well as being emotionally cold towards the students, solving conflicts between the faculty and students with force-based strategies or teaching pressure. In this area, we can mention both physical aggression, as well as other factors pertaining to the teaching process, which have a direct bearing on the relationship between students and teachers. These include, but are not limited to, requirements that are not in line with the capabilities and needs of individual students, unfair treatment and assessment of a student, failure to ensure the student's success, focusing on the difficulties and deficiencies of individual students, without appreciating their progress. This also includes Insufficient time devoted to the educational processes,

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<sup>2</sup>J. Surzykiewicz, *Agresja i przemoc w szkole. Uwarunkowania socjoekologiczne*, Centrum Metodyczne Pomocy Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznej, Warsaw 2000.

such as conflict resolution, reducing tension during classes, and so on. The incidence of school aggression and violence in the area of relations between students and teachers is also exacerbated by the lack of negation of such behaviours by other teachers, inconsistency of these reactions among teachers, lack of clear rules of school life, as well as inconsistency of teachers in enforcing the adopted standards.

The third factor concerns the abnormal relationships between the students themselves, which may stem from individual personal characteristics, in particular reduced self-control, high impulsivity, short attention span, attention deficits. Aggressive and violent behaviours can also be a consequence of students experiencing situations where, for example, they notice that a violent student benefits from their behaviour without losing their popularity, and without suffering any negative consequences of their behaviour. The perpetrator of violence is viewed positively by the social group as a brave person, while their committed acts of violence build their high social standing. The conviction that in the group the sense of responsibility is distributed and the sense of guilt is reduced forms yet another incentive to join the group of perpetrators.<sup>3</sup>

These days, the analysis of the phenomenon of school aggression and violence needs to also include the media, which play an increasingly important role in the upbringing of young people. Watching acts of violence has a quantifiable effect on children and youth, as it impacts them by teaching them aggressive behaviours, in particular in the cases where violence is presented in a realistic and attractive way, brings satisfaction to the perpetrator, is not punished or is justified by higher social reasons, or presented as socially acceptable.

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<sup>3</sup>J. Surzykiewicz, *Agresja i przemoc w szkole. Uwarunkowania socjoekologiczne*, Centrum Metodyczne Pomocy Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznej, Warsaw 2000; K. Ostrowska, J. Surzykiewicz, *Zachowania agresywne w szkole. Badania porównawcze 1997 i 2003*, Centrum Metodyczne Pomocy Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznej, Warsaw 2005; G. Poraj, *Szkola wobec agresji*, *Psychologia w Szkole*, 2006, no. 1 pp. 3-24; I. Pufal-Struzik (ed.), *Agresja dzieci i młodzieży*, Wydawnictwo Pedagogiczne ZNP, Kielce 2007.

## The concept of school aggression and violence

The analysis of the phenomenon of school aggression and violence requires the definition of the concepts, since the common knowledge of these concepts, especially at the intuitive level, makes it recognisable in everyday language; however, there are many ambiguities in their actual definitions.<sup>4</sup> Aggression – from Latin word *aggressio* – means assault. The conducted study was based on the definition coined by Adam Frączek,<sup>5</sup> which defines aggression as “acts aimed at doing harm and causing loss of socially-important values, inflicting physical pain or causing moral suffering to another person”. The recognition of a given behaviour as aggressive hinges on three basic criteria – its intentional nature, its result – specific consequences of behaviour, as well as the moral and social context.<sup>6</sup> In international literature, the authors usually quote the definition of violence coined by Dan Olweus,<sup>7</sup> who defines violence/violent behaviour as aggressive behaviour where the actor or perpetrator uses his or her own body as an object (including a weapon) to inflict (relatively serious) injury or discomfort upon an individual, while this research project is based on Anna Brzezińska’s definition of violence,<sup>8</sup> which states

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<sup>4</sup> M. Czub, *Zachowanie agresywne – agresja – osiągnięcie. Analiza zjawiska agresji jako istotnego czynnika w procesie socjalizacji*, Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny, 1992, no. 1, pp. 126–135.

<sup>5</sup> A. Frączek, *Czynności agresywne jako przedmiot studiów eksperymentalnej psychologii społecznej*, [in:] *Studia nad psychologicznymi mechanizmami czynności agresywnych*, (ed.) A. Frączek, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich – Wydawnictwo PAN, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk 1979, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> A. Frączek, *Czynności agresywne jako przedmiot studiów eksperymentalnej psychologii społecznej*, [in:] *Studia nad psychologicznymi mechanizmami czynności agresywnych*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich – Wydawnictwo PAN, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk 1979, p. 14; U. Meier, *Aggressionen und Gewalt in der Schule. Zur Dialektik von Schülerpersönlichkeiten, Lernumwelten und schulischem Sozialklima. Jugendsoziologie*, vol. 6, Münster 2004, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> D. Olweus, *Mobbing. Fala przemocy w szkole. Jak ją powstrzymać?*, Agencja Wydawnicza Jacek Santorski & Co, Warsaw 2007.

<sup>8</sup> A. Brzezińska, *Jak rodzi się agresja?*, [in:] *Dzieci i młodzież wobec agresji i przemocy*, A. Brzezińska, E. Hornowska (eds.), Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2004, p. 108.

that “violence is the abuse or use of one’s physical, emotional or situational superiority over another individual to achieve an outcome deemed important by the perpetrator”.

The ambiguity in consistently distinguishing the semantic field of the terms *aggression* and *violence* leads to methodological difficulties in researching these subjects. In this case, we see a phenomenon, which can be referred to as “conceptual diffusion” of these terms, which results in their mutual interpenetration and interchangeability; however, most current research on violence and aggression in the school setting adopt a combination of the two concepts,<sup>9</sup> mostly due to the broadest possible coverage of different types of violent and aggressive behaviours of students and teachers alike. Due to the interchangeability of these concepts, as well as the subjectivity inherent in the assessment of certain forms of behaviour that can be interpreted as aggressive or violent, which are also determined by situational, cultural and social factors, it does not seem necessary to clearly define these two terms. The phenomenon of school aggression and violence has been defined by Marek Kulesza<sup>10</sup> as “a broad range of deliberate acts and actions undertaken by members of the school community (...) which occur at school or on the way to school, and which result in physical or mental suffering of people on the school premises, as well as the destruction of property located on the school premises”. On the basis of this definition and the analysis of these issues in the available sources, the author established that for the purpose of this study, the phenomenon of school aggression and violence is a broad spectrum of delib-

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<sup>9</sup> A. Frączek, *Agresja i przemoc wśród dzieci i młodzieży jako zjawisko społeczne*, [in:] *Agresja wśród dzieci i młodzieży. Perspektywa psychoedukacyjna*, A. Frączek, I. Pufal-Struzik (eds.), Wydawnictwo Pedagogiczne ZNP, Kielce 1996; M. Kulesza, *Klimat szkoły a zachowania agresywne i przemocowe uczniów*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2011; J. Surzykiewicz, *Agresja i przemoc w szkole. Uwarunkowania socjoekologiczne*, Centrum Metodyczne Pomocy Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznej, Warsaw 2000.

<sup>10</sup> M. Kulesza, *Klimat szkoły a zachowania agresywne i przemocowe uczniów*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2011, p. 24.

erate actions and acts undertaken by members of the school community, which occur at school or on the way to school, as well as over new communication technologies, and which result in physical or mental suffering of the members of this community, or destruction of property located on the school premises.

## Perpetrators of school violence and aggression

The results of the conducted studies reveal that the most frequently experienced form of aggression and violence at school is peer violence, which can occur on the school premises, on the way to or from school, via a mobile phone or on the Internet.<sup>11</sup>

Peer violence, mainly physical violence, is more often perpetrated by boys than by girls, who, on the other hand, are more likely to engage in emotional violence.<sup>12</sup> Not only do boys commit acts of physical violence more often than girls, but they are also more violent.<sup>13</sup>

The risk of becoming a victim of school aggression and violence hinges on a number of factors, including the individual characteristics and traits of the victim and the perpetrator, such as gender, social standing and more, as well as the social space, which can be conducive to such behaviours.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> M. Kulesza, *Klimat szkoły a zachowania agresywne i przemocowe uczniów*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2011; J. Włodarczyk, *Przemoc rówieśnicza. Wyniki Ogólnopolskiej diagnozy problemu przemocy wobec dzieci*, [in:] *Dziecko krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka*, 2013, 12(3), pp. 63–81; J. Włodarczyk, K. Makaruk, *Ogólnopolska diagnoza problemu przemocy wobec dzieci. Wyniki badania*, Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje, Warsaw 2013; A. Komendant-Brodowska, *Agresja i przemoc szkolna. Raport o stanie badań*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Edukacyjnych, Warsaw 2014.

<sup>12</sup> M. Kulesza, *Klimat szkoły a zachowania agresywne i przemocowe uczniów*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2011; J. Przewłocka, *Bezpieczeństwo uczniów i klimat społeczny w polskich szkołach. Raport z badań*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Edukacyjnych, Warsaw 2015; J. Pyżalski, *Przemoc rówieśnicza w szkole – badania retrospektywne studentów pedagogiki*, *Studia Edukacyjne*, 2015, no. 34, pp. 177–196.

<sup>13</sup> I. Chmura-Rutkowska, *Przemoc rówieśnicza w gimnazjum a płęć. Kontekst społeczno-kulturowy*, *Forum Oświatowe*, 2012, no. 46(1), pp. 41–73.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. D. Schwartz, K.A. Dodge, J.D. Coie, *The emergence of chronic peer victimization in boys' play groups*, *Child Development*, 1993, 64(6), pp. 1755–1772; A. Komen-

The analysis of sources on aggression and violence of students with special needs, including students with disabilities shows that these students are more often subject to peer victimisation than their able-bodied counterparts.<sup>15</sup> We may therefore conclude that disability is also one of the factors that determines the frequency of experiencing school aggression and violence.

Due to the fact that the source of school aggression and violence may include improper relationships between the students and teachers, in addition to peer relationships, it seems important to determine whether students with disabilities are also more likely to be victimised in this area.

Violent behaviour of teachers perpetrated against students have particularly negative outcomes when it comes to the occurrence of school aggression and violence, and above all for the development of children. The teacher should be an authority and a model of de-

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dant-Brodowska, A. Baczko-Dombi, A. Giza-Poleszczuk (eds.), *Przemoc w szkole. Raport z badań*, Warsaw 2011; [szkolabezprzemocy.pl](http://szkolabezprzemocy.pl) [retrieved on: 28.11.2019]; J. Przewłocka, *Bezpieczeństwo uczniów i klimat społeczny w polskich szkołach. Raport z badań*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Edukacyjnych, Warsaw 2015.

<sup>15</sup> M. Buchnat, *Percepcja klimatu szkoły przez uczniów z lekką niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w trzech formach kształcenia a agresja i przemoc szkolna*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2019; E. Hodges, D. Perry, *Personal and interpersonal antecedents and consequences of victimization by peers*, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1999, no. 76(4), pp. 677–685; A. Mikrut, *Stygmat 'upośledzenie umysłowe' a ryzyko zostania ofiarą przemocy*, *Szkoła Specjalna*, 2007, no. 3, pp. 184–191; W.J. Murphy, *The victim advocacy and research group: Serving a growing need to provide rape victims with personal legal representation to protect privacy rights and to fight gender bias in the criminal justice*", *Journal of Social Distress and the Homeless*, 2001, 10, pp. 123–138, D.G. Perry, S.J. Kusel, L.C. Perry (1998); *Victims of peer aggression*, *Developmental Psychology*, 1998, no. 24(6), pp. 807–814; D. Olweus, *Mobbing. Fala przemocy w szkole. Jak ją powstrzymać?*, Agencja Wydawnicza Jacek Santorski & Co, Warsaw 2007; P. Plichta, *Dzieci i młodzież z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną a narażenie na agresję rówieśniczą*, [in:] *Przemoc rówieśnicza wobec dzieci ze SPE. Materiały pokonferencyjne*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Edukacyjnych, Warsaw 2015, pp. 35–42; I. Pospiszyl, *Ofiary chroniczne. Przypadek czy konieczność*, Wydawnictwo APS, Warsaw, 2003; Sveinsson A.V., Morris R.J., *School bullying and victimization of children with disabilities*, [in:] *Disability Research and Policy: Current Perspectives*, ed. R.J. Morris, Routledge, London 2005.



sired social behaviours for the student,<sup>16</sup> because by being the role model, they have an important impact on the process of bringing up children and youth at school. Unfortunately, as the results of the study show,<sup>17</sup> the position of authority allows teachers to use their power in working with children.

Such behaviours exhibited by teachers not only prevent students from getting help in situations of school aggression and violence, but also lead to the emergence of negative patterns of behaviour. They show students a way to deal with a specific situation, which they will use, unfortunately it is often a way based on aggression and violence. They are not only a role model that can be followed, but also create an atmosphere conducive to such forms of behaviour. Violent behaviour is particularly dangerous when it affects a selected group of children in the class or group, because they exacerbate their social stigma in a given school space. In the case of such groups, the teacher not only does not constitute a source of support or help, but becomes a factor directly causing or generating unwanted behaviour in others. In the light of Pierre Bourdieu's social theory, two processes determine the position of an individual within the social space. The first is the way in which a person has been placed in the social field by objective social forces on which they depend in said space. In the case of the school field, this primarily concerns the teachers. The second process is the positioning of the individual according to their personal autolocation potential. In the case of students with mild intellectual disabilities, their autolocation potential is low, so their place in school space is mainly determined by their teachers and, of course, their peers, which means that their

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<sup>16</sup> M. Dudzikowa, *Nauczyciel – uczeń, między przemocą a dialogiem: obszary napięć i interpretacji*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 1996.

<sup>17</sup> J. Przewłocka, *Bezpieczeństwo uczniów i klimat społeczny w polskich szkołach. Raport z badań*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Edukacyjnych, Warsaw 2015, pp. 90–94; J. Maćkiewicz, *Nauczyciele wobec problemu dziecka krzywdzonego w rodzinie*, Nowa Szkoła, 2005, no. 8, pp. 10–13; M. Zbrozczyk-Szczepaniak, *Po pierwsze dziecko – założenia programu irlandzkiego*. III. Konferencja Naukowa „Standardy postępowania w zespole dziecka krzywdzonego”, Warsaw, 02.12.2006, pp. 26–30.

attitudes towards these children are particularly important for their adaptation and social integration. They can either foster their integration and normalisation, or exacerbate their isolation or aggression and violence perpetrated against them.

### **Author's own research methodology**

The aim of the study was to determine whether and how often teachers' violent behaviour towards students with mild intellectual disabilities occur, and whether they are conditioned by the form of organisation of education, as well as whether there are differences in the experience of teacher violence between students with mild intellectual disabilities and those without any intellectual disabilities. The study covered 180 students with mild intellectual disabilities in fourth and fifth grades, 60 of whom attended special schools, 60 attended mainstream schools and 60 were taught in integrated classes. In order to eliminate factors reducing the reliability of the study, the following criteria were taken into account when selecting children for the test sample:

- a certificate confirming the need for special education on the grounds of mild intellectual disabilities (the certificate still uses the old, deprecated name: mild mental retardation);
- no additional disabilities - no occurrence of diagnosed motor, sensory or autism spectrum disorders;
- earlier education carried out in an educational organisation of the same kind;
- students of fourth and fifth grade in special schools, public schools or integration classes;
- students learning in the city (of more than 20,000 residents) in Greater Poland Voivodeship.

Due to the difficulties experienced while looking for children with mild intellectual disabilities attending public mainstream school, the author adopted a variable manner of selecting the sample. In the case of students attending special schools and an integrated classes,

a stratified random sampling methodology was used, while in the case of students with mild intellectual disabilities attending a mainstream school, a targeted selection was carried out. The study also included students without intellectual disabilities attending classes with selected students with mild intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools and integrated classes. This was to verify whether the experience of aggression and violence perpetrated by teacher against students with mild intellectual disabilities in these two forms of educational organisation depends on the individual situation of the given student (related to the fact of having mild intellectual disabilities) or is consistent with the experiences of their able-bodied peers in the class. This group of respondents was selected with a targeted selection methodology, and in total 1164 students of public schools and 888 students of integration classes were covered by the study. The adopted research procedure was carried out by means of a diagnostic survey, in which a test was conducted on the basis of an IBE School Climate questionnaire on school aggression and violence, which after the pilot study was adapted to the needs and abilities of a student with mild intellectual disabilities. Different statistical methods were used in the study, depending on the assumed partial research objectives. The descriptive statistic measures such as: totals, averages, standard deviations and percentage fractions were used to characterise the studied group and variables. The significance of differences in the distribution of the number of the examined categorical variables was determined using  $\chi^2$  (chi square) distribution. The calculations were made with IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software suite.

### **Author's own research results**

The obtained results concerning the experience of students with mild intellectual disabilities in special, mainstream and integrated classes in the last four weeks before the study of violent behaviours perpetrated by teachers are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Teachers' aggressive and violent behaviours towards students with mild intellectual disabilities in three forms of education organisation

Teacher yelled at you	Special school		Mainstream school		Integration class	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
No	38	63.33	23	38.33	30	50.00
Once	19	31.66	11	18.33	18	30.00
2-4 times	2	3.33	21	35.00	6	10.00
More than 4 times	1	1.66	5	8.33	6	10.00
Teacher said offensive things to you	Special school		General school		Integration class	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
No	58	96.66	45	75.00	52	86.66
Once	1	1.66	12	20.00	6	10.00
2-4 times	0	0.00	2	3.33	2	3.33
More than 4 times	1	1.66	1	1.66	0	0.00
Teacher mocked, ridiculed you in front of other students	Special school		General school		Integration class	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
No	55	91.66	26	43.33	44	73.33
Once	3	5.00	18	30.00	12	20.00
2-4 times	1	1.66	13	21.66	4	6.66
More than 4 times	1	1.66	3	5.00	0	0.00
Teacher hit or jerked you	Special school		Mainstream school		Integration class	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
No	59	98.33	57	95.00	56	93.33
Once	0	0.00	2	3.33	4	6.66
2-4 times	0	0.00	1	1.66	0	0.00
More than 4 times	1	1.66	0	0.00	0	0.00

Source: Author's own compilation based on study results.

The conducted analyses lead to the conclusion that the observed differences in teachers' violent behaviour towards students with mild intellectual disabilities are statistically significant, while taking

into consideration the form of education, in the following forms: shouting at students ( $\chi^2(6) = 30.35$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), using offensive words ( $\chi^2(6) = 14.22$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ), mockery, ridiculing in front of other students ( $\chi^2(6) = 37.15$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). All these aggressive behaviour perpetrated by teachers was most often experienced by students with mild intellectual disabilities from mainstream schools, a little less frequently by students from integrated classes and the least frequently by students attending special schools. There were no statistically significant differences between students with mild intellectual disabilities from the three forms of education in the experience of being struck or jerked by the teacher ( $\chi^2(6) = 8.081$ ;  $p = 0.232$ ). Such behaviour was rarely seen in all types of schools.

It is worth noting that a statistically significant difference between students with mild intellectual disabilities and their able-bodied classmates was also revealed in the mainstream schools, with regards to experiencing violent behaviours perpetrated by teachers (shouting at students ( $\chi^2(3) = 25.49$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), using offensive words ( $\chi^2(3) = 17.71$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ), mocking, ridiculing in front of other students ( $\chi^2(3) = 74.93$ ;  $p < 0.001$ )). Able-bodied students experienced such behaviour much less often than their peers with mild intellectual disabilities. Students in mainstream schools revealed that they never experienced being yelled at by teacher (46.7%), they never had offensive words used against them (90.8%), and that they were never mocked or ridiculed in front of other students (82.6%), while for students with mild intellectual disabilities it was 38.3%, 75% and 43.3%, respectively. The differences between students with mild intellectual disabilities and their able-bodied peers in integrated classes were not statistically significant, although they also revealed more frequent experience of violent behaviours perpetrated by the teacher by students with mild intellectual disabilities. The results reveal that teachers in mainstream schools perpetrate violent behaviour against students with mild intellectual disabilities with the highest frequency. Such behaviour by teachers may be indicative of a low level of preparation for work with students with mild intellectual disabilities, and therefore a lack of understanding of their behaviour and needs.

One of the consequences of the frequency of the use of violent behaviours against students with mild intellectual disabilities in the three forms of organisation of education is that students declare the number of teachers they fear and like. The results obtained in this area revealed statistically significant differences in terms of the form of education both in the number of teachers whom students are afraid of ( $\chi^2 (14) = 26.81$ ;  $p = 0.02$ ) and the number of teachers whom they like ( $\chi^2 (46) = 65.07$ ;  $p = 0.033$ ). Students attending special schools most often declared that there were no teachers they were afraid of (83.3%), in the case of integration classes it amounted to 70%, and in the case of mainstream schools it was only 56.7%. In the case of mainstream schools and integrated classes, there were students who revealed that they were afraid of up to seven teachers, while in the case of students with mild intellectual disabilities attending special schools one person indicated three such teachers, the remaining students indicated one or two. The inverse proportion between the students taking advantage of these three forms of education was revealed in the number of teachers they like. None of the students from special schools indicated that there are no teachers whom they like, while 21.7% of students from integration classes and 15% of students attending mainstream schools gave that response. The majority of special school students indicated a higher number of teachers they like (with 48 teachers indicated as the maximum value), while students from mainstream schools and integration classes mainly indicated one or two such teachers.

The specific situation of students with mild intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools and integrated classes was confirmed by the results of analyses comparing students with mild intellectual disabilities and their able-bodied peers. The results revealed statistically significant differences between students with mild intellectual disabilities and their able-bodied peers in the declared number of teachers of whom they are afraid of, both in mainstream schools ( $\chi^2 (7) = 205.9$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and integrated classes ( $\chi^2 (6) = 134.9$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Able-bodied students attending mainstream schools and integrated classes declare that they are less afraid of their teachers

than their peers with mild intellectual disabilities. The results concerning the number of teachers whom their students like turned out to be statistically significant due to the absence or presence of mild intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools ( $\chi^2(11) = 173$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and integrated classes ( $\chi^2(13) = 207.8$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Able-bodied students usually indicate that they like at least 2 (about 30% of students from mainstream schools and integrated classes), 3 (about 30% of students from mainstream schools and integrated classes) or 4 teachers (about 15% of students from mainstream schools and integrated classes). The lack of such teachers was indicated by only 0.2% of students from mainstream schools and 0.6% of students attending integrated classes, while 21.7% of students with mild intellectual disabilities attending integrated classes and 15% of students with mild intellectual disabilities from mainstream schools indicated such a lack.

## Conclusion

Summing up the results obtained in the area of teachers' violent behaviour towards students with mild intellectual disabilities in the three forms of education shows that students from mainstream schools and integrated classes experience such behaviour perpetrated by teachers much more often than students from special schools; however, students with mild intellectual disabilities in integrated classes experience such behaviours less often than students from mainstream schools. Students with mild intellectual disabilities from mainstream schools and integrated classes also experience more victimisation by teachers than their able-bodied peers. Experiencing violent behaviour perpetrated by teachers goes hand in hand with the higher declared number of teachers whom students are afraid of and a lower number of teachers whom they like. The results of the study indicate that students with mild intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools and integrated classes are in a significantly worse position when it comes to experiencing aggression and vio-

lence perpetrated by their teachers than their peers with mild intellectual disabilities attending special schools and their able-bodied peers. The fact that such behaviours perpetrated by teachers is not experienced with the same frequency by special school students and able-bodied students confirms the low level of preparation of teachers, mainly from mainstream schools, to working with students with mild intellectual disabilities, presented in numerous studies<sup>18</sup>, which indicates that despite years, unfortunately little has changed in this area.

The lack of adequate preparation of teachers from mainstream schools and integrated classes to working with students with mild intellectual disabilities in the context of the analysed experience of school aggression and violence by these students is particularly worrying. Teachers should not only be able to adapt the work to the abilities and needs of a student with mild intellectual disabilities, but above all, they should instil in them a sense of security and acceptance; however, not only do they fail at this task, but also they become perpetrators of violence. A teacher who perpetrates aggressive behaviours towards students with mild intellectual disabilities destroys the sense of security among such students, when they experience violence, and they lose the person they can turn to for help in such a difficult situation. Secondly, such a teacher models the behaviour of other students who, either by imitating the teacher or

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<sup>18</sup> See for example: M. Buchnat, *Kompetencje i oczekiwania nauczyciela do pracy z dzieckiem ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi w nowej szkolnej rzeczywistości*, Studia Edukacyjne, 2014, no. 31, pp. 177–195; M. Chodkowska, Z. Kazanowski, *Socjopedagogiczne konteksty postaw nauczycieli wobec edukacji inkluzyjnej*, Wyd. UMCS, Lublin 2007; B. Jachimczak, *Gotowość nauczycieli szkół ogólnodostępnych do pracy z uczniem o specjalnych potrzebach edukacyjnych*, [in:] *Miejsce Innego we współczesnych naukach o wychowaniu – wyzwania praktyki*, I. Chrzanowska, B. Jachimczak (eds.), Satori, Łódź 2008, pp. 136–145; Z. Gajdzica, *Opinie nauczycieli szkół ogólnodostępnych na temat edukacji włączającej uczniów z lekkim upośledzeniem umysłowym w kontekście toczącej się reformy kształcenia specjalnego*, [in:] *Uczeń z niepełnosprawnością w szkole ogólnodostępnej*, Z. Gajdzica (ed.), Humanitas, Sosnowiec 2011, pp. 56–82; S. Sadowska, *Jakość życia uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu lekkim*. Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2006.



feeling that their behaviour is not negated, also perpetrate violence against students with mild intellectual disabilities. The study carried out by Jadwiga Przewłocka<sup>19</sup> revealed that the issue of peer violence is less prominent in schools where teachers are interested in their students and where they are perceived by children and youth as friendly and more willing to help. It is also important to remember that conflict with a teacher is treated as a source of severe stress, while mental abuse, mockery or labelling students often leads to feelings of anger, frustration and, consequently, aggression, which can be directed at students and teachers alike. Therefore, it seems important to pay particular attention to preparing teachers for working with students with mild intellectual disabilities, aimed not only at raising the level of education of students with mild intellectual disabilities in forms of non-segregated education, but above all at eliminating teachers' aggressive behaviours towards this group of students.

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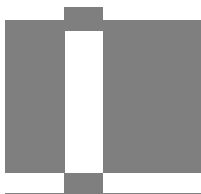
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<sup>19</sup> J. Przewłocka, *Bezpieczeństwo uczniów i klimat społeczny w polskich szkołach. Raport z badań*, Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Edukacyjnych, Warsaw 2015.

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## Developing social competences of children with Down syndrome by playing

**ABSTRACT:** Agnieszka Jędrzejowska, *Developing social competences of children with Down syndrome by playing*. Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy, no. 29, Poznań 2020. Pp. 117–147. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-391X. e-ISSN 2658-283X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ikps.2020.29.06>

The subject of this article is a report from a study on the functioning of children with Down syndrome in a pre-school integration group and the rationality of attending kindergarten. During the research, children with Down syndrome in two groups in a kindergarten in Wrocław were observed. The research started with the thesis that play is the basic form of children's activity, in which, among others, the social competence of children is shaped. The activity most willingly chosen by children during free play were theatrical forms (role playing, puppet theatres, shadow theatres). The research was conducted for nine months; I was a researcher and educator in this kindergarten.

**KEY WORDS:** Social competence, fun

### Introduction

Humanities pedagogy perceives the process of education as a dialogue. Dialogue is a method, process and attitude. "The dialogue method is a way of communication, in which subjects strive to understand each other, get closer and cooperate. The dialogue attitude is a readiness to open up to understanding, getting closer

and cooperating in relation to the environment. Therefore, a dialogue attitude is an openness towards another human being".<sup>1</sup>

One of the key competences, important for the development of individuals and groups, is social competence. Competence is the potential that exists in a person.<sup>2</sup> Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak believes that an individual's competence is its special characteristic, expressed in demonstrating, at the level set by social standards, the ability to behave adequately, as well as being aware of the need for and consequences of such conduct and in assuming responsibility for it.<sup>3</sup> Katarzyna Koszewska defines this notion in a similar way, as a range of knowledge (I know about something), skills (I know how to do it) and responsibility (attitude – I want and am ready to use my knowledge); a range of powers and authority to act. Competence is a potential ability that becomes apparent when performing a given task or a predisposition to perform it.<sup>4</sup> It is claimed that a socially competent person can generate effective communication strategies to maintain and develop interpersonal relationships.<sup>5</sup>

The notion of social competence is accompanied by such components as empathy, the ability to interact with others, both peers and adults, the ability to share one's possessions, as well as experiences and emotions, and a sensitivity to the harm of others and the desire to help. All these elements of social development are particularly shaped in the preschool period. The child first goes through a stage of egocentrism, therefore in the initial phase the relationship between peers is tense and there are often disputes and quarrels. Kindergarten is a good ground for shaping children's social compe-

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<sup>1</sup> J. Tarnowski, *Jak wychowywać?*, Wydawnictwo ATK, Warszawa 1993, pp. 117–118.

<sup>2</sup> M. Armstrong, *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi*, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2002, pp. 249–252.

<sup>3</sup> M. Czerepaniak-Walczak, *Między dostosowaniem a zmianą*, Szczecin 1995, p. 134.

<sup>4</sup> K. Koszewska, *Co to są kompetencje społeczne?*, Mazowiecki Kwartalnik Edukacyjny „Meritum”, 2014, no. 2(33), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> J. Lubowiecka, *Kompetencje społeczne w sytuacjach edukacyjnych w przedszkolu*, [in:] H. Sowińska (ed.), *Dziecko w szkolnej rzeczywistości. Założony z rzeczywistości obraz edukacji elementarnej*, Wydawnictwo UAM, Poznań 2011, p. 377.

tences, as long as favourable conditions and appropriate stimulation of such behaviour are provided.<sup>6</sup> The development of a child's self-image consists in the satisfaction with the relationship with his or her friends and his or her own position in the group, which influences the feeling of happiness and acceptance of self. This is the beginning of identity formation. According to Jerzy Nikitorowicz, the "significant Others", whose role is to set certain points of reference with which the child can identify, are necessary for its development.<sup>7</sup>

Social competence develops through experience which can take place in everyday life situations and in educational situations intentionally organized by the teacher. An ideal way to develop children's social skills is to work in groups. In a game or a task, group members communicate, negotiate, do something together, help each other, present the results of their actions, have fun together.

## The importance of play in diagnosing social skills

The diagnosis of social skills requires an understanding of the situational parameters of behaviour, taking into account the factors that precede it and its consequences, as well as an awareness that different children's behaviours can be assessed in a different way. The difference of opinion about what behaviour is desirable or accepted in children and what is not, is due both to the reliability of the assessment and the way adults, who have different relationships with the child, peers and even the child itself perceive it.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A.I. Brzezińska, M. Mielcarek, A. Ratajczyk, *Mali aktorzy na scenie życia, czyli o rozwoju kompetencji społecznych w okresie dzieciństwa*, Mazowiecki Kwartalnik Edukacyjny „Meritum” 2014, no. 2(33), p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> J. Andrzejewska, *Zróżnicowanie modeli edukacyjnych w przedszkolu a funkcjonowanie psychospołeczne dzieci*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2013, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> K. Kaszlińska, *Diagnostowanie kompetencji społecznej dzieci przedszkolnych – możliwości i ograniczenia*, „Przegląd Pedagogiczny” 2015, no. 1, p. 215.

For the teacher, the main diagnostic area is when children begin playing. As Lew S. Wygotski and Danuta Waloszek emphasize, play is an attribute and the most important activity related to childhood. Observing children in their natural environment and during free behaviour is an excellent field for assessing the development of social skills in children.<sup>9</sup>

Play is an activity that comes from a natural need to learn about reality and action. Stuart Brown, psychiatrist, clinical researcher and founder of the National Institute for Play, describes from his own research and the discoveries of biologists, psychologists and neurologists how play helps to shape one's mind, empathy, allows to find oneself in a group, and is a source of creativity.<sup>10</sup>

Play is a characteristic, even fundamental, element of the behaviour of all children. It plays a significant role in their mental development. Howard Gardner presents the goals of play in the development of a child: "(...) a better mastery of the world, a more adequate handling of problems and fears, a better understanding of oneself and the relationship between oneself and the world, an initial discovery of the relationship between reality and fantasy, an area where intuitive, quasi-logical forms of thinking can be freely tested".<sup>11</sup>

For a child, the goal of play is pleasure itself, without any conscious goals. From a social point of view, the developmental sequence in a child's play can be indicated as follows<sup>12</sup>:

- 18 months - 2 years - individual play with the use of various objects such as toys;

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<sup>9</sup> K. Kaszlińska, *Diagnozowanie kompetencji społecznej dzieci przedszkolnych – możliwości i ograniczenia*, „Przegląd Pedagogiczny” 2015, no. 1, p. 218.

<sup>10</sup> S. Brown, Ch. Vaughan, *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, Pinguin Group, Nowy Jork 2009.

<sup>11</sup> A. Birch, T. Malim, transl. by J. Łuczyński, M. Olejnik, *Psychologia rozwojowa w zarysie. Od niemowlęctwa do dorosłości*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1995, p. 29.

<sup>12</sup> A. Birch, T. Malim, transl. by J. Łuczyński, M. Olejnik, *Psychologia rozwojowa w zarysie. Od niemowlęctwa do dorosłości*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1995, p. 30.



- 3 years of age – children play next to each other, sometimes this is accompanied by observation and mutual imitation, but still without real interactions;
- about 4 years of age – play becomes socialized, interactions appear – at first rigid, but then turn-taking which means means complementary behaviour and cooperation.

Jean Piaget links the development of play with the development of intelligence and concludes that it is possible to partially assess the development of a child on the basis of observation of the way he/she plays. He suggests the following stages of playful activity:

- Sensory-motor play corresponds to the sensory-motor level of intelligence development (from birth to the end of the second year of life). Various objects are examined by sight and touch, the movements are repeated.
- Symbolic play appears at the preoperative level of intelligence development (between the second and seventh year of life). The child uses his/her imagination and is satisfied with using one object as a symbol of another object (e.g. a tennis racket can become a guitar).
- Role play is appropriate for the operational level of intelligence development (from the age of seven). The child's developing thought processes become more logical, and when playing, the child uses various procedures and rules.

J. Piaget claims that play is an expression of the assimilation process, in which the child tries to incorporate knowledge about the world surrounding him or her, adjusting it to his or her experience and understanding of the world.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Jerome S. Bruner sees play as an opportunity to learn, develop motor and cognitive skills. Lew S. Wygotski also stresses the value of play as the main developmental factor. It is play that creates a zone of closest development, where the child can act at a higher level of development than that intended for his or her age. One of the ways to

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<sup>13</sup> A. Birch, T. Malim, transl. by J. Łuczyński, M. Olejnik, *Psychologia rozwojowa w zarysie. Od niemowlęctwa do dorosłości*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1995, p. 31.

assess a child's possible development at a given moment is to determine the distance between the level of activity achieved through play and activity in other everyday situations.

Sigmund Freud in his psychodynamic theory of development treats play as a means of lowering the level of suppressed emotions. Play can be used by children to explore and deal with their feelings and to work out their fears and anxieties in a safe situation. Play can therefore be treated as a defence against problems, as well as dealing with them.

Eric Erikson believes that "children's play is an infantile form of the human ability to cope with one's experiences by creating model situations and improving reality through experimentation and planning".<sup>14</sup> Playful activity supports physical, intellectual and social fitness.<sup>15</sup> Playing in a peer group is a source of different stimuli, e.g. unforeseen behaviour of the participants, their successful and unsuccessful attempts at communication, conflict resolution, searching for new and interesting objects. At the same time, the complex social situation forces the participants to use their minds, creating unforeseen events that require immediate decisions and make an effort to understand what is happening.<sup>16</sup>

At first, children tend to play alone. This is due to the fact that although the child formally belongs to a preschool group, the most important person for him/her is the teacher who satisfies his/her basic needs.<sup>17</sup> When a child plays alone, he/she plays with other toys, regardless of other children, sometimes talks to other children, but does not make contact with them regarding play activities. In-

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<sup>14</sup> A. Birch, T. Malim, transl. by J. Łuczyński, M. Olejnik, *Psychologia rozwojowa w zarysie. Od niemowlęctwa do dorosłości*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1995, p. 32.

<sup>15</sup> H. Olechnowicz, *Terapia dzieci z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2010, p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> H. Olechnowicz, *Terapia dzieci z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2010, p. 259.

<sup>17</sup> B. Tylewska-Nowak, *Wiek przedszkolny - pomiędzy wyobcowaniem a grupą rówieśniczą*, [in:] H. Kubiak, A. Jakoniuk-Diallo (ed.), *Człowiek niepełnosprawny w otoczeniu społecznym*, Wydawnictwo Difin SA, Warszawa 2011, p. 57.

dividual games turn into parallel games when children play side by side, when they play alone but often with the same toys. During such games, children build a tower of blocks, but they do not cooperate with each other and each builds their own. The next step in the development of a child's playful activity is to play together, when children exchange toys and talk about the activities. However, such form play is not planned and there is no role-playing. Over time, the child moves on to team games, with role-playing. Children form teams for the purpose of playing, sometimes one or two children organize a game for the others. For example they play home, at the shop, at the doctor's, kindergarten. During these games, children share their roles, agree on who will be who and what they will do.

When a child plays with his or her peers or other companions, they learn the rules of cooperation. When role-playing, each participant has to take a different point of view of reality than his or her own in order to fulfil the intended plan and reproduce a relevant behaviour and features of the character. It is important to realize that the game will be beneficial if each participant takes into account their own preferences for their character. Such a situation is an ideal opportunity for the child to understand and acquire particular social skills. It starts with expressing one's will and needs openly and clearly, through contacting other participants, listening to other children, understanding their intentions, the need to resolve conflicts and disputes, recognizing the existing contradictions, and dealing with strong emotions. This aspect is extremely important in diagnosing the ways of communication and the level of socialization of children in kindergarten.<sup>18</sup>

Kindergarten is an ideal place to learn the rules of social life, play is an activity that introduces all these rules in a natural way for the child. In peer relations, children feel the interaction on an equal level, it is the basis for establishing social contacts. All these beha-

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<sup>18</sup> A.I. Brzezińska, M. Bątkowski, D. Kaczmarska, A. Włodarczyk, N. Zamęcka, *O roli zabawy w przygotowaniu dziecka do dorosłego życia. Wychowanie w Przedszkolu*, 2011, no. 10, p. 8.

viours are based on developmental norms and stages of mental maturation.<sup>19</sup>

Social competence is combined with communicative competence, i.e. the use of verbal and/or non-verbal behaviour in a manner appropriate to the context. It is the ability to assess the relevance and effectiveness of a person communicating or the goal achieved by communication. A specific behaviour may be appropriate and effective in one context, but not in another. The communication process depends on the motivation, knowledge and ability of the individuals involved and the context of interaction.<sup>20</sup>

Children who fail to master social skills, including cooperative skills, are more likely to get angry, and their clumsiness and anxiety can make others feel uncomfortable in their company. The resulting negative experiences in social relationships can cause low self-esteem and hinder learning. In adulthood, they may face depression and constant anxiety, and in extreme cases, this kind of social inadequacy may even lead to complete social rejection<sup>21</sup>. Children with developmental disabilities are particularly at risk. Teaching social skills, including cooperation skills will allow to avoid the consequences of social rejection and achieve predispositions to find oneself in a world that requires constant adaptation to change.<sup>22</sup>

Already at the age of two and three, pro-social behaviour, also known as altruistic behaviour, can for the first time be observed in children. A three-year-old child starts showing interest in playing with other children. He/she will offer help to the child who has

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<sup>19</sup> E. Miśkowicz, *Kształtowanie umiejętności kontaktów społecznych dziecka w rodzinie i przedszkolu*, „Edukacja Elementarna w Teorii i Praktyce” 2006, no. 25/3, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> S.P. Morreale, B.H. Spitzberg, J.K. Barge, *Komunikacja między ludźmi. Motywacja, wiedza i umiejętności*, transl. by D. Kobylińska, P. Izdebski, A. Jaworska, Warszawa 2007, p. 22.

<sup>21</sup> M. Plummer, *Jak kształtować umiejętności społeczne. Gry i zabawy grupowe dla dzieci od lat pięciu do jedenastu*, Wydawnictwo Fraszka Edukacyjna, Warszawa 2010, p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> D.M. Plummer, *Jak kształtować umiejętności społeczne. Gry i zabawy grupowe dla dzieci od lat pięciu do jedenastu*, Wydawnictwo Fraszka Edukacyjna, Warszawa 2010, p. 24.

been injured, propose a toy or try to comfort him.<sup>23</sup> At this age children begin to understand that the people around them can feel something different from themselves. Friendships begin to form. The first manifestations can already be seen around the eighteenth month. Toddlers become more willing to be surrounded by particular children. Preschool-age friends are nicer to each other, interact with each other more often, and show more positive and less negative behaviour. They also show more support in new situations. Friendships at this age are usually formed between children of the same sex. Even among young children, two and three year olds, most relationships are mono-sexual and remain so until the start of school, when children start choosing friends on the basis of common interests and gender often does not matter.<sup>24</sup>

Children with Down syndrome tend to engage in parallel individual play (they play alongside other children, but do not interact). In such situations, the role of a mediator (intermediary) is very valuable, someone who leads the child into a more structured play that requires contact with other children and accompanies the child during playtime. This mediation can consist of physical guidance, shaping circumstances, forming relationships in a group so that the child is better integrated, giving responsibility for changes by asking questions such as "who is to be who in this game?".<sup>25</sup>

Anna Sobolewska, the mother of now adult Celia who has Down syndrome, writes about the loneliness of children and youth in educational institutions:

Our children do not have their own environment. And this is the dark side of their life and ours. The biggest concern is the lack of real part-

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<sup>23</sup> H. Bee, *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*, Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2004, pp. 234–240.

<sup>24</sup> H. Bee, *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka*, Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2004, pp. 240–241.

<sup>25</sup> E. Zausmer, *Zabawy i umiejętności manualne*, [in:] S.M. Pueschel (ed.), *Ku lepszemu przyszłości. Zespół Downa. Przewodnik dla rodziców i opiekunów*, Wydawnictwo Replika, Zakrzewo 2009, pp. 195–196.

nership in contacts with other children. This is especially painful during the holidays. We want our children to have friends or acquaintances.<sup>26</sup>

Children who have no friends and are not very popular experience a sense of worthlessness or incompatibility.

Further, Prinstein's and La-Greca's studies show that the feeling of loneliness grows even more in adolescence, when the emotional bond with parents is clearly weakened, and at the same time the isolation of these people in school increases.<sup>27</sup> Such experiences are important for shaping the personal and social identity of each person. This is confirmed by the Polish research conducted by Agnieszka Żyta; she conducted interviews with adults with Down syndrome. They differ in their awareness and acceptance of their *otherness*.<sup>28</sup>

M. Margalit came to the conclusion that the social isolation of people with intellectual disabilities is determined by a lower level of school achievement, underdeveloped social skills, taking on the social role of a person with disabilities, excessive concentration on the Self.<sup>29</sup> So how can a person with intellectual disabilities realise themselves? At this point it is worth recalling the Kurt Goldstein personality theory. Intellectual deficit and impaired cognitive functions are not an obstacle in the process of self-realization. The difficulty may be the dependence of a person with disabilities on others without whom he/she will not realize this need. The neurologist and psychiatrist defines this phenomenon *as reaching an agreement with the environment*.<sup>30</sup> K. Goldstein is not interested in the theory of

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<sup>26</sup> A. Sobolewska, *Cela*, Wydawnictwo W.A.B., Warszawa 2002, p. 203.

<sup>27</sup> S. Kowalik, *Psychologia niepełnosprawności umysłowej*. *Psychologia niepełnosprawności umysłowej*, [in:] H. Sęk (ed.), *Psychologia kliniczna*, Vol. 2, Wyd. Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2005, p. 154.

<sup>28</sup> A. Żyta, *Życie z zespołem Downa. Narracja biograficzne rodziców, rodzeństwa i dorosłych osób z zespołem Downa*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2011, p. 216.

<sup>29</sup> S. Kowalik, *Psychologia niepełnosprawności umysłowej*, [in:] H. Sęk (ed.), *Psychologia kliniczna*, Vol. 2, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2005, p. 154.

<sup>30</sup> C.S. Hall, G. Lindzey, G.B. Cambell, *Teorie osobowości*, PWN, Warszawa 2004, pp. 432–435.

learning. However, he indicates the serious consequences of the difficult conditions of a given environment for a child, which may result in the lack of possibility of self-fulfilment and further development of pathological processes.<sup>31</sup>

The analysis of the subject carried out by D. Gibson, which is referred to by E. Zasępa, was of great importance for research on social development of children with Down syndrome<sup>32</sup>. He established the following relationships between the social maturity quotient and the intelligence quotient:

- the social maturity age of people with mental disabilities caused by other reasons is higher than in the case of people with Down syndrome who are of the same intelligence age;
- the social maturity age is on average 3 years and 4 months higher than the age of intelligence;
- the social maturity age progresses regardless of the age of intelligence, together with the age of life, especially in the early years.

C. Cunningham reports that the age of social maturity in children with Down syndrome is usually 3 years higher than their intelligence age. The reason may lie in the tasks that are included in the scale for measuring social maturity. These are tasks that measure the independence of activities that are taught at home every day and are absorbed by children more easily than tasks that measure language or mental abilities, which are more dependent on psychophysical abilities. The researcher further concludes that the results of tests measuring mental capacity, speech development and social functioning are highly correlated with each other. A child with higher mental function has more developed social and language skills. In most cases, social development is relatively the highest and

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<sup>31</sup> D. Baczała, *Metoda Knillów a teoria osobowości Kurta Goldsteina (studium indywidualnego przypadku)*, [in:] Z. Gajdzica (ed.), *Wspólne i swoiste zagadnienia edukacji i rehabilitacji osób z upośledzeniem umysłowym*, Wyd. Humanista, Sosnowiec 2008, pp. 119-121.

<sup>32</sup> E. Zasępa, *Rozwój intelektualny dzieci z zespołem Downa*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej im. Marii Grzegorzewskiej, Warszawa 2003, p. 38.

the age denoting speech development is the lowest. Development of speech is more difficult than learning self-service activities.<sup>33</sup>

In order to describe the social development of young children with Down syndrome one should take into account that it is a resultant of intellectual capabilities, development of perception and cognitive processes, motor skills and *mind theory*. The social development of a child with DS can be perceived from different perspectives. It is possible to refer the social development of a child with DS to the development of a healthy child, to compare children with DS to the development of children with another etiology of intellectual disability and finally to look at the progress of social development of a child with DS in the context of other spheres of its development.

In order to support the social development of a child in a peer group, it is necessary to realize what deficiencies in social development hinder his/her functioning in this group. Research conducted by Ludwika Sadowska and her colleagues<sup>34</sup>, evaluating the effects of the therapy of young children with DS with the use of the Munich Functional Developmental Diagnostics, has shown improvement in psychomotor functions, especially in terms of muscle tension, coordination and efficiency of the articulatory apparatus, whereas the sphere of spontaneous activity and intellectual achievements improved the least.

The research carried out by Anna Maria Choińska<sup>35</sup> shows that the level of social development of children with DS up to the age of

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<sup>33</sup> C. Cunningham, *Dzieci z zespołem Downa. Poradnik dla rodziców*, WSiP, Warszawa 1992, pp. 216–217.

<sup>34</sup> A. Białas, *Rodzina a problemy rozwoju, wychowania i socjalizacji dzieci i młodzieży niepełnosprawnej*, [in:] J. Patkiewicz (ed.), *Udział rodziny w kompleksowej rehabilitacji i życiu dzieci i młodzieży niepełnosprawnej*, Polskie Towarzystwo Walki z Kalectwem, Wrocław 1999, pp. 73–83.

<sup>35</sup> A.M. Choińska, *Zmiany w poziomie rozwoju fizycznego i sprawności psychomotorycznej dzieci z zespołem Downa od 0 do 3 roku życia, kompleksowo rehabilitowanych według Wrocławskiego modelu Usprawniania*. Doctoral thesis written under the direction of prof. dr hab. Ludwika Sadowska, Akademia Wychowania Fizycznego, Wrocław 2002.



3 is comparable to the results of research carried out by Bożena Bartosik and colleagues<sup>36</sup>, L. Sadowska and colleagues<sup>37</sup> and shows that the examined 3-year-olds were able to solve 56–77% of the tasks provided for a healthy 3-year-old in the following areas: statomotorics, grasping, perception, active speech and its understanding and social maturity and independence. Similar results of the relationship between communication skills and the age of initiation of therapy were obtained by Teresa Kaczan<sup>38</sup> in the case of children with DS. The researcher showed that the progress in the development of grasping skills corresponded with the progress in the development of active speech and its understanding. The author also indicates that children with DS undergoing speech therapy had no major difficulties in contacting other people and were able to comply with the rules and regulations. They strived to establish contact and were spontaneous.

The results of these studies correspond to the studies carried out in an integration kindergarten by M. Niklasińska.<sup>39</sup> The aim of the research was the perception of preschoolers with disabilities by their peers without disabilities. It turned out that when dealing with disabled children, healthy children take little account of their intellectual capabilities or external appearance. The readiness to play together,

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<sup>36</sup> B. Bartosik, L. Sadowska, A. Kreft, *Postęp w rozwoju społecznym małych dzieci z zespołem Downa poddanych terapii według Wrocławskiego Modelu Usprawniania (WMMU)*, [in:] J. Patkiewicz (ed.), *Wspomaganie rozwoju dzieci z trudnościami w uczeniu się*, Polskie Towarzystwo Walki z Kalectwem, Wrocław 2004, pp. 69–85.

<sup>37</sup> L. Sadowska, B. Bartosik, *Uspołecznianie dzieci z zespołem Downa jako proces pokonywania barier społecznych*, [in:] J. Patkiewicz (ed.), *Problemy barier rozwoju dzieci i młodzieży niepełnosprawnej*, Polskie Towarzystwo Walki z Kalectwem, Wrocław 2004, pp. 165–174.

<sup>38</sup> T. Kaczan, *Wpływ wczesnej rehabilitacji mowy na rozwój umiejętności komunikacyjnych i językowych u dzieci z ZD*. Doctoral thesis written under the direction of prof. dr hab. S. Maria Pecyna, Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiki Specjalnej, Warszawa 2001.

<sup>39</sup> B. Bartosik, L. Sadowska, A.M. Choińska, *Dojrzałość społeczna dzieci z zespołem Downa rehabilitowanych zgodnie z zasadami Wrocławskiego Modelu Usprawniania w środowisku rodzinnym*, [in:] J. Patkiewicz (ed.), *Zespół Downa – postępy w leczeniu, rehabilitacji i edukacji*, Polskie Towarzystwo Walki z Kalectwem, Wrocław 2008, pp. 106–107.

the readability of social messages and the manifestation of emotions were taken into account in the first place. Children with DS were not perceived as disabled by healthy children and their readiness to sympathise and specific emotional viscosity made healthy children willing to take care of them and help them. Children with minimal cerebral dysfunction or autism spectrum disorders were perceived differently. Due to the low predictability of their behaviour, changeability, weirdness, they were not chosen as partners to play and functioned at the side of the group. Analysing the results of other research showing the differences in social development of children with DS in comparison to children with different etiology of intellectual disability, it can be assumed that the more beneficial social development of a child with DS is to some extent connected with a better development of the *theory of mind*. In the experimental research, which aimed to determine the level of development of the theory of mind, most of the examined children with DS, as compared to children with autism over the age of four, were able to perform the *Unexpected Change Test* correctly, therefore it can be concluded that these children, despite their lower intellectual level, are ready to feel the mental state of another person, and thus it can also be concluded that they have a better possibility for empathy and reading non-verbal messages.<sup>40</sup> Also the results of previous research, conducted by J. Kruk-Lasocka<sup>41</sup>, in which the author related the social development of children with DS to children with cerebral palsy, show a higher level of social development in the case of children with DS. The author pointed out that the source of a better social functioning of children with DS is their readiness to imitate, perceptiveness, good mechanical memory, syntony. Children show love, affection and friendship to those who are kind, caring and gentle to them. On the other hand, they reject

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<sup>40</sup> B. Winczura, *Diagnoza i terapia deficytów poznawczych dziecka autystycznego na podstawie koncepcji teorii umyśtu*, [in:] B. Cytowska, B. Winczura (ed.), *Dziecko z zaburzeniami w rozwoju. Konteksty diagnostyczne i terapeutyczne*, Oficyna Wyd. IMPULS, Kraków 2005, pp. 65–93.

<sup>41</sup> B. Bartosik, L. Sadowska, A.M. Choińska, *Dojrzałość społeczna dzieci z zespołem Downa...*, op. cit., p. 107.

people whose facial expressions and body language do not arouse conviction and trust. B. Bartosik, L. Sadowska, A.M. Choińska refer to many studies that describe the emotional and social development of children with DS<sup>42</sup>: research conducted on infants with DS showed less involvement in social situations and focus on fewer social stimuli as compared to infants with normal intellectual development. Studies of older children with DS around the age of 4 and other disabled peers without DS and healthy children of the same mental age showed that the level of development of the ability to recognize emotions is the same in the three groups of examined children. Further on, the authors refer to the research of Elżbieta Maria Minczakiewicz, who in her study emphasizes the importance of using the syntonic abilities of children with DS when engaging them in an increasingly rich emotional and verbal *dialogue*. Joanna Kruk-Lasocka observes that even small children with DS, thanks to their warmth, love and gratitude for tenderness and care, were able to break the distance and rejection on the part of their parents and evoke an attitude of acceptance in them.<sup>43</sup> For comparison, the lack of emotional syntony, interest in the mother, rejection of her caresses and inability to empathize can cause trauma in the mother, according to Aleksandra Maciarz.

Although the age of social maturity rises, a child with DS will never reach full emotional maturity. Emotional maturity (expressing, recognizing, controlling emotions) is connected with thinking, and this in the case of children with DS is delayed. This in turn will translate into limited possibilities of social functioning. It may be concluded that such a child will recognize simple, clear and legible social situations and function relatively well in them. On the other hand, wherever understanding of the social situation depends on reading more complex messages requiring abstract thinking and not connected with the child's experiences, children with DS will have difficulties.

Peers without disabilities provide a good opportunity for the development and happy functioning of such children and their

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 107–108.

<sup>43</sup> B. Bartosik, L. Sadowska, A.M. Choińska, *Dojrzałość społeczna dzieci z zespołem Downa...*, op. cit., pp. 107–108.

families. Children without disabilities at preschool age are able to establish cooperation with a peer they did not know before. They are able to adapt their actions to the partner's actions and teach them new skills. Research by Andrzej Twardowski<sup>44</sup> on communicative dialogue competence of preschool children without disabilities has shown that already four-year-olds apply elaborate strategies which make it easier for a less competent partner to participate in the conversation. For example, they ask questions which contain the information necessary to provide an answer, they give ready-made answers and ask for their repetition or use additional instructions enriched with non-verbal elements. Already at preschool age, children without disabilities can adapt their behaviour and speech to the cognitive and linguistic abilities of their peers with intellectual disabilities, e.g. they reduce the complexity of the game and try to make it more structured and readable for the partner. When speaking to their disabled peers, they use shorter, less grammatically complex statements consisting of words with a specific meaning. They try to articulate words clearly and repeat certain statements. The relationships between a child with a disability and their non-disabled peer are characterized by reciprocal influence. Both partners decide whether a relationship will be initiated and how it will proceed. Usually the interaction only takes place because a non-disabled child can understand the unclear statements made by a colleague with disabilities and correctly identify the intentions.

Interactions with peers support mental development. As C.R. Cooper has shown<sup>45</sup>, the very presence of peers has a mobilizing effect on the cognitive activity of preschool children. In the

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<sup>44</sup> A. Twardowski, *Rola pełnosprawnych rówieśników w procesie wspomaganie rozwoju dzieci niepełnosprawnych*, [in:] W. Dykcik, A. Twardowski (ed.), *Wspomaganie rozwoju i rehabilitacja dzieci z genetycznie uwarunkowanymi zespołami zaburzeń*, Wyd. Naukowe Polskiego Towarzystwa Pedagogicznego, Poznań 2004, p. 83.

<sup>45</sup> A. Twardowski, *Rola pełnosprawnych rówieśników w procesie wspomaganie rozwoju dzieci niepełnosprawnych*, [in:] W. Dykcik, A. Twardowski (ed.), *Wspomaganie rozwoju i rehabilitacja dzieci z genetycznie uwarunkowanymi zespołami zaburzeń*, Wyd. Naukowe Polskiego Towarzystwa Pedagogicznego, Poznań 2004, p. 83.

presence of peers, children solve tasks better and faster than when they have to solve them alone.

A. Twardowski<sup>46</sup> distinguishes two types of childhood interactions of an educational nature: peer tutoring and cooperative learning. The first one can be observed when one child (tutor) helps the other (novice) to master certain knowledge and skills by giving him/her guidance, instructions or directing his/her activities. The rationale for this type of learning is contained in L. Wygotski's concept, who believes that the development of a child can take place in relations with those who know more about culturally accepted practices and tools (he considers language the most important). All skills and knowledge are acquired in social experience and then internalized and decontextualised.<sup>47</sup>

The term *peer tutoring* describes a symmetrical relationship, as the partners have a similar knowledge and skills base. But this resource is insufficient for each of them to solve the task on their own. Cooperation through the exchange of information, mutual explanations, discussions, and asking questions is the only condition for solving the task. This type of interaction is justified by J. Piaget's theory, who stated that peer contacts in the pre-operative period stimulate overcoming of egocentrism as they require children to compare their cognitive perspectives. The child is forced to decentralize because he or she has to coordinate his or her point of view with the cognitive perspective of the partners. The current representation of the child is restructured. As a result, the child acquires new knowledge – one which he or she would not have acquired in the course of activities performed alone.<sup>48</sup>

## Theatrical games

Children's play can take different forms. Role-playing is one of the fun activities that plays a fundamental role in the diagnostic and

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<sup>46</sup> A. Twardowski, *Rola pełnosprawnych rówieśników...*, op. cit., p. 83.

<sup>47</sup> L.S. Wygotski, *Wybrane prace psychologiczne*, PWN, Warszawa 1971, p. 544.

<sup>48</sup> A. Twardowski, *Rola pełnosprawnych rówieśników...*, op. cit., pp. 84–85.

therapeutic dimension. Małgorzata Taraszkiewicz describes this activity as a theatrical form (together with drama and simulation). According to the Author, role-playing is understood as behaviour depending on the place where a given person is or depending on the person that accompanies them.<sup>49</sup> The child has an opportunity to work out the social roles that are a part of it, and therefore gains experiences that give rise to confidence. This in turn means that he/she gains the option to look at his or her actions and make beneficial changes. On the other hand, playing a role other than that known to the child from autopsy – such as a fictional, symbolic figure – makes this method a source of knowledge of the outside world.<sup>50</sup> The child is given the opportunity to experience certain problems and find a solution for them. The simulations are based on a similar assumption – a child can practice certain skills or attitudes in a safe situation and face the consequences, because even if he makes a mistake, he can still fix it by playing his role again. This method involves training specific skills. This experience can be a source of a great sense of causality, subjectivity and control over one's life. It is important for the child to feel natural in a given situation, be aware of the reality, as it will train certain life skills, abilities such as confidence or effective communication.<sup>51</sup> Theatrical forms can shape emotional life and imagination, broaden horizons, build bridges of understanding, contacts, communities, satisfy and educate the needs of expression".<sup>52</sup>

Regardless of the context of any of the methods proposed by M. Taraszkiewicz, the most important is the goal of the educational

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<sup>49</sup> M. Taraszkiewicz, *Jak uczyć lepiej – czyli refleksyjny praktyk w działaniu*, Wydawnictwa CODN, Warszawa, 2000, p. 120.

<sup>50</sup> M. Taraszkiewicz, *Jak uczyć lepiej – czyli refleksyjny praktyk w działaniu*, Wydawnictwa CODN, Warszawa, 2000, p. 121.

<sup>51</sup> M. Taraszkiewicz, *Jak uczyć lepiej – czyli refleksyjny praktyk w działaniu*, Wydawnictwa CODN, Warszawa, 2000, p. 128.

<sup>52</sup> H. Guzy-Steinke, T. Wilk, *Uczeń i teatr. Realia a poszukiwania możliwości realizacji edukacji teatralnej w szkole*, Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne, „Akapit”, Toruń 2009, p. 69.

activity – i.e. the comprehensive development of the child’s personality. A pedagogue should be interested in stimulating the child’s imagination and empathy, developing his/her self-expression skills, shaping positive communication attitudes in conflict situations.<sup>53</sup> Each activation method is designed to provide the participant with a spiritually uplifting experience, offering solutions to a variety of problems in a safe environment. Even the sudden turns of action or the logical consequences of decisions made by a child does not pose a threat, as long as the teacher creates a positive atmosphere in the common education experience. By allowing for constructive criticism and expression of one’s own feelings and observations in an atmosphere of understanding and support, the teacher gives the less daring students a chance to develop something much more important – the feeling that they can express themselves in a favourable environment in which they will gain acceptance.

Romana Miller writes about the important role of theatrical forms for the development of a small child. Children from the age of three can better understand the world around them and themselves through these forms of influence, which can significantly influence their personality development.<sup>54</sup> The scientist also stipulates that for these purposes it is difficult to find a better form of influence. Another pedagogue, W. Renikowa, emphasizes that upbringing through theatre is the best way to the most complete development of the personality of pupils”.<sup>55</sup> Maria Dudzikowa also advocates preparing the child from the first stage of education to “self-determination, which is made in and through creation” and recommends that this approach be continued in further stages of edu-

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<sup>53</sup> I. Borecka, *Drama w programach edukacyjnych, wychowawczych i terapeutycznych*, [in:] I. Borecka, M. Widerowska i in., *Drama i arteterapia w szkole. Programy i scenariusze zajęć*, Wydawnictwo Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej im. Angelusa Silesiusa, Wałbrzych 2005, pp. 20–22.

<sup>54</sup> H. Guzy-Steinke, T. Wilk, *Uczeń i teatr. Realia a poszukiwania możliwości realizacji edukacji teatralnej w szkole*, Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne, „Akapit”, Toruń 2009, p. 68.

<sup>55</sup> H. Guzy-Steinke, T. Wilk, *Uczeń i teatr. Realia a poszukiwania możliwości realizacji edukacji teatralnej w szkole*, Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne, „Akapit”, Toruń 2009, p. 71.

cation. The author goes on to write that in participatory education it is important to give the pupil an opportunity to play as many roles as possible so that he or she can experience many different points of view<sup>56</sup>. The child, as an actor, expresses himself through playing. "An actor-creator is a creator who, in intentionally composed theatrical actions, through acting, publicly expresses his/her personality, reveals his/her world of values and spirituality, communicates his/her beliefs, desires, aspirations to others"<sup>57</sup>.

## Methodological assumptions of the research

### Organization and research area

From September 2009, a pilot project of inclusive education for children with Down syndrome in preschool education was implemented in Wrocław. The project was initiated by parents from the Lower Silesian Association for People with Down Syndrome "Razem". From 2010 the project has been approved as a systemic solution (3–5 children with homogeneous disabilities – Down syndrome – attend the group). The implementation of the inclusive education program in selected Wrocław facilities was a result of information on the previous difficult educational paths for children with Down syndrome in integration facilities.

Also, research on the possibilities of children with developmental disabilities and ad hoc observations of the functioning of such children in peer relations led to the conclusion that the social skills of children with disorders were developed by imitating the behaviour of their peers.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> H. Guzy-Steinke, T. Wilk, *Uczeń i teatr. Realia a poszukiwania możliwości realizacji edukacji teatralnej w szkole*, Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne „Akapit”, Toruń 2009, p. 66.

<sup>57</sup> A. Włoch, K. Maćkowiak, *Pedagogiczne aspekty procesu kreowania postaci scenicznej w teatrze*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Opolskiego, Opole 2016, p. 55.

<sup>58</sup> A. Jędrzejowska, *Stymulacja zaburzonych funkcji psychicznych u dzieci w wieku przedszkolnym*. Master's thesis written under the direction of prof. dr. hab Stanisław



Criteria for the selection of the examined children according to the level of functioning:

- age of children 4-7 years (data taken from children's documentation);
- ability to communicate verbally (in words or simple sentences) or to use non-verbal communication (gestures, facial expressions) (data taken from the child's records);
- level of mental development: mild to moderate intellectual disability (data taken from the child's records);
- diagnosis of the child: Down syndrome (data taken from the child's records: medical certificates, certificates from psychological-educational counselling centres);
- children attended specialist classes within the framework of Early Intervention and Development Assistance (Wrocław Model of Improvement Program).

For 9 months I observed 15 children with Down syndrome (selected according to the above criteria) in situations of casual play, guided play and targeted activities. The observations were recorded

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Mihilewicz, University of Wrocław, Wrocław 2009 (the aim of the research was to show the possibilities and limitations of applying selected therapeutic methods in the work with pre-school children with impaired mental functions. In W. Sherborne's Developing Movement Method, the observation of a peer, who was also taking part in the activity, was encouraging and mobilizing for some children, the information carrier in this method was movement, and words were a secondary element, so the method was not burdened with language barriers, body language became universal, accessible to all and understandable (this was an opportunity especially for children with speech disorders, who did not have to use verbal language, but an easy and expressive body language). In the Polysensory Stimulation Method according to the Seasons of the Year, J. Kielin's Morning Circle, children learned about their surroundings on concrete and visual material (they could touch, smell, taste, see). The research led to the following conclusions: *It must be said that children became more open, they played more in the group, they could focus on a specific activity, when playing they started to comment on what they were doing, this was especially visible in children with speech disorders. Their words may be unclear, specific, characteristic of the child, but express their emotions and needs. Children started to initiate contacts, involve third parties, encourage them with messages – play with us (to the volunteers who visited the group), children became creators and not just passive participants.*

on disordered sociograms, which are used for small groups. During the construction of the sociograms, I placed child X, whom I was observing at that moment, in the middle of the sheet of paper. Then I drew symbols of people who were chosen, disregarded or rejected by child X and vice versa, people who chose, disregarded or rejected child X when it took the initiative. The analysis of this kind of data allowed to identify those who were more popular, who receive the most positive and the least negative choices, those who were rejected (the most negative choices), disregarded (the least positive choices and the least negative choices). The records revealed the criteria used to select the children in the group. For example, often during casual play children without disabilities did not play or played briefly with children with Down syndrome because of the latter's impaired communication skills. Limited development of motor skills and coordination also made it difficult to play together. Children with Down syndrome, on the other hand, often did not understand the rules of the proposed games; they stood beside.

During the games organized by the teacher, they withdrew from the tasks that required a longer concentration span, physical activity (i.e. poor elements of their development). Also activities conducted with the use of verbal methods and concerning abstract topics caused their withdrawal. If the task in a team or in a pair was above the developmental capabilities of a child with Down syndrome, then often the child made it difficult for the child without disabilities to complete the task by accosting him or her, snorting, or taking away the tools needed to complete the task.

Observation in task situations could help to make the teacher and educator, as well as group members, aware that each task requires different skills and that not everyone was able to meet the requirements. This induced a way of thinking about children with Down syndrome - as a group of children with a specific developmental path.

The following research problems determining particular research stages were formulated:

The problem of the first stage (when observations recorded in sociograms were conducted):

Is the role of preschool education in supporting the social development of children with Down syndrome noticeable?

Questions posed in the first stage of the research:

- 1.1. Does the psychosocial development of children with Down syndrome enable them to participate in tasks performed in their age group?
- 1.2. How does a child with Down syndrome experience contact with his or her peers?
- 1.3. How do healthy children react to the behaviour of their peers with disabilities?

Problems of the second stage:

What areas of social development can be developed in children with Down syndrome using individual therapeutic programs with elements of alternative and supportive communication methods?<sup>59</sup>

Questions posed in the second stage of the research:

- 2.1. Is it possible to teach a child with Down syndrome basic self-service activities or to improve the level of performance, and to what extent?
- 2.2. Is it possible to teach a child with Down syndrome to communicate, and to what extent?
- 2.3. Does playing together with peers create opportunities for the physical development of children with Down syndrome and to what extent?
- 2.4. Are playful and task-based situations an opportunity for children with Down syndrome to develop the ability to recognize and express their emotions correctly?

The diagnosis of psychosocial development of children was also based on the analysis of documentation, as another source of data collection, i.e.:

- decisions from psychological-educational counselling centres on the need for special education,

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<sup>59</sup> The applied therapeutic programs using elements of alternative and supportive communication methods constitute a separate issue and do not concern the presented topic.

- the individual educational and therapeutic program from 2010/2011 preceding the year of the experimental procedure,
- the journal of remedial and educational activities conducted by the teacher,
- a journal of observations of the behaviour of children with Down syndrome in situations of free play, guided play and organized activities prepared in the form of sociograms,
- interviews conducted with parents, teachers and educators dealing with the child.

The tools for diagnosing psychosocial development were P-PAC and PAC-1 developed by H.C. Gunzburg. The abbreviation PAC comes from the English name for the method: Progress Assessment Chart, which means evaluation of progress in social development. In the Polish version it is known as P-PAC, PAC-1 and PAC-2.<sup>60</sup> I have diagnosed the social development of children at the beginning of the study (pretest) and at the end (after 9 months).

### **Analysis and interpretation of test results**

I divided the image of progress in the social development of children into three levels:

- children with very visible progress in all areas (8 children/15 children),
- children with progress visible in all or some areas (clear uneven development of areas; 4 children/15 children),
- children with poorly visible progress in all areas (3 children/15 children).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> T. Witkowski, *Metody PAC i PAS w społecznej rewalidacji upośledzonych umysłowo*, Centralny Ośrodek Metodyczny Poradnictwa Wychowawczo-Zawodowego Ministerstwa Edukacji Narodowej, Warszawa 1988, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> All diagrams of progress in social development, including tables, are included in the post-doctoral monograph by A. Jędrzejowska, *Wspomaganie rozwoju społecznego dzieci z zespołem Downa w przedszkolnej grupie rówieśniczej*, Wydawnictwo Atut, Wrocław 2017.

During the observation, I focused on the possibilities and limitations of developing children's social competences. In the sphere of socialization, different levels of functioning could be observed. The ability to focus on the partner was common for all children. Children reached out their hands towards the other person when they wanted to draw attention to something or to themselves; they smiled. They reacted with mimicry adequate to the observed, experienced event (emotionally clear, e.g. joyful, sad). The children waved their hands, in response, to say goodbye and hello. Parallel forms of play dominated their playful activity; alongside other children, without interaction. They often moved away from the group and organized individual games, e.g. in the kitchen corner or the book corner. There were also children who stood next to other children and just watched. Association games appeared (with external support) when children played together with other children, but without taking on tasks. The expectation of being praised for good behaviour was common to all children. The majority of children showed satisfaction and animation when hearing music (singing and dancing), some imitated the gestures of their peers or the teacher, accompanying the music, and movement games, others sang with their own vocalizations or single syllables. All of the children took part in a simple ball game (alternate rolling). Board games, e.g. ludo caught their attention only for a short period of time, and pawns were rather used for manipulative games.

In terms of communication: I made eye contact with all the children, which was also a communication channel (all the children communicated their needs and emotions by looking). Almost all of them used an alternate, consonant mimic dialogue. Children were able to share a common field of attention, though at a different time. All children used their own vocalizations. The verbal channel (single words) determined greater openness to interactions with peers in 5/15 children. All children, when hearing their name, reacted with animation, using specific reactions depending on their psychophysical abilities: they repeated their name, pointed at themselves, smiled, directed their eyes towards the person calling them.

Most of them were able to ask for a certain activity (e.g. jumping on a ball), ask for things, e.g. a toy that was located in a higher place (some used a pointing gesture, some said "give", and some children only directed their gaze at the object they wanted) or used a gesture. They did not use the verbal question: *why?* If they did not understand, they would usually communicate with an enquiring look. They did not understand the relations between time and space. While listening to longer and more varied stories, they quickly got distracted; they needed pictures to keep focusing on the story, to understand it, and then to remember it. Children searched for the source of sounds, some of them made attempts to recognize and imitate it (e.g. animal sounds).

During guided activities, most of the children showed an understanding of simple instructions, but they exercised them in a selective manner. Children got involved when looking at children's books with their peers or teachers; they used numerous vocalizations and communicated with mimicking when looking at new pictures. They reacted more lively to familiar images (e.g. animals).

Manual skills and dexterity were underdeveloped. Children were reluctant to reach for crayons (drawing at the stage of scribbling). They preferred painting with paints on large sheets of paper. They needed much more time and attempts to perform fine motor skills tasks than their peers.

Spontaneous activity was dominated by schematic playing with objects, playing with the same car, the same doll, looking at the same book. Half of the children were diagnosed with right hand domination. Also half of the children distinguished red, green, yellow, blue, white, black. All the children had a developed concept of object constancy. Despite difficulties with fine motor skills, they made attempts to cut with scissors, wind thread on a spool. Children pointed to their own body parts and that of others (6/15 children required a visual hint). They had difficulty with simple classification of objects, e.g. based on whom they belonged to: *mine* – *not mine*, a friend's, the teacher's (sometimes they took other children's private toys or a sandwich/piece of meat from another plate and

resisted when their peers tried to take their property back). The children divided the objects according to their characteristics: tasty – not tasty, nice – not nice, i.e. based on their sensory experiences (taste, smell, touch).

In free play, children with low social and cognitive skills often experienced rejection, disregard or aroused controversy. The level of social (also communication) competence was particularly evident in play, as children with Down syndrome often did not understand the rules of play proposed by their non-disabled peers. Also, the limited development of motor skills and coordination hindered play together. A. Maciarz<sup>62</sup> emphasizes that the mastery of various types of social skills is conditioned by the development of motor, emotional and motivational and intellectual dispositions in children. In task situations, delayed psychomotor development did not allow for full participation in the activities envisaged by the program for the whole group. Disturbances of mental processes such as memory, thinking, association, speech had a decisive influence on the level of involvement. It was noticeable that children had difficulties in understanding the requirements formulated exclusively by means of verbal communication. Children who understood the tasks had difficulties with their realization due to delayed motor development. Observing the emotional reactions of children in these situations brought to mind a comparison with the emotional reactions of a person who had just missed his/her bus: regret, frustration, anger, depression, submission, withdrawal. Such situations occurred several times a day in the case of each of the 15 children. This was transferred to the experience of contact with peers. If speech (receptive and expressive function), motor development, reaction time, cognitive abilities were developed enough to allow children to participate in games proposed by their peers, then children with Down syndrome were attractive play partners. Otherwise, they looked for their own safe niche to play together.

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<sup>62</sup> A. Maciarz, *Revalidacja społeczna dzieci*, Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, Zielona Góra 1981, p. 23.

## Conclusions

Kindergarten is a time of transition from alienation to participation in a peer group. Each child needs the right conditions to move away from oneself to the Other, regardless of their health. Especially in a peer group, children can develop empathy, the ability to interact with others, the ability to share their own things, as well as their experiences, and the ability to react to events in their peer's life. These components of social competence have been particularly active in children with Down syndrome compared to other children with disorders. The children presented an attitude of concern for someone else's suffering; they often recreated the event that caused their peer to suffer, such as a fall or an injured knee, or grasped their own head when their peer had a headache. The children pointed out, to the teacher or other children, a friend who, for various reasons, experienced some kind of suffering and tried to explain what happened (using gestures, vocals, words). This became the foundation for building a bond that was formed between the children. It was strengthened through play, and children with Down syndrome played together in the free activities. Most often these included different theatrical forms (short scenes with dressing up – children had access to a suitcase with different clothes in the theatre corner), puppet theatres, shadow theatres. Their psycho-physical abilities did not limit their participation in these forms of play. They experienced acceptance from each other, which further deepened openness and trust between them. Their sense of subjectivity was particularly strengthened during this kind of play. Rejected in play by children without disabilities, they regained their sense of dignity and value in mutual reception, watching, applauding during role-playing or simulation. During these activities, the children were free to choose, make conscious decisions and deliberately direct their actions. This was also associated with a sense of causality, i.e. influence on the course of events (when they were actor-directors). Children "on stage" also experienced a sense of responsibility for their actions, as well as a sense of being equal (not worse) in contact with



another person. The alternation of the actor and then the viewer gave the opportunity to shape the skills of alternate listening and being listened to in everyday dialogue, not only during the play. A group of children with Down syndrome began to function within a group which presented patterns of normal social behaviour. The everyday experience of the quality of interaction between these children led to the conclusion that, in addition to social development, children had a chance for a happy personal development. A fundamental task for the organizers of preschool education is to build an environment in which children with disabilities are surrounded by peers similar to them (in different ways) who are more *understandable, more like themselves, less different*. The idea of mutual similarity brings the children closer to each other, protects them from loneliness. A bond based on dialogue that is understandable to the children provides a mechanism that opens the opportunities for the development of social competences in children.

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## Online education of students with mild intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder during the COVID-19 pandemic

**ABSTRACT:** Marzena Buchnat, Aneta Wojciechowska, *Online education of students with mild intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy, no. 29, Poznań 2020. Pp. 149–171. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-391X. e-ISSN 2658-283X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ikps.2020.29.07>

The situation of the pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 disease is a new and unknown situation for everyone, causing fear and uncertainty. It is also a situation that has led to numerous changes in the everyday life of many people, including students who had to adapt to the new reality of distance education from day to day. The paper concerns with the situation of online education of students with mild intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder. It is an attempt to indicate the difficulties encountered by this group of students in the situation of distance learning from a perspective of both the student and the teacher. The paper also indicates the issues which should be considered in this education, the way of its adaptation to the possibilities of the discussed group of students, as well as elements which are really important in this education.

**KEY WORDS:** online teaching, student with mild intellectual disability, student with ASD, COVID-19

## Introduction

The pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 disease has caused a crisis in various areas of social life. This situation surprised and even exceeded expectations of numerous adults, let alone children. Disintegration of everyday life in all its areas of rest, study, work, social contacts causes strong, primarily negative emotions. The threat of disease as well as impaired functioning on many levels causes a strong fear that most of the society has to face. The pandemic has also changed the child's world – including the way of school operation, because education has been moved to distance mode. Changing the way of teaching, social isolation and a widespread crisis causing emotional burden is a huge challenge for children and adolescents, especially those for whom such changes are difficult to understand such as: children with mild intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The article provides the analysis of the way this group of students deals with the new reality of distance school education.

### **Cognitive abilities of students with an intellectual disability and students with ASD**

Distance education introduced to schools is a completely new situation for students, as well as parents and teachers. Until now, e-learning has been conducted as an additional form, and it was one of the possibilities to use. Currently, it constitutes the only available method of education. In the case of students with mild intellectual disability and students with ASD, this can be a challenge, because as reported by Z. Gajdzica<sup>1</sup>, they require special approach to their educational needs. This means that education should be adapted to their abilities and needs, which are different because of their level of functioning.

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<sup>1</sup> Z. Gajdzica (2011), *Sytuacje trudne w opinii nauczycieli klas integracyjnych*, Kraków, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”.

The basic prerequisite for working with students with mild intellectual disability is significant substantiation resulting from the achieved level of thinking. The consequence of the inability to master the level of abstract and hypothetical-deductive reasoning are difficulties in analysing, synthesising, abstracting, and generalising.<sup>2</sup> They cause that the education of these children must be based on the concrete reality on the basis of which the teacher will guide the child through individual processes to obtain final conclusions. During the analysis of a task, children with mild intellectual disability, because of their concrete level of thinking, often make mistakes regarding both logic and losing threads, and reveal inability to generalise or abstract. Rigid thinking and low ability to stop their reactions results in their worse adaptation to the changing conditions of cognition. Lack of thorough analysis of the task, referring it to previous experience and making a critical assessment of undertaken actions means that children with mild intellectual disability usually learn by trial and error, rather than planned strategies that are most effective for a given individual. All these factors cause deficits in receiving information. On the other hand, inaccurate information gathering may be one of the reasons for the lack of success in the further learning proces.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, difficulties in thinking prevent the use of better and better memory strategies<sup>4</sup>, which determines the limitation in this respect. These students have problems in all memory processes, from coding acquired information, through actively maintaining information in the articulatory loop, to the general short-term and long-term memory deficit.<sup>5</sup> Deficits in the area of information re-

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<sup>2</sup> J. Wyczęsany, Z. Gajdzica (2006), *Uwarunkowania edukacji i rehabilitacji uczniów o specjalnych potrzebach rozwoju*, Kraków, Wyd. Naukowe AP, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> M. Buchnat (2015), *Formy organizacyjne kształcenia dziecka z lekką niepełnosprawnością intelektualną a jego kompetencje społeczne*, Poznań, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, pp. 35-43.

<sup>4</sup> R. Stefańska-Klar R. (2005), *Późne dzieciństwo. Młodszy wiek szkolny*, [in:] B. Harwas-Napierała, J. Trempała (red.), *Psychologia rozwoju człowieka* (vol. 2, pp. 130-163), Warsaw, Wyd. Naukowe PWN, p. 135.

<sup>5</sup> E. Nęcka (2003), *Inteligencja: geneza - struktura - funkcje*, Gdańsk, GWP, pp. 182-185.

tention strategies result in reduced memory persistence. They better memorise material related to their own experience, based on emotions, which is stored in episodic memory. This type of memory in children with mild intellectual disability is present at the level of normal children. However, significant limitation is observed in terms of semantic memory, because memorisation of language messages that form the knowledge system requires complex conceptual operations that are disturbed.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, students with mild intellectual disability require polysensory cognition, during the activity preferably associated with emotions and frequent repetitions, so that the material is remembered. It is also important that they can use the newly acquired knowledge in practice, otherwise they often learn without understanding.<sup>7</sup> Because the attention of these children is poorly split and alternating, and easily distracted, they require elimination of stimuli that interfere with the learning process. Elimination of interfering stimuli is both necessary in the child's environment and reflected in the proper construction of teaching aids and worksheets. Low split attention skills mean that these children cannot effectively use various sources in the process of acquiring information.

The reduction of unwanted stimuli and properly prepared didactic material are also justified by limitation in the area of perception. The process of perception in children with mild intellectual disability is limited, which makes the perception of reality simplified and quite poor. These children do not notice the details or the occurring relationships, which results in a superficial acquisition of information. This situation is aggravated by the aforementioned deficits in concentration of attention, which further impede the acquisition of data needed to solve a specific task. Auditory and visual perception disorders also have an impact on inaccuracy, a smaller range and a slower pace of perception. These disorders affect the

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<sup>6</sup> R. Kościelak (1989), *Psychologiczne podstawy upośledzonych umysłowo*, Warsaw, Wyd. Naukowe PWN p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> J. Głodkowska (2000), *Pomóżmy dziecku z upośledzeniem umysłowym doświadczać przestrzeni*, Warsaw, Wyd. WSFS. p. 68.



inaccuracy of perception, which results in the fact that children with mild intellectual disability have a distorted perception of reality. They mainly notice the external characteristics of objects, e.g. colour, ignoring their detailed features. They have a problem with placing them in space and shaping their concept. This level of perception causes difficulties in comparing objects, finding their similarities and differences, as well as noticing interrelationships. Children with mild intellectual disability perceive much less objects at a given time than children with normal intellectual capacity, which results from the slower course of cortical processes, and the perception of the surrounding reality is even poorer.<sup>8</sup>

Difficulties in cognitive processes also affect the language development of children with mild intellectual disability in all areas which include: lexical, morphosyntactic, phonological and pragmatic ones.<sup>9</sup> Limited vocabulary range, lack of understanding of the interlocutor's messages, their location in a given reality, causes a lot of communication disruptions. It happens that students with mild intellectual disability misunderstand verbal instructions on how to perform a task and do not know what information to look for. Therefore, the formulated instructions, materials for independent reading or listening to must be properly prepared in a way to be understood by the child.

As a result of such a course of cognitive development, these children show a low degree of cognitive interests, are not very inventive, passive in thought, and unfortunately also have a fairly low level of motivation to learn. Building both external and internal motivation in children with mild intellectual disability is largely difficult. Internal motivation requires the ability to analyse one's own actions. It is difficult for these students to analyse and under-

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<sup>8</sup> M. Buchnat (2015), *Formy organizacyjne kształcenia dziecka z lekką niepełnosprawnością intelektualną a jego kompetencje społeczne*, Poznań, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, p. 40; J. Wyczesany, Z. Gajdzica (2006), *Uwarunkowania edukacji i rehabilitacji uczniów o specjalnych potrzebach rozwoju*, Kraków, Wyd. Naukowe AP, p. 68.

<sup>9</sup> U. Jęczeń (2003), *Uwarunkowania rozwoju kompetencji językowej i komunikacyjnej u dzieci upośledzonych umysłowo*, Logopedia, 32, pp. 127–138.

stand the reasons for undertaken actions, as well as to track the course of their own actions and subject it to critical analysis. In building external motivation, ideological and world-view-related reasons or universal human values are too abstract for them and do not increase their activity.

Cognitive reasons are also not effective because of the low level of their cognitive activity. The most effective strengtheners are specific stimuli that correspond to the level of thinking of these children and provide a noticeable signal for them to change their behaviour. Therefore, children with mild intellectual disability show the greatest learning effectiveness when they are focused on achieving a specific goal, especially when this process takes place in a collaboration-oriented group.<sup>10</sup>

Deficits present in children with mild intellectual disability are also characteristic of children with autism spectrum disorder. If the cognitive abilities of a student with ASD are discussed, the above difficulties should be considered in the case of a child with multiple disabilities: intellectual disability and ASD. This multiple disability may relate to different degrees of intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder, however, in the present paper special attention is focused on children with ASD having normal intellectual capacity or with mild intellectual disability and children with mild intellectual disability alone.

On the one hand, the learning abilities of a child with autism spectrum disorder are conditioned by specific processes related to cognitive abilities that are the same as those described above for students with intellectual disability, and on the other hand, by specific features characteristic of ASD. Students with autism spectrum disorder have psychoeducational profiles that are characterised by uneven development patterns. Studies indicate that deficits in numerous cognitive functions may occur, but this does not apply to all people with ASD. Intellectual disability occurs in most people with

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<sup>10</sup> D. Mitchell (2008), *What Really Works in Special and Inclusive Education*, London -New York, Routledge.

autism<sup>11</sup>, which means that the learning processes of this group of students should be considered depending on the cognitive abilities of each student. In the case of the presence of intellectual disability, it can be assumed that learning processes are similar to the learning processes in children and adolescents with different degrees of intellectual disability. The above-mentioned difficulties, are additionally accompanied by problems in the area of speech and communication, greater difficulties in the area of social understanding and learning, as well as more common behaviour interfering with the acquisition of knowledge, such as stereotypes, stimulations, routine, etc.

The involvement in the surrounding world of a child with ASD from an early age is definitely lower compared to children without this disorder. Exploration of the environment and desire to learn provide the opportunity to practice different skills and acquire knowledge relevant for cognitive and social development. The low level of involvement, especially in the social aspect of life, limits learning abilities for children with ASD.<sup>12</sup> One of the basic problems in social learning is the difficulty in acquiring skills by imitation, which is the basis of learning as early as in infancy in areas such as play, speech and social functioning. Deficiencies in this respect observed in people with ASD already in the preschool period, affect learning. This is because this ability first determines the basis for further acquisition of basic communication skills, and in later periods also gives the opportunity to effectively learn social communication, peer relationships, but also provides the basis for seeking ways to solve numerous everyday problems.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> G. La Malfa, S. Lassi, M. Bertelli, R. Salvini, G.F. Placidi (2004), *Autism and intellectual disability: a study of prevalence on a sample of the Italian population*, Journal of Intellectual Disability Research, 48(3), pp. 262-267; A.L. Hedvall (2014), *Autism in preschool children: Cognitive aspects and interventions*, Printed in Gothenburg, Sweden, Ale Tryckteam, Bohus.

<sup>12</sup> D. Keen (2009), *Engagement of Children with Autism in Learning*, Australasian Journal of Special Education, Volume 33, Issue 2, pp. 130-140.

<sup>13</sup> E. Pisula (2015), *Autyzm. Od badań mózgu do praktyki psychologicznej*, Gdańsk, GWP; H. Sowden, M. Perkins, J. Clegg (2008), *The co-development of speech and gesture*

In addition to difficulties in the social area, impairment of social cognition, including deficiencies in the ability to split attention, notice and recognise the emotions of other people, deficits in the area of prediction and conclusion concerning emotional states and beliefs of other people, and so in everything that form theory of mind, can be noticed.

In the course of cognitive processes characteristic of people with ASD, disorders at the level of central coherence, which in educational practice causes deficiencies in paying attention to important tips and information, and directing it often to elements of little importance and sometimes unnecessary, is also noticed. The weak central coherence theory concerns limitation of the ability to understand the context or excessive attention to details in people with ASD. Weak central coherence may cause difficulties in receiving information from various areas, including non-verbal and verbal communication (e.g. difficulties in understanding complex messages with a lot of information, focusing on unimportant elements of a statement). Difficulties in this area are recognised as a different perceptive and cognitive style, which is of great importance for the communication and social functioning of a person with ASD.<sup>14</sup> Numerous more complex difficulties in the reception of social communication result from a disorder in the development of theory of mind, which in turn makes it difficult to assess, among others, the intentionality of people, non-verbal communication, understanding of metaphorical, figurative, ambiguous language, and cause difficulties in tasks involving imagination, pretending, creating situations, etc.<sup>15</sup>

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*in children with autism*, *Clinical Linguistics and Phonetics*, 22 (10–11), pp. 804–813; A. Cangialose, P.J. Allen (2014), Screening for autism spectrum disorders in infants before 18 months of age: *Pediatric nursing* 40(1), pp. 33–37.

<sup>14</sup> U. Frith (2008), *Autyzm: Wyjaśnienie tajemnicy*, Gdańsk, GWP.

<sup>15</sup> See: M. Prentka (2015), Aetiology of Theory of Mind disorders for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Neurocognitive therapeutic intervention: *Transdyscyplinarne Studia o Kulturze (i) Edukacji*, 10, pp. 87–100; A. Pluta (2012), Mechanizmy poznawcze teorii umysłu: *Roczniki psychologiczne*, volume XV, no. 1, pp. 7–30;

Students with ASD also have problems in planning their activities, as well as difficulties in undertaking actions related to solving a problem. This is related to the above areas, or understanding social situations and the skills to effectively plan problem solving strategies. In addition, they have difficulties with mental flexibility, generating new ideas and self-control.

The strong point of students with ASD is memory, especially visual memory. They memorise visual material more easily than the one transmitted in other forms or without the possibility of visual support. This sphere also positively affects the performance of tasks based on visual and visual-spatial perception. Therefore, people with ASD achieve significantly higher results on a non-verbal scale than on a verbal scale in tests involving the study of learnt functions. In these studies it was also observed that they deal better with abstract problems than with analysing problems related to social situations. Similarly, they achieve lower results in subtests concerning vocabulary and understanding.<sup>16</sup>

People with ASD also have difficulty in learning information patterns, which is associated with problems with learning basic event strategies if the strategy of hypothesis testing cannot be used. Studies also indicate that people with ASD have difficulties in implicit and latent learning, and this way of learning is more effective also in language learning, approaches to solving mathematical problems, etc. The performance of implicit learning tasks is strongly correlated with ASD symptomatology, including communication skills, social skills, and the occurrence of repetitive behaviour.

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S. Baron-Cohen (2001), Theory of mind in normal development and autism: *Prisme*, 34, pp. 174–183; M. Dekowska, P. Jaśkowski (2011), W świecie masek, czyli o tym, jak osoby z autyzmem spostrzegaj ludzką twarz: *Roczniki psychologiczne*, volume XIV, no. 1, pp. 91–125.

<sup>16</sup> V.E.A. Brunsdon, E. Colvert, C. Ames, T. Garnett, N. Gillan, V. Hallett, S. Lietz, E. Woodhouse, P. Bolton, F. Happe (2015), *Exploring the cognitive features in children with autism spectrum disorder, their co-twins, and typically developing children within a population - based sample*, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 56: 8, pp. 893–902.

At the level of executive functions, people with ASD also have difficulty in splitting attention, persistent pursuit of the task, and they experience lack of impulse control.<sup>17</sup>

## Distance education of students with disability

Deficits in children with mild intellectual disability and in children with autism spectrum disorder determine the overall picture of learning difficulties specific to this group of children that must be considered in conducting education – distance education of these students.

Distance education of students with mild intellectual disability and ASD requires teachers to prepare it in a special way, and to find the right way to implement it that meets the needs and abilities of these students. There are many premises that indicate that distance education can support the development of people with special educational needs, but unfortunately also cause their further marginalisation. In the current compulsion of distance education, one of the problems determining the quality of education includes digital competence of students, their parents, as well as teachers, necessary for participation in this form of education. Previous studies in this area have revealed that they are at a very differentiated level<sup>18</sup>, and

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<sup>17</sup> J.L. Amaral, S. Collins, K.T. Bohache, H. Kloos (2012), *Beyond the Black-and-White of Autism: How Cognitive Performance Varies with Context*, [in:] *Current Topics in Children's Learning and Cognition*, edited by Heidi Kloos, Bradley Morris, Joseph Amaral, chapter 6, pp. 105–122.

<sup>18</sup> S. Cortesi, A. Hasse, A. Lombana-Bermudez, S. Kim, U. Gasser (2020). *Youth and digital citizenship+ (plus): Understanding skills for a digital world. Youth and Media, Berkman Klein Center for Internet & Society*. Retrieved from: <https://cyber.harvard.edu/publication/2020/youth-and-digital-citizenship-plus> (access: 20.05.2020); J. Pyżalski (2019a), *Cyfrowa pedagogika medialna*, [in:] Z. Kwieciński, B. Śliwerski (ed.), *Pedagogika. Podręcznik akademicki*, Warsaw, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN SA; D. Smahel, H. Machackova, G. Mascheroni, L. Dedkova, E. Staksrud, K. Ólafsson, S. Livingstone, U. Hasebrink (2020), *EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries*. EU Kids Online.

in the current situation it is difficult to improve them. This is even more important because owing to the pandemic, it is not possible to choose the way of education, and thus to supplement or explain issues that the children did not understand online. The problem may also be the availability of computer equipment or broadband Internet, which is the basis of distance education. The study conducted by Piotr Plichta<sup>19</sup> revealed that people with a disability have less access to such tools, thus confirming the existence of digital inequalities in this social group. However, this author<sup>20</sup> points out that limitations in terms of competence are a much more serious challenge in the pedagogical perspective.

International studies<sup>21</sup> reveal that students with disabilities experience barriers to direct access to e-learning courses. In the study conducted by J.B. Roberts, L.A. Crittenden and J.C. Crittenden<sup>22</sup>, almost half of students with a disability declared that their disa-

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<sup>19</sup> P. Plichta (2018), *The use of information and communication technologies by young people with intellectual disabilities in the context of digital inequalities and digital exclusion*, "E-Methodology", 5, pp. 11–23.

<sup>20</sup> P. Plichta, *Różne konteksty nierówności cyfrowych a wyzwania dla zdalnej edukacji – propozycje rozwiązań*, [in:] *Edukacja w czasach pandemii wirusa COVID-19. Z dystansem o tym, co robimy obecnie jako nauczyciele*, ed. J. Pyżalski, Warsaw, EduAkcja, 2020, p. 71.

<sup>21</sup> Among others: N. Coombs (2010), *Making online teaching accessible: Inclusive course design for students with disabilities*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass; C.S. Fichten, V. Ferraro, J.V. Asuncion, C. Chwojka, M. Barile, M.N. Nguyen, R. Klomp, J. Wolforth, (2009) *Disabilities and e-learning problems and solutions: An exploratory study*. *Educational Technology and Society*, 12(4), 241–256; C.G. Keeler, M. Horney (2007). *Online course de-signs: Are special needs being met?* *American Journal of Distance Education*, 21(2), 61–75; National Council on Disability (2004). *Design for inclusion: Creating a new marketplace*. *National Council on Disability Website*. Retrieved from [http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2004/online\\_newmarketplace.htm](http://www.ncd.gov/newsroom/publications/2004/online_newmarketplace.htm); R. Thomson, C.S. Fichten, A. Havel, J. Budd, J. Asuncion (2015), *Blending universal design, e-learning, and information and communication technologies*. In S. Burgstahler (ed.), *Universal design in higher education: From principles to practice* (pp. 275–284). Cambridge, MA, Harvard Education Press.

<sup>22</sup> J.B. Roberts, L.A. Crittenden, J.C. Crittenden (2011), *Students with disabilities and online learning: A cross-institutional study of perceived satisfaction with accessibility compliances and services*. *Internet and Higher Education*, 14(4), pp. 242–250.

bility had a negative impact on their success during online classes. In another study, female students with a disability and learning difficulties declared that they had not received adequate support and were less satisfied with online courses than women who had no learning difficulties.<sup>23</sup> It is believed that even those people with a disability who have access to digital technologies are unable to reap all the benefits which this technology provides to other people.<sup>24</sup> These inequalities are noticeable, despite the fact that studies of differences in the performance of student subgroups by gender, age or race rarely analyse differences between students with disabilities.<sup>25</sup> In order to eliminate these differences, activities aimed at ensuring universal access to online learning are being conducted. World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), introduced Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI)<sup>26</sup> in order to develop guidelines for web design accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities, but also those with temporary disabilities or people with variable abilities due to ageing

The guidelines developed by WAI, based on the four principles of accessibility (visibility, comprehensibility, feasibility, reliability) are aimed at creating web content accessible to people with disabilities. They are focused on the following quick tips:

- 1.1. Text alternatives – provide text alternatives for any non-text content so that it can be changed into other forms people need, such as braille, speech, symbols, or simpler language.
- 1.2. Time-based media – provide alternatives for time-based media.
- 1.3. Adaptable – create content that can be presented in different ways without losing information or structure.

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<sup>23</sup> T. Heiman (2008), *Females with learning disabilities taking on-line courses: Perceptions of the learning environments, coping and well-being*, Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 21(1), pp. 4–14.

<sup>24</sup> S. Burgstahler (2015), *Opening Doors or Slamming Them Shut?*, Online Learning Practices and Students with Disabilities Social Inclusion 3, 6, p. 84.

<sup>25</sup> D. Xu, S.S. Jaggars (2014), *Performance gaps between online and face-to-face courses: Differences across types of students and academic subject areas*, Journal of Higher Education, 85(5), 633–659.

<sup>26</sup> WAI. Introduction to understanding WCAG 2.0. Retrieved from <http://www.w3.org/TR/UNDERSTANDING-WCAG20/intro.htm>



- 1.4. Distinguishable – make it easier for users to see and hear content, including separating foreground from background.
- 2.1. Keyboard accessible – make all functionality available from a keyboard.
- 2.2. Enough time – provide users enough time to read and use content.
- 2.3. [Medical]Seizures – do not design content in a way that is known to cause seizures e.g., avoid flashing images
- 2.4. Navigable – provide ways to help users navigate, find content, and determine where they are.
  - 3.1. Readable – make text content readable and understandable.
  - 3.2. Predictable – make web pages appear and operate in predictable ways.
  - 3.3. Input assistance – help users avoid and correct mistakes.
- 4.1. Compatible – maximise compatibility with current and future user agents, including assistive technologies.<sup>27</sup>

These guidelines are updated regularly. Despite all these efforts, we are still dealing with unequal access to online content, especially for people with learning difficulties or cognitive limitations, as well as little preparation of teachers to conduct such classes for people with disabilities.<sup>28</sup>

### **Specific situation of students with mild intellectual disability and ASD in the context of distance education – difficulties and support**

Difficulties in the accessibility, as well as preparation of teachers to conduct online classes pose a threat to the efficiency and quality

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<sup>27</sup> S. Burgstahler (2015), *Opening Doors or Slamming Them Shut?*, Online Learning Practices and Students with Disabilities Social Inclusion 3, 6, p. 72.

<sup>28</sup> M.A. Gladhart (2010), *Determining faculty needs for delivering accessible electronically delivered instruction in higher education*, Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 22(3), pp. 185–196; K.D. Roberts, H.J. Park, S. Brown, B. Cook (2011), *Universal design for instruction in postsecondary education: A systematic review of empirically based articles*. Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 24(1), pp. 5–15.

of ongoing distance school classes, especially for people with mild intellectual disability and ASD, in the case of which adaptation needs are very large.

First of all, the difficulty for distance education is the very pandemic situation in which society, and above all children with mild intellectual disability and ASD, is placed. The social, educational and family situation that was caused by the COVID-19 epidemic is extremely incomprehensible to children and adolescents. It is a difficult situation for the whole society and, as W. Poleszak and J. Pyżalski point out, the observed experience includes such states that indicate passing through the crisis with its entire dynamics and going through stages from experiencing tension with growing emotions of fear, anger, irritation, through increasing discomfort in everyday life, search of time organization again, to the loss of emotional control, if in the earlier stages no relief of tension takes place.<sup>29</sup>

Children and adolescents with intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder are in an extremely difficult situation. The authors indicate that the dynamics of emotional burden depends on such components as: social context, family context and personality traits. Understanding of the social situation by people with intellectual disability or with ASD is limited to a varying extent. A change in daily routine can cause growing anxiety, a problem with accepting the lack of previous elements of everyday life. Students with the discussed disabilities often react with anger, aggression and self-aggression to a change in the predictable pattern. This condition may be exacerbated by omnipresent information about the threat to life and health in a situation of contact with other people. The mass media repeat messages incomprehensible to children and adolescents, which also introduce anxiety among their families. Staying at home with a disabled child for numerous hours a day can also build a tense atmosphere among family members. Hour-long care with-

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<sup>29</sup> W. Poleszak, J. Pyżalski J. (2020), *Psychologiczna sytuacja dzieci i młodzieży w dobie epidemii*, [in:] J. Pyżalski (2020), *Edukacja w czasach pandemii wirusa COVID-19, Z dystansem o tym, co robimy obecnie jako nauczyciele*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo EduAkcja Sp. z o.o.

out the possibility of moving, contacting specialists and teachers weakens the mental and physical condition of parents, which can lead to more frequent conflicts between family members, as well as negatively affect the mental condition of a disabled child. It may happen that this situation leads to the shaken sense of security.

Personality factors of a student with intellectual disability or with ASD (with or without intellectual disability) such as perseverance, knowledge of plans, life goals and ability to implement them in their own lives are very limited in ordinary everyday situations. The pandemic is not even more a condition for increasing the mobilisation to achieve one's goals or perseverance in overcoming the daily difficulties of staying at home most of the time. It is also hard to talk about attempts to look for positive elements of the situation in order to improve comfort.

Experiencing the crisis situation is difficult in the face of a pandemic for most students, and although at first the situation seemed to be temporary, which would last only for a while, finally the students have been "stuck" in online education for numerous weeks with very unclear rules for returning to intramural education.

The family situation of a child with intellectual disability and ASD in the face of online education is extremely complicated. It results from the specific nature of the functioning of such children – their ability to increase attention, motivation to make intellectual effort outside of school, cognitive abilities, as well as the severity of autism spectrum disorder symptoms.

Secondly, the problem is the organisation of distance education. Preparation of materials for distance education of students with mild intellectual disability and ASD is particularly difficult because of the specific nature of the learning process resulting from the development opportunities presented above. This obligates to use a significant individualisation. Transmission of contents in a manner consistent with the needs of these students requires diverse digital competencies of teachers. Those that will enable their students to learn based on contact, the concrete reality of a specific structure, form that allows independent work of the student, with the help of

their parents if necessary, also considering the digital competence of the student and their family, as well as the availability of equipment, the Internet, etc., additionally considering the ability to focus attention, communication, fatigability, the ability to work independently on a task, search for messages, reading comprehension, etc. The selection of contents, the scope of material to teach is also a challenge for teachers. This requires diagnosing the student concerning the extent to which it is possible to teach the general education program online, and the extent to which it is impossible. This also requires determining whether it is more important to maintain the knowledge and skills of the child, which they have already acquired in the course of previous education, or shape new competencies, or maybe only maintain a relationship with the student? The process of the evaluation of the student, the way it should look like and the issues it should concern are also difficult. Attention should be paid to whether the evaluation relates to the child's knowledge, skills or digital competencies, which may constitute an insurmountable threshold for the student. All these elements will determine the effectiveness of distance education of students with mild intellectual disability and with ASD.

The possibilities of supporting distance education in the current epidemiological situation in Poland and in the world pose a huge challenge to the school, teachers, therapists and parents. Therefore, it is necessary to raise a question concerning the most important elements in the whole approach to online teaching. When considering all the strengths and weaknesses of learning educational content, it should be emphasised that the most important thing is to maintain a healthy relationship between the student and the teacher as well as between the student and their parents and siblings. Creating a healthy relationship is aimed at ensuring the child's psychological comfort. It is important here to explain the situation as much as possible, supporting it with visuals – pictures, films. Visual transmission is of great importance here, because many people with intellectual disability and in particular people with ASD visually receive much more information than aurally. It is also important to

modify the daily schedule. There is a chance that organising and setting a new daily schedule will provide the child with a sense of security and greater predictability of what will happen.

In distance education, the form in which it takes place and the way it is adapted to the needs and abilities of both the child and the whole family are also important:

My child is 10 years old, they have autism and severe intellectual disability. They do not speak, do not understand the instructions directed to them, they are bad at using communication with pictures – they use only two pictures related to food. Favourite activities are walking, jumping and running as well as waving various objects. They attend the second grade in a school and education centre. In the current situation, teachers send tasks to complete at home. It is not possible for my child to sit down in front of the computer and listen to the teacher and feel like contacting them via the Internet. Therefore, we receive tasks to complete at home: worksheets for drawing, colouring, connecting elements, tracing letters, recalculating... My child has autism and severe intellectual disability. It is necessary to remind them to go to the toilet, they need help to get dressed, prepare food, wash themselves and organise every moment of the day. They neither count nor trace letters. They do not understand the instructions directed to them. Therefore, we organise ourselves – we teach them daily activities, try to introduce new symbols for communication. The only question is what my child did during those 1.5 years at school before... A view of mother of a child with ASD

Distance education reveals many aspects of the previous approach to the student: both strengths and weaknesses. It is worth considering here whether the problem is the lack of appropriate materials that can be sent to parents for education at home, or maybe the lack of knowledge about the student's abilities?

It is necessary to provide children and adolescents with information about the spreading disease and the risks associated with it to the possible extent. A lot of specialised materials in the form of films or leaflets, whose task is to draw children's attention to the

most important aspects of the situation appeared in the mass media. It should be remembered that children with intellectual disability, as well as children with ASD – also those with normal intellectual capacity – understand transmitted information very literally, with a strong emotional context, perceiving many things very individually. It is important, therefore, that the materials which are present to students do not intensify the fear, and focus more on solutions and guidelines to undertake activities for health care.

It is also important to take care of family and peer relationships. This applies on the one hand to the support of parents in building their competencies related to teaching their children at home, maintaining their psychophysical condition while caring for a child with a disability, and on the other hand, to attempts to continue peer relationships, which usually before the pandemic were not particularly developed and maintained by children with intellectual disability and ASD. W. Poleszak and J. Pyżalski indicate that numerous students, before the pandemic situation, maintained not only real, face to face contacts, but also communicated using electronic devices via various communicators, Facebook, and mobile phone.<sup>30</sup> This possibility is still available to many of them, but in the case of children with intellectual disability and ASD, this contact before the pandemic was usually minimal. First of all, the discussed group of children and adolescents, does not belong to the group of children who gather around them a large group of friends with whom they also willingly keep in touch online, secondly, as indicated by studies of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights<sup>31</sup> (2015) children and adolescents with disabilities more often are victims of peer violence, including cyberbullying.

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<sup>30</sup> W. Poleszak, J. Pyżalski (2020), *Relacje przede wszystkim – nawet jeśli obecnie jedynie zapośredniczone*, [in:] J. Pyżalski (2020), *Edukacja w czasach pandemii wirusa COVID-19, Z dystansem o tym, co robimy obecnie jako nauczyciele*, Warsaw, Wydawnictwo EduAkcja Sp. z o.o.

<sup>31</sup> FRA – European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights(2015), *Przemoc wobec dzieci niepełnosprawnych: prawodawstwo, polityki i programy w UE*, [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2015-violence-against-children-with-disabilities-summary\\_pl.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2015-violence-against-children-with-disabilities-summary_pl.pdf) [access on 18.05.2020].

Another aspect is the adaptation of materials for distance education. Many children with intellectual disability as well as with ASD need to learn using concrete material, which introduces difficulty in carrying out some of the tasks. Therefore, it is worth considering showing parents what objects in the immediate environment to use and what activities to organise for them. It may also be helpful to record simple instructional videos in which it will be presented how to perform a given task. Worksheets are of course an easier and faster solution, but many materials are inadequate to the child's abilities. Many of the children discussed above primarily need support in the development of communication and self-care skills. Therefore, it is worth focusing on communication aspects in distance learning. Some children using AAC systems may have difficulty understanding the online message. Preparation of content developed on the system used by the student supports their communication capabilities as well as acquiring knowledge. Sometimes it is worth focusing only on the use of the system by the family, because communication is above all the most important thing. When adjusting the materials to the needs of these students, the basic question concerning the content they introduce should be raised. In this difficult period they should be selected with great care. It is necessary to analyse whether students with mild intellectual disability and with ASD have the ability to master them themselves, or whether it is better to fix already known content. Children learning online must be successful, which will build their self-esteem, but also their motivation to make the effort of education. The person primarily responsible for achieving this success is the teacher, as they should prepare the process of distance education of children in such a way as to enable them to obtain a positive evaluation of their work.

## Summary

The situation which was faced by the society around the world when fighting against the COVID-19 pandemic is unique, rare and unexpected. Humanity stood face to face with a change in lifestyle,

reorganisation of opportunities to take up a job, maintaining social relations, as well as in the face of different family functioning. In addition to the numerous difficulties which are experienced by each family, one of the hardest ones is the organisation of education of children with intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder. The guidelines presented in the text are only guidelines for attempts to organise distance education of this group of students. It is difficult to talk here about ideal solutions, or about proven solutions. It is difficult, because we all were placed in this situation suddenly and without preparation. Despite this, it is worth remembering that the most important thing in online education of children is not focusing on teaching the general education program, but above all ensuring them a sense of security and maintaining those skills with which disabled students have been sent home for many weeks to give them the chance to return to intramural education ready to acquire further knowledge, skills and competencies.

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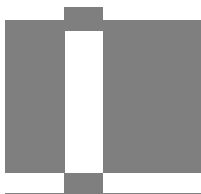


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## Students with special educational needs in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic – parents’ opinions

**ABSTRACT:** Maria Trzcińska-Król, *Students with special educational needs in distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic – parents’ opinions*. Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy, no. 29, Poznań 2020. Pp. 173–191. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-391X. e-ISSN 2658-283X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ikps.2020.29.08>

This article focuses on how children with special educational needs, psychological and pedagogical opinions and advice and guidance on how to work with them, and their parents are coping in a distance learning situation. Four research problems have been formulated, i.e., What changes do parents notice in the child’s motivation to learn during distance learning education? What limitations and difficulties arise with distance learning education? What are the attitudes of children during distance learning in the opinions of their parents? Do parents notice any progress in their children’s learning during distance learning education? For research on the key methods used and interview technique. The research was conducted on the basis of the opinions of parents, who during distance learning education were strongly involved in the educational processes of their children, and often took on the role of a teacher. Self-study for children is limited by the challenge, cannot be met, and remote learning evokes great emotions in them. In the opinion of parents, distance learning education tools are not conducive to the focus of attention on the part of their children.

**KEY WORDS:** parents, opinions, children with special educational needs, distance learning

The presence of modern technologies in the lives of children and youth is a fact. A computer with access to the Internet, a phone, a tablet have been and still are tools used at various levels, e.g. as a form of “spending free time, a desired element of lifestyle, an instrument for communicating, teaching or finally as a source of danger”.<sup>1</sup> The manner in which we use these tools can bring positive results, enrich us and our actions, be constructive or on the contrary, contribute to destruction, disintegration, destruction of personality, psyche, behaviour. In the school environment, when children and young people attended regular school classes, many parents tried to limit their children’s access to new technologies, especially in the case of younger students, often treating access to ICT (Information and Communication Technology) tools as a reward, or as a form of entertainment after school duties have been fulfilled. In the current epidemiological situation, due to the closure of schools and forced isolation, ICT tools have become the only channel of communication between teachers and children and the tools that allow for the realization of educational processes. All participants in these processes had to switch from the option of using ICT tools in education, to the necessity of using them, regardless of their competences, skills, technological capabilities. Teachers had to change the forms and methods of work and transfer the methods of activating the learner, which have a huge impact on the effectiveness of learning, into virtual reality, regardless of their digital competences. And as research shows, these are varied. Both the digital competences of parents, teachers and students themselves.<sup>2</sup> The schools were closed and distance learning was introduced.

Among the solutions used in remote education one can indicate: e-mails, electronic school registers, conference tools, communicators,

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<sup>1</sup> P. Plichta, J. Pyżalski, *Wstęp*, [in:] *Wychowanie i kształcenie w erze cyfrowej*, ed. P. Plichta, J. Pyżalski, Regional Centre of Social Policy in Łódź, Łódź 2013, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> J. Pyżalski, A. Zdrodowska, Ł. Tomczyk, K. Abramczuk, *Polskie badanie EU Kids Online 2018. Najważniejsze wyniki i wnioski*, Scientific Publishing House of Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, Poznań 2019.

tools enabling group work. The solutions, methods and techniques of remote education adopted by the school depended, among others, on the capabilities of the school, teachers and students. Regardless of the adopted form of teaching, parents were strongly involved in their children's remote education.

Such a drastic change made the author focus on the situation of children with special educational needs<sup>3</sup> and how they and their parents cope with remote education? The focus of both classical and remote education is determined by different types of special educational needs. The identification of special educational needs through the prism of learning difficulties has allowed the identification of a group of parents whose children have a decision or opinion from

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<sup>3</sup> Until recently, special educational needs were related to children and adolescents with disabilities, social maladjustment and behavioural disorders. They now apply to all children who "have clearly greater learning difficulties than most of their peers, regardless of whether the source of these problems is organic damage or not" (Olechowska, 2016, p. 27). Thus, they refer to all students who may have learning difficulties regardless of their cause. "Four main areas of special educational needs are recognized: 1) communication and interpersonal contacts, 2) thought processes and information acquisition, 3) behaviour, emotions and social development, 4) sensory and/or physical development" (Noworyta, 2013, p. 433). Special educational needs also apply to gifted students. The Ordinance of the Minister of National Education of 9 August 2017 on the principles of organizing and providing psychological and pedagogical assistance in public kindergartens, schools and institutions includes students with special abilities among those in need of psychological and pedagogical assistance. For decades, a gifted child has been considered an exceptional, above-average, a prodigy child who did not require support from educational institutions. However, as the study by Dyrda (2000) shows, a gifted child is very often a pupil with underachievement syndrome. Łukasiewicz-Wieleba (2018), on the other hand, mentions low motivation, lack of perseverance and social difficulties (*ibid.*, p. 352) among the elements having negative impact on the development of a gifted person. Friedman-Nimz and Skyba (Friedman-Nimz, Skyba, 2009, pp. 421–436) point out that outstanding abilities are not without influence on self-esteem and functioning in society. Other researchers emphasize the rather negative impact of the possessed abilities on the self-esteem of such a person and his or her needs for achievement (Silverman 1991, Jackson et al. 2009, after: Knopik, 2018, p. 16).

a psychological-educational counselling centre regarding recommendations and guidelines for working with the student in the classroom.

Learning is closely linked to the attention mechanism, which consists of three interrelated processes: attention orientation (receptors), attention selectivity and the ability to organize information.<sup>4</sup> Control over all three mechanisms is essential for effective learning. Very often in the case of students with special educational needs, we encounter a dysfunction of one of these mechanisms and the students have recommendations and guidelines for work. Attention is directed, among others, by motivational processes<sup>5</sup> that stimulate action, challenges and exploration. They direct our actions leading to a specific result. The basic way of motivating students to learn is external motivation, expressed by school grades.<sup>6</sup> Internal motivation, defined as an innate propensity to develop one's own abilities, to challenge and seek novelty, to explore and learn, is the most desirable and sufficient stimulator in itself. Motivation can result from the desire to succeed or avoid failure. It is influenced not only by environmental stimuli (e.g. the environment in which the child is raised) but also by physical and mental predispositions. The development of children's motivation is greatly influenced by parents' involvement in educational processes, which manifests itself e.g. through taking care of intellectual development, arousing interests, discovering the world.<sup>7</sup> Excessive requirements have a demotivating effect, so it is important to adapt the requirements to the abilities of the students, especially those with special educational needs. For reasons beyond their control, they are not able to achieve the same results as their peers, therefore they should be supported.

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<sup>4</sup> R.E. Franke, *Psychologia motywacji*, GWP, Gdańsk 2006, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> M. Głowska-Soldatow, *Wybrane aspekty motywowania uczniów do nauki*, [in:] *Edukacja dziecka – mity i fakty*, ed. E. Jaszczyszyn, J. Szada-Borzyszkowska, Trans Humana Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie, Białystok 2010, p. 422.

<sup>7</sup> J. Niepokólczycka-Gac, *Skuteczne budowanie motywacji do nauki*, Portaloswiatowy.pl, 2011. <https://www.portaloswiatowy.pl/organizacja-zajec-szkolnych/skuteczne-budowanie-motywacji-do-nauki-9584.html> [1.08.2020].



## Research methodology

The aim of the research was to learn about the situation of a child with special educational needs, the limitations and problems faced by children and their parents during the period of distance learning and progress in learning.

The subject of research included the parents' statements targeted with questions concerning the situation and learning of a child during the period of distance learning.

Four research problems were formulated:

- 1) Do parents see any changes in their child's motivation to learn during remote education and what kind of changes?
- 2) What limitations and difficulties have emerged as a result of remote learning?
  - a. What actions have the parents taken to support their child in the educational process?
- 3) According to the parents what kind of behaviour does the child present during remote learning?
- 4) What progress has been made in their child's learning during remote learning, if any?

The paper uses the key case method, which is a "heuristic strategy of cognitive behaviour, characterized by the fact that it is a kind of research reconnaissance, intended to provide approximate answers to questions about the existence, characteristics, genesis, structure, functions, etc. of a certain object or phenomenon...".<sup>8</sup> It is applicable when other methods fail, when it is difficult to find a pattern of conduct, when there is no theory related to the explored area that could be an inspiration or there is a lack of practical experience in the explored topic. Finding key cases, i.e. people important for the research, allows to get to know the issue, obtain answers to research questions.<sup>9</sup> **The difficulty of this method is to generalize**

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<sup>8</sup> A. Góralski, *Metoda Przypadków kluczowych*, [in:] *Metody badań pedagogicznych w zarysie*, ed. A. Góralski, Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiki Specjalnej im. Marii Grzegorzewskiej, Warszawa 1989, p. 118.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

**the results.** Generalization based on the study of small groups may not be reflected in the regularities of other communities or populations. The most reasonable technique in the case of this method is the interview, which is an appropriately targeted process of interaction between the interlocutors, i.e., the researcher and the surveyed person, requiring the ability to listen carefully and not to impose own opinions and views.<sup>10</sup> Kvale<sup>11</sup> writes that an interview is “a specific form of conversation in which knowledge is created in the course of interaction”, but unlike it, it is targeted and subordinated to a set goal.<sup>12</sup>

The research uses the technique of free, partially categorized interview, which leaves a large scope of freedom to ask questions to the surveyed person, and at the same time does not exclude the possibility of asking previously prepared questions, but requires us to ask them in a different way and in a different order from the one previously established. It allows to ask both open and closed questions, as well as those not included in the interview questionnaire.<sup>13</sup> The interview was open and individual in nature. In order to carry out the research, an interview questionnaire was prepared. In the situation of limited contacts, the interview was conducted with the use of ICT tools after prior appointment of an interview date convenient for the parents.

The selection of the sample was purposeful and was carried out among the parents of students from four different elementary school, i.e. three public elementary schools: in Skierniewice, Piastów, Warsaw and one social elementary school in Warsaw. Parents of school-age children attending 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th grade ele-

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<sup>10</sup> M. Łobocki, *Wprowadzenie do metodologii badań pedagogicznych*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 1999, p. 245.

<sup>11</sup> S. Kvale, *Przewodzenie wywiadów*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2010, pp. 19–20.

<sup>12</sup> S. Gudkova, *Wywiad w badaniach jakościowych*, [in:] *Badania jakościowe. Metody i narzędzia*, ed. D. Jemielniak, Vol. 2, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2012, p. 112.

<sup>13</sup> M. Łobocki, *Metody i techniki badań pedagogicznych*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2011, p. 269.

mentary school were interviewed, including three mothers and one father of students with special educational needs.

The research was conducted between May 11th and 13th, 2020 among the parents of students who have a decision or opinion of a psychological-educational counselling centre concerning the methods of working with the child, adjusting the requirements, forms and methods of work to the child's perception capabilities. The information obtained has been organized and developed in terms of the research problems posed.

### **Characteristics of the boys**

The first boy described by a mother (M1) is 11 years old and attends the 5th grade of elementary school. He belongs to the group of children who began compulsory schooling at the age of 6. The boy was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome in the first grade of elementary school and has difficulties in focusing attention and recommendations concerning, among other things, longer working time. Currently, at school the boy is under the care of a supporting teacher, a psychologist and a school pedagogue.

The second boy, also described by a mother (M2), is 9 years old and attends the third grade of elementary school. He was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome in 2016. The boy has difficulty in focusing attention, sound hypersensitivity. At school he has a supporting teacher and a psychologist.

Information about the third boy was also provided by the mother (M3). He is a pupil from the group of children who began compulsory schooling at the age of 6, but his parents took steps to postpone his compulsory education for one year and as a result he went to school a year later than his peers and is now in the fourth grade of elementary school. The diagnosis at the counselling centre was carried out in the first grade of elementary school due to reported problems with concentration and auditory memory. He attends corrective and compensatory classes at school, has recommenda-

tions, including: longer working time, making eye contact with the child when saying the instructions, directing the child's activity during lessons.

Information about the fourth child was provided by the father (T1). The boy is 13 years old and attends the sixth grade of elementary school, has directional and analytical skills and attends additional classes. He was referred to the counselling centre because of social problems (e.g. he did not remember the names of the children from his class) and long working time reported by the teachers.

The following part of the article will present the results of the research according to the order of the research questions posed.

## 1. The child's motivation to learn during remote education

With regard to three boys, the parents stated that they did not observe increased motivation to study, but rather expressed their opinion that it simply did not exist.

*[...] Generally, his motivation for school is poor. It was poor, so to speak, before and is bad now [...]. And it is hard, it is very hard. To motivate him to study at all, especially since there is a problem with certain kids, well... there is no supporting teacher at the moment. And we just have to do it, everything is on our shoulders. (M1)*

*He has never had an inner motivation to learn, he has always been externally motivated and it's the same now. He certainly has no motivation to learn. (M3)*

*[...] I ask him, I explain and so on, but ... he has no motivation. (M2)*

The situation was completely different in the case of the fourth boy, whose parents observed a great deal of self-motivation to perform English exercises in the first week of isolation. This was motivated by the fact that he did not have to perform these tasks for the next two weeks. In the following weeks, the father no longer observed increased motivation in his son.

One of the topics addressed in the interviews was the children learning on their own. The information obtained shows that all the boys must be supported and controlled by their parents. In relation to three boys, the mothers said they had to do the homework with the child and help him learn the new material provided by the teachers.

*Leaving him unattended is... difficult, because he wouldn't learn by himself [...]. And he didn't do the work in class... (M1)*

*When I stand over him and tell him to read the task, he will do it in 10 minutes. So I tell him: look, you've done it in 10 minutes and it wasn't difficult at all. (M2)*

*Of course, you have to sit down with him [...] and do the homework together with him. (M3)*

In the case of the fourth boy, after the introduction of a system for recording homework in a special notebook designed for this purpose, he was able to take greater control and became more independent in learning.

## **2. The limitations and difficulties that emerged with remote education**

In relation to individual children, parents talked about huge problems resulting from, among other things, a disturbance of the existing rhythm and work system, which gave the children a sense of security and harmonized their actions.

*Lessons at school were always lessons [...]. He did something there. It was a completely different situation [...]. Now, unfortunately, everything has changed. For the worse, I think. It will be difficult to return to this rhythm. (M1)*

They signalled that the beginnings of remote learning were very difficult for both children and parents. They pointed out the follow-

ing problems: new tools, new forms of work, their inadequacy to the methods and possibilities of children's work. Parents were concerned about the way of preparing materials for pupils to learn, the incompatibility of attachment names in the text materials and the attached files. The father of one of the boys mentioned too many platforms and tools that emerged with remote learning. Lack of information about the topics or homework in one place forced the child to constantly search the platforms used by the teachers for particular lesson topics, which was very time-consuming.

*At the beginning it was a nightmare [...]. The teachers wrote something. Partly they wrote to the parents for the child to do something, partly to the child. [...] the following week the Microsoft cloud was introduced, and then there was the Outlook, the chat room, the Teams, the tasks on the Teams. Some of the teachers used the register, some of them worked differently. So the whole system of assignments has changed a lot. [...] although there are also wallets and tablets and what not... and you have to check all that, which is difficult. The mish-mash, generally speaking. (T1)*

The boy needed about 45 minutes a day to find all the information about what to do and what homework to prepare for the next lessons.

In the case of two pupils, the mothers stated that the school did not conduct online classes with the children and the teachers only sent information about what the students were supposed to do for a given lesson. In their opinion there was no explanation, no discussion of a given part of material on the part of the teachers, which forced them to enter into the role of a teacher and to explain the discussed lessons to their child.

*This is what the classes look like: we get [...] a list of tasks that the child should do on a given day, i.e. read the text, answer the questions, do the tasks in the exercise book, analyse them, i.e. to work independently, and the teacher doesn't really help with anything. (M2)*

*[...] the teacher sends the material [...] to be read and exercises to be done. There are teachers who are available in a classroom chat during these classes. (M3)*

The three mothers talked about the problems their children faced during their education not only in distance learning, but also in the classroom. These included problems with concentration. In their opinion, remote education does not help with concentration, and the materials prepared by the teachers do not take into account the needs of children with special educational needs.

*[...] He has a problem with imagining some things, but he has a big problem with ... writing questions to a text. He does not understand, he writes the answers (M2)*

*[...] the way the maths teacher conducted lessons on Messenger... It is often the case that he does not keep up. [...] What is the main problem? It is the problem with concentration, so if there is too much material, or the number of students who answer the same question and suddenly there are 10 answers, it is chaos for him ... and he is not able to keep up. (M3)*

The biggest challenge for parents in remote education was to reconcile their own work with the fact that at the same time they had to become teachers for their children. This was an overwhelming and burdensome situation for them. The opinion I often heard in the interviews was: "It's hard, it's just hard". Leaving children alone with this form of learning, in the opinion of mothers, would result in educational failure. They quoted attempts by their children to work on their own, which ended in failure.

It is worth noting that all parents developed their own solutions to the emerging difficulties. One of the mothers who had problems with reconciling her own work with her son's education asked the assistant teacher to support the child in learning new material and doing homework during online meetings. In his case, the teachers did not provide on-line lessons, but sent the materials for independent study.

*So finally I decided that somebody should help me and I think that is the role of the supporting teacher [...] to help my child. (M2)*

Other parents took on the role of the teacher, trying to explain a given part of the material discussed by the teacher, so that the child could understand and perform the tasks themselves.

*[...] it must be clearly said that it [learning – author’s note] does not take more time... but this is because the parents are involved and perform the role of the teacher. (M3)*

Or, as in the case of the gifted boy, it was enough for the teachers to put all the information in one place, so as not to look for it in different places, platforms, registers, emails used by the teachers.

*[...] now we simply write it all down in the notebook. [...] he saves it to check Outlook or somewhere else. And somehow he manages. (T1)*

In the parents’ opinion, time spent by the students at the computer is a big problem now. Previously, all the surveyed guardians said that children could use the tool at a certain time. In the given educational situation it would not be possible to realize the teaching processes – learning without modifying the rules, which has an impact on the children and their behaviour, therefore parents tried to find a solution and e.g. set time for work at the computer, but also breaks to rest without ICT tools.

### **3. The students’ behaviour in remote learning situations**

A big problem for children was not only the form of teaching itself, but also the verification of knowledge. Online tests evoked a lot of emotions, were a source of additional stress and frustration. For one boy, for example, the pressure of time, as well as the novelty of the tool with which the test was performed, evoked such strong emotions that the boy had big problems writing it.



*There was a situation when the teacher prepared a test [...]. And of course we had a terrible brawl. [...] Perhaps he got upset that he was under time pressure, that he had to do it. [...] he started to get aroused and [...] he didn't write anything. [...]. I know that he had the knowledge. But once he go into this spiral... (M1)*

Parents also noticed the silencing of certain emotions connected with the child's functioning in school, in a peer group. They said that children have become calmer, less nervous. They feel more at ease. The guardians of all the children noted that they were happy with the solution that allowed them to study at home without having to go to school. Two students treated this situation as a holiday and were quite reluctant to study.

The fact that the students had to explore the material that was previously explained by the teacher and that it took much more time and effort on their part was a source of some rebellion and aversion to learning.

*The difficult part is that now he has to read everything. This is what he said to me: "At school, I only read two lines and you make me read the whole page." [...] he doesn't understand why he has to do so much. Because he has noticed [...] that now he must do everything [...] by himself. (M2)*

Of course, there were also students who tried to cope with boredom during remote lessons and performed additional activities.

*He invents some kind of machines in class, he programs in Scratch instead of learning biology, for example. He has two monitors, on his laptop and this one... So on one of them he has the biology teacher and on the other, let's say Scratch, so... it was Python before, wasn't it? This is how he tried to deal with boredom in class. He is bored, for example, in mathematics [...], but he tries to do something during the maths exercises [...]. He plays with the computer, for example, he creates thousands of catalogues, or writes something in Scratch, or... or tries to do something in Python. (T1)*

#### 4. Learning progress

The new situation has forced new solutions. All participants of the educational processes had to start using remote education tools, computers with Internet access, phones, tablets. As the research shows, everyday use of these tools contributed to the development of students' computer skills. With regard to all children, parents talk about the development of digital competences.

*[...] Because... this is really computer- and internet-based learning, there is certainly some progress in this area. (M3)*

The rest of the parents spoke in a similar tone. However, the guardians also noticed that the computer was not only an attractive tool for children, but also slowed down their work.

*The learning itself, without the computer, ... would have been more effective, to sum up. (T1)*

The assessment of progress in home schooling is completely different. Despite systematic lessons and verification of the level of mastery of the material through tests, some parents have doubts about the quality of learning and what their children are getting out of it.

*But now he knows... I mean, he knows these are lessons, but he doesn't take them too seriously. He knows he has to do them and that's it. (M1)*

One of the guardians also observed that in the current situation, all additional subject activities have been suspended, which was at a loss to his son, as he did not develop mathematically. During the learning process carried out in the school environment such classes not only gave him pleasure, but also provided additional knowledge about the subject which is his passion.

*[...] he does not develop mathematically, and that is a problem, he does not develop in physics [...] in school during the half hour he had fun [...] the problem is with mathematical and physics development. (T1)*

## Conclusion

Never before have schools been closed on such a scale. Teachers, parents and pupils alike have found themselves in an uncomfortable situation, which has created many challenges for all participants in the educational process. For teachers, it meant an accelerated course in using the tools enabling them to carry out lessons, changing the way, forms and methods of teaching, verifying the pupils' knowledge. For parents, greater support of children in learning, helping the children use the tools, controlling their children's learning process. Finally, for the children themselves, greater independence in exploring the content of the lesson, participation in activities often carried out with the use of Internet platforms. What had previously been used as an additional option, a possibility, became a compulsion. At first the rapid shift from one way to the other (a remote education system unverified on such a scale) caused great chaos. Each teacher carried out his or her lessons in a way that was beneficial to them, preferring their own tools, sometimes without taking the children's abilities into account. They often prepared materials that did not take into account individual preferences, the needs of children, especially children with special educational needs. In the presented research it seems that teachers did not take into account the cognitive and emotional-social capabilities of their pupils, especially those with special educational needs. Sending lessons and homework materials on different platforms, the incompatibility of file names in the materials with the names of the attachment created unnecessary confusion. Teachers seemed to forget that every "content appearing on the platform should be selected according to the specific participants, their abilities, interests and needs".<sup>14</sup> The disruption of the existing rhythm of work, changes in the way of learning, the emergence of new tools, new ways of

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<sup>14</sup> N. Walter, *Mamy (za) duży wybór – jak nie zgubić się wśród narzędzi cyfrowych?*, [in:] *Edukacja w czasach pandemii wirusa COVID-19*, ed. J. Pyżalski, EduAkcja, Warszawa 2020, p. 52.

communication with teachers is a big problem for students. Parents, not only parents of children with Asperger's syndrome, pointed out that the disruption of the current order of the day caused frustration, nervousness, an inability to find themselves in the new situation. It took time to adapt to the changes.

The current form of education is not home schooling, but distance learning in a situation of crises<sup>15</sup>, requiring a great deal of students' independence, the will to learn, greater commitment and effort put into familiarizing themselves with the lessons, reading, understanding the material. As the presented research shows, independent learning is a big challenge for children, one they are not able to meet. However, it is worth emphasizing that all parents were strongly involved in their children's educational processes and have found solutions that helped to support their children, e.g. one of the mothers asked for support from the school, the supporting teacher. The mothers said they took on the role of the teacher and worked together with the child, explaining the material. The father, on the other hand, claimed that it was enough to change the way of sending the information by the teacher (listing all the tasks, instructions in one place) for the child to become more independent in the learning process. All parents talked about controlling their children's work, i.e., keeping an eye on: the learning, the homework or doing tests. In the case of three of the boys, attempts to learn independently in the remote education system failed.

New tools, new methods of teaching and learning, the verification of knowledge evoked a lot of emotions. Fear of the new, ignorance of the tools does not serve the purpose of assimilation of knowledge by pupils. It caused nervous situations, prevented normal functioning and learning. These situations were very stressful for children and were not conducive to learning. The high level of stress and its intensity is "a natural enemy of memorizing and, more

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<sup>15</sup> A. Doucet, D. Netolicky, K. Timmers, J. Tuscano, *Thinking about Pedagogy in an Unfolding Pandemic School Closures, Independent Report written to inform the work of Education International and UNESCO*, 2020, p. 33. [https://issuu.com/educationinternational/docs/2020\\_research\\_covid-19\\_eng](https://issuu.com/educationinternational/docs/2020_research_covid-19_eng) [14.05.2020].

generally, learning".<sup>16</sup> The computer with Internet access is a very attractive tool, used to a limited extent during regular education conducted at school, and parents noticed significant progress in their children's computer skills, however, it was also the cause of numerous problems for students in remote education. In the opinion of parents, this form of learning does not encourage concentration of attention, children have problems with reading and analysing the information that appears simultaneously.

In order to make education "effective", it is necessary to use methods that activate the student, i.e. those that engage his or her senses, imagination or emotions".<sup>17</sup> It is not enough to tell them what to read, what tasks to do in the book or exercise book. We cannot transfer the methods used in a classroom environment to remote education because they will not work. In the learning process, a student needs a teacher who will support and mentor him/her, motivate and guide him/her. When it is not possible for a teacher to provide such support through synchronous communication channels, the role of the teacher is taken over by the parents. However, it is important to remember that parents will not be able to spend their entire days educating their children.<sup>18</sup>

The information obtained is burdened with the subjective assessment of the respondents and is not a source of factual information. However, from an exploratory point of view, it is an opportunity to learn the parent's point of view and assess the situation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> M. Kaczmarzyk, *Neurobiologiczny kontekst edukacji zdalnej*, [in:] *Edukacja w czasach pandemii wirusa COVID-19*, ed. J. Pyżalski, EduAkcja, Warszawa 2020, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> N. Walter, *Mamy (za) duży wybór – jak nie zgubić się wśród narzędzi cyfrowych?*, [in:] *Edukacja w czasach pandemii wirusa COVID-19*, ed. J. Pyżalski, EduAkcja, Warszawa 2020, p. 52.

<sup>18</sup> A. Doucet, D. Netolicky, K. Timmers, J. Tusciano, *Thinking about Pedagogy in an Unfolding Pandemic School Closures, Independent Report written to inform the work of Education International and UNESCO*, 2020, p. 33. [https://issuu.com/educationinternational/docs/2020\\_research\\_covid-19\\_eng](https://issuu.com/educationinternational/docs/2020_research_covid-19_eng) [14.05.2020].

<sup>19</sup> S. Gudkova, *Wywiad w badaniach jakościowych*, [in:] *Badania jakościowe. Metody i narzędzia*, ed. D. Jemielniak, Vol. 2, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2012, p. 116.

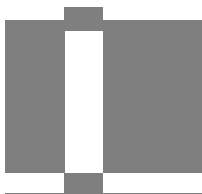
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## The economic situation and social interactions of prisoners' families

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This article shows the current state of knowledge about: the economic situation and social interactions of families of prisoners. An in-depth analysis of own research, as well as those presented so far in Polish and foreign literature, has allowed to distinguish three types of social situations of families of prisoners, with particular emphasis on their economic situation and social interactions, namely; (1) the social situation of a family supporting the resocialization of the prisoner, (2) the social situation of a prisoner's family, which is in opposition to the process of resocialization, (3) the social situation of a family focused on the reconstruction of its own social environment.

**KEY WORDS:** social situation, social interactions, families of prisoners, imprisonment

### Introduction

Literature on the subject treats the resocialisation role of prisoners' families in a rather conservative and instrumental manner. Such families are considered mainly in the context of intermediaries between the convicted person and society. They are assigned co-responsibility for the further course of the re-adaptation process. The fami-

lies are to provide protection against the preclusive reactions of the neighbourhood and prevent former prisoners from returning to criminal behaviour. However, the problem of the collateral consequences of incarceration is neglected.<sup>1</sup> The consequences of imprisonment cannot be treated individually only in relation to the imprisoned person. Every convicted person leaves behind his or her loved ones, and the socio-economic consequences of criminal policy for the families remain almost unknown. On the basis of data obtained from prison population surveys<sup>2</sup>, it can be estimated that around 60% of the prisoners remain in a relationship. The same data indicate that the number of children in Poland who are deprived of a parent because he or she is serving a prison sentence ranges from 50 000 to 100 000.<sup>3</sup> The reason why the functioning of families should be the subject of in-depth scientific analysis is that imprisonment affects not only the material sphere of their live<sup>4</sup>, but also intra-family relations and external interactions.<sup>5</sup> According to Renata Szczepanik and Kamil Miszewski: "[...] the imprisonment of one of the family members changes its (the family's - S.DZ-B) quality, and it is the family and procreation that constitute those ele-

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<sup>1</sup> R. Szczepanik, K. Miszewski, *Wpływ długoterminowego uwięzienia na rodziny więźniów – stan wiedzy i zaniedbane kierunki badan*, *Profilaktyka społeczna i resocjalizacja* 30/2016, p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> A. Rzepliński, *Rodziny więźniów długoterminowych*, Wydawnictwo Ossolineum – PWN, Wrocław 1981; A. Szymanowska, *Więzienie i co dalej?*, Wydawnictwo Żak, Warszawa 2003; M. Muskała, *Więź osadzonych recydywistów ze środowiskiem*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Polskiego Towarzystwa Pedagogicznego, Poznań 2006; A. Matusiak-Błaszczyk, *Sytuacja życiowa kobiet pozbawionych wolności*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2010.

<sup>3</sup> A. Barczykowska, *Sytuacja życiowa rodzin osób pozbawionych wolności*, [in:] L. Golińska, B. Dudka (ed), *Rodzina i praca z perspektywy wyzwań i zagrożeń*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2008, pp. 341–352; S. Dzierżyńska-Breś, *Niewidzialne dzieci – o sytuacji społecznej dzieci osób pozbawionych wolności*, *Resocjalizacja Polska* 14/2017, pp. 137–150.

<sup>4</sup> R. Smith, R. Grimshaw, R. Romeo, M. Knapp, *Poverty and Disadvantage Among Prisoner's Families*, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (ISTD) 2007.

<sup>5</sup> R. Coundry, *Families Shamed; The Consequences of Crime for Relatives of Serious Offenders*, Willan publishing, Uffculme 2007.

ments of life that most often prevent from returning to crime and imprisonment".<sup>6</sup>

One of the most important issues related to the functioning of families of persons held in custody is their social position. It is the "location" on the social ladder that influences: the families' own perception of imprisonment, the families' actions and the social perception of the situation. These families are not a homogeneous group, they face different problems, depending on the interpretation perspectives set by socio-cultural conditions.<sup>7</sup> Family role models and functioning are created in social circles, therefore, on the one hand, the stay of a husband/partner and father in prison will not always be treated as a cause for shame and despair or ostracism on the part of other relatives and neighbours. The effect on their material status may not be significant. On the other hand, the trauma and problems experienced in connection with the conviction of the closest family member may lead to its disintegration, exclusion and stigmatisation on the part of the public, as well as the loss of all property. Therefore, this article addresses two categories of issues: the economic situation of families and their relations with the social environment. It would be optimistic to assume, that families are willing and able to support the convicted person in his or her social rehabilitation process and re-adaptation. However, the worsening of financial conditions, financial problems and the negative reactions of the extended family and neighbours often lead to a break in contact with the convict, and, consequently, the break-up of the family.

This study will present the state of knowledge concerning: the economic situation and social relations of families of convicted persons. What is important, and only occasionally mentioned in litera-

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<sup>6</sup> R. Szczepanik, K. Miszewski, *Wpływ długoterminowego uwięzienia na rodziny więźniów – stan wiedzy i zaniedbane kierunki badań*, Profilaktyka społeczna i resocjalizacja 30/2016, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> R. Szczepanik, K. Miszewski, *Wpływ długoterminowego uwięzienia na rodziny więźniów – stan wiedzy i zaniedbane kierunki badań*, Profilaktyka społeczna i resocjalizacja 30/2016, pp. 53–95.

ture on the subject, the presented research will not only refer to the current situation of the families, but also to the situation prior to the incarceration of one of the family members, the husband/partner and father. This is purposeful and intended to capture the change that takes place in two of these areas of life. When I write about families, I mean families of the convicted persons, i.e. their wives and life partners, as well as their children over the age of 10. However, before I refer to the analysis of the research, I will present how the economic situation and social relations of families of convicted persons have been described in subject literature so far.

### **The economic situation of families of convicted persons**

The experience of families related to the economic sphere of life, presented in the research<sup>8</sup>, is quite universal, at least during the first period of imprisonment and the first sentence of a husband/partner and father. The majority of families are faced with the following problems: taking over the role of the main breadwinner of the family by the wife/partner, maintaining financial stability and material assistance for the convicted person. However, this does not mean that these families had not experienced financial problems before the conviction. Anna Szymanowska's research shows that in the case of 70% of the families, prior to the arrest, the convicts did not work or their work was of a temporary nature.<sup>9</sup> They coped mainly thanks to social assistance. In one of the first Polish studies on the families of long-term prisoners, Andrzej Rzepliński pointed out that before the arrest, 21% of the families lived below the social minimum.<sup>10</sup> The dominant type of education among convicts is voca-

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<sup>8</sup> J. Christian, J. Mellow, S. Thomas, *Social and economic implications of family connections to prisoners*. Journal of Criminal Justice, 34/2006, pp. 443-452.

<sup>9</sup> A. Szymanowska, *Więzienie i co dalej?*, Wydawnictwo Żak, Warszawa 2003, M. Muskała, *Więź osadzonych recydywistów ze środowiskiem*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Polskiego Towarzystwa Pedagogicznego, Poznań 2006.

<sup>10</sup> A. Rzepliński, *Rodziny więźniów długoterminowych*, Wydawnictwo Ossolineum - PWN, Wrocław 1981.

tional education. The fact that they lack the skills and qualifications sought on the labour market does not make their difficult situation any easier.<sup>11</sup> In illustrating the economic situation of families of convicted persons, reference can be made to the detailed study on this population carried out by Jeremy Travis.<sup>12</sup> As a result of the imprisonment of the partner/father there is usually a reduction of the income of the whole family. More than 70% of men imprisoned in the United States of America declared having permanent or temporary employment in the month before their arrest. In more than 60% of cases their salary was the only source of income for the family. The life partners of convicted men had permanent jobs only in 39% of cases, and the remaining source of their income was social assistance 42% and temporary work 44%.

The more the families try to keep in touch with the convicted person, the more costs they incur. This ranges from paying for a lawyer during the arrest and trial, providing the prisoner with telephone cards, clothes, parcels, travelling to prison for visiting days during the prison stay, to maintaining and supporting the husband/partner who returns home after the sentence.<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that regardless of the sex of the convicted person, it is the women: mothers, wives and partners, who take responsibility for supporting the imprisoned person and stabilising family life. They are left alone with many difficulties they have to cope with: finding a livelihood, paying off debts, the upbringing and emotional problems of children, stress, social reactions, and the convicts themselves, who are demanding not only care and support, but also specific material assistance.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A. Szymanowska, *Więzienie i co dalej?*, Wydawnictwo Żak, Warszawa 2003, M. Muskała, *Więź osadzonych recydywistów ze środowiskiem*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Polskiego Towarzystwa Pedagogicznego, Poznań 2006.

<sup>12</sup> J. Travis, *But they all come back; Facing the Challenges of prisoner Reentry*, Washington DC; The Urban Institute Press 2005.

<sup>13</sup> C. Shapiro, M. Schwartz, *Coming home: Building on family connection*, Correction Management Quarterly, 5(3), pp. 52–61, 2001.

<sup>14</sup> R. Coudry, *Families Shamed; The Consequences of Crime for Relatives of Serious Offenders*, Willan publishing, Uffculme 2007.

The often complicated family situation of convicted persons causes further financial difficulties. It is not only the wives or permanent partners of convicts who complain about the loss of their main source of income, but also their former life partners who experience a loss, for example, the lack of payment of child maintenance for their joint children. The parents of prisoners also experience financial crisis. They try to help not only their convicted son, but often support their wife/partner, who is left without a livelihood for herself and the children. This includes not only financial help, but also taking care of the grandchildren and their upbringing and education. Research conducted on the parents of prisoners who decided to provide care for their grandchildren indicates financial problems – this was one of the main difficulties they declared.<sup>15</sup> Rose Smith, Roger Grimshaw, Renee Romeo and Martin Knap<sup>16</sup> in their 2007 report on the economic situation of families of convicted persons in the UK, calculated that the imprisonment of one family member for six months results in a cost estimated at GBP 5860 per family borne by social policy institutions dealing with family support. If that amount were added to the cost of the prison service, then that institution's expenditure would increase by 31%.

The economic situation of families of convicted persons is influenced by a number of factors which are determined primarily by the individual characteristics of the family's functioning and its social location. In households where the convicted person had a job before his or her stay in prison, did not have an addiction problem, was not violent towards other family members, and his or her income ranged from high to that exceeding the accepted poverty threshold – imprisonment leads to economic losses that the rest of the family has to deal with. Most often, the higher the family's material status, the higher the education of the spouse or partner, as

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<sup>15</sup> J.C. Finney-Hairstone, *Prisoners and Families; Parenting Issues During Incarceration*, University of Illinois, Urban Institute 2002, pp. 44–45.

<sup>16</sup> R. Smith, R. Grimshaw, R. Romeo, M. Knapp, *Poverty and Disadvantage Among Prisoner's Families*, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (ISTD) 2007.

well as the type of profession she performs, the faster the family returns to a relatively stable economic situation.<sup>17</sup> In other cases, where the convict himself or his behaviour had been a source of stress and material loss for the family and had a negative impact on the functioning of all members of the household, his "removal" from the family system, even at the cost of material loss, is perceived as a situation of psychological relief and stability, and over time the economic situation of these families improves.<sup>18</sup>

### **Relations between the families of convicted persons and the social environment**

The feeling of stigmatisation and shame is more difficult for those who remain in society than for the convicts themselves.<sup>19</sup> As Rachel Country notes, in prison coping with everyday life comes to the fore. The convicts exist in an environment where their crimes are not a source of public debate or embarrassment, but are a part of the prison norm. Whereas the situation of their wives/partners and children is different, they have to continue their daily lives in communities where their "contaminated status" of the offender's family is well known. Research on families of convicted persons confirms that this group is not only an object of exclusion and stigmatisation in their local communities, but also its interactions with various institutions such as schools, social welfare centres, workplaces, prisons etc. are marked by the stigma of being the wife/partner or child of a prisoner.<sup>20</sup> Families of prisoners share their "ruined iden-

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<sup>17</sup> J. Christian, J. Mellow, S. Thomas, *Social and economic implications of family connections to prisoners*, *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 34/2006, pp. 443–452.

<sup>18</sup> L. Gordon, *Invisible Children, A study of the children of prisoners*, PILLARS report 2009, p. 35.

<sup>19</sup> R. Country, *Families Shamed; The Consequences of Crime for Relatives of Serious Offenders*, Willan publishing, Uffculme 2007, p. 80.

<sup>20</sup> A. Mills, H. Codd, *Prisoner's families*, [in:] *Handbook of Prisons*, Y. Jewkes (ed.), Willan Publishing 2007.

tity” with the imprisoned family member.<sup>21</sup> A loved one’s stay in prison is a source of shame felt by other family members. Shame takes over the individual’s life, giving a new dimension to his or her identity, and the relatives of convicted persons feel it in a double sense, not only those whose loved ones committed serious crimes.<sup>22</sup> The very fact that someone is in prison, regardless of how long they have been there and what they have done, stigmatises the families. The feeling of shame felt by the families is also socially determined. Pauline Morris notes that it particularly affects the wives/partners and children of first-time offenders, especially during the initial period of imprisonment. Families of persistent offenders claim that they are unfamiliar with this feeling and that the situation is not embarrassing for them.<sup>23</sup> Research carried out by Robin Bates on adult children of former prisoners showed that shame and embarrassment were the feelings that accompanied them during their father’s stay in prison.<sup>24</sup> They have a paralysing effect on the family, preventing it from effectively benefiting from social assistance or the support of close family members. Some families, fearing the loss of friendship, respect or harassment, conceal the situation from their surroundings or even their loved ones, and sometimes even decide to break off contact with the convicted person.<sup>25</sup> Others, especially those linked to the criminal world, with a multi-generational problem of crime and numerous prison stays, may even feel proud and respected by their immediate environment.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> H. Codd, *Prisoners’ Families: The “Forgotten Victims”*, *Probation Journal* 45/1998, pp. 148–153.

<sup>22</sup> A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość. „Ja” i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*, Warszawa 2001, p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> P. Morris, *Prisoners and their families*, Allen & Unwin, Londyn 1965.

<sup>24</sup> R. Bates, S. Lawrence-Wills, C.F. Hairstone, *Children and families of incarcerated parents; a view from the ground*, [in:] *Research brief on Children, Families and Criminal Justice System*, University of Illinois, Chicago 2003.

<sup>25</sup> A. Mills, H. Codd, *Prisoner’s families*, [in:] *Handbook of Prisons*, Y. Jewkes (ed.), Willan Publishing 2007.

<sup>26</sup> R. Szczepanik, K. Miszewski, *Wpływ długoterminowego uwięzienia na rodziny więźniów – stan wiedzy i zaniedbane kierunki badań*, *Profilaktyka społeczna i resocjalizacja* 30/2016, pp. 53–95.



Families of convicted persons feel shame not only "in their own eyes", but are often forced to hide from the disdainful looks of others. They are aware of the change that often takes place: from a "disdainful gaze" to harmful actions such as ending friendships, spreading false information about their relatives or even physical attacks on them. At this point, the wider socio-cultural context also plays a significant role. The higher the social class and the higher the social status of families, the more severe the effects of the social reactions they feel.<sup>27</sup> Rachel Coundry, who deals with the families of people who have committed serious crimes such as murder or sex crimes, has provided an interesting analysis of this issue.<sup>28</sup> In her work, she cited five types of "blame" imposed on the families of convicted persons; two of these concerned the influence of the family, such as:

1. *Association* – which assumes that relatives of convicted persons due to the close relationship between them and the convicted person are the same as the prisoner.
2. *Genetic* – linked to a rather primitive idea of bad blood. For the social audience, information about an individual belonging to the same family as the offender, triggers negative comments and actions, and genetic conditions become an excuse for bad treatment.

The next three types concern direct reasons for blaming the family members of convicted persons.<sup>29</sup>

3. *Omission* – negligence, family members of the convicted person are blamed for something they did not do, something they neglected or did not know about, and which, in the opinion of the public, was the cause of the crime.

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<sup>27</sup> R. Szczepanik, K. Miszewski, *Wpływ długoterminowego uwięzienia na rodziny więźniów – stan wiedzy i zaniedbane kierunki badań*, Profilaktyka społeczna i resocjalizacja 30/2016, pp. 53–95.

<sup>28</sup> R. Coundry, *Families Shamed; The Consequences of Crime for Relatives of Serious Offenders*, Willan publishing, Uffculme 2007.

<sup>29</sup> R. Coundry, *Families Shamed; The Consequences of Crime for Relatives of Serious Offenders*, Willan publishing, Uffculme 2007, pp. 65–78.

4. *Commission* – authority or mandate, blaming relatives of the convicted person for what they did in the past, or just before the crime was committed by the convicted person, and which may have contributed to the commission of the crime.
5. *Continuation* – applied to those family members who are in contact with the convicted person and who, in the public's opinion, should break any contact.

### **The typology of the social situation of families of convicted persons**

In my research, carried out between 2013 and 2014, I used a qualitative paradigm. Qualitative research leads to an understanding of facts and processes, allowing for a qualitative description of reality. One of the constitutive features of these studies, apart from the interactive method of collecting and obtaining data from significant cases, are small research samples.<sup>30</sup> The researcher is not interested in the representativeness of the results obtained, but in generating as much comprehensive information as possible on the research problems posed. The aim of qualitative research is not to show the phenomena taking place in the population, but rather to deepen them, to obtain “new” information, so as to better understand the analysed aspect.<sup>31</sup>

For the purposes of this text, I will only present some of the results which have been obtained by describing and typologising the economic situation and social relations of the families of convicted persons.<sup>32</sup> The research included the families of prisoners (32 fami-

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<sup>30</sup> S. Pasikowski, *Czy wielkość jest niezbędna? O rozmiarze próby w badaniach jakościowych*, Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych, no. 21 (2/2015), pp. 195–211.

<sup>31</sup> S. Juszczyk, *Badania jakościowe w naukach społecznych. Szkice metodologiczne*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, Katowice 2013.

<sup>32</sup> All studies published in: S. Dzierżyńska-Breś, *Sytuacja społeczna rodzin osób pozbawionych wolności*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań 2016.

lies) represented by their wives or life partners and children between 10 and 18 years of age, who knew about their father's stay in prison and expressed their wish to participate in the research. The selected families were characterised by a variety of social and financial circumstances. Families who were in contact with the imprisoned person were interviewed, as well as those who broke contact.

A detailed analysis of own research and the research presented so far in Polish and foreign literature made it possible to distinguish three types of social situations of families of convicted persons. These are:

- 1) The social situation of a family focused on supporting the resocialisation process of the convicted person.

In families representing type I of the social situation when the family is focused on supporting the resocialisation process, the imprisonment of a husband/partner and father is a shock for the family, causing chaos in the fulfilment of family roles. Relations between family members become labile and the fulfilment of family functions is shaken. Family members who are left behind do not know how to act in this situation, and they are open to support and help which they seek during the initial period of imprisonment. These families define their situation as a crisis.

In this type of social situation, the respondents mentioned the negative changes in their economic situation. The inability to meet their own needs and those of their children gave rise to a state of deprivation and could lead to serious mental and physical health problems and the proper functioning of individuals.<sup>33</sup> The housing and financial situation does not merely have a stratification function. It determines an individual's place on the ladder of social life, but also leads to a sense of security. Instability in this area gives rise to a feeling of powerlessness and inability to act. In these families, housing conditions have definitely deteriorated after the arrest of the husband/partner. Only a part of the families could afford to stay in their current flat. Most often thanks to the financial help of

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<sup>33</sup> A. Szymanowska, *Więzienie i co dalej?*, Wydawnictwo Żak, Warszawa 2003, p. 33.

the immediate family, or in cases where the wife/partner of the convicted person worked professionally and received a fixed salary. In one of the surveyed families, their own flat meant converting the garage in the parents' home into an apartment, but they had to take out a loan to finish it (Case no. 7). In another family, the rented apartment was paid for by the mother of the woman participating in the study (Case no. 1). Rented flats were often in debt, and families had often been in arrears with rent or current charges before their husband/partner was imprisoned. The women and children were worried about the future. They were most afraid of losing a roof over their heads. Two of the surveyed families lived in tragic conditions, without furniture, with a gas cooker instead of an oven. The children in one of the families slept with their mother on a mattress, which was the only piece of furniture in the house. The family living in the garage was in constant conflict with the parents of the convicted person (the garage was part of their home), who disconnected their daughter-in-law's electricity and water supply when their son was in prison. The children in some of these families shared one room with their parents and did not have the conditions to do their homework or invite colleagues.

Shock, disbelief, extreme emotions, crying, were the most frequently mentioned reactions presented by type I families to the arrest of the husband/partner and father. Very often the wives/partners of convicted persons, instead of receiving support from their own or their partner's parents, met with resentment, shouting and lack of understanding. Family relationships of the surveyed women from type I families did not change over time. If they were positive before the husband's arrest, they usually remained so, and the family of the convicted person received support from the relatives. However, in the case of families where the reactions were negative, time only piled up the conflicts and worsened family relationships. The surveyed women from type I families, when describing their further relationships with friends and neighbours, often pointed out that, despite initial support or its declaration, after some time everyone returned to their own problems, forgetting their promises. If, on the other hand, reactions to the crime committed by the husband/

partner were negative, harassment, insults and ostracism intensified, sometimes forcing the women to change their environment.

2) The social situation of a prisoner's family which is in opposition to the convict's social rehabilitation process.

In families affected by imprisonment, family roles are also affected<sup>34</sup>, focused on the convict and his criminal "career". Interactions, both within and outside the family system, are characterised by aggression, a demanding attitude and closure. Families affected by imprisonment often live in an environment characterised by poverty, numerous social problems and persistent multi-generational dysfunctionality. In these families, crime is a way of life perceived as cleverness and an ability to find one's place in today's "unjust" world. The husbands/partners and fathers serve long sentences or are often in prison. As they say imprisonment is just an "accident at work", it is not treated as an extraordinary event, but rather as something that is constantly present in their lives. This type of family functions very well within the system of aid institutions and knows where to go for material and financial support. This is the main source of their interest. Members of these families are familiar with the principles of prison life.

It should be stressed that the feelings of the surveyed families concerning their economic situation were subjective, which was related to their cultural and social background. They usually had fewer needs and lower expectations concerning their lives. They described their current financial situation as good, which was contrary to their objective living conditions or their profession. In families affected by imprisonment which were in opposition to the process of resocialisation of the convicted person, every element of the new situation was perfectly organised. This also applied to the place of residence of the convicted person's wife/partner and children. Despite the arrest and imprisonment of the husband/partner and

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<sup>34</sup> This means that the roles played by family members are adapted to the living conditions in the criminal environment and prison. The members of these families have assimilated the norms, values and patterns of behaviour accepted in the prison community.

father, the families did not experience housing or financial chaos. They were simply taken in by their extended family for the duration of the sentence, or their address remained unchanged, and the surveyed women had no problems with adapting to the new situation and knew how to obtain financial support. It should be noted that the accommodation conditions of these families were not particularly attractive, which was not a problem for them. Their homes were usually furnished with old equipment and old furniture. Against this background, the presence of new audio-visual equipment was definitely a surprise. These families usually live in districts with a bad reputation and reluctance from other city residents (e.g. Gołęcin in Szczecin, Bałuty in Łódź, Praga Południe in Warsaw). Their flats are often located in old tenement houses. In the case of two surveyed families (case no. 8 and case no. 15) there was no toilet in the flat. In families affected by imprisonment, relations between the neighbours and family friends continued to be friendly. Women, when asked what they would have done if they had met with harassment and abuse from their neighbours, reacted aggressively. Their social relations with their immediate surroundings did not change. However, they were supported by neighbours and friends, who also had problems with the law, and they were quite familiar with the institution of the prison. Type II families declared that they experienced support and help from at least a few people in the family. However, their contact with people from other social circles, or with representatives of institutions, such as schools, court guardianship, social assistance centres, prison services and the police, was characterised by reluctance, hostility and a demanding attitude. The surveyed women and children expressed negative opinions about the representatives of these institutions, complaining about their indifference and lack of kindness.

3) The social situation of a family focused on reconstructing its social environment.

The last, third type of families focused on the reconstruction of their own social environment is characterised by a reorganised system of roles and conflicting relations not only with the convicted

person, but also between the remaining family members. The performance of functions in these families remains correct or unbalanced depending on how much time has passed from the conviction of the husband/partner and father. The more time has passed, the more the previously disturbed functions returned to normal. The whole family system, in interactions, is distinguished by reluctance to the past and closure. These families break the bond with the convict, and their aim is to reconstruct the existing role system and relations. A frequent manifestation of this is, for example, the appearance of a new partner of the mother in the family, which intensifies the conflicts within the families. The period of imprisonment of husbands/partners and fathers in this case ranges from 5-year sentences to 25-year sentences or life imprisonment. The very act for which the convicted person is responsible, his or her behaviour towards the family and the social response to the situation are among the factors that determine the break-up of the family. Families reconstructing their own social situation change their living environment, break off contacts with distant family and friends in order to forget about the past.

In some of the type III families there is a clear improvement in the economic situation of the family after the imprisonment of the husband/partner. Even if the surveyed women claimed their situation worsened, it was not significant. They often said that they would rather have less money and reduce their expenses than live with an unwanted partner again. In this type of family, after the initial deterioration, the housing situation gradually improved as more time passed from the conviction of the husband/partner and father. Even if the current housing conditions were not favourable for the family, family members were still happy and optimistic about their situation in the future. This was probably related to the fact that women took up work and accumulated their own savings, which were to be used for renting a flat.

The social reactions to imprisonment in this type of family were similar to those of type I, which represented the social situation of families supporting the process of resocialisation of convicts. Lack

of understanding and support were most frequently mentioned. This did not change over time. These families often met with indifference from their social environment. Relations with close family members were similar: if, before the arrest and conviction, they were negative, the imprisonment of a family member only made them worse.

The wives/partners of convicted persons, regardless of the type of situation they represent, have also assessed how the economic situation and the reactions of those close to them influenced their own behaviour and the behaviour of their children towards their husband/partner. This was not insignificant in any of the families; on the contrary, it was important for maintaining the bond between the family and the convicted person. Satisfying basic material needs, having a job, having a roof over one's head and supporting and friendly reactions of loved ones help to maintain this bond. On the other hand, poverty, unemployment, ostracism, insults and aggression against the families of convicted persons contribute to its break-up. This is why the diagnosis of the economic situation and the social relations of families is so important. Families that function effectively provide support for the convicted person and are more willing to cooperate with prison educators and the judiciary with regard to the effects of resocialisation and readaptation.

## Conclusion

According to Alice Mills and Helen Codd, two important arguments, the humanitarian one and the pragmatic one, are in favour of organising support and assistance for families of prisoners.<sup>35</sup> The aim of the first one is to maintain family ties for the benefit of the families themselves, and the second is to promote the role of the family in the resocialisation of prisoners. However, these are not simple tasks. Contemporary subject literature relating to the eco-

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<sup>35</sup> A. Mills, H. Codd, *Prisoner's families*, [in:] *Handbook of Prisons*, Y. Jewkes (ed.), Willan Publishing 2007.

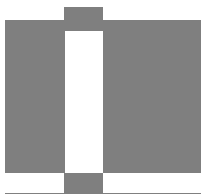


conomic situation and social interactions of such families indicates that they continue to experience the same problems that were described in the first research on "imprisoned families" in the 1960s. The impact on both the convict himself and his family is not a priority for the prison service, just like 60 years ago. There is a need for in-depth research that could help to understand not only the contribution of families to the social rehabilitation impact, but also their needs and problems, so that, working in parallel with the whole family system, the most effective support for the social re-adaptation process can be obtained.

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## The situation of children in the spaces of selected metropolitan courtyards in the context of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of reproducing cultural capital

**ABSTRACT:** Agnieszka Janik, *The situation of children in the spaces of selected metropolitan courtyards in the context of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of reproducing cultural capital*. Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy, no. 29, Poznań 2020. Pp. 211–235. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-391X. e-ISSN 2658-283X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ikps.2020.29.10>

The article addresses the subject of social and cultural inequalities in relation to the situation of children in degraded spaces of selected courtyards in one of the smallest housing estates in Wrocław, Poland, Przedmieście Oławskie. The aim of the research was to diagnose and describe the specific situation of these children and to analyse it in the context of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of reproducing cultural capital.

The first part presents theoretical threads relevant for further interpretations and covers the concepts of marginalisation and reproduction of cultural capital as perceived in P. Bourdieu's theories. The second part discusses the methodology of qualitative research, embedded in an interpretive paradigm and based on: ethnographic research strategy, the approach to research with children and the mosaic approach. The third part presents the results of research showing the specificity of the physical and socio-cultural environment of the studied courtyards. On the one hand, the dimensions of its marginalisation and the processes proving the reproduction of poor cultural capital were indicated; on the other hand, examples of artistic interventions in this type of marginalised environment were presented as exemplifications of breaking the mechanisms of cultural reproduction.

**KEY WORDS:** cultural capital, reproduction of cultural capital, child and childhood studies, courtyards/backyards, child

## Introduction

According to Fred Mahler, marginality or marginalization denotes the experience of individuals and social groups that are worse off than other groups. Their position is less privileged, which implies an uneven distribution of power between them and other groups. These differences may be apparent in access to economic, social, cultural or political resources. An example of experiencing marginalization may be the different level of intellectual property held by: educated and illiterate people, urban and rural communities, colonizers and the colonized.<sup>1</sup> Experiences of marginality vary depending on the specific socio-cultural and economic conditions in which the groups function, as well as the specificity of the individuals' understanding of their situation. However, there are certain experiences of marginality common to different groups. According to F. Mahler this includes situations in which the said groups have: fewer rights and more duties, fewer choices and more limitations; a lower economic position and fewer economic, educational, professional or leisure opportunities.<sup>2</sup> The understanding of marginality proposed by Jerzy Kwaśniewski is also worth noting. He described it as a "state of eradication", preventing groups and individuals from participating in the institutional social order.<sup>3</sup> The phenomenon of marginalization is also characterised by spatial dimension. The courtyards of one of the smallest housing estates in Wrocław, Przedmieście Oławskie, described in this paper, are an example of a marginalizing environment, both in the physical and socio-cultural sense.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the residents, including children,

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<sup>1</sup> F. Mahler, *Marginality and Maldevelopment*, [in:] *Insights into Maldevelopment. Reconsidering the Idea of Progress*, ed. J. Danecki, Uniwersytet Warszawski, Warszawa 1993, pp. 192-193.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, p. 193.

<sup>3</sup> J. Kwaśniewski, *Postrzeżanie marginalizacji oraz strategii środków kontroli społecznej*, [in:] *Kontrola społeczna procesów marginalizacji*, ed. J. Kwaśniewski, Wydawnictwo INTERART, Warszawa 1997, pp. 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> The results of the research presented and discussed in the article were conducted by the author as part of her doctoral dissertation entitled *External spaces and*

who use these spaces experienced marginalization. On the other hand, these courtyards were also a special area of research as a result of the interventions, workshops and art projects conducted in them, which created unique opportunities for children to experience art. The aim of the article is to show the situation of children in selected, degraded courtyards of Przedmieście Oławskie in Wrocław with reference to the specificity of the processes taking place in them: on the one hand, the processes of marginalization, on the other hand, artistic activities. It is also important to point out that artistic activities can overcome socio-cultural inequalities. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of reproduction of cultural capital is a perspective that enables a deeper understanding and a more insightful look at the situation of children in a degraded environment. The above issues are described in the following sections of the article.

### **Pierre Bourdieu's concept of reproduction of cultural capital**

P. Bourdieu's research interests focused on such categories as: culture, action, social inequality. The sociologist put forward a bold thesis, stating that cultural practices and symbols, ranging from style of dress, artistic taste, eating habits, to philosophy, science and religion, embody certain social interests and functions and, consequently, actually reinforce social differences and division.<sup>5</sup> This means that everyday activities, such as gestures or body posture, represent the participation of social groups and institutions in the struggle for the right to establish the rules of what we define as "normal"; they make up the concept of "habitus". Also, sophisticat-

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*play areas from the perspective of children's experiences and cultural practices* – a thesis written under the supervision of dr. hab. Wiktor Żłobicki, PhD, Prof. of the University of Wrocław and the assistant promoter dr Kamila Kamińska-Sztark, defended in December 2018 at the University of Wrocław.

<sup>5</sup> D. Schwartz, *Culture and Power. The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1997, p. 6.

ed aesthetic judgments, manifested in the form of various forms of capital, are expressions of socially regulated means of social division distributed according to class.<sup>6</sup>

As Bourdieu pointed out, individuals and social groups, by gathering various kinds of goods of material, social, cultural and symbolic nature, strive to preserve and strengthen their positions in the social order. In this way they build their capitals, whose various forms should be understood as manifestations of power.<sup>7</sup> The sociologist distinguished three types of capital: economic, cultural and social. Cultural capital is the most important for my further analysis, as it denotes cultural dispositions received by individuals within the framework of their social origin, acquired education, class affiliation or position in an institution.<sup>8</sup> This capital consists of “cultural goods received through different family pedagogical activities, depending on the group and class from which they originate”.<sup>9</sup> Thus, cultural capital is transferred through family habits, especially in the form of language or school capital.<sup>10</sup> It consists of various resources and skills, which include: education, ethical preferences, general cultural knowledge.<sup>11</sup> This capital can manifest itself in three forms. The first is its embodied state, which occurs in the form of long-term dispositions of the body and mind, such as: good manners or knowledge of cultural and social conventions. The second form is objectified capital, which is made up of cultural goods, for example: possession of dictionaries, paintings, instruments or books indicating the artistic taste of their owner. The third form is institutionalized capital, manifested in the form of certain and rela-

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<sup>6</sup> L. Koczanowicz, *Wspólnota i emancypacje. Spór o społeczeństwo postkonwencyjonalne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej Edukacji TWP, Wrocław 2005, p. 83.

<sup>7</sup> D. Schwartz, *Culture and Power...*, op. cit., p. 73.

<sup>8</sup> P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron, *Reprodukcja. Elementy Teorii Systemu Nauczania*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, p. 47.

<sup>9</sup> P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron, *Reprodukcja. Elementy...*, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 182.

<sup>11</sup> D. Schwartz, *Culture and Power...*, op. cit., p. 75.

tively permanent “objectifications”, exemplified by formal education obtained at a prestigious university. Such a distinguishing achievement attests to the value of the cultural capital held by an individual and, at the same time, by the fact of its acquisition, is to guarantee the ability to maintain this capital.<sup>12</sup>

Bourdieu pointed out that in modern societies cultural capital has the greatest impact on social stratification, and its unequal distribution in an objectified and institutionalised form among different social classes is the key dimension of inequality.<sup>13</sup> Cultural capital, governed by the laws of accumulation, exchange and other market laws, contributes to determining the social position of individuals and groups and their chances of accessing other forms of capital, goods and services.<sup>14</sup>

## Around the research methodology

The interpretations presented in the article are part of the interdisciplinary research on children and childhood, which Barbara Smolińska-Theiss described as extensive and multithreaded studies. In her opinion, they constitute a great, internally diverse and heterogeneous output: “they have their dynamics, grow out of specific social and cultural contexts, create different currents of exploration”.<sup>15</sup> I considered the outdoor spaces and playgrounds of children as the subject of my own research. The aim of the research was to diagnose and describe the specific situation of children in selected, degraded spaces of Przedmieście Oławskie in Wrocław in the context of Bourdieu’s concept of reproduction of cultural capital. The specificity of this situation consisted of the socio-cultural and

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<sup>12</sup> P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron, *Reprodukcja. Elementy...*, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>13</sup> D. Schwartz, *Culture and Power...*, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>14</sup> P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron, *Reprodukcja. Elementy...*, op. cit., p. 346.

<sup>15</sup> B. Smolińska-Theiss, *Rozwój badań nad dzieciństwem – przelomy i przejścia*, [in:] *Dzieciństwo – witraż bolesny*, ed. E. Jarosz, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego „Chowanna”, Vol. 1(34), Katowice 2010, p. 14.

physical environment of the courtyards and the processes taking place in them. A significant element of the socio-cultural environment was, on the one hand, the process of marginalization, and on the other hand, artistic activities related to the celebration of the title of European Capital of Culture Wrocław 2016.

I have embedded my own research in the qualitative paradigm, giving it an interpretative character. As Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln pointed out, qualitative research is seen as “a field of multiple interpretative practices”.<sup>16</sup> The word “qualitative” implies the study of such issues as: socially constructed reality, socially created experiences and the meaning given to them.<sup>17</sup> I based my own research on the strategy of ethnographic research by attempting to “immerse” in the context of the lives of the respondents.<sup>18</sup> Research of adults took the form of ethnographic field methods and consisted of the observation of the backyard life “minute by minute”, using hidden and participatory observation, free conversations<sup>19</sup> and qualitative research interviews.<sup>20</sup> In my research of children, I used the strategy of “research with children” as proposed by Mary Kellett. Within this strategy, children often act as co-researchers or actively participate in activities planned and organized by adults. In this way, adults, throughout the entire research process, find themselves in the position of co-learners, learning from children.<sup>21</sup> In my research with children I used not only observation and free

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<sup>16</sup> N.K. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, *Wprowadzenie. Dziedzina i praktyka badań jakościowych*, [in:] *Metody badań jakościowych*, Vol. 1, ed. N.K. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009, p. 28.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 34.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. L. Atkins, S. Wallace, *Qualitative Research in Education*, Sage, London 2012, p. 148; I. Kawecki, *Metoda etnograficzna w badaniach edukacyjnych*, Wydawnictwo Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych, Łódź 1994, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> M. Angrosino, *Badania etnograficzne i obserwacyjne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2010, p. 129.

<sup>20</sup> S. Kvale, *Interwiew. Wprowadzenie do jakościowego wywiadu badawczego*, Trans Humana Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie, Białystok 2004, pp. 31–33.

<sup>21</sup> M. Kellett, *Rethinking Children and Research. Attitudes in Contemporary Society*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London, New York 2010, p. 88.



conversation, proper ethnographic field research, but also elements of the mosaic approach. The basis for collecting this type of data included organized meetings, during which children performed the tasks I had planned, inspired by such methods and techniques as: guiding tours, creating albums and mandalas.<sup>22</sup> The environment of my own research included deliberately selected courtyards of Przedmieście Oławskie, distinguished by impoverishment of the socio-cultural environment and degradation of physical space. In the selection of courtyards for research I used the concept known as a “flaner’s walk”. A contemporary flaner is a person who strolls through the city without a clear plan and purpose, choosing the path according to his/her current interest; he/she gets to know the city in a multisensory way, randomly and transiently.<sup>23</sup> I entered the spaces of Przedmieście Oławskie without a specific plan, open to random situations, my own subjective interests and observed events. While visiting the housing estate, I gradually got used to the new environment and its inhabitants. As time passed, certain spaces began to take on a special meaning for me and transformed into “scenes of everyday life”. On this basis I made a subjective choice of courtyards which became spaces of my research.

In total, I have conducted more than one hundred and fifty hours of ethnographic fieldwork, which covered about one hundred children and eighty adults. Thirty-three of the respondents took part in organized classes with children; the classes lasted a total of about fifteen hours. Most of the field research was conducted in three selected courtyards of Przedmieście Oławskie between June 2016 and mid-December 2016 and between June 2017 and October 2017.

From the beginning, all data collected during the research was systematically processed. I extracted fifty-five fragments of the text

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<sup>22</sup> Por. A. Clark, P. Moss, *Listening to Young Children: The Mosaic Approach*, National Children’s Bureau, England 2011; A. Clark, *Spaces to Play: More listening to young children using the Mosaic approach*, National Children’s Bureau, England 2005.

<sup>23</sup> B. Jałowicki, *Czytanie przestrzeni*, Konsorcjum Akademickie: Wydawnictwo WSE in Kraków, WSiZ in Rzeszów, WSZiA in Zamość, Kraków-Rzeszów-Zamość 2012, p. 68.

with a total volume of one hundred and forty-seven pages from the extensive transcription material. Then I further processed the text, dividing it into segments and encoding it. I analysed the data in terms of the key concepts revealed in the respondents' statements. This is what is known as data coding in the literature and consists in creating categories without prior reference to the theory.<sup>24</sup> The whole analysis was time-consuming and the analytical activities became more and more complex as the research progressed. In accordance with the assumptions of ethnographic research I was aiming at: grasping the sense of the researched "social world, together with the relations and practices existing in it"<sup>25</sup> As Liz Atkins and Susan Wallace pointed out, in the final phase of the analysis, I posed a question about the image emerging from the analysed data and how it can be interpreted.<sup>26</sup> The results of the final analyses and interpretations in relation to the description of the situation of children in the surveyed courtyards of Przedmieście Oławskie and in the context of Bourdieu's theory of reproduction of cultural capital are presented later in the article.

## **The physical and socio-cultural landscape of the surveyed courtyards of Przedmieście Oławskie**

The physical landscape of the examined courtyards of Przedmieście Oławskie was not encouraging. The courtyards were usually surrounded by devastated tenement houses with destroyed facades and plaster falling off the walls covered with graffiti. Within the larger courtyards there was little greenery. Instead, there were grey garages, outbuildings, residential buildings or service and workshop buildings. The space was divided into smaller parts, or quarters, by walls of different heights. The free spaces were usually

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<sup>24</sup> G. Gibbs, *Analizowanie danych jakościowych*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2011, pp. 90–91.

<sup>25</sup> L. Atkins, S. Wallace, *Qualitative Research...*, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 164.

filled with parked cars, sometimes not used for years and slowly turning into wrecks. The smaller courtyards were usually deprived of any infrastructure. The surfaces were unpaved; they were largely made up of: compacted soil, sand and scattered pebbles, as well as smaller and larger elements of concrete slabs; there was rubble in some places. There was a lot of garbage, especially around the overfilling containers, which emitted a bad smell in the summer. The whole thing made a depressing impression.

The socio-cultural image of the surveyed courtyards did not inspire optimism either. Many researchers stressed the numerous problems faced by the residents of the estate. The authors of the "Wrocław Social Diagnosis" indicated that the local community felt a small sense of security and expressed dissatisfaction with the place of residence, which was probably related to: security risks, poor state of infrastructure, lack of cleanliness, numerous social problems.<sup>27</sup> The authors of the Local Revitalization Program (LRP) also pointed out the accumulation of numerous social problems in this housing estate. In their opinion, they were reflected in a number of negative attitudes of the residents: "low activity of local communities (e.g. no NGO, no housing estate council<sup>28</sup> or informal groups), lack of identification with the place of residence and at the same time a sense of responsibility for it, numerous acts of vandalism, addictions articulated in public space, homelessness, etc."<sup>29</sup> The authors of the LRP stressed the high unemployment rate as compared to the average for Wrocław and the significant number of people benefiting from social assistance, including financial aid.<sup>30</sup> In their opinion, the environment of Przedmieście Oławskie was cha-

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<sup>27</sup> M. Błaszczuk, S.W. Kłopot, G. Kozdraś, *Problemy społeczne w przestrzeni Wrocławia. Raport z badań socjologicznych nad mieszkańcami miasta*. Wrocławska Diagnoza Problemów Społecznych, Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, Wrocław 2010, pp. 173–184.

<sup>28</sup> The Housing Estate Council of Przedmieście Oławskie has been operating since 2017, <http://osiedle.wroc.pl/index.php/przedmiescie-olawskie-samorzad/przedmiescie-olawskie-rada-osiedla> [15.12.2017].

<sup>29</sup> Local Revitalization Program, pp. 28–29, <http://www.wroclaw.pl/lokalny-program-rewitalizacji/lokalny-program-rewitalizacji-na-lata-2016-2018> [20.02.2017].

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 28.

racterized by poverty and learned helplessness, which, together with negative patterns of behaviour, was inherited by multigenerational families.<sup>31</sup> Based on the results of my research, it should be noted that the inhabitants of the surveyed courtyards indicated the following problems: the appropriation of space by “courtyard gangs”, the presence of louts, hoodlums and homeless people in the courtyard; consumption of drugs and alcohol parties; lack of care for order; vandalism, general dirt and disorder.

It should also be noted that Przedmieście Oławskie has been known as the “Bermuda Triangle” to many residents of Wrocław – a notorious, dangerous and forgotten part of the city “where anything can happen”. Despite the ongoing revitalization processes, the construction of new seals and the influx of new residents, the estate is still identified with crime, demoralization and pathology. Agnieszka Włostowska has described one of the main streets of the “Triangle”, R. Traugutta St., in the following manner: “Ravines of dark streets with cobblestone roads and shabby tenement houses, dirty kids with mischievous glances running around, groups sipping various drinks in the gates, the sounds of drunken brawls”.<sup>32</sup> This type of environment created an everyday living and playing space for the children who spent their free time in the courtyard.

Keeping in mind the above characteristics, it is worth noting the considerations on public spaces undertaken by Małgorzata Michel. In an attempt to explain the mechanisms of marginalization and exclusion of children and youth in degraded areas of big cities, the author has conducted an interdisciplinary analysis of urban space. In her analyses she referred e.g. to the division into “inclusive” and “exclusive” spaces. While the former give the residents a sense of “being in the right place” and promote their well-being, the latter make people “feel out of place”. Exclusive spaces are intended for a selected group of people, and those who do not belong to them

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<sup>31</sup> Ibidem, pp. 28–29.

<sup>32</sup> A. Włostowska, *Usługi, warsztaty, przemysł ulicy Traugutta we Wrocławiu*, [in:] *Przedmieście Oławskie we Wrocławiu*, ed. H. Okólska, H. Górka, J. Wagner-Głowińska, Muzeum Miejskie Wrocławia i Wydawnictwo GAJT, Wrocław 2013, p. 125.

may experience threats and unfriendly behaviour.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the examined backyards of Przedmieście Oławskie can be considered as an example of an exclusive space. This is indicated by the feelings and reactions of the residents of the housing estate who emphasise: the lack of the feeling of safety and experiencing acts of verbal violence. Residents also pointed out the appropriation of courtyard spaces by courtyard gangs, manifested through vulgar behaviour and alcohol consumption. Children also experienced the excluding function of some spaces in the courtyards. One such example was the “car park”, not so much associated with an actual place for parking cars, but rather an unwanted place: “We don’t go there” (Julek, 6.5 years old). This space was inaccessible for children, arousing a sense of fear and danger: “We don’t go there” (Iga, 6 years old); “I’m afraid to go there, they accost me there” (Piotrek, aged 6).

### **The situation of children in the surveyed courtyards of Przedmieście Oławskie – analyses and interpretations**

With reference to Bourdieu’s theory, cultural practices and symbols, manifested both in the style of dress and artistic taste, as well as in the ways of spending free time or acquired education, embody certain social functions – defining what is perceived by individuals as “normal”, testifying to their “habitus”, reinforcing social differences and divisions. In the context of the socio-cultural and physical environment of the surveyed courtyards, as outlined above, it should be pointed out that they were generally characterized by poor cultural capital determined by the low cultural dispositions of individuals living in those spaces and manifesting such behaviours as: consumption of alcohol, lack of care for the space and its, often vulgar, appropriation. The impoverishment of cultural capital was

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<sup>33</sup> J. Painter, C. Philo 1995 after: M. Michel, *Gry uliczne w wykluczenie społeczne w przestrzeni miejskiej. Perspektywa resocjalizacyjna*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2016, p. 166.

revealed by numerous social, cultural and economic problems, as described above. Bourdieu suggests that such dispositions were acquired by individuals as a result of their local origin.<sup>34</sup> This phenomenon can be described by the stigma of the “bad address”. According to Maria Skóra, spaces are assigned different values; places become a determinant of social prestige and aspirations. This means that both elegant and neglected areas shape the mosaic of the city, discovering the class diversity of their inhabitants and emphasizing the inconsistency of the local community. In this sense, a place of residence can be a stigma.

In the light of the above deliberations, it is worth noting B. Smolińska-Theiss’s research on the childhood of new middle class children in Poland.<sup>35</sup> It is not so much a theoretical reference to the analysis of the situation of children playing in the backyards of Przedmieście Oławskie, but the extent to which children’s chances and opportunities for development depend on their social and cultural affiliation, indicating the gap between their educational opportunities. Smolińska-Theiss used the notion of “high quality children” in her analyses, referring to the parental approach of investing in children. The term describes a post-modern childhood dominated by market influences, the pursuit of success and money.<sup>36</sup> The opposite of the term “high quality children” is the term “low quality children”, i.e. those who do not have the opportunity to benefit from family support and their basic needs are not met. Therefore, it can be concluded that the children I examined, coming from Przedmieście Oławskie, were an example of the latter. These children were deprived of family capital that could serve them to build valuable educational and life plans and help them acquire important competences and knowledge, ensuring well-paid jobs and professional success. Their families did not provide them with high quali-

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<sup>34</sup> M. Skóra, *The stigma of “bad address”. Social risks of revitalization processes in Polish cities*, [in:] *The city: a learning experience*, ed. K. Kamińska, A. Szerłaż, Wydawnictwo LIBRON, Wrocław 2011, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> B. Smolińska-Theiss, *Dzieciństwo jako...*, op. cit., p. 281.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 224.

ty nutrition, clothing and interesting playful activities. In the context of Bourdieu's concept of reproduction of capital, it can be pointed out that children from these courtyards had unequal opportunities to access economic, social and cultural goods and thus were largely deprived of opportunities for development and good education. Due to the unequal distribution of cultural capital, these children were disadvantaged as compared to other social groups. They had limited opportunities of spending their free time – generally determined by the spaces offered by the courtyards – and limited access to intellectual and cultural goods, which was not provided by parents and guardians who left them in the backyard for the entire day. In general, they did not have the opportunity to: engage in higher culture, participate in foreign travels, acquire sporting, musical and language skills, or engage in civic and political activities. They did not go to summer camps, and usually spent their time in the backyards. As a result, they would have little chances to get into a good university. Therefore, it can be assumed that most of these children would not have the opportunity to change their position in the social structure, and they would reproduce the attitudes of their parents and guardians, their low educational aspirations or unambitious life goals. This type of situation concerning children, who had fewer economic, educational or leisure opportunities, is an example of their experience of marginality. Moreover, according to Bourdieu, one of the forms of cultural capital includes cultural goods, e.g. dictionaries, paintings, instruments or books indicating the artistic taste of their owners. Children spending their time in the backyards did not use such attributes. This could be the result of the specificity of their activities, such as running, playing football, activity games, which were determined by the specifics of their environment. On the other hand, not using such attributes could indicate a lack of interest in such forms of spending free time as: reading books, playing instruments, developing interest in art, which is an example of low cultural capital.

An important element describing the situation of children in the surveyed backyards includes their activities in these spaces. The

results of research show that children often took up such activities as: running, shouting, kicking a ball around, kicking stones, climbing the roofs and walls of garages, loud conversations and laughs, strolling around, playing hide and seek, fighting, playing war. This is confirmed by the statements of the respondents: "I like to play outside with my friends, e.g. tag, but I also run around the staircase" (Damian, age 8); "Well, we like to play war best" (Tomek, age 8); "Sometimes I fight with my friends, but it's just for fun" (Damian, age 8); "We go up on the roofs, these, here. Climbing the roofs is great fun" (Wiktoria, age 7). It also happened that children got into conflicts with adult users of the backyard spaces, who tried to force them to "behave themselves", by saying: keep quiet, play politely and calmly, stay in one place. According to Bourdieu, cultural capital includes "good manners" and knowledge of cultural and social conventions, which constitute its embodied forms. Children's games, such as climbing the roofs of garages, throwing stones, shouting and running around were considered by the adult inhabitants to be uncultured and inappropriate – they did not fit into the accepted cultural and social conventions and did not reflect the expected behaviour regulated by social norms. Some of the residents stressed that children were "bratty" and "left to themselves to do what they wanted". This was indicated by statements of the residents of the estate: "The children are left to themselves, no one watches over them" (Respondent 3, age ca. 60–65); "They think they can just let the children out into the backyard and not care about anything" (Respondent 1, age 45); "They don't watch over the children!" (Respondent 2, age ca. 50). Children responded to such disciplinary behaviour in their own way. They broke the unwritten rules – they did not listen to the instructions of adults. At the same time, they escaped the outraged gaze of other residents and literally ran away from the accusations shouted at them, using their knowledge of the area and the routes they themselves marked out. Thus, on the one hand, they did not show "good manners" but, on the other hand, they avoided social sanctions imposed by adults from their position of power. This type of behaviour of adults and children can also be



perceived through the prism of the “process of social distribution of the neighbourhood space”, described by Anita Gulczyńska in a socio-pedagogical study devoted to the everyday life of teenagers living in impoverished urban environments. By observing and analysing the everyday life of teenagers in one of the districts of Łódź, the author drew attention to the notion of negotiating public space by its users. As she noted: “It is a process of social allocation and use of space by its inhabitants, which takes place through social negotiations between representatives of different categories”.<sup>37</sup> Distribution is a process in which the rights and needs of different groups clash. In reference to the situation in the surveyed backyards of Przedmieście Oławskie, it would seem that adult users who have an advantage over children would find it easy to enforce their rationale. However, this was not the case, and children, using their own methods, avoided disciplinary sanctions. Thus, mutual negotiations took the form of a strategy of “eliminating children from the yard”, on the one hand, and defensive tactics expressed in the effective avoidance of sanctions, on the other hand.

According to Bourdieu cultural capital also consists of ethical preferences and the values expressed by individuals. In this context, it is worth pointing out the essence of socio-cultural aspects affecting the everyday backyard environment of children. It may come as a surprise that all the surveyed children over the age of five demonstrated a pejorative attitude towards the homeless living in the studied spaces or people searching through rubbish bins, called “ecological divers” by some residents. With regard to the “uninvited guests”, children used the common and offensive term “wino”. A statement made by Maja (aged 6) may serve as an example: “I don’t like winos, rotten apples, garbage, and winos. I don’t like it when someone sits in my staircase”. This kind of behaviour of children could be a reflection of the environment’s opinion about the negative social role of these people. According to Bourdieu, this

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<sup>37</sup> A. Gulczyńska, *Chłopaki z dzielnicy*. Studium społeczno-pedagogiczne z perspektywy interakcyjnej, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2013, p. 67.

kind of behaviour could be a reproduction of the cultural capital available in the backyard and acquired through family or environmental habits in the form of language capital. In order to explain the mechanisms of such behaviour of children, it may be useful to refer to the specifics of the socialization environment of backyards. According to Jolanta Zwiernik, these were internal courtyards surrounded by walls, i.e. spaces relatively isolated from the environment, enabling children of different ages and genders to gain experience together, exercise physical fitness and resourcefulness, as well as shape communication and social competences. In such spaces, children jointly acquire experience to perform future social roles.<sup>38</sup> Thus, the specificity of the backyards and their relative isolation from other educational environments may have been conducive to the reproduction of negative patterns of behaviour displayed by their users.

When analysing the situation of children in the surveyed backyards, it is also worthwhile to refer to the children's general cultural knowledge, constituting an important element of cultural capital. Knowledge understood as the competence of recognizing symbols and codes contained in space is of great importance here. As Bohdan Jałowicki pointed out, in the course of space exploration, individuals acquire knowledge of the code enabling them to read the meanings of symbols and signs contained in material spatial forms, i.e. understanding the symbolism of a square, street, building. Such codes can be defined as a natural language belonging to the culture and common heritage of people.<sup>39</sup> The children playing in the backyards did not show a significant level of such knowledge: they did not know the codes and symbols that would allow them to understand and read the cultural heritage of their local environment. While the children were well acquainted with hiding places

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<sup>38</sup> J. Zwiernik, *Dziecięca codzienność w przestrzeni podwórka*, [in:] *Pedagogika wczesnej edukacji. Dyskursy, problemy, otwarcia*, ed. D. Klus Stańska, M. Szczepska-Pustkowska, Wydawnictwo Akademickie „Żak”, Warszawa 2011, p. 413.

<sup>39</sup> B. Jałowicki, *Czytanie przestrzeni...*, op. cit., p. 20.

and shortcuts between different areas of the estate, they were not aware of the existence of such architectural gems as: 19th century tenement houses with rich ornamentation, the former Oławska Gate, the Webskych palace, i.e. the building of today's Ethnographic Museum.

It is also worth considering what kind of skills were acquired by children while playing in backyards or what opportunities for shaping skills were created by children in the backyards. The results of research showed that these were skills that enabled children to survive in their environment, the so-called "survival skills". Children learned: to move around independently in the backyards, to use the available places and opportunities to play, to cope, to take care of themselves and not to hurt themselves despite the lack of adult care. This type of behaviour is evidence of the children's independence and their ability to organize their own time in their immediate surroundings. However, in the context of the theory of reproduction of cultural capital<sup>40</sup>, these behaviours can be interpreted in a different way: children have not so much learnt to be self-sufficient in their immediate environment, but rather acquired skills that enabled them to function efficiently in the social class environment to which they belonged. Thus, it can be concluded that their independence and the ability to cope could only be used in the environment they were familiar with, i.e. in their own neighbourhood.

The lack of interest of the children in taking care of their own, closest environment is also worth noting. This is another phenomenon that can testify to the reproduction of poor cultural capital of children living in the backyards of Przedmieście Oławskie. Dirt and disorder reigned the surveyed areas. The environment was neglected and often devastated. During the research I did not observe any actions by adults or children expressing concern for these spaces, for example: removing dog excrements, garbage, cigarettes, putting the objects in order or performing activities that could beautify the yard, such as planting. It can be assumed that in the future these

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<sup>40</sup> P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron, *Reprodukcja. Elementy...*, op. cit., p. 135.

children will also show a lack of interest in their immediate surroundings and, consequently, will not engage in changing them. Thus, the children will not be prepared to improve their living space, but rather to replicate the negative behaviours manifested by the community to which they belong.

In order to further explain the mechanisms of reproduction of cultural capital taking place in the backyards of Przedmieście Oławskie, it is worth quoting Tomasz Szlendak's reflections on the "vicious circle of class reproduction" and inheritance of social position in the family.<sup>41</sup> By analysing the research on social mobility in Poland, the author concluded that the social structure in Poland is stiffening and the inheritance of social positions is increasing. This process characterizes two extreme groups in particular – the wealthy and the poor. The possession or lack of property is strongly connected with the level of education. As T. Szlendak points out: "Thus, social positions are most strongly inherited in the families of, on the one hand, well-off entrepreneurs, middle-class managers and non-technical intellectuals, and on the other hand, among the poorest strata".<sup>42</sup> Moreover, an important assumption related to the reproduction of social position is the thesis cited by Szlendak about the inheritance of poverty, not so much directly, but rather as a result of inheriting certain patterns concerning educational aspirations. This means that children brought up in poor families will become poor adults because their parents did not show any motivation to study, which is nowadays considered to be the most significant factor resulting in a higher income. It is not difficult to guess that poor parents cannot afford to educate their children, which in turn would allow them to "break the vicious circle of poverty".<sup>43</sup> In this context, some families living in the examined backyards of Przedmieście Oławskie can be described by the mechanisms of social inheritance: "Uneducated, poor parents, focused on multid-

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<sup>41</sup> T. Szlendak, *Socjologia rodziny. Ewolucja, historia, zróżnicowanie*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2012, p. 235.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 235.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 236.

mensional survival, living in accordance with the values, norms, attitudes shaped over years, in the contemporary market reality, provide their children with «inadequate» cultural capital, with «inadequate» language capital at the forefront”.<sup>44</sup> Thus, children who speak an unauthorized language and have an unauthorized capital have less chances of good educational achievements at the very beginning of their school career. They also have little opportunity to break out of their early childhood environment.<sup>45</sup>

### **Examples of artistic influences in the surveyed backyards**

During the period of my research, Przedmieście Oławskie was a platform of artistic influence carried out by the IMPART Festival Office of the European Capital of Culture Wrocław 2016. This organization intervened artistically in the environment of Przedmieście Oławskie, reaching directly to the courtyards and their users and inviting them to participate in various actions and projects. These actions were both temporary and long-term in nature. As Konrad Miciukiewicz noted, artistic works and activities create a critical counter space and are an “expression of difference” for the products of capitalist practices. At the same time, artistic works create “a platform for dialogue between the dominant representations of space and the historically rooted, ethnically and culturally diverse spaces of representation that are experienced every day”.<sup>46</sup> This role is also played by alternative cinemas, jazz clubs, or representations of cities in literature that contradict urban plans. In the context of the analysis of the situation of children in the courtyards of Przedmieście Oławskie, this type of platform for dialogue, rooted in the local specificity, included projects, workshops and events

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<sup>44</sup> Ibidem, p. 236.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem, p. 236.

<sup>46</sup> K. Miciukiewicz, *Miasto jako społeczna reprodukcja przestrzeni i kontrprzestrzeni miejsc*, [in:] *Pedagogika miejsca*, ed. M. Mendel, Scientific Publishing House of the Lower Silesian College of Education TWP in Wrocław, Wrocław 2006, p. 224.

proposed to children by artists as part of the celebrations of the European Capital of Culture Wrocław 2016.

The "Hedgehog" project by Iza Rutkowska was an important example of an activity that enabled children to co-create art. As the author pointed out: "The project consisted of a series of animation activities with the use of an 8-meter high inflatable hedgehog made of durable, colourful material. The hedgehog was used for summer meetings, one could lie on it, jump on it or lie down on its sticky spikes".<sup>47</sup> The artist conducted regular animation activities with children and adult residents of the courtyard, such as: sewing new hedgehog spikes together and watching cartoons and movies projected after dusk on the wall of the tenement house. The participants walked outside their backyard with the inflatable spikes and the hedgehog was "symbolically domesticated" in the open windows of one of the tenement houses. The artist decided to continue the activities based on her network of friendly contacts and together with the residents arranged a crowdfunding fundraiser for a trip for the children, which turned out to be a big, grassroots success.<sup>48</sup> In this way, the children participated in activities that used art and intervened in the backyards used by them.

Another example of artistic activities undertaken in the courtyard spaces were workshops, art classes and educational activities offered by Studio Komuny Paryskiej 45 located in a tenement house at one of the surveyed courtyards. The Studio was a place for artistic activities and exchange of experiences between the invited artists, animators and the local community. It offered classes for children conducted three times a week, as well as inter-generational workshops and activities for other groups. Concerts and exhibitions were regularly held there, also hosted and attended by children. At the entrance to the Studio, in the window located above the sidewalk, there was the Suwaczek Gallery, the smallest art gallery in

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<sup>47</sup> I. Rutkowska, *Jeź*, [in:] *Wrocław – Wejście od podwórza*, Wrocław, Festival Bureau IMPART 2016, Wrocław 2016, p. 62.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 89.

Przedmieście Oławskie, which presented works created by the children during the art classes.<sup>49</sup>

It is also worth quoting a description of one of the events organized in the Studio, during which I had the opportunity to observe the impact of the artistic interventions on children. It was a vernissage of the works of a Wrocław artist combined with his performance of electronic music. The event was attended mainly by invited guests who were distinguished by their festive and sometimes extravagant clothes, generally representing the artistic community. Children using the Studio's offer on a daily basis were also invited to participate in the vernissage. Children, unlike adults, were dressed in everyday, backyard clothes: sneakers, shorts, baseball caps and T-shirts. I described this event in the following way in my field diary: "When the vernissage started, the children stood with the other guests – they chose to be more or less in the middle. During the short welcome and introduction by the artist, they were a little anxious: they wriggled, sometimes poked one another and silenced each other. However, their behaviour did not evoke any reaction from the audience (...) After a few minutes they decided to sit on the floor with their feet crossed. During the event, from time to time, they silenced each other, for example by whispering «tss» and putting their finger to their lips (...). After playing a few songs, the artist finished his performance and received a thunderous applause, also from the enthusiastic children. (...) The Studio Leaders invited the guests to ask questions. At some point, one of the boys took the floor and asked the following question: «Is painting important to you?». This question aroused the enthusiasm of the audience: laughter and thunderous applause. But before the confused artist could give an answer, the boy got up and shouted: «I love painting! For me, it is most important!» (Agnieszka Janik, field diary).

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<sup>49</sup> The studio has been operating continuously since October 2015. The creators of its concept were: Kamila Wolszczak, Krzysztof Bryła and Natalia Gołubowska. In 2016 it was supervised by K. Wolszczak and K. Bryła in cooperation with Damian Kalita and Jacek Sterczewski, see: K. Wolszczak, J. Sterczewski, [in:] *Wrocław – Wejście od podwórza*, Festival Bureau IMPART 2016, p. 92.

The above shows the interpenetration of everyday, backyard experiences of children and their experiences with the world of art. Mutual silencing, demonstrating a willingness to respect the rules shared by other guests or expressing admiration during the culminating moments of the concert could testify to their awareness of participating in an important event and knowledge of social conventions – the rules of behaviour in this type of situation. This was a result of the children's previous experience of this type. It should also be noted that the boy's statement complimenting painting could be an expression of not so much his personal beliefs, but rather proof of his awareness of being in a specific situation, as well as cunning and intelligence. The question asked by the boy and the answer he himself provided seemed to positively surprise and amuse the gathered audience, which clearly made the boy happy. Encouraged by the audience, he proudly presented himself in front of the guests applauding him. His statement could testify to the possession of resources of cultural capital enabling him to behave properly in the situation he found himself in. The boy was aware of the circumstances of the event and of the importance of art for the invited guests; he also knew what art was and how he could use it in the context of the cultural event in which he was participating.

## Conclusions

With reference to Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction, it can be stated that the situation of children in the surveyed backyards in Przedmieście Oławskie was generally marked by the low cultural capital of the backyards. Factors such as: the children's negative attitude towards socially excluded groups, the use of a specific language, lack of knowledge about their immediate environment related to its history or architecture, lack of respect and care for their immediate surroundings, and the acquisition of the so-called "survival skills" indicate the processes of reproducing poor cultural capital available to the children in their environment.



On the other hand, projects, workshops and artistic activities aimed at children, organised in their everyday living spaces, involving them and enabling them to experience art in different dimensions, showing other forms of spending free time than those they have been familiar with so far, are exemplifications of activities breaking the pattern of marginalization and reproduction processes. This type of artistic intervention, organised in the everyday environment of children in the surveyed backyards of Przedmieście Oławskie, combined with a supporting and educating school environment, is a key activity in the pursuit of improving the situation of children and enabling them to advance in social stratification. Thus, the importance of art in transforming the everyday reality of man and his immediate environment is underlined.

To sum up, the examples presented in the article, showing the situation of children in the surveyed backyards of Przedmieście Oławskie, testify, on the one hand, to the ongoing processes of reproduction of cultural capital; on the other hand, they show the importance of artistic intervention as an example of an action that allows to break the mechanisms of marginalization and reproduction of capital in order to increase the possibility of access to its various forms.

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## Tailored Success: Disability and the Possibility of Being Successful

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The article addresses the issue of success in the context of people with disabilities. Attention was paid to the specific nature of the concept; starting with the definition, attempts were made to point out that success, being a certain “objective” construct, has a definitely individual character and should be considered as such. This individual dimension designates not only the interpretative framework determining its achievement, but also draws attention to the fact that success may have many faces. There is a need for achievement in every person, a completed challenge gives a sense of happiness, and this, according to many, is the real measure of success.

**KEY WORDS:** disability, successful, education

*The road to success is always under construction.*

Lily Tomkin

The modern world is strongly success-oriented. However, a question emerges: what is success? The dictionary defines it as *accomplishment of an aim or purpose, good outcome of an undertaking*.<sup>1</sup> Adopting such perspective forces us to go beyond the narrow understanding that is characteristic for economic sciences, but also for the common comprehension where success is identified with a high professional position, accumulated wealth, fame, etc. The dictionary definition shows that the measure of success is not the "objective" social assessment, which is the result of comparison with others, but it may be an inner conviction that something has been accomplished. When interpreting the concept of success, scientific milieus, coaches and therapists often identify it with the process of self-fulfilment. T. Tomaszewski attracts attention to the fact that such approach is close to humanistic psychology and claims: "(...) humanistic psychologists put main emphasis not on disclosing and satisfying man's inner (...) drives, but on revealing and activating his inner potential, in other words his self-realisation".<sup>2</sup> Such need of self-fulfilment is an important factor activating the individual's potential and triggering action, in the consequence of which success becomes feasible, offering a feeling of satisfaction. According to Witkowski "to accomplish success is to obviously be lucky".<sup>3</sup> Psychologists, whilst relating success to happiness, attitude, self-recognition and self-fulfilment, draw attention to the fact that it may be conditioned by the individual's potential related to his/ her degree of interest in a given area, which is the planned territory for accomplishing success.<sup>4</sup> K. Gołąb notes that success is related to an

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<sup>1</sup> *Słownik języka polskiego*, ed. E. Sobol, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2005, p. 973.

<sup>2</sup> T. Tomaszewski, *Główne idee współczesnej psychologii*, Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak, Warszawa 1998, p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> S. Witkowski, *Psychologia sukcesu*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1994, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. C. Dweck, *Nowa psychologia sukcesu*, Muza S.A., Warsaw 2013; E. Nęcka, *Inteligencja. Geneza – Struktura – Funkcje*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2002, p. 209.

action that accomplishes the highest possible level for an individual, oriented at satisfying desires and fulfilling dreams pertaining to various areas of life, taking the balance among them into account.<sup>5</sup> The author draws attention to the necessity of planning activities; therefore, success is an intended state referring to the accomplishment of the pre-set tasks/ goals within a specific time. Such approach is also characteristic for the recently fashionable coaching approach. However, it must be emphasised that experiencing success is a highly individualised state, as anybody may relate it to situations, emotions or values important for them. Therefore, it may be assumed that in every case success is going to be related to the feeling of individual fulfilment, and not only its social determinants (above-average accomplishments in a certain area - professional, material, etc.). In this perspective, success ceases to be unequivocal. S. Lebowitz, referring to the definitions of success given by influential people, who are definitely seen as successful in business, indicates that it not only has different faces, but may also be used in diverse ways. For one of the wealthiest men in the world, Bill Gates, success is related to the possibility of influencing the world. He claims that: "It would be nice to feel that you made a difference for the world - you have invented something, you brought up children or helped people in need".<sup>6</sup> Billionaire R. Branson relates success to the feeling of happiness. In turn, in the opinion of the founder of Huffington Post, A. Huffington<sup>7</sup>, success comprises three factors. The first is power, the second is money and the last consists of wealth, wisdom, admiration and giving.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> K. Gołąb, *10 złotych zasad sukcesu*, <https://posukcesnaszpilkach.pl/2014/10-zlotych-zasad-sukcesu/> [10.10.2019].

<sup>6</sup> S. Lebowitz, *12 wpływowych osób dzieli się swoimi zaskakującymi definicjami sukcesu*, <https://businessinsider.com.pl/rozwoj-osobisty/rownowaga/czym-jest-sukces-definicje-min-gatesa-bransona-obamy/xr37bcy> [10.10.2019].

<sup>7</sup> D. Schawbel, *Arianna Huffington: Why Entrepreneurs Should Embrace The Third Metric*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/danschawbel/2014/03/25/arianna-huffington/#3a102df11aa4> [10.10.2019].

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

Attempts were made to indicate that success is an ambiguous and diverse concept, even though associated most frequently with a high social and economic status and accomplishments, which may entail liability much broader than the borders of one's home; it is also significantly related to the individual feeling of happiness, satisfaction, realisation of own potential and thus self-fulfilment of an individual.

From the perspective of institutions responsible for the educational process of fully able and disabled children and youth, it seems important to quote the definition referenced at the beginning, where success is defined as the positive outcome of undertaken activities.

Ch. Buchner indicates that the most important in accomplishment of success by a child is the feeling of making progress and joy derived from it, readiness to put significant effort into action, steadfast striving for the designated purpose, but primarily accomplishment of results that are adequate to one's potential and talents.<sup>9</sup> A similar approach is taken by the authors of this text, who understand the *tailored success* from the title in this manner.

As emphasised by A. Karpińska, introduction of pedagogical factors related to the individual approach and atmosphere fostering development is of fundamental importance in education. The author writes: "Civilisation transformations and educational tendencies resulting from them are related, among others, to a change of the general philosophy of education and formation of a model of student-friendly education, focused on getting to know and developing the strong sides of the child's personality, which allows the student to accomplish educational successes. At the same time, success does not only refer to the mastering of knowledge and skills offered by the school curriculum, but it is primarily about accomplishments in the area of development of personality of children and youth within the scope of all areas specified in the goals of education".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> C. Buchner, *Sukces w szkole jest możliwy*, Jedność, Warszawa 2004, pp. 13–14.

<sup>10</sup> A. Karpińska, *W poszukiwaniu źródeł edukacyjnego sukcesu. Oferta edukacyjna dla wszystkich*, [in:] *Edukacja "głębszego poziomu" w dialogu i perspektywie*, ed. A. Karpińska, Trans Humana Wydawnictwo Uniwersyteckie, Białystok 2005, p. 11.



Limiting the understanding of success of a disabled person to the level of knowledge and skills mastered by him/ her may cause disappointment and in consequence lead to withdrawal from activity, if the expectations are too high or impossible to fulfil. No possibility to observe own progress is a demotivating factor. The situation is similar in case of overly protective stance of the environment. Lack of challenges or relieving of daily efforts makes the disabled children convinced about their impotence, which may also lead to the withdrawal from activities and relinquishment of attempts intended to overcome own limitations and realisation of own potential. Such approach not only narrows down the field for success, but also makes it practically unattainable. A responsibly conducted educational process, accompanying and supporting children, teachers and carers should foster conditions making the individual success not only desired, but also feasible. Thus, accomplishment by persons with disabilities of success on their own level depends both on the internal motivation and possibilities, but also the external stimulators. Frequently, these areas condition each other. For example, passion excites the individual to incessant performance of activities which are most frequently supported by friends, teachers and the family. In striving to accomplish the goal, competitors and the desire to compete also play an important role. Success is often perceived as an exceptional accomplishment that has to be noticed. Competition guarantees at least one observer of our efforts; such point of reference reinforces the desire to accomplish the goal and provides an extra incentive. Therefore, the environment may both stimulate the activities oriented at success and hinder or even limit them. Lack of faith in the individual's potential (frequent in case of persons with disabilities) may give rise to a conviction that taking any action is devoid of sense, as there is a significant probability of failure. Stereotypical perception of needs and potential of people with disabilities or transposition of own fears of the family and/ or teachers on the disabled student entails that success is perceived almost exclusively as accomplishment of a specific action and not as

a process intended to reaching a more comprehensive, holistic development of an individual.

On the other hand, too many rewards may also be a factor discouraging from work. An individual, accustomed to regular rewards and devoid of positive reinforcement, may withdraw from action. The case is similar in the application of attention as a valuating and activating factor, the cessation of which leads to expiry of engagement needed to accomplish the goal. Therefore, in case of too many rewards, the level of motivation drops and thus the probability of accomplishing success is also reduced.

However, as noted by W. Rybak, due to the fact that success is a subjective value, "the potential, even though greatly diversified, is hidden in every person, irrespective of the type of dysfunction".<sup>11</sup> Therefore, disability is not an obstacle on the road to success. It is rather the excessive expectations or lack of faith in success, too much protection or replacement of incentives with rewards that can make the success unattainable.

In the work with people with disabilities, attention is drawn to the fact that many of them have a higher level of determination and desire to overcome own limitations. The appearing obstacles do not lead to withdrawal from an activity. External support and positive approach to own potential supports activities aimed at accomplishing a specific goal, success reinforces the feeling of self-esteem which, in consequence, reinforces a conviction that success is possible. W. Rybak notes that "every person with a specific dysfunction has individual talents and deficiencies, own rate and rhythm of development"<sup>12</sup>; such perspective requires understanding of these

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<sup>11</sup> W. Rybak, *Sukces edukacyjny osób niepełnosprawnych w kontekście warunków uprawiania turystyki na terenie Bieszczadzkiego Parku Narodowego*, [https://www.repozytorium.uni.wroc.pl/Content/79784/7.6\\_Wojciech\\_Rybak\\_Sukces\\_educacyjny\\_osob\\_niepelnosprawnych\\_w\\_kontekscie\\_warunkow\\_uprawiania\\_turystyki\\_na\\_terenie\\_Bieszczadzkiego\\_Parku\\_Narodowego.pdf](https://www.repozytorium.uni.wroc.pl/Content/79784/7.6_Wojciech_Rybak_Sukces_educacyjny_osob_niepelnosprawnych_w_kontekscie_warunkow_uprawiania_turystyki_na_terenie_Bieszczadzkiego_Parku_Narodowego.pdf) [15.02.2020].

<sup>12</sup> W. Rybak, *Sukces edukacyjny osób niepełnosprawnych w kontekście warunków uprawiania turystyki na terenie Bieszczadzkiego Parku Narodowego*, [https://www.repozytorium.uni.wroc.pl/Content/79784/7.6\\_Wojciech\\_Rybak\\_Sukces\\_educacyjny\\_osob\\_niepelnosprawnych\\_w\\_kontekscie\\_warunkow\\_uprawiania\\_turystyki\\_na\\_terenie\\_Bieszczadzkiego\\_Parku\\_Narodowego.pdf](https://www.repozytorium.uni.wroc.pl/Content/79784/7.6_Wojciech_Rybak_Sukces_educacyjny_osob_niepelnosprawnych_w_kontekscie_warunkow_uprawiania_turystyki_na_terenie_Bieszczadzkiego_Parku_Narodowego.pdf)

dependences by the environment, acceptance and taking supportive measures.

We are living in a society where knowledge and human awareness of disabilities should be high, yet there are still people among parents and carers of children with disabilities who solidify their feeling of inferiority, thus obstructing their road to success. Meanwhile, reality shows that people with disabilities can be successful in many fields.

For example, pupils from the Z. Tylewicz School and Education Centre for Children and Youth with Disabilities in Poznań won the Champion of Poland title in wheelchair basketball five times; the team also won the Vice Champion title three times and scored the Cup of Poland five times. In 1996, six contestants from the Student Sport Club became members of the national team, which won the 6<sup>th</sup> place at the Junior World Championship in Canada. In 1997, the team took part in the European Championship in Slovenia, as well as in the first Junior World Championship in Toronto. In 1999, they also participated in another European Championship, which this time was held in Portugal. In the 2007/2008, the disabled basketball players took part in the World Championship in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>13</sup> The billiards group had similarly impressive accomplishments. Successes of the Centre's pupils are not only related to sports. Participating in the robotics class, they successfully accepted scientific and practical challenges. In 2008, the 5<sup>th</sup> Robot Festival was held at the Poznań University of Technology and the CybAirBot Robot Sumo Contest. The pupils took part in the "Most Interesting Amateur Robot Structures" and won the first place.

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torium.uni.wroc.pl/Content/79784/7.6\_Wojciech\_Rybak\_Sukces\_educacyjny\_osob\_niepełnosprawnych\_w\_kontekście\_warunków\_uprawiania\_turystyki\_na\_terenie\_Bieszczadzkiego\_Parku\_Narodowego.pdf [15.02.2020], p. 253.

<sup>13</sup> Uczniowski Klub Sportowy, <http://www.sosw.poznan.pl/> [1.08.2017]; Wasielewska M., Karpińska A., Hurysz M. *Krótką historią Specjalnego Ośrodka Szkolno-Wychowawczego dla Dzieci i Młodzieży Niepełnosprawnej im. Zbigniewa Tylewicza w Poznaniu*, CLiWR Demostenes, Poznań 2019.

The above-listed sports and educational success are not separate, individual cases referring to students of one centre; such examples can be multiplied. However, it is not about triumph measured with the colour of medals or the position on a dais, but about success aligned with the potential, predisposition, resources and needs. What for some may be an ordinary and automatic activity, will be a great joy and a reason for pride at the cost of great effort. Therefore, success may be writing a sentence with rounded letters in case of individuals who suffer from excessive muscle tension, learning a poem by heart in case of compromised cognitive ability, fastening a button or tying the shoelaces in case of limited sight and movement coordination, etc.

There are many possibilities of self-fulfilment that offer a feeling of sense and accomplishment in life. There are various faces of success, just like our potentials and desires vary. Everybody has a right to be happy; irrespective of own limitations, we are pre-destined to accomplish minor victories on a daily basis and, overcoming difficulties, to accomplish successes at multiple fields of our human existence. Here, persons with disabilities are no exception. However, it has to be acknowledged with honesty that in many cases, their road to success is much more curvy and bumpy. Without doubt, self-acceptance supported by realistic self-assessment helps on the path to realising own intentions, yet the understanding and support of the environment are also very important. Overcoming our own limitations and prejudice is a challenge for all of us, both fully-able and disabled people.<sup>14</sup> This calls for going beyond the traditional mental schemes pertaining to success and disability; in such case, success in an enterprise will become much more available. However, in order to make success possible, it should be tailored and form an effect of fulfilment of our needs and possibilities, overcoming of challenges; otherwise, it will either go unnoticed or we will be doomed to constant bitterness of failure.

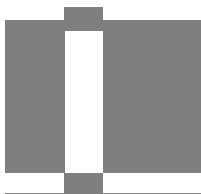
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<sup>14</sup> Cf.: J. Kossewska, *Spoleczeństwo wobec osób niepełnosprawnych – postawy i ich determinanty*, *Annales Academiae Paedagogicae Cracoviensis, Folia 14*, "Studia Psychologica", 2003, I, pp. 40–41.

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## **A Child with Autism in a State School – A program for working with an autistic child in primary school**

**ABSTRACT:** Emilia Wieczorek, *A Child with Autism in a State School – A program for working with an autistic child in primary school*. Interdisciplinary Contexts of Special Pedagogy, no. 29, Poznań 2020. Pp. 247–261. Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-391X. e-ISSN 2658-283X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14746/ikps.2020.29.12>

In the paper, the author discusses educational interactions focused on a child with autism. The first part of the study presents the characteristics of functioning of an autistic child, taking into account specific needs and difficulties. The research material was used to present the specificity of child's functioning in certain developmental spheres: socio-emotional sphere, cognitive sphere, self-care, communication, sensory integration and motor integration. Bearing in mind a multi-profile diagnosis of the disorder and including various spheres of child's functioning, the diagnosis was referenced to programming the process of support. The author concludes by presenting a reflection on dilemmas and challenges in education of autistic children.

**KEY WORDS:** autism, school, case study, developmental spheres, educational impacts, diagnosis

### **Introduction – Individual needs of a student with autism**

According to the scientific literature, childhood autism is a disorder of a complex nature. As emphasized by Aleksandra Maciarz, it is a diverse syndrome with many different symptoms. Thus, child-

hood autism is a heterogeneous and multiform disorder [Maciarz, 2000, p. 9]. However, Iwona Chrzanowska points out numerous controversies over the subject. In her opinion, the syndrome should be referred to as autism spectrum disorder, i.e. an area with three types of patients having characteristic autistic features. The patients have different expectations, mechanisms and causes of developmental difficulties [Chrzanowska, 2012, p. 107]. As Jolanta Wasilewska, Elzbieta Jarocka-Cyrta and Maciej Kaczmarek indicate: *the symptoms of the three axial directions of development are referred to as the so-called autistic triad and include: social development disorders, deficits and dysfunctions in communication (verbal and non-verbal) and behavioural disorders. The phenotypic variability of autism also includes a different level of mental development – cognitive impairment* [Wasilewska, Jarocka-Cyrta, Kaczmarek, 2009, p. 40]. This is in line with the Kazimierz Zablocki's findings, who points out that autistic disorders are a series of many developmental abnormalities, which differ in aetiology and the specificity of child's functioning. Thus, upbringing and educational problems in children with autism depend on their individual skills and predispositions. However, as K. Zablocki emphasizes, we can indicate a certain area characteristic for this group. In his opinion, the most common disorders and abnormalities are related to social development [Zablocki, 2002, p. 65]. Judith Bluestone also points to communication as a common area. At the same time, she believes that viewed from standpoint of the didactic and educational work with a child with autism, it is communication that determines both quality and effectiveness of educational, didactic and therapeutic interactions. In the author's opinion, general functioning of a child with autism is also determined by the problem with setting patterns and the unity of senses. Indeed, an autistic child makes attempts to put a disorganized and constantly changing reality in order. According to J. Bluestone, it is natural that a child with autism will strive to implement predictable sequences to bring order in its life and eliminate chaos [Bluestone, 2012, p. 89].

Pursuing the theme of the specificity of early childhood autism, we should mention that the disorder is associated with congenital



dysfunctions of the nervous system. As indicated in the scientific literature, the aetiology of the disorder is multifactorial and relatively complicated. The symptoms worsen and are especially noticeable before the age of three. As Urszula Bigas indicates, both infants and children before the age of two may present different symptoms of autism spectrum disorder. The symptoms generate characteristic reluctance to establish social relations, systematic behaviours and avoidance of communication [Bigas, 2012, pp. 361–365]. However, according to the scientific literature, these behaviours are intentional and deliberate. Their autotelic goal is communication, but one that is acceptable to a child with autism [Markiewicz, 2004, p. 91]. According to Barbara Winczura, this is due to the fact that [...] *any non-communication, cutting ties or withdrawal is a kind of an autistic child's search for understanding* [...] [Winczura, 2004, p. 91].

It is worth emphasizing that sometimes social development disorders are not noticeable at all stages. However, as U. Frith points out, early childhood is an important stage of development. Indeed, in the author's opinion: *Early childhood – from the age of 3 to 5 – is the period in which the social isolation of an autistic child reaches its peak. [...] Five-year-old autistic children usually show progress in the development of social skills and general adaptation. In fact, in these children, socialization progress is observed throughout the entire period of development* (Frith, 2009, p. 132). As Lorna Wing indicates, the isolation is also a consequence of aggressive behaviours, destructive actions and the lack of cause-and-effect analysis. The accompanying anxiety intensifies reluctance to interact with others and aggravates hostile, defensive reactions [Wing, 2005, p. 118]. As K. Zablocki points out: *Some scientists believe that limited skills in playing are one of the causes of impaired interactions between children with autism and their peers. Without the ability to make friends, the children do not have an opportunity to practice all necessary social skills, including the ability to function in a group, cooperate or control impulsiveness* [Zablocki, 2005, p. 82]. It should also be mentioned that implementation of the upbringing and educational process is influenced by various problems of children with autism. The most frequent issues included in the scientific literature

are digestive tract disorders, symptoms of heavy metal poisoning [Dawidiuk, 2009, p. 24], sleep disorders [Pisula, 2010, p. 63], Candida fungal infections, weakened immunity and numerous allergies [McCandless, pp. 52–59]. For the purpose of this study, stereotypical behaviours in children with autism should also be mentioned. As J. Bleszynski points out: *In early childhood autism, i.e. until the age of 12 months – stereotypes and general anxiety coexist; they are observed mainly as hand and head movements, around the age of 2 they occupy a central place in the child's behaviour, repertoire of stereotypes is expanding; aggravation of anxiety and highly expressive reactions; play is stereotypical, schematic* [Bleszynski, 2011, p. 96]. According to the scientific literature, there are various examples of rigid behaviour patterns, their nomenclature is also diverse, e.g. fixations, mannerisms, stereotypes, perseverations, compulsions, obsessions and others [Charman, Bair, 2002, pp. 289–300].

Iwona Chrzanowska also addresses an important issue of functioning of a child with autism in contemporary school. She believes that autism causes the child to take on a characteristic student role which is different from the commonly known. The author points to a specific relationship. If we have an autistic student in our school, it is also necessary to have teachers and educators adequately prepared for this work. The researcher investigates knowledge of contemporary and future educators about autism and a number of dilemmas related to education and integration at the educational level. The study results clearly indicate the existence of harmful stereotypes about autism in the selected social group. This also proves the lack of knowledge and skills which are crucial to undertake work necessary to stimulate the multidimensional development of a child with autism [Chrzanowska, 2012, pp. 109–114].

## **A case study – data analysis**

Before starting data analysis, it is worth presenting methodological assumptions of our research. The aim of the study was to prepare a program of working with a child with autism in primary

school. Detailed problems involved the following areas: demographic characteristics of the child, boy's functioning in particular spheres: socio-emotional sphere, cognitive sphere, self-care, communication, sensory integration and motor skills. To implement the research, theoretically justified conceptual and instrumental procedures were adopted in order to cover the entire investigation and then solve a given scientific problem. For the purposes of this study, a case study research method was chosen. It allows to include a broad philosophical context. As Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz indicates, the first studies based on this method can be found in the works of famous philosophers: Socrates, Plato or Aristotle [Tatarkiewicz, 1999, pp. 70–74]. With reference to the methodological literature, Tadeusz Pilch points to the following definition of a case study: *... is a method of research based on the analysis of individual human fates involved in specific educational situations, or the analysis of specific phenomena of educational nature seen through the prism of human biographies with a view to diagnose a case or phenomenon and undertake therapeutic activities* [Pilch, 1974, p. 62]. According to this definition, the method is somewhat different from the techniques used in pedagogy. According to the definition presented by Mieczyslaw Loboeki, which is in line with the T. Pilch's definition, *the method of an individual case study and monographic method are two variants of the so-called case study*, i.e. in its narrow and broad sense [Loboeki, 2000, pp. 245–250].

As demonstrated in the introductory section to this publication, a student with autism has the need for an individualized assessment of his/her skills, competences and problems. On the other hand, the definition indicated by T. Pilch gives grounds to believe that the case study method chosen for this analysis will allow for a thorough and multifaceted exploration of the topic. The following research techniques were used in the study: questionnaire interview with the class tutor, questionnaire interview with the teacher co-organizing integration education, questionnaire interview with the teacher – speech therapist, observation and desk research. These research techniques were used to collect source material and prepare the boy's case study.

**Adam M. born X.X.2013<sup>1</sup>**

Adam was born in 2013. In the 2019/2020 school year, he attended the kindergarten in a state school. In mother's opinion, the child's development was normal until the age of 2. The mother compared her son's achievements to the development of his older brother. Problems with social interactions and abnormalities in the general development observed by the mother and the teaching staff of the kindergarten resulted in a consultation at the Psychological and Pedagogical Out-patient Clinic. In the 2017/2018 school year, specialists decided on the need for early support of the child's development, i.e. special education. The documentation clearly indicated that the organization of upbringing and education should include special methods and forms of work adapted to children with autism. The key task of the educator and other entities responsible for the boy's educational and therapeutic process is, according to the documentation, operationalization of educational and therapeutic goals and their adaptation to individual needs and skills of the child. Moreover, it is necessary to adapt rooms and the organization of the class life to allow the boy function properly by reducing the number of stimuli. The source material (completed questionnaire of the interview with the class tutor, completed questionnaire of the interview with the teacher co-organizing integration education, completed questionnaire of the interview with the speech therapist teacher, analysis of the certificate on the need for special education, analysis of the statement on the need for early support of the child's development, observation of the boy's work – observation sheet, analysis of the initial diagnosis of the child's readiness to begin primary school education, analysis of the boy's artistic and technical works, analysis of exercises and notebooks with doodles) was used to prepare the characteristics of boy's functioning in particular spheres. It is as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Child's name was changed. Day and month of birth were concealed, year of birth is real.

1. **Socio-emotional sphere** – The boy interacts with peers. He makes a brief eye contact and creates a common area of interests. He shows an interest in the surroundings, plays with toys for a short time, but becomes bored relatively quickly. He seeks new activities on his own. When interacting with teachers and other school staff, he shows respect and uses polite phrases. His behaviour is easy. When playing, he sometimes does not follow the rules of the class community (he often throws blocks, sometimes he does not tidy up toys after play – teacher’s reminder is necessary).

2. **Cognitive sphere** – Short-term attention, he becomes easily distracted, often changes activity and is hyperactive. When performing tasks, he initially listens and follows commands, he respects bans. Signs of impatience and difficulty concentrating appear fairly quickly. Involuntary attention, which is dominant, is stimulated by interesting objects and activities. The boy requires repetitions, commands and mobilization to complete the task. He can match three shapes to a puzzle, build a tower of many blocks, form a picture from 4 parts, play with water and other substances: he pours liquids and loose substances, puts items into containers, pours from one container into another, arranges according to a simple pattern.

3. **Self-care** – As for self-care, from time to time, he needs help from the teacher, has problems with putting shoes on properly. He reports physiological needs, eats and drinks on his own, maintains the correct posture while eating a meal.

4. **Communication** – Active and passive vocabulary is normal. There is a speech impediment. The boy correctly identifies and names items, counts to 10, names colours. Adam usually palatalizes dentalized sounds: sz, ź, cz, dź, s, z, c, dz, however, sometimes he correctly articulates these sounds. He substitutes k with t, f with ch, r with l, li with ly. When pronouncing more difficult words, simplifications, elisions and shifts appear. His articulation is largely age-adequate. He uses gerund clauses and short statements. Adam has difficulty understanding complex commands and expressing cause-and-effect relationships. The child often does not answer questions, but sticks to the issues that are interesting to him. The boy has diffi-

culty in spontaneous describing the content of pictures, but tries to answer the questions related to the picture.

5. **Sensory integration** – The sense of hearing, taste, smell, sight are normal. Touch – no features of hyper or hyposensitivity. He likes games based on the sense of touch acc. Bogdanowicz, activities in which he can get dirty, for example making Plasticine figures, using play doh, playing with kinetic sand, painting with 10 fingers, with sensory boxes filled with rice, beans and peas. His proprioceptive system is hypersensitive – he is eager to play movement games and is very fond of climbing. He likes strong pressure, while playing he often hits the body hard against the ground or the floor. The child seeks pressure, has a great need to frolic, often falls to his knees, eagerly wrestles, and loves jumping intensively. The vestibular system is hyposensitive. Adam very often tries to change his activity, is hyperactive, runs and jumps. He has difficulty maintaining a sitting position for longer. He likes fast movement. He gets distracted quickly.

6. **Motor skills** – Fine motor skills – he uses the right hand. Manual dexterity is significantly reduced: boy's drawing requires support from the teacher. He can reproduce the pattern from an example picture, but he cannot create it himself. He likes painting and uses the technique of 10 fingers on large sheets of paper. He makes Plasticine rollers, picks up small items and puts them in a box with a hole, puts blocks on a peg, etc. Gross motor skills – the boy prefers playing on the carpet, he walks up and down the stairs by himself. General motor skills are good, age-adequate.<sup>2</sup>

This characteristics of boy's functioning was used to develop a program of multifaceted interactions. Within each sphere, general and specific goals were indicated, taking into account the boy's skills and predispositions as well as difficulties not related to the developmental disorder. Within each sphere, a proposal for didactic activities was made (the program of support). The program is presented in the table below.

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<sup>2</sup> Source: Own study based on the source material.

**Table 1.** Reference of the diagnosis to programming the process of support

Child's development sphere	General objective	Specific objectives	Program of the process of support
Socio-emotional sphere	Intensive, global stimulation of social and emotional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- learning the ability to function in a group and play together,</li> <li>- participation in various forms of social and cultural life,</li> <li>- instilling norms and principles of social life,</li> <li>- elimination (suppression) of "difficult behaviours",</li> <li>- developing a sense of acceptance and security</li> </ul>	Thematic games with the use of hand puppets, books, picture stories, relaxation exercises, relaxation, the use of colour assessment system to eliminate difficult behaviours, social praise/reward.
Cognitive sphere: memory, attention, thinking, visual and auditory perception	Intensive, global stimulation of cognitive development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- dynamization of memory and attention,</li> <li>- learning to understand simple and more complex commands,</li> <li>- extending the time of concentration</li> </ul>	Matching, guessing, wooden puzzles, puzzles, forming pictures from parts, classifying according to the criterion: shape, colour, usage, searching for a hidden object and elements in a picture, extracting, grouping, drawing, painting, moulding, etc.
Self-care: - food - dressing up - cleaning and washing - other	Developing maximum self-reliance and resourcefulness in everyday situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- shaping the ability to independently dress items of clothing, including footwear,</li> <li>- developing the skill of unassisted hand washing,</li> <li>- shaping cleaning habits;</li> <li>- learning to play independently;</li> </ul>	Engaging the child in physical contact with a therapist - imitation, thematic games with dolls and teddies imitating the activities of washing and wiping hands, imitation games - dressing shoes.
Communication	Developing communication skills	- establishing emotional contact with the child,	Keeping visual, emotional and verbal contact with the use of objects and

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- imitation of certain actions and gestures,</li> <li>- reacting to bans, e.g. "do not",</li> <li>- pointing at individual parts of the body and signalling the needs,</li> <li>- using short, voice-enhanced commands (including intense facial expressions),</li> <li>- developing communication adequately to the child's possibilities, symbols of alternative communication,</li> <li>- enriching the ways of communicating, developing an active and passive vocabulary,</li> <li>- hearing training - an organ of reception,</li> <li>- improving the respiratory and phonatory systems (strengthening the respiratory and phonation muscles, improving articulators)</li> </ul>	<p>pictograms; associating words with an object/activity; the use of exercises to strengthen the organ of articulation;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- "from" and "to" communication; imitation and cooperation in play and during tasks; communication with parents and peers; the use of "verbal bath" in everyday activities;</li> <li>- speech therapy massages, rhythmic gestures and movement creations, auditory programs, for example "I listen and learn to speak" - "Vowels and exclamations", "Onomatopoeic expressions"</li> </ul>
<p>Sensory integration Smell, hearing, sight, touch, balance, deep sensation</p>	<p>Shaping the awareness of one's own body</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- normalization of the proprioceptive system,</li> <li>- normalization of the vestibular system</li> </ul>	<p>Delivering large doses of proprioceptive sensations in order to improve the sensation of the body and regulate the state of arousal;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jumping with a ball with ears, trampoline, frog jumping, swinging</li> <li>• Playing on the playground: climbing frames, slides, swings, sandpit, wrestling games, elbowing.</li> <li>• Spinning while sitting on a slippery surface.</li> </ul>



<p>Motor skills Fine and gross motor skills</p>	<p>Stimulation of motor development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- stimulation of perceptual and motor functions,</li> <li>- developing graphomotor skills, flexibility and precision of hand and finger movements</li> </ul>	<p>Relaxation exercises – e.g. playing with water, painting with hands, manipulation games (e.g. touching, squeezing, opening, putting on various objects, – exercises to improve the work of the hands and palms, various manual exercises, including drawing, painting, tearing, kneading, moulding, sticking)</p>
<p>Child’s own activity (according to preference) – interests – manipulation – games: thematic, construction, drawing, reading/paging books</p>	<p>Intensive, global stimulation of cognitive, social, emotional and motor development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- improving the ability and extending the time of concentration,</li> <li>- learning about closer and further surroundings,</li> <li>- arousing interest in the social environment</li> </ul>	<p>Thematic games according to the child’s preferences, just following the child – observation – modelling activity in the desired direction, providing books – playing with text and pictures, using various objects in therapy (toys and objects from the surroundings) by manipulation and in free and directed play, enriching therapeutic activities and play with aids and items available in the rooms.</p>

Source: own study based on the research material and scientific literature: C.H. Delacato, 1995, cf. also A. Maciarz, 2000, cf. also U. Frith, 2008, cf. also F. Affolter, 1997, cf. also T. Galkowski, cf. also J. Kossewska 2000, cf. also H. Olechnowicz, 2003, cf. also E. Pisula, 2000, cf. also J. Bleszynski, 2004, A. Szczypczyk, Joanna Kossewska 2009, R. Piotrowicz 2016.

## **Conclusion – educational process in children with autism – dilemmas and challenges**

Education of a child with autism entails not only various dilemmas, but also challenges for modern school. A child with autism spectrum disorder requires both interpersonal and individual support provided in all areas of educational activity. It is obvious that interpersonal skills are necessary for establishing and maintaining relationships with other people. It is sometimes impossible to measure and precisely estimate social skills, which belong to the group of psychosocial soft skills. However, because these skills play a particularly important role in social adaptation and have an influence on multidimensional development, it is necessary to emphasize the need for social skills training. We should take advantage of everyday circumstances and situations to model desired behaviours and emotional reactions. The teacher ought to be eager and unbiased in implementing the program. Any didactic and educational activities should be focused not only on acquiring skills and knowledge, but aimed at shaping interpersonal interactions, encouraging verbal contact and eliminating secondary dysfunctions. Based on the review of scientific literature and the research data, we can conclude that regularity is the autotelic value in working with an autistic child. When interacting with the child, the teacher should undertake various activities to stimulate its multidimensional development. As Deborah Deutsch Smith points out, *It is of utmost importance that autistic students experience programmed and supported interactions with healthy peers. This provides them with the correct patterns of behaviours and peer interactions* (Smith, 2008, p. 297). An overriding goal of autistic children education is to achieve child's self-reliance and resourcefulness in functioning in various areas of life. Working with an autistic child requires cooperation between an educator, teacher co-organizing integration education, school pedagogue, psychologist and other teachers supporting the process of therapy, education and upbringing. It is also important to ensure regular cooperation with parents/caregivers and institutions such

as psychological and pedagogical counselling centres. In order to optimize the effects of interactions, all entities involved should constantly improve their skills and knowledge about education of children with autism spectrum disorder.

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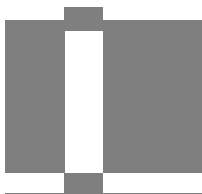




## **REPORTS**







**Tara Leniston, Rhian Grounds *Dom oswojony.*  
*Jak stworzyć bezpieczną przestrzeń dla dziecka z ASD*  
[*Tamed house. How to create a safe space for a child with ASD*]  
Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego,  
Kraków 2020**

The reviewed book was written by two women who wish to support people working with children with autistic spectrum disorders. Tara Leniston is the mother of three children. In 2011, her two-year-old son Dylan was diagnosed with ASD. Rhian Grounds is a speech and language therapist working with children and young people with ASD. The first author shares her experience of raising a child with ASD. She invites the readers to her home and shows them around the house, sharing practical advice and ideas that have supported her family since Dylan's diagnosis. Rhian Grounds provides many therapeutic guidelines that she has used in her work with people with autistic spectrum disorders over the years. She encourages a holistic view of each child and cooperation between other professionals with whom the child has contact.

The book *Tamed house. How to create a safe space for a child with ASD* consists of eight chapters. The unique form of the book gives the reader the impression that they are being shown around the family house and the immediate vicinity of a person with an autistic disorder. The titles of the chapters are the names of the rooms in the house or places close to the person with ASD such as the kitchen, bathroom and so on.

We can find a pattern in each chapter. Tara Leniston, Dylan's mother is the first to speak (the boy's father also speaks in the first chapter, which is an exception). The second part of each chapter is written by speech and

language therapist Rhian Grounds. The chapters end with short summaries containing the most important conclusions. It is important that each chapter describes the experiences of the mother and the therapist, the facts about the functioning of children with ASD, and provides many practical solutions that can make life easier for the family of Persons with ASD. The first area described is the *Parents' corner*, which is an essential element in any home to maintain good relationships between the parents. The shared responsibility for communication within the family is worth noting. The authors also provide elements important for a good exchange of information: methods of communication, reasons for wanting to make contact or the situation and its participants. The therapist proposes to create a *personal passport* for a child with ASD so that other people who work with the child get to know how to communicate, support, how the child perceives the world and its preferences and fears. At the end of this chapter, the role of positive silencing techniques is explained, and a proposal to shape socially unacceptable behaviour into acceptable one is presented, e.g. throwing objects is replaced by throwing balls into a basket. Already in the first chapter, the authors focus on the emotional sphere, offering to familiarise children with their emotions during everyday activities and, at the same time, to recognize them (by every family member). In the second chapter, Tara Leniston describes the *Bedrooms*. She draws attention to activities that support healthy sleep, presenting an environment that helps to rest, pointing out the difference between the needs of children with ASD. The therapist, in turn, lists the ways in which you can learn about the child's sensory preferences and how to adapt to their environment. She suggests an ABC approach (noting the preceding circumstances) to highlight the role of observation. This chapter also explains the sensory complexities of a child with ASD, highlighting insensibility or hypersensitivity. She also underlines the role of pre-sleep routine activities (Dylan's mother presents an *evening plan of action*). Finally, the TEACCH method is presented, which helps to spend time productively, after which the child wants to fall asleep. The third room presented by the authors is the *Kitchen*. This chapter praises meal time, when both parents and children experience different emotions. It is often in this room that communication situations are created naturally. Allowing the child to make a choice, e.g. using the PECS system, is a sign of respect for his or her preferences and needs. The therapist also explains the hierarchy of suggestions which is useful when offering different types of food. Both authors draw attention to the positive influence of coopera-

tion with a child, e.g. preparing meals together. They also address the issue of diets or special supplements, but stress that they can only be introduced under the doctor's supervision, after examination. The proposal to consult the website of the organisation Research Autism, where it is possible, for example, to check the influence of a specific diet or supplements on people with ASD is also noteworthy. Dylan's mother offers solutions to help with furnishing and designing the kitchen, e.g. installing additional safety devices at drawers with knives. The next chapter four offers a guided tour of the *Playroom*. The authors present a list of the ten best toys, which includes a trampoline or a sensory box. It presents ways to develop a child's games, their different types and value in development. This chapter also describes how to develop communication during play. Not only when your child is playing with an adult, but also with peers or siblings. Then we take a look at the *Bathroom*, which offers solutions for children learning to use the toilet or take a bath, both for those who can imitate and those who cannot. This part of the publication presents many proposals for step-by-step planning of a child's bathing activities. In chapter six we are shown around the *Living Room*, where each member of the household can find an interesting activity for themselves. The authors stress that when spending time in the living room, everyone should develop their interests or passions. At the end of this part the authors discuss proposals for spending free time such as: games, movement games or the use of new technologies. The last area of the house discussed by the authors is the garden and a similar place, the balcony. In chapter seven, therapies, e.g. hippo therapy, are introduced. The potential to create a sensory corner with different plants such as flowers, herbs or shrubs in the garden, on the balcony or even on the window sill has been recognised. In the last chapter, the authors take the readers out to the shop, to a family meeting or on a car or plane trip. The role of planning in advance and familiarising the child with ASD with the plan is emphasised. Rhian Grouds draws attention to how people with ASD are perceived by the public, particularly how they are described. She focuses on the value of the used words, and encourages the description of children with autism spectrum disorders by specifying the support that a particular person requires. In conclusion, the therapist introduces alternative and supportive communication methods.

Throughout the publication, great importance is attached to activities that support communication and good interaction at every step (in every place in the house and outside). The authors emphasise that the actions will

only be effective if they are implemented by all the people surrounding a child with ASD. The narrative used is also important, as it is always a reminder that those who work with children with autistic spectrum disorders are not alone, but can seek advice from specialists such as doctors and therapists. People from the whole spectrum of autistic disorders are considered, which is a positive thing, starting with those who need a lot of support in many areas of life to those who are practically independent, for whom social functioning is a challenge. Many of the solutions proposed can be tailored to the individual needs of children with ASD. The publication places great importance on the communication and emotional sphere, describing the strength and value of gestures, closeness and spending time with the child. An example is the evening plan of actions prepared by Dylan's mother, in which one of the many important elements are "good night kisses", reading together or discussing the plan for the next day. The book presents many examples that enable a better understanding of the issues raised, e.g. perception of sensory stimuli. The authors share many practical ideas with their readers, e.g. *a peace box, a personal passport, reference items* and even recipes (e.g. for magic cookies). At the same time, they show a wide spectrum of autistic disorders, discuss various scenarios of types of behaviour. This publication proposes to broaden the knowledge of the issues raised, providing the titles of books or even addresses of websites with articles. The authors encourage people to get to know the point of view of People with ASD, for example, by reaching for Grandin Temple's or Stephen Wiltshire's books. They present a number of practical solutions that deserve our attention, but also confirm their application by referring to scientific research. In summary, in this publication, Tara Leniston and Rhian Grounds have attempted to analyse and organise the immediate space of children with ASD. They have looked at the house, the garden and shorter or longer trips.

Unfortunately, Dylan's father was given only one chance to speak in this work. It would have been valuable to know his opinion on the issues raised. In the only comment he made he pointed out that he felt excluded from contact with his son, so it would be interesting to know his perspective. There is also the risk of following the advice from this book too literally, especially concerning the decor elements of the rooms, e.g. providing all rooms with soft carpets or lamps made of Himalayan salt lumps. It would be worth stressing, especially at the beginning of the publication, that these are proposals which need to be adjusted to the needs of a particular person with ASD.

The book is written in a language that is understandable for the parents. If there are any difficult specialist terms, their definitions are provided. It is also aimed at professionals who have the opportunity to get to know the everyday reality of carers and a specialist who has worked with people with ASD for many years in London and Wales. The subject matter covered by the authors is important and topical. The book is unique because it offers many practical solutions, which include concrete advice or even plans for coping with difficult tasks such as teaching the child to use the toilet or travelling by plane. I consider this publication worth recommending and propose it in particular to people who are not indifferent to the fate of persons with autistic spectrum disorders. This book proves that with the right preparation children with ASD can do the same things that neurotypical children do. It also inspires the readers to introduce new solutions that make the functioning of people with ASD easier in the "tamed" closest space.

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