

**EDUKACYJNA ANALIZA TRANSAKCYJNA**

**NR 14/2025**

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**EDUCATIONAL TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS**

**NO 14/2025**

Pismo Zespołu Badawczego Edukacyjnej Analizy Transakcyjnej  
Katedra Badań Nad Edukacją  
Uniwersytetu Jana Długosza w Częstochowie

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JAN DŁUGOSZ UNIVERSITY IN CZESTOCHOWA

# **EDUKACYJNA ANALIZA TRANSAKCYJNA**

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Częstochowa 2025

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## Od redakcji

Z przyjemnością oddajemy w ręce Czytelników kolejny, czternasty już numer rocznika „Edukacyjna Analiza Transakcyjna”. Zgromadzone w tym tomie artykuły ukazują zarówno kontynuację klasycznych wątków koncepcji Erica Berne’a, jak i jej dynamiczne współbrzmienie z nowymi zjawiskami współczesności.

Autorzy podejmują szerokie spektrum problemów – od zagadnień wychowania i kształcenia, przez relacje interpersonalne w świecie cyfrowym, po poszukiwania duchowego wymiaru terapii. Obok tekstów teoretycznych i refleksyjnych istotne miejsce zajmują raporty z badań empirycznych, które pokazują, że analiza transakcyjna pozostaje nie tylko teorią, lecz także praktycznym narzędziem diagnozy, rozwoju i zmiany. Wśród nich znalazły się opracowania dotyczące edukacji młodzieży, funkcjonowania osobowości, relacji akademickich oraz nowych obszarów badań nad bezpieczeństwem w sieci i kondycją emocjonalną studentów.

Zaletą tego numeru jest także poszerzenie pola refleksji o prace sytuujące się „na pograniczu dziedzin” – tam, gdzie analiza transakcyjna spotyka się z arteterapią, duchowością, teorią zrównoważonego rozwoju czy nowymi technologiami. Ta różnorodność perspektyw potwierdza, że myślenie transakcyjne, ufundowane na idei dialogu, kontaktu i wzajemnego rozumienia, wciąż inspirowała badaczy, terapeutów i nauczycieli.

Redakcja ma nadzieję, że przedstawione w tym tomie teksty staną się impulsem do dalszych badań i praktyk opartych na analizie transakcyjnej – otwartej na interdyscyplinarność, wrażliwej na kontekst współczesnych przemian i wiernej humanistycznym wartościom, które legły u jej podstaw.

Na koniec pragniemy poinformować naszych Czytelników, że wraz z tym numerem funkcję Redaktora Naczelnego „Edukacyjnej Analizy Transakcyjnej” objął dr Zbigniew Łęski. Od kolejnego numeru planowana jest również zmiana w procedurze publikacji polegająca na wprowadzeniu systemu *online first*. Oznacza to, że artykuły zgłaszane do naszego czasopisma nie będą już czekały na publikację do końca roku, lecz będą sukcesywnie kierowane do procesu recenzji i publikowane na bieżąco, w miarę ich napływania. Wierzmy, że to rozwiązanie uczyni nasze czasopismo jeszcze bardziej atrakcyjnym dla Autorów i Czytelników.

**Redakcja „Edukacyjnej Analizy Transakcyjnej”**



## Editorial

It is our pleasure to present to our Readers the fourteenth issue of the annual journal *Educational Transactional Analysis*. The articles collected in this volume reflect both the continuation of the classical threads of Eric Berne's theory and its dynamic resonance with contemporary phenomena.

The authors address a wide range of topics – from issues of education and upbringing, through interpersonal relations in the digital world, to explorations of the spiritual dimension of therapy. Alongside theoretical and reflective papers, a significant place is given to empirical research reports, which demonstrate that transactional analysis remains not only a theory but also a practical tool for diagnosis, development, and change. These include studies on youth education, personality functioning, academic relations, and emerging research areas such as online safety and students' emotional well-being.

Another value of this issue lies in the expansion of reflection into areas *at the crossroads of disciplines* – where transactional analysis meets art therapy, spirituality, the theory of sustainable development, and new technologies. This diversity of perspectives confirms that transactional thinking, grounded in the ideas of dialogue, contact, and mutual understanding, continues to inspire researchers, therapists, and educators alike.

The Editorial Board hopes that the texts presented in this volume will serve as an impulse for further research and practice based on transactional analysis – open to interdisciplinarity, sensitive to the context of contemporary transformations, and faithful to the humanistic values on which it was founded.

Finally, we are pleased to inform our Readers that with this issue, the position of Editor-in-Chief of *Educational Transactional Analysis* has been assumed by Dr. Zbigniew Łęski. Beginning with the next issue, a new publication procedure will also be introduced, implementing an *online first* system. This means that articles submitted to our Journal will no longer await publication until the end of the year but will be processed, reviewed, and published on an ongoing basis as they are received. We believe that this system will make our Journal even more attractive to both Authors and Readers.

**Editorial Board of "Educational Transactional Analysis"**



**TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS IN EDUCATION**  
**ANALIZA TRANSAKCYJNA W EDUKACJI**



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## Student Personality Adaptations, Part III\*

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### Abstract

Across three consecutive articles, examples of student personality adaptations have been presented. Drawing upon the concepts of transactional analysis and knowledge from the field of personality disorders, a range of typical traits and behaviours, dominant needs, and selected AT parameters are discussed. Practical guidelines are also offered to assist teachers and educators in understanding their relationships with students whose difficulties stem from characterological problems. Furthermore, compensatory actions and interventions in the form of affirmations are proposed to help prevent manifestations of dysfunctional personality development.

In the final article of this series, further examples of dysfunctional personality adaptations observable in some students are presented.

**Keywords:** student, personality adaptations, borderline, histrionic disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, optimal adaptation

### I Experience Extreme Emotions

The *borderline adaptation*—which will be discussed here—is, like the symbiotic personality, entangled in family attachment issues. The term *disorganised*

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\* This article partly draws upon one of the chapters from the book: Jagieła, J. (2023). *Psycho pedagogika relacji. Analiza transakcyjna dla nauczycieli i wychowawców* [Psychopedagogy of Relationships: Transactional Analysis for Teachers and Educators]. Difin Publishing.

*attachment* is often used in this context. Nevertheless, in such cases we move alarmingly close not merely to a particular characterological style but to the borderland of deeper mental disorders (*BPD – borderline personality disorder*). The destructiveness of this personality type also brings it closer to narcissistic and psychopathic adaptations.

A personality with borderline features (also referred to as a *borderline personality*) is most often characterised by marked instability of self-image, which affects various domains of life such as thinking, emotions, and behaviour, as well as—most importantly for our considerations—interpersonal relationships. A very characteristic ambivalence can be observed here, expressed through contradictory statements such as “*I hate you!*” – “*Don’t leave me!*” or “*I want to be independent!*” – “*I can’t manage without you!*”

Some authors describe this type of adaptation in terms of four simultaneously co-occurring states, corresponding to S. Karpman’s Drama Triangle: the helpless Victim, the guilty Persecutor, the furious Victim, and the omnipotent Persecutor (Gregory, 2007, pp. 131–147).

However, describing this personality type poses considerable challenges for researchers, which is why numerous slightly differing characterisations can be found in the literature.

Table 1

*The Impulsive Child – Borderline Adaptation in Transactional Analysis*

The Acting-Out Child	Borderline Adaptation
Central problem	Stability.
Primary unmet need	A stable bond, support, and certainty in relationships.
Dominant emotions	Capricious and unstable moods; a mixture of fear, rage, and despair; intense, uncontrolled anger; a sense of emptiness and boredom; feelings of helplessness, insecurity, and injustice; despair; the impression of living on the edge.
Parental behaviours toward the child	Parents showed a lack of sensitivity to the child’s needs and failed to soothe its frustration. Frequent divorces or separations occurred. Inconsistency in upbringing was common. At times the child was excessively praised and placed at the centre of attention, at others excessively punished and treated with severity. Parents, preoccupied with their own problems, often failed to notice the child’s difficulties. They were dissatisfied with the child’s feelings and needs when these differed from their own. The child’s autonomy and signs of independence were regarded as bad or threatening. After a satisfactory stage of symbiosis and attachment, growing individuation and separation were not tolerated. Excessive dependency and sharing of difficult family issues were rewarded. The child was sometimes left without support when facing, for instance, the sudden loss of a caregiver (through death or divorce) or when their emotions (e.g., after the birth of another child) went unnoticed. Some individuals with borderline traits were sexually abused or physically or emotionally mistreated in childhood.

Table 1  
*The Impulsive Child... (cont.)*

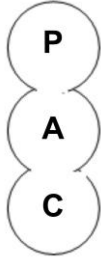
The Acting-Out Child	Borderline Adaptation
Attachment style	Disorganised, ambivalent, and insecure.
Selected injunctions	<i>Don't grow up. Don't be yourself. Don't be important. Don't be close. Don't feel joy. Don't succeed in your relationships. Don't be normal or mentally healthy.</i>
Script drivers	<i>Be strong. Please others.</i>
Probable ego states	
Selected traits and behaviours	<p>Panic fear of abandonment and loneliness. Ambivalences and counter-tendencies expressed through opposing emotional states, thoughts, and behaviours. Identity disturbances characterised by an unstable self-image oscillating between high and extremely low self-esteem. Instability in many life domains. Difficulties in formulating personal plans. Mood swings, capriciousness, and emotional lability. Dichotomous thinking. High sensitivity to criticism. Emotional vulnerability. Impulsivity and uncontrolled outbursts of anger. Excessive efforts to please others. Problems with concentration. Difficulty in understanding and reflecting on one's own behaviour. Shifts from idealisation to devaluation in interpersonal relationships. A tendency to be quarrelsome, provoke conflicts, and display sarcasm and irritability. Inability to compromise. Involvement in emotionally intense relationships marked by stormy breakups and reconciliations. Expectation of immediate gratification. Acting without considering possible negative consequences. Inability to tolerate routine and order. Frequent lateness and procrastination. Perceiving oneself, others, and the world in extreme black-and-white terms, with no middle ground between euphoria and breakdown (<i>binary value attributions</i>). Identity deficits. Unrealistically high standards or expectations of oneself (<i>self-invalidating</i>). A sense of inner emptiness. Lack of capacity for unconditional love. Difficulty understanding what is happening in the present moment. Conflicts concerning giving and receiving care, and closeness versus distance (<i>counter-dependence</i>). Suicidal thoughts, threats, or attempts. Susceptibility to depression, anorexia, and bulimia. Self-harming tendencies. Engagement in risky sexual behaviour. A liking for daring acts and dangerous extreme sports. Suicidal threats. Use of psychoactive substances. Experiences resembling delusions or hallucinations. Primitive defence mechanisms such as denial, omnipotent control, and projective identification.</p>

Table 1

*The Impulsive Child...* (cont.)

Typical beliefs	"I am a helpless person." "I live in a hostile world." "My unpleasant feelings or thoughts may get out of control." "I don't manage as well as other people." "If I get close to others, they will probably reject me." "Everything counts or nothing counts." "Someone close to me will be disloyal or unfaithful." "I must be alert." "I should end the relationship before the other person does." "I must subordinate my needs and desires to others, or they will abandon or hurt me." "When I'm alone, I'm helpless." "I must attack first before others attack me." "I am bad and deserve punishment."
Life position	<i>I'm not OK – You're OK (I–, U+).</i>
Favourite interpersonal games	"What will you do if you catch me?", "Row", "Fight", "Cops and robbers."
Examples of real, film, literary, or fairy-tale characters	Female protagonists of films such as <i>Margot at the Wedding</i> (2007, dir. N. Baumbach) and <i>Girl, Interrupted</i> (1999, dir. J. Mangold). It is said that both Marilyn Monroe and Princess Diana suffered from this condition. Readers are encouraged to look for further examples.
Positive traits	It is difficult to indicate clear positive features of this adaptation. Nevertheless, such individuals manage to cope with life to a greater or lesser degree. They can be found in all professions and tend to change jobs frequently, often being in conflict with their employers and close surroundings. They cope poorly in occupations requiring solitary work. Typically, they achieve low professional outcomes despite their talents and skills. A person with this type of adaptation could be described as an <i>Unpredictable Antagonist</i> .
Desired strokes	Conditional positive strokes.
Teacher's affirmations	"Between your anger and polite acceptance there is a whole range of things to acknowledge." "We must agree on something and both stick to that agreement." "By hurting others with your anger, you also hurt yourself." "My criticism of your behaviour is not always a sign that I dislike you." "It's possible to disagree with someone and still be friends." "Sometimes you have to wait to get what you like." "The order and rules in the classroom serve us all, including you."

Source: own research

**Teachers and educators** should be aware that "the term borderline often means different things to different authors, and a review of the literature shows considerable inconsistency in the use of this label" (Johnson, 1993, p. 12). Therefore, extreme caution must be exercised when formulating unambiguous and unequivocal recommendations for managing individuals exhibiting these characteristics.

### Specific Recommendations for Teachers and Educators

Nevertheless, it is worth attempting to provide some guidelines:

- Providing a sense of constancy and availability (“If you ever need to meet and talk with me, we can always arrange such a meeting beforehand”).
- Communicating according to the SET model (Support, Empathy, Truth) recommended for these types of personality issues (see Footnote 1):
  - S (Support) – “I’m concerned about your behaviour and well-being today.”
  - E (Empathy) – “You must be feeling awful.”
  - T (Truth about the situation) – “However, I will not tolerate such rude behaviour from you any further.”
- Applying another communication model from transactional analysis, referred to as the ‘Bull’s Eye’ (Geetha, 2015, p. 27). Messages directed at the interlocutor should target the three structural ego states:
  - Parent Ego State – “Let’s stick to these rules.”
  - Child Ego State – “I understand that this is difficult for you right now.”
  - Adult Ego State – “It’s worth considering how to get out of this situation.”
- Patience as a key strategy for relationship-building (“I’m repeating this again: I am not angry with you, although I find the way you sometimes behave difficult to accept”).
- Setting clear and firm boundaries for specific concerning behaviours (“Your anger hurts others; you should be aware of that”).
- Establishing relational boundaries (“I would like to define the mode of our mutual meetings together with you/your parents”). There is, however, a paradox in setting boundaries with individuals exhibiting borderline characteristics. In typical situations, those most dissatisfied with the establishment of any boundary are those who benefit from its absence. In the case of the individuals discussed here—internally volatile and psychologically unstable—defining boundaries is often met with distinct relief and acceptance.
- Utilising metacommunicative transactions (see Footnote 2) (“You are talking to me about what was, or what will be. I would like you to tell me what you understand ‘here and now’ by the statement that others will take advantage of you”).
- Being prepared for various counterattacks (“We agreed that you would report your lack of preparation for class each time. Do not try to convince me I did not say that. Today, you did not do your homework again. I will not allow that”).
- Maintaining a stable and balanced self-image in the face of frequent blaming and unjustified accusations (“I believe that your accusations against me are

unwarranted. I think differently of myself and do not deserve to be treated badly”).

- Preparing for tense or confrontational conversations in advance (“I suggest that you/your parents come to see me again next week to discuss the details”).
- Respecting personal boundaries during rage attacks (“Please step back a few paces from me”).
- Skillfully giving praise and encouragement (“I can see that you are trying to control yourself – that makes me very happy”).
- Instilling hope and mobilising self-work (“I see an improvement in your behaviour, and I hope it continues”).
- Pointing out the consequences of destructive behaviours (“I find it difficult to accept your behaviour today, which provokes anger in others”).
- Being authentic in the relationship (“As you can see, I am not pretending anything with you/your parents”).
- Attempting to understand and accept subjective views and experiences, even when they do not align with one’s own perception of reality (“I understand that this is how you/your parents may assess this situation”).

Individuals characterised by borderline adaptations exhibit considerable chaos in relationships and often sabotage any form of help. They experience intense emotions, display extreme behaviours, and struggle to control their actions, creating persistent interpersonal problems. An aware teacher or educator should therefore take special care to establish distinct “bridgeheads” of stability, transparency, and clarity of rules governing mutual relations.

Moreover, as many authors confirm, the number of individuals with these characterological and personality disorders is steadily increasing. The prevalence is estimated at 5.9%, with approximately 10% committing suicide; two-thirds of those affected are women (Talarowska et al., 2021, pp. 59–60). These statistics apply not only to adults but increasingly to younger generations. Some authors, however, argue that personality is not fully formed in childhood and remains subject to continuous development. “Other clinicians dispute this view. They believe that emotional and behavioural problems related to personality development are distinctly present early in life and can often be observed a year or two before such a person seeks help. This, they believe, proves the persistence and entrenchment of the behaviour” (Mason & Kreger, 2013, p. 248).

We have termed the internal child state of individuals exhibiting borderline personality traits the **Acting-Out Child**. This is deliberate: “Acting out, or re-experiencing childhood, is the most destructive way the wounded inner child disrupts our lives” (Bradshaw, 2008, p. 39). Such acting out may be directed externally or inwardly, punishing oneself as one was once punished. This dynamic hinders or even prevents the development of healthy interpersonal relation-

ships. Consequently, in cases of serious borderline-type disorders, relational therapy based on transactional analysis proves to be the most effective form of intervention (Rodríguez & Cabrero, 2015, pp. 587–606).

## I Must Be Liked and Attract Attention

The personality adaptations discussed previously were often shaped during the earliest developmental periods. Representatives of the psychodynamic approach refer to this as the pre-Oedipal stage. The following adaptation and subsequent personality characteristics relate to a later period, termed the Oedipal stage. This period spans roughly between the ages of three and seven, although clear and unambiguous chronological boundaries are difficult to establish.

While earlier adaptations (schizoid and oral) signify the relationship: Self – bond/attachment, and the ones that followed them (borderline) signify Self – others, the present adaptation will express the configuration: Self – within the surrounding system. This is the assertion of representatives of the psychoanalytic-developmental stream. The inherent ambivalence here is expressed by the motto: “My great attractiveness will draw you in – but it may also destroy you.”

Table 2  
*The Seduced Child – Characteristics of the Histrionic Adaptation*

<b>The Seduced Child</b>	<b>Histrionic Adaptation</b>
Central Issue	<b>Attractiveness.</b>
Core Unmet Need	Being noticed, appreciated, and admired.
Dominant Feelings	Experiencing intense, yet often variable and shallow, emotions and moods: sadness and shame, confusion and anxiety, anger and submissiveness, etc. These feelings are, however, superficial and occur almost in an “as-if” convention. Concealed sadness. Impatience in seeking attention, and a feeling of helplessness. Fear covering genuinely experienced anger.
Parental Behaviour Towards the Child	Upbringing in an atmosphere where only external attractiveness to others ensures a sense of success. Exploiting the child's natural sexuality for the parents' own purposes. A family with a high degree of control and low cohesion. A family constellation where one parent is emotionally cold and distant, and the other is charming and seductive. The conviction that the most important thing in the family is that everyone is happy and satisfied. Sometimes sexual abuse occurs in such families, but this is not a rule, and seduction then takes more hidden and indirect forms.
Attachment Style	Disorganised and ambivalent.
Selected Injunctions	Don't be yourself. Don't be a child. Don't grow up. Don't be important. Don't be close. Don't think. Don't feel angry.

Table 2  
*The Seduced Child...* (cont.)

The Seduced Child		Histrionic Adaptation
Script Drivers	Please others. Be perfect. Try hard.	
Probable Ego States		
Selected Traits and Behaviours	<p>A continuous desire to draw attention to oneself in search of acceptance. The need to constantly remain at the centre of attention. Ego-centrism. Capriciousness. Effusiveness. Seductiveness in relationships. Exaltation. Constant search for stimulation. Dramatising ordinary daily events. Lack of interest from others is experienced as rejection. Easily influenced by suggestions and moods. Lack of self-criticism. Manipulating the environment to receive attention, support, and approval. Imprecise thinking and an inability to focus attention on one task for a longer period. Low persistence in pursuing goals. Vague and imprecise speech full of generalisations or containing an excess of unnecessary details. Speaking loudly, expressively, and emotionally. Overuse of words signifying excess (e.g., enormous, huge, very great, etc.). Excessive tendency towards gesticulation and suggestive behaviour. Loud laughter. Competing with others for one's attractiveness. Excessive sensitivity to unfavourable evaluations. Vanity. Intellectual emptiness. Emotional shallowness. Immaturity. Lack of rationality. Pretentiousness. High reactivity in interpersonal relationships. Shortening interpersonal distance, e.g., by unwarranted use of first names (known as ingratiation). Exhibitionism. The desire to keep "dangerous thoughts" out of consciousness. Lack of respect for the opposite sex. Sexualising many relationships and engaging in erotic provocations while simultaneously denying them. Frequent loss of acquaintances and friends as a consequence of violently experienced emotions. Frequent perception of betrayal and disloyalty from the environment. Behaviours characterised by a specific melodramatic and "operatic" quality. Clothing intended to attract attention, being extravagant or unconventional, and inappropriate for specific circumstances (e.g., parties, funerals, ceremonies, etc.).</p>	
Typical Beliefs	<p>"My attractiveness and seductiveness will ensure my success." "I must impress others," "I must be adored always and by everyone." "All gratification comes from people of the opposite sex." "In reality, I am incompetent and won't cope with life." "Because I am exceptional, I deserve special rights."</p>	
Life Position	I am not OK – You (They) are OK. (I-, U+).	

Table 2  
*The Seduced Child...* (cont.)

The Seduced Child	Histrionic Adaptation
Favourite Interpersonal Games	"Rape," "If it weren't for you," "Gotcha, you SOB," "Stupid," "Toy Pistol," "No, actually," "Let's Get Joe," "Let's Make Mum Mad."
Selected Real, Film, Literary, and Fairy-Tale Figures	Characters such as: Scarlett O'Hara from <i>Gone with the Wind</i> (1939), dir. S. Howard; Carolyn Burnham from <i>American Beauty</i> (1999), dir. S. Mendes; Holly Golightly in <i>Breakfast at Tiffany's</i> (1961), dir. B. Edwards; and Blanche DuBois in the film <i>A Streetcar Named Desire</i> (1951), dir. E. Kazan, are pointed to. Important themes are also present in films like: <i>Anything Else</i> (2003), dir. W. Allen; <i>Hysterical Blindness</i> (2002), dir. M. Nair; and <i>Secrets &amp; Lies</i> (1971), dir. M. Leigh. The text omits mentioning people from the so-called front pages of newspapers, media, or social portals who unashamedly disclose their intimate private lives. It is important to remember that individuals with such personality traits often choose professions that provide them with popularity, acceptance, and the opportunity to remain the centre of attention: e.g., actors, presenters, singers, dancers, journalists, etc. They are now referred to as celebrities. Why are they celebrities? – "because they are popular" and that is why they are celebrities. The Rose in A. Saint-Exupéry's <i>The Little Prince</i> , which "charmed with beauty and fragrance." It is worthwhile to look for similar examples oneself.
Positive Qualities	Ability to adapt to the environment when accepted. Attending to one's image and success. Capacity to care for others. Being compassionate and caring. Such a person could be termed an: Expressive Enthusiast.
Desired Strokes (Signs of Recognition)	Positive unconditional (authentic!).
Affirmations for the Teacher	"Be yourself." "Good relationships with others are built not on being attractive, but on being real." "You don't have to be liked by people, and you don't have to worry about it." "Being in the centre doesn't always mean we are the most important." "When on a mood swing, it's sometimes worth standing on the ground and walking for a while." "The colours of our statements fade over time." "Criticism towards us doesn't always mean a complete lack of acceptance."

Source: own research

**Teachers and educators** may focus on the following elements in their work, knowing that these do not exhaust all possible courses of action.

### Recommendations for Teachers and Educators

Here are some useful guidelines:

- Rewarding behaviours that express authenticity, sincerity, and genuine feelings ("I see that you said that in an open and natural way; I really like that").
- The skill of teaching boundary setting in mutual relationships ("You don't have to agree to everything others expect of you").

- Distancing oneself from a student's attempts to break certain boundaries ("I do not give my private phone number to everyone").
- Applying praise for small things that the student has done independently or with great effort ("I really liked your drawing because I can see you worked very hard on it").
- When expressing criticism, explaining the reason ("I don't like what you did because you acted disrespectfully towards a classmate who might have felt upset because of it").
- Treating the student equally with others ("Everyone in the class is treated on equal terms").
- Raising the issue of gender with parents ("I observe excessive coyness in your daughter; perhaps it would be worthwhile to discuss this with her?").
- Encouraging the child to choose their own goals and preferences ("It is not good to excessively yield to the opinions of others").
- Developing the ability to express critical judgments ("I would now like to hear your assessment and how you justify it?").
- Fostering precision in thinking and speaking ("Try to say that once more, but precisely and concretely").
- Teaching concentration on one issue at a time ("Now focus only on this one fragment of the text and tell me your thoughts").
- Conducting an in-depth analysis of specific facts ("You tell me you are hesitant about choosing one university course over another. Tell me what speaks in favour of each decision? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?").
- Highlighting the appropriateness of clothing choices for the situation, teaching dress code principles ("Let's talk about various life situations, e.g., going to a prom, school, graduation, a funeral, the beach, a name day party, etc., and let's consider together how one should dress then, and when our outfit is inappropriate?").

When discussing the *Seduced Child*, it is important to be aware, as mentioned, that this does not always imply literal incest, molestation, or sexual exploitation. Seduction is often indirect, symbolically expressed, and hidden, rather than incestuous. From my own therapeutic practice, I recall the case of a father who did not live with the family. For his daughter's eleventh birthday (she was often referred to as a "little woman," "my princess," "Daddy's girl," etc.), he gave her a gift of 11 crimson roses and a thong (sic!). It is, therefore, not surprising that the girl clearly exhibited histrionic traits, and the father—despite my observations—saw nothing inappropriate in his behaviour. Stephen M. Johnson noted:

Every time I have had the opportunity to see an example of hysterical personality, clearly distinguishable from oral, narcissistic, and symbiotic tendencies, it was always a woman,

having had a past of special, sexually-toned relations with a seductive father (Johnson, 1998, p. 249).

This is an aspect of the discussed adaptation that should also draw the attention of teachers and educators.

It is also worth noting that histrionic behaviours appear to be somewhat rewarded in recent times. This is evidenced by the fact that they were previously estimated at 2-3% in the general population, whereas they are currently diagnosed in only about one percent of cases (Talarowska et al., 2021, p. 68).

### Order is Most Important to Me

The next personality adaptation presented is labelled the Disciplined Child. John Bradshaw writes about this as follows:

Children need parents who will model self-discipline, not just preach it. They learn what their parents actually *do*, not what they say they are going to do. If parents fail to generate discipline, the child becomes undisciplined. If, however, parents use discipline but do not follow through on what they preach—the child becomes over-disciplined (Bradshaw, 2008, p. 47).

The ambivalent attitude is expressed in the conviction: “I must watch myself, be perfect, and not make any mistakes – or I will not deserve love and recognition.” The characteristics discussed below are presented in this way.

Table 3  
*The Disciplined Child – Characteristics of the Anankastic (Obsessive-Compulsive) Adaptation*

The Disciplined Child	Anankastic (Obsessive-Compulsive) Adaptation
Central Issue	Discipline and control.
Core Unmet Need	Being loved and accepted regardless of what one does or who one is.
Dominant Feelings	Anxiety, for which the defence mechanisms are the occasional obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours. Fear of losing self-control. Guilt combined with internal anxiety. Anger and irritation towards others. Repression or denial of emotions.
Parental Behaviour Towards the Child	Extremely demanding, controlling parents who place great emphasis on achievement, though they do not always meet these requirements themselves. Establishing strict, rigorous, and inviolable parental rules. Recognising that the most important values in life are work, effort, and achievement. Expecting the child to keep impulsivity, emotionality, and spontaneity under constant control.
Attachment Style	Avoidant, insecure, and ambivalent.
Selected Injunctions	Don't be a child. Don't play. Don't feel. Don't be close. Don't feel grief.
Script Drivers	Be perfect. Try hard. Be strong.

Table 3  
*The Disciplined Child... (cont.)*

The Disciplined Child	Anankastic (Obsessive-Compulsive) Adaptation
Probable Ego States	
Selected Traits and Behaviours	<p>The student is often perceived as well-behaved, reserved, re-spectful of the teacher, and meticulous and accurate in performing tasks. Excessive focus on achievements (e.g., school, profes-sional, etc.). Workism – the belief that work is the sole meaning and centre of one's life. Lack of ability to separate private from school/professional spheres. Internal pressure to do things per-fectly. High tendency to conform to the demands of the environ-ment and authorities, and a search for experts. Living under the pressure of constant duties and tasks. Perfectionism in many ar-eas of activity, which may, however, hinder the completion of started tasks. Any failure or mistake is an unforgivable defeat worthy of punishment or stigma. Limited capacity for spontane-ous play and joy. Poor ability to relax and enjoy recreation. A lack of feeling comfortable in a group, hence individual relationships with others or loneliness. Rigidity, schematism, and routine in ac-tion. Dissatisfaction with already achieved results. Simultaneous involvement in an excessive number of activities. Being without obligations causes anxiety and discomfort. Excessive, obsessive preoccupation with certain thoughts and problems. Rigorousness and dogmatism of beliefs and views. Tendency to issue strict moral judgements. Strong attachment to one's beliefs, values, or principles. Focusing on secondary details while failing to notice essential, fundamental issues. Lack of understanding of interper-sonal relationships and intolerance for ambiguity in them. Seek-ing authorities and significant people. Performing intrusive activi-ties (e.g., tics, frequent hand washing, repeated checking of cer-tain things, etc.). Low creativity and development of imagination. Difficulties in making important decisions. Repression of the emo-tional sphere. Often the eldest child among siblings, though this is not a rule. Excessive concern for order, neatness, and precision in action. Creating problems for oneself that one wishes to avoid. Lack of understanding of ambiguous communications. Striving to achieve goals unattainable for others. Difficulties in building close and warm relationships with others. Stubbornness where firm-ness should be, submissiveness where flexibility should be shown. Stinginess and preparing for unfavourable circumstances. Susceptibility to numerous addictions (e.g., alcoholism, drug ad-diction, compulsive shopping, gambling, bulimia, etc.). Rigidity ex-pressed in posture and body movements.</p>

Table 3  
*The Disciplined Child...* (cont.)

The Disciplined Child	Anankastic (Obsessive-Compulsive) Adaptation
Typical Beliefs	<p>"I must not make mistakes." "Thanks to my diligence and conscientiousness, I will avoid feelings of shame and critical remarks." "This is quite good, but it could be much better." "I have to control myself, or I will lose control and then explode." "There's something wrong with me." "I will never make a similar mistake in my life." "Details are always extremely important because the devil is in the details." "Others should act as I do." "To do something well, strict rules and order are necessary." "If there is no specific structure and framework, everything will fall apart." "There is too much randomness in the actions of others." "No matter what I do, it will still be unacceptable." "Showing emotions is a sign of weakness."</p>
Life Position	I am not OK – You (They) are OK. (I-, U+)
Favourite Interpersonal Games	"See How Hard I Tried," "Harried," "If It Weren't for You."
Selected Real, Film, Literary, and Fairy-Tale Figures	<p>Films: <i>Day of the Wacko</i> (2002), dir. M. Koterski; <i>Black Swan</i> (2010), dir. D. Aronofsky. Hercule Poirot, the detective character created by Agatha Christie in crime novels and TV series. The fanatic Saeed in the film <i>The Pilot's Wife</i> (2021), dir. A. Z. Berached. The Rabbit in A. A. Milne's <i>Winnie the Pooh</i>, who is impatient and hardworking in caring for his garden. The Banker in A. Saint-Exupéry's <i>The Little Prince</i>, focused on constant counting and described as a "serious man." It is worthwhile to look for similar examples oneself.</p>
Positive Qualities	<p>A high level of professional achievement. The ability for logical thinking and fact analysis. A responsible person who can be entrusted with the most difficult tasks and can hold responsible positions. An excellent, though strict, organiser of others' work. Often quickly promoted in company and organisational structures. As a subordinate, they are an asset to any superior, but as a boss, they can be dictatorial towards employees, expecting them to subordinate their entire lives to tasks just as they do. This is a common trait among many military personnel and generals—especially one who will likely remain in our memories for a long time. The person with an anankastic adaptation deserves the title of: Responsible Workaholic.</p>
Desired Strokes (Signs of Recognition)	Positive conditional.
Affirmations for the Teacher	<p>"Effort alone does not always bring results." "Everything is fine, you don't need to worry." "See that your mistakes also teach you something." "Smart people make mistakes – foolish people cannot even see them." "Feelings are just as important as thinking." "I accept you as you are." "Try to look at certain things from a different perspective as well."</p>

Source: own research

**Teachers and educators** are perhaps most likely to encounter the characteristics of the above adaptation. When setting specific requirements for students in various situations, they may notice this type of reaction but also fall into a certain trap. The trap is this: teachers tend to like and value students with anankastic personality traits, simultaneously failing to notice the underlying psychological problems.

### **Guidelines for Teachers and Educators**

Therefore, it is worthwhile to undertake certain sensible actions towards this group of students.

- Assistance in understanding ambiguous communications (To a reprimand directed at a late student, such as: “What time is it!?”, a student with anankastic traits would most likely reply, without malice and according to the factual state: “It is currently 8:15.” The teacher should then say: “I am pointing out that you are late for the first lesson”).
- Acceptance of the student's mistakes and experienced failures (“Making mistakes is OK, as long as we can draw appropriate conclusions for ourselves”).
- Awareness of the student's particular need for control (“Don't worry about it!”).
- Improving group relationships (“For this task, pair up with the person you know least in the class”).
- Acknowledging and accepting ambiguity (“Give me an example from the novel we are discussing where things could have been different than the author described – how?”).
- Reducing internal pressure (“Who can tell me about a time when something wasn't working out for them, but they succeeded in the end?”).
- Assistance in making various decisions (“What needs to be done to make a good choice?”).
- Identifying unaccepted emotions (“What feelings do we dislike and prefer not to experience?”).
- Pointing out methods of constructive rest and recreation (“Which ways of playing and relaxing do you think are better and which are worse—why?”).
- Encouraging flexibility (“Who among you has changed their mind on a subject and found it beneficial?”).
- Agreeing on a conscious mistake (“This will be our secret agreement: after every lesson with me, you will leave me a small note on my desk with information: what deliberate mistake you recently made?”).
- Weakening excessive compulsive and overly orderly behaviours (“Your artwork must depict an interesting or intriguing mess”).

- Reducing physical tension (“We are getting out of our desks now and performing relaxation exercises for individual body parts according to the pattern I will show. We start by relaxing the muscles of the face – neck – shoulders...”).

Let us again recall the narratives of adults participating in scientific research.

A 38-year-old man recounted his childhood experience:

I come from a large family where my parents always believed that authority and discipline were the best educational tools. We did not experience parental closeness, excessive effusiveness or tenderness; perhaps I, as the eldest, am the least familiar with closeness and tenderness... The man recalls memories of his father, who was a professional soldier. Consequently, ‘iron discipline’ reigned at home. In his childhood memories, he describes his father as a strict individual who abused his authority, was dominant and despotic, and for whom the use of humiliating physical punishment was the rule: ‘...He transferred the military unit into the home, and it was a real training ground. My father abused his authority and professional position. Hard military rules prevailed at home; physical punishment was, in his father’s opinion, a natural element of upbringing...’ At 21, I didn’t know how to live; I was withdrawn, constantly feeling wronged, with fears and anxieties about making major decisions. As an adult man, I didn’t know how to build relationships, I didn’t know what it meant to have friends or a social life; I constantly felt I wasn’t entitled to it. I felt I had no right to my own space, to make my own decisions, to decide for myself. What was worse, I hurt all close relationships because I didn’t respect the boundaries of others, I was intrusive, I was afraid I constantly didn’t know something about the other person, I was suspicious if I didn’t know everything...

Let us now clarify the area of problems we are discussing, which might be difficult for someone encountering knowledge about this type of adaptation for the first time. There are people who could be described as well-mannered, attentive to detail, disciplined, emotionally reserved, persistent and reliable in work, and demanding of themselves and others. At the same time, they may excessively accumulate unnecessary items, be frugal with money, repeatedly check if they have locked the door or turned off the iron before leaving the house, have a somewhat stiff bsorbe (the so-called “ramrod man”), and sometimes be slightly dogmatic in their views, etc. We then speak of having to deal with obsessive-compulsive behaviours (OCB). Such behaviours occur in many people and generally do not impair social functioning. The second group consists of individuals overwhelmed by intrusive and obsessive thoughts and ritualistic actions, living under various compulsions, revealing beliefs that we would be inclined to call outright fanatical. We are then dealing with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Such people defend themselves against their own traits and bothersome actions but act under their pressure and internal compulsion due to anxiety. They are, therefore, accompanied by suffering and discomfort. The third group—which we highlighted in the above-discussed characteristics—is obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD), where the mentioned traits are embraced as one’s own, proper, and considered beneficial by the individual, regardless of the fact that this damages their relationships with others. However, some authors draw attention to the existing differences:

The main difference between OCD and OCPD is the degree of functional impairment in life. People struggling with OCD suffer greatly because of their problem and strongly want to get rid of it. In contrast, for people with OCPD, the disorder is only sporadically troublesome; such individuals rarely feel they would benefit from therapeutic help. Essentially, they are often completely unaware that their behaviour causes trouble for colleagues and family members until the people affected by the consequences of such behaviour draw it to their attention (Hyman & Pedrick, 2013, p. 41).

Some representatives of Transactional Analysis apply rather strict—though it is difficult to determine if justifiably so—screening criteria for this type of adaptation. The mere observation that someone simply washes their hands more often than others or drinks excessively, checks certain things repeatedly, is overly absorbed by their thoughts, takes up too much time with daily activities, or exhibits a concern for order and accuracy, is enough to preliminarily qualify this as an anankastic personality. This indicates that the differences between the mentioned categories are not always sharp and tend to blur within the complexity of the human psyche.

## I Focus on Development

To visually distinguish the next adaptation from those discussed earlier, we have changed the placement in the first field of the table. Where the state of the wounded Inner Child appeared, we now find the adaptation itself, which—it must be admitted—does not occur in a full and pure form. We are dealing, therefore, with a certain kind of idealisation and the expectation of precisely this kind of fulfilment in the human personality. However, this rarely happens; one might even say it never fully occurs. Only individual characteristics may manifest in the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of some individuals. Hopefully, this happens as often as possible. The adaptation that will be presented here signifies optimal personality development and the fullness of physical and psychological health. There are no characteristic ambivalences here, as in the previous cases, because the described personality is integrated, unambiguous, and devoid of opposing tendencies.

It can be considered that, in a sense, it summarises everything that has been presented earlier by showing the opposite and an alternative. Simply put: this is how it *could* be, but is generally not, in the context of the previous personality adaptations.

Table 4

*The Developing Child – Characteristics of the Optimal Adaptation*

The Developing Child		Optimal Adaptation
Central Issue	Development.	
Core Need	The ability to grow, belong, and build bonds.	
Dominant Feelings	All emotions that arise are allowed to exist and are acknowledged.	

Table 4  
*The Developing Child...* (cont.)

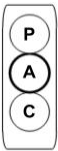
The Developing Child	Optimal Adaptation
Parental Behaviour Towards the Child	Providing presence, support, and security. Meeting the child's basic needs. Accepting the child as they are, in their uniqueness and distinctiveness. The ability to see through the child's eyes and evaluate one's own intuitions regarding them. Behaviours that create possibilities, space, and freedom for development, but also capable of setting sensible boundaries. Conduct that expresses firmness and decisiveness, but also understanding of the child's feelings and empathy. Providing praise, noticing the child's efforts. Initiating new experiences and shaping the ability to learn through experiencing inevitable setbacks and failures. Teaching respect for oneself and others. Being a role model and suggesting constructive patterns for social relationships and examples of fair competition and cooperation. Caring for psychological and physical development. Showing the values within the family and their significance. Parents embodying the "Jolly Giant" (as a positive metaphor for the father in TA) and the "Fairy Godmother" (as a positive metaphor for the mother in TA).
Attachment Style	Secure and engaged.
Injunctions	Rational prohibitions resulting from external and justified limits of reality.
Script Driver	"Be Yourself". Grow and develop healthily.
Probable Ego States	
Selected Traits and Behaviours	Attachment to others. The desire to play and enjoy life. Curiosity about the world and people. Sensitivity to the presence of others. Building trust to the degree appropriate for the given situation. Ability to recognise one's needs and ask for help. Striving for realistic goals. Patience, self-control, and calmness. Subordination to the actual demands of the environment. Acceptance of one's own possibilities and limitations. Coping with one's emotions, which consequently allows focus on established goals. The capacity for love and work (Z. Freud) and building constructive collaboration with others. Recognition of the inevitable turns of fate, failures, and life losses. Focus on the present, accepting the past, and building hope for the future. Responsibility for oneself and one's loved ones. Tolerance and understanding towards people with differing views, values, or lifestyles. Sovereign decision-making. Realistic thinking and developed cognitive skills. Striving for satisfaction and a sober sense of self-worth. Self-confidence and responsibility. The ability to achieve life satisfaction. Emotional and material independence from one's parents in adult life. The ability to plan and set realistic goals. Readiness to take measured risks. Lack of excessive perfectionism and utopian views. Possessing competence and professional commitment. Developing a coherent system of closely held values. Flexibility and creativity. Attention to health and psychological well-being. Sense of humour and self-distance. Cheerful disposition and optimism. Openness to the spiritual realm and transcendence.

Table 4  
*The Developing Child...* (cont.)

The Developing Child	Optimal Adaptation
Typical Beliefs	"Life is worth living." "Not every failure is a disaster." "It is better to face difficulties than to avoid them." "Not everyone has to like, love, and accept me, which does not mean I am worthless." "I take the environment into account, but ultimately I set the standards by which I want to live." "I primarily seek support within myself and my closest family/friends." "I live mainly in the present, not the past or the future." "The bad things that happened to me in the past do not ultimately determine my life and choices." "I have control over my emotions, thoughts, and behaviours." "I achieve happiness through my own effort and commitment." "I like to see how smart you've become" (mother sometimes says this to her son). "Grow into a beautiful woman" (father sometimes says this to his daughter).
Life Position	I am OK – You (They) are OK. (I+, U+).
Stance on Interpersonal Games	Consciously choosing honest, direct, and open communication with others instead of engaging in interpersonal games.
Selected Real, Film, Literary, and Fairy-Tale Figures	Films: <i>Zorba the Greek</i> (1964), dir. M. Kakogiannis; <i>The Glass Castle</i> , dir. D. D. Cretton; <i>The Structure of Crystal</i> (1969), dir. K. Kieślowski; <i>Anything Can Happen</i> (1995), dir. M. Łoziński; <i>Time to Die</i> (2007), dir. D. Kędzierszawska; <i>Gods</i> (2014), dir. Ł. Palkowski; and many other films with characters affirming life through various twists of fate. It is worthwhile to look for similar examples oneself.
Positive Qualities	A satisfying life in accordance with oneself and one's environment. Experiencing the fullness of life and caring for physical and mental health. A person exhibiting these traits could be termed an: Mindfull Realist*
Desired Strokes (Signs of Recognition)	Positive unconditional and conditional.
Affirmations for the Teacher	"You have a wonderful child" (a teacher to the parents).

\* Mindfulness is a specific type of attention directed to the present moment. In the context of relationships, according to one possible definition, this is the practice and cultivation of mindfulness within the relational context connecting the individuals involved (Germer et al., 2015, p. 125).

Source: own research

I would like to convey to **teachers and educators** that writing these three successive articles concerning personality adaptations caused me considerable doubt and concern. Primarily, I feared they might provide overly simplistic material leading to excessively easy diagnoses and objectifying labelling of others. I hope this has not been the case. Finally, I questioned whether the content presented here would genuinely contribute to deepening the knowledge teachers and educators need to build satisfying relationships with students and their parents. Grasping this subject matter can be difficult, which is why it is worthwhile to consult further

literature in this area. I decided that it is nonetheless worthwhile to understand human characters, if only to avoid getting lost in the thicket of meanings and words, and the confusion of orders and values in the world we live in.

Although psychiatrists and clinical psychologists are the professionals formally authorised to diagnose personality disorders or treat such problems, this does not mean that educators should fail to notice the early manifestations of similar anomalies in the personality development of their students. They should not only notice them but also feel a responsibility to react appropriately. This often does not require excessively high qualifications but may come down to building an appropriate relationship between themselves and the student, or undertaking the simplest interventions. I am not encouraging the undertaking of psychotherapy, which is beyond teachers' competence, but rather the provision of corrective experiences for various maladaptive behaviours. The influence of teachers is possible, and although it will not replace necessary professional help and treatment, it can nonetheless prove to be extremely valuable.

A teacher aware of the content presented in these chapters will avoid certain personal pitfalls or mistakes. For example, they will not appoint a student with pronounced psychopathic traits to a leadership role or entrust them with control functions. Nor will they frequently emphasise the exceptionality of a narcissistic student or ward. They can, however, try to gradually and skilfully include the student who is schizoidally or autistically isolating themselves from everyone in class life. They can consciously build a sense of security in the case of observed mistrust, initiate creativity in the case of a student's rigidity and dogmatism, and develop qualities in the histrionic student other than just the conviction of the value of their own beauty and attractiveness. While all classifications state that the diagnosis of personality disorders can only take place in so-called young adults, practical and common observation allows one to notice the existence of certain abnormal personality adaptations much earlier. I am convinced of this. Examples abound.

A research report on teachers' perceptions of students reveals a statistically significant parameter indicating that in assessing students, the teacher pays equal attention to the student's knowledge and skills as to who the student is and the personality traits and behaviours that characterise them (Wołodkiewicz, 2013, p. 2003). Therefore, if these behaviours significantly deviate from the norms and standards accepted in the class and social environment, this must obviously also affect the student's relationship with the teacher. This perception, however, depends on the teachers' psychological competencies, even if only elementary and practical ones. Yet, the state of knowledge and skills acquired through academic education is not always sufficient. Teachers themselves often speak of this self-critically during various training sessions and informal conversations. I, therefore, wish to believe that the topics presented in these articles offer an undeniable and hard-to-overestimate opportunity for teachers and educators. The chance to pro-

vide real and most-needed “first aid” to certain students requiring attention, so that they can build healthy relationships in their lives and develop as best as possible in various situations.

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## Uczniowskie adaptacje osobowości, cz. III\*\*

### Streszczenie

W trzech kolejnych artykułach ukazano przykłady uczniowskich adaptacji osobowości. Odwołując się do koncepcji analizy transakcyjnej oraz wiedzy z zakresu zaburzeń osobowości, przedstawiono szereg typowych cech i zachowań, dominujących potrzeb oraz wybranych parametrów AT, a także podano praktyczne wskazówki mogące pomóc nauczycielom i wychowawcom w rozumieniu swoich relacji z uczniami sprawiającymi kłopoty wynikające z problemów charakterologicznych. Wskazano też sposoby działań kompensacyjnych oraz interwencji w postaci afirmacji służące zapobieganiu ujawniających się przejawów dysfunkcjonalnego rozwoju osobowości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uczeń, adaptacje osobowości, borderline, zaburzenia histrioniczne, zaburzenia obsesyjno-kompulsywne, adaptacja optymalna.

\*\* Artykuł w jakiejś części jest fragmentem jednego z rozdziałów w książce: J. Jagieła (2023). *Psychopedagogika relacji. Analiza transakcyjna dla nauczycieli i wychowawców*, Wydawnictwo Difin.

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## Education in the Era of Generative Artificial Intelligence: A Transactional Analysis Perspective

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### Abstract

Education in the digital age is evolving toward the use of new technologies such as generative artificial intelligence, which increasingly incorporates psychological aspects of learning. Currently, it can offer personalized and effective educational environments that provide tailored feedback. However, it may disrupt cognitive processes and relationships, as well as generate and disseminate misinformation or perpetuate biases. Transactional Analysis (TA), developed by Eric Berne, is based on a model of human communication that allows for the identification and modification of behavioral patterns in interpersonal relationships. The combination of these two fields creates potential for more effective support of educational processes. This article analyzes the impact of ChatGPT on educational processes through the lens of *Transactional Analysis* (TA), with particular emphasis on the dynamics of *Ego States* and *transactions* in teacher-student relationships. Therefore, it is important to examine various aspects of AI use, especially in the context of its impact on relationships.

**Keywords:** Digital education, GenAI in education, Personalized learning, Transactional analysis

### Transactional Analysis as a Theoretical Framework

*Transactional Analysis* (TA) (Berne, 1964; Petrovsky, 2025) offers unique tools for examining educational interactions in the context of GenAI. Key concepts relevant to this analysis include:

- *Ego States* – behavioral systems (Child, Parent, Adult) activated in interactions;
- *Transactions* – exchanges of messages between participants’ Ego States;
- *Psychological Games* – repetitive transaction sequences with hidden motives.

In the context of education utilizing GenAI, maintaining a balance between ego states and the authenticity of transactions becomes particularly significant.

The aim of this article is to present selected issues concerning the impact of GenAI on educational processes through the lens of *Transactional Analysis* (TA) from the perspective of responses provided by the currently most popular system, ChatGPT.

The ChatGPT model used in this study is a natural language processing (NLP) system based on the GPT architecture (*Generative Pre-trained Transformer*), originally developed for tasks such as machine translation and summarization. Unlike traditional artificial intelligence (AI), ChatGPT is a generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). It is designed to generate new content or ideas in real-time in a *text-to-text* format. ChatGPT generates and presents entirely new content during real-time conversations with users while maintaining a dialogue style that closely mimics human interaction (Xu, Dainoff, Ge, & Gao, 2023).

Evolution and Capabilities of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Between 2012 and 2024, GenAI and *large language models* (LLMs, *Large Language Models*) underwent tremendous development (Zhang et al., 2024), marking another milestone in the evolution of artificial intelligence. These models revolutionized human-AI interaction (Xu et al., 2023).

Models like GPT (*Generative Pre-trained Transformer*), especially versions GPT-3 and GPT- 4, have found broad applications in education—for tasks such as automated text translation, creating educational materials, and generating test questions (Küchemann et al., 2024) (see Figure 1).

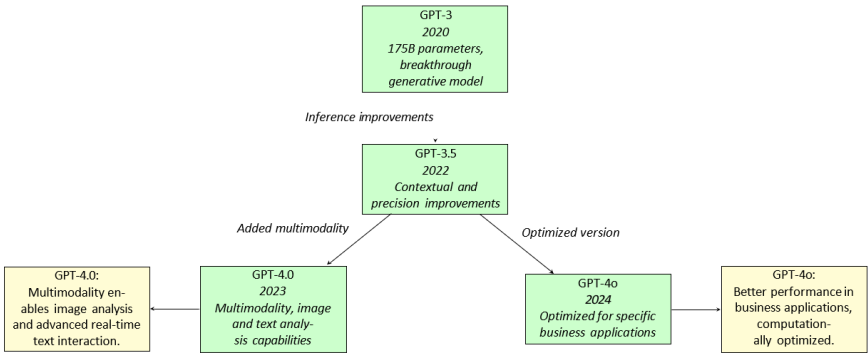


Figure 1  
Evolution of AI from GPT-3 (2020)

Source: own materials

Educational chatbots based on these models are becoming increasingly popular in education, particularly in teaching mathematics, foreign languages, and developing critical thinking skills. The efficiency of personalized learning has significantly improved through the implementation of *virtual tutoring* services, enabling interactive work with the system (Hall Jr, 2021; Osmanovic-Thunström, 2022; Qadir et al., 2020), which is crucial for distance learning systems.

The effectiveness of this iterative process reaches two standard deviations ( $2\sigma$ ) — the two-sigma effect (Bloom, 1984; Hall Jr, 2021; Leyzberg, Spaulding, & Scassellati, 2014). This improvement stems from immediate feedback, progress at a individually tailored pace, and appropriately adjusted difficulty levels, all of which enhance comprehension and skill acquisition. *Virtual tutors* can thus serve as teacher substitutes (Qadir, 2020). However, it is worth noting that the main obstacles in learning are lack of engagement and the absence of perceived social interaction in the learning process (Qadir, 2015; Qadir & Imran, 2018). ChatGPT plays a key role in mitigating these barriers, though it cannot fully replace the individualized support provided by teachers (E. R. Mollick & Mollick, 2023).

In the latest phase of AI development (since 2023), *multimodality* (Lee et al., 2023) has been introduced, enabling the processing of both text and images. This allows for the creation of more complex educational workflows, spanning content generation to outcome analysis. However, it requires mastering the skill of crafting text-based queries (*prompts*). Prompt construction is challenging enough that a new field — *prompt engineering* — has emerged (Marvin, Hellen, Jjingo, & Nakatumba-Nabende, 2023). Online databases of prompts and their corresponding outputs have appeared (Korzynski, Mazurek, Krzyrkowska, & Kurasinski, 2023), and prompts are now copyrighted, leading to platforms for buying/selling them (e.g., <https://promptbase.com/>).

Thanks to *multimodality* (Lee et al., 2023), AI has become more interactive and capable of adapting to individual student needs (*personalized learning environments*). AI can analyze student work and provide tailored feedback to develop practical skills (bin Mohamed, Hidayat, binti Suhaizi, bin Mahmud, binti Baharuddin, et al., 2022).

In educational contexts, ChatGPT can generate content and solve tasks for students, teachers, and parents alike. It also enables users to receive feedback on their work (Osmanovic-Thunström, 2022; Qadir et al., 2020). However, its use has sparked controversy (Waltzer, Pilegard, & Heyman, 2024) over ethical concerns (Cotton, Cotton, & Shipway, 2024). Studies also suggest that ChatGPT may curb creativity in writing (Niloy, Akter, Sultana, Sultana, & Rahman, 2024). Various aspects of AI's long-term impact on metacognition and learning — including within the framework of the revised Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001) — are discussed in (Johnpaul, Miryala, Jayaprakashnarayana, & Miryala, 2025).

Notably, Poland has developed the *Transactional Analysis Cognitive Toolkit* (Trans-ACT). This toolkit enables the integration of TA principles into multi-agent systems (MAS) (Zamojska, Chudziak, et al., 2025), generating agents with realistic psychological dynamics. Trans-ACT embeds the Parent, Adult, and Child ego states into an agent’s cognitive architecture. Each ego state retrieves context-specific memories to shape responses to new situations, with final outputs aligned with the agent’s core life script. This research opens new possibilities for applications in conflict resolution, educational support, and advanced social psychology studies.

Table 1  
*Summary of seven approaches to using AI in education*

AI Role	Function	Pedagogical Benefits	Pedagogical Risks
MENTOR	Providing feed back	Feedback improves learning out-comes, even when not fully utilized.	Lack of critical assessment of feedback, which may contain errors.
TUTOR	Direct instruction	Personalized direct instruction is highly effective.	Uneven knowledge level of AI and significant risk of confabulation.
COACH	Supporting metacognition	Reflection and self-regulation opportunities enhance learning out-comes.	Coaching style/tone may not suit the learner. Risk of erroneous advice.
TEAMMATE	Enhancing teamwork	Providing alternative perspectives, supporting collaborative work.	Confabulations and errors. Personality conflicts with other team members.
STUDENT	Receiving explanations	Teaching others is a highly effective learning technique.	Confabulations and flawed arguments may disrupt learning effects.
SIMULATOR	Deliberate practice	Practicing and applying knowledge supports skill transfer.	Inadequate simulation fidelity.
TOOL	Task execution	Increases task efficiency by reducing time.	Replaces thinking with task completion.

Source: own research.

**Roles of Artificial Intelligence in Education**

Currently, AI can be positioned in seven fundamental roles (E. Mollick & Mollick, 2023), each associated with both benefits and risks — see Table 1.

From a didactic process perspective, practically every role contributes to improved learning outcomes. This approach covers all critical aspects of the educational process that have historically been challenging to implement: personal-

ized learning, rapid feedback, development of reflection and self-regulation skills, teamwork, the highly effective “teaching others” technique, opportunities for practical knowledge application, and efficiency-boosting tools.

Research indicates that maintaining a balance between AI-assisted work (20-30%) and independent work (70-80%) is crucial (J. Wang & Fan, 2025). Studies show that when AI serves in a supporting role, results are comparable to traditional learning (S. Wang et al., 2024). However, unrestricted use of standard generative models reduced subsequent performance by approximately 17% (S. Wang et al., 2024). AI support is best applied during initial idea generation, simulation, or test practice phases. The core elements of the process — analysis, critique, correction, and learning — should remain the student’s responsibility. Table 2 presents recommended AI involvement levels for different learning stages.

Table 2  
*Recommended AI involvement for different learning stages*

Stage	Percentage of AI use	Independent work
Planning	20%	80%
Idea/solution generation	30%	70%
Analysis, critique, correction	10% – AI verification	90%
Knowledge repetition and testing	30% – AI flashcards	70% – repetition

Source: own research.

Recommended ways to use AI within the discussed roles are as follows:

- *AI tutor/AI coach/AI mentor* — students ask questions and request guidance rather than using ready-made solutions (E. Mollick & Mollick, 2023);
- *AI simulator* — e.g., conversations, case studies in foreign languages, programming;
- *AI tool* — generating short questions, quizzes, flashcards to support learning techniques like *spaced repetition* (Baillifard, Gabella, Lavenex, & Martarelli, 2023; Plaskura, 2024).

It’s worth noting that a positive aspect of AI implementation is the reduction of exam-related stress (Elsayed, Kholikov, Abdullayeva, Al-Farouni, & Wodajo, 2024).

### Impact of AI Roles on Ego States

The use of AI generates certain risks (J. Wang & Fan, 2025) related to an uncritical approach to received feedback, issues concerning the risk of AI delivering information of varying quality and reasoning methods, as well as providing false information or problems with simulation fidelity. This may lead to conflicts with other team members due to likely being equipped with slightly different knowledge of var-

ying credibility levels, as well as cognitive challenges related to the use of tools supporting the educational process, the functioning of which may not be entirely clear.

Each role is characterized by distinct features:

- *Parent (P)* – norms, evaluations, prohibitions, care or criticism
- *Adult (A)* – rational analysis, logical decisions
- *Child (C)* – emotions, spontaneity, creativity, fears, rebellion

Clearly, different roles influence *ego states* (Tankelevitch et al., 2024) – see Table 3. The psychopedagogical interpretation is as follows:

- When students use AI consciously and critically for analysis, testing, and verification, they strengthen their *Adult* (AI as Adult function).
- If AI imposes solutions or moralizes (e.g., feedback without reflection), it may activate the internal *Critical Parent* (AI as pseudo-Parent).
- In roles like TEAMMATE or COACH – AI can stimulate the *creative and curious Child*, fostering emotional engagement (AI as Child stimulus).

Key conclusions regarding AI roles’ impact on *ego states*:

- Varied AI roles can support development of all *ego states* when used consciously and reflectively.
- Greatest pedagogical benefits come from coaching and simulation modes, strengthening the *Adult* and *healthy Child*.
- The main risk is over-reliance on AI as *Parent* – potentially leading to submissiveness, lack of autonomy, and avoidance of independence.

Table 3  
Impact of AI roles on student’s ego states in Student-AI interaction

AI Role	Dominant effect on <i>ego state</i>	Impact description (on student’s <i>ego state</i> )
MENTOR	Nurturing Parent/Adult	Provides guidance and feedback – may activate the internal Parent ( <i>I should improve this</i> ) or Adult if feedback is critically analyzed.
TUTOR	Adapted Child/Critical Parent	Unreflective acceptance of instructions may activate the Adapted Child; excessive correction – the internal Critical Parent.
COACH	Adult/Child	Encourages reflection and self-regulation – strengthens the Adult. Warm AI style may also stimulate the creative Child.
TEAMMATE	Child/Adult	Collaboration stimulates creativity and initiative (Free Child), but also analysis and dialogue (Adult).

Table 3  
Impact of AI roles on student's ego states... (cont.)

AI Role	Dominant effect on <i>ego state</i>	Impact description (on student's <i>ego state</i> )
STUDENT	Parent/Adult	AI as student strengthens the Adult (material control) and normative Parent (student becomes expert).
SIMULATOR	Adult	Requires repetition, analysis and knowledge application - clearly activates the Adult state.
TOOL	Adult/risk for Child	Supports efficiency (Adult) but may suppress process enjoyment (Free Child) if used too mechanically.

Source: own research.

### The Impact of AI on Ego State Dynamics in Education

The development of AI has significantly influenced the dynamics of *ego states* in the educational process. Traditional teaching models often activated the **Parent ego state** in teachers and the **Child ego state** in students. Modern tools like ChatGPT can:

- Strengthen the *Adult ego state* by democratizing access to knowledge
- Simultaneously reinforce the *Adult* (rational analysis) and provoke *Child* reactions (e.g., AI dependency)
- Disrupt traditional *transactions* by introducing GenAI as a *third participant*
- Create risks of *psychological games* around *work authenticity*, where GenAI overuse could become part of *educational games* (e.g., )

### ChatGPT on Education from a Transactional Perspective

This section presents responses from ChatGPT (<https://chatgpt.com/>) to *prompts* by the author. We used ChatGPT version 4 during June-July 2025. Responses are published unedited. Notably, ChatGPT-generated text demonstrates high structural, grammatical, and semantic accuracy. The following fragment was omitted in all queries:

Assume the role of a researcher specializing in transactional analysis and provide/review relevant literature references.

### ChatGPT's Impact on Teacher-Student Transaction Dynamics

**Prompt:** How does ChatGPT affect teacher-student transactions from a TA perspective?

**ChatGPT:** ChatGPT may:

- Strengthen *Adult-Adult* transactions through objective information
- Disrupt transactions by provoking *Parent* (control) or *Child* (compliance) reactions
- Create new communication patterns through triangulation (*Teacher-AI-Student*)

My responses can:

- Enhance *Adult-Adult* transactions with factual information
- Trigger *Parent* in teachers (authenticity verification)
- Activate *Child* in students (seeking ready solutions)

### Using AI to Support Learning Within Transactional Analysis Framework

**Prompt:** How can students use AI to support learning without disrupting *Parent* and *Teacher* ego state relationships?

**ChatGPT:** In the digital era, artificial intelligence (AI) can become a valuable educational tool when maintaining proper TA relationships. The key is balancing *ego states*: **Adult**, **Parent**, and **Child**. Student strategies include:

#### 1. Strengthening the Adult State

##### **Critical Verification:**

- Prompts: *What sources confirm this information?*
- Exercise: Comparing AI responses with textbook knowledge

##### **Study Planning:**

- Using AI for scheduling (*Adult-Adult transaction*)
- Example: *AI, help me plan my study review sessions according to the forgetting curve.*

#### 2. Avoiding Overdependence (*Child-Parent*)

##### **Self-awareness:**

- Monitoring requests: *Am I asking for help or complete solutions?*
- Technique: Recording own ideas before AI consultation

##### **Responsible Use:**

- 30/70 rule – 30% AI inspiration, 70% independent work
- Example: Using AI only for result verification, not generation

#### 3. Maintaining Healthy Teacher Relationships

##### **Clear Communication:**

- Disclosing: *I'm using AI for [specific purpose], is this appropriate?*
- Avoiding hidden AI collaboration

##### **Collaboration Over Replacement:**

- Example: *Teacher, AI suggests this interpretation – what do you think?*

Practical AI applications by ego state are shown in Table 4.

Table 4  
Safe AI Applications by Ego State

Area	AI Application	Ego State
Review	Flashcard generation	Adult
Problem-solving	Step-by-step hints	Adult
Paper writing	Style correction	Adult
Language learning	Conversations	Adult-Adult

Source: own research.

Risks and countermeasures include:

**Infantilization risk** (*AI will do it for me*) – Solution: Set time limits for AI use

**Teacher authority erosion** – Solution: Treat AI as *study group peer* not authority In summary, AI concluded that:

- AI works best as an *intelligent encyclopedia*, not human relationship substitute
- Awareness of *ego states* in tech interactions is crucial
- Teachers should be partners in implementing AI in education

### The Impact of Asking Good Questions on Relationships

**Prompt:** In the age of AI, can asking good questions disrupt *Adult ego state* and *Child-Parent* relationships?

**ChatGPT:** The development of artificial intelligence (AI) can influence relationship dynamics from a transactional analysis (TA) perspective, particularly regarding **communication, authority, and learning processes**.

#### **Adult ego state and AI Relationship**

- Risks
  - Dependence on AI (e.g., ChatGPT) as an *omniscient Parent* may weaken the **Adult state** – rational, critical thinking.
    - *Example:* When students/teachers uncritically accept AI responses as *absolute truths*, they abandon their own analysis (disengaging the Adult state).
  - Dehumanization of relationships: AI may replace human dialogue, limiting natural *Adult- Adult* transactions.
- Benefits
  - AI can be a **tool supporting the Adult state**, for example by:
    - Providing data for independent verification (e.g., *Let's check what research says about this*).
    - Training question-asking skills (e.g., *Is this source reliable?*).

### **Child-Parent Relationship and AI**

#### — **Risks**

- Teachers/parents may use AI as a *digital Parent* that:
  - Issues commands (e.g., algorithms scheduling a child's day).
  - Punishes/rewards (e.g., automated grading systems).
- Students may fall into *Child role* (*AI knows better, I don't need to think*).

#### — **Benefits**

- AI as *supportive Parent* can:
  - Provide positive feedback (e.g., educational apps with gamification).
  - Assist with emotional regulation (e.g., therapeutic chatbots for children).

### IMPACT OF QUESTIONS ON TRANSACTIONS

The key is **awareness of the ego state** behind questions:

#### — **Adult questions:**

What *are the arguments for and against this theory?* → Strengthens critical thinking.

#### — **Child questions:**

*Tell me what to think!* → Reinforces dependence.

#### — **Parent questions:**

*Are you sure you're right?* (controlling) → May provoke rebellion (*Child role response*).

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- For teachers/parents:
  - Teach **critical dialogue with AI** (e.g., *Why does AI think this? How can we verify it?*).
  - Model *Adult-Adult* transactions (*AI is a tool, not an authority*).
- For students:
  - Practice **metacognition** (e.g., *Is this question driven by curiosity or laziness?*).
- For AI developers:
  - Design interfaces that **don't infantilize** users (e.g., avoid messages like *Good boy for asking!*).

### **The Use of AI in Early Childhood Education from a Transactional Analysis Perspective**

**Prompt:** Create a 5x3 grid table describing the impact of ChatGPT on early childhood education (grades 1-3) from a transactional analysis perspective. Show use cases in rows AND provide brief text in two columns (teachers and children). The table should include short explanatory text.

The response included a table created in L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X format – see Table 5.

Table 5

*Impact of ChatGPT on early childhood education (grades 1-3) from a transactional analysis perspective*

ChatGPT Use Case	Impact on Child (Ego State)	Impact on Teacher (Ego State)
Answering student questions in a friendly advisor style	Activation of Curious Child and Adult – enhances reflection and exploration.	Activation of Curious Child and Adult – enhances reflection and exploration.
Generating stories based on student's words	Strengthening Free Child and creativity - develops self-expression.	Strengthening Free Child and creativity - develops self-expression.
Using ChatGPT for math quizzes	Adapted Child or Learning Adult – depending on usage method.	Analytical Adult – teacher monitors difficulty and task appropriateness.
Asking AI to complete stories	Natural Child + Adult – creative combination of structures and emotions.	Nurturing Parent – provides feedback, corrects mistakes.
Overusing ChatGPT instead of asking teacher questions	Reduced teacher contact, risk of activating Adapted Child.	Critical Parent or Concerned Adult – threat to interpersonal relationship.

Source: own research.

## Discussion of Results

ChatGPT accurately addresses the application of AI in education from a transactional analysis perspective. It correctly identifies individual ego states and their interrelationships, properly outlines associated risks, and proposes mitigation strategies from the standpoint of potential disruptions to these states. The system recognizes the challenge of maintaining appropriate proportions in AI utilization within the learning process.

ChatGPT appropriately specifies methods for employing its capabilities and their dual impact on both students and educators. It accurately describes anticipated changes in relational dynamics resulting from acquiring effective prompt formulation skills, particularly regarding communication patterns, authority structures, and learning processes – noting these may lead to relational disturbances.

The information provided by ChatGPT is substantiated by existing research. The current version reliably references scholarly literature, with most citations correctly aligned to the discussed topics. This section presents only selected queries and responses, which may serve as:

1. A foundation for further in-depth studies
2. A basis for implementing appropriate interventions at present

## Recommendations and Interventions

Based on the literature and presented research, we can outline recommendations for using GenAI within a transactional analysis framework:

- Maintain balanced AI usage supporting learning: 20–30% AI-assisted work versus 70–80% independent work (J. Wang & Fan, 2025).
- Both teachers and parents should guide students in AI usage, fostering awareness, critical thinking, and information credibility assessment (Holstein & Aleven, 2022).
- AI should be used for analysis, comparison, and testing to develop the *Adult* ego state, not for copying ready-made solutions (Khosravi et al., 2022).
- Avoid evaluative or moralizing AI unless students are prepared to receive such feedback with detachment (Berne, 1964) – preventing activation of the Critical Parent.
- AI tools are valuable for experimentation, creative writing, and simulations (Graesser, Chipman, Haynes, & Olney, 2005), strengthening the Creative Child.
- Overdependence on AI may limit student autonomy (Khosravi et al., 2022). Excessive AI as *Parent* can reduce motivation and foster over-compliance (Berne, 1964). Using AI for ready solutions lowers reflection and higher-order thinking (J. Wang & Fan, 2025).

Excessive AI reliance risks *metacognitive laziness* – losing independent critical thinking (Fan et al., 2025). The recommended solution is developing students' conscious approach to AI as a learning partner rather than an *infallible authority* (Holstein & Aleven, 2022).

Based on this, we can formulate intervention proposals using TA:

1. Teacher training in recognizing *ego states* in AI contexts;
2. Developing prompt formulation skills as *Adult ego state* exercise;
3. Designing tasks minimizing *psychological games* risk;
4. Creating exercises strengthening student autonomy (*Adult ego state*).

## Conclusions

GenAI itself **does not disrupt** relationships in TA – it is **people** who assign it roles (e.g., as a *digital Parent*). The key lies in **conscious management of ego states** when interacting with technology and maintaining *Parent* and *Teacher* re-

relationships as primary, while AI should serve as a supportive assistant in the overall process.

Educational *transactions* require redefinition in the GenAI era, necessitating new methods for detecting *psychological games*. A fresh approach to *educational games* is needed, along with maintaining balance between participants' *ego states*. GenAI significantly impacts the dynamics of educational *transactions*, making monitoring of *ego states* essential.

Teachers require training in TA within the context of new technologies, particularly for designing educational transactions that account for AI's role. Emphasis should be placed on exercises that strengthen autonomy (*Adult ego state*). Unlimited use of AI degrades the learning process, while excessive dependence creates risks of losing independent critical thinking, which disrupts *ego states*. The use of AI should be limited to approximately 20-30% of total learning time, with the remaining 70-80% reserved for student-directed cognitive engagement.

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## **Edukacja w dobie generatywnej sztucznej inteligencji: perspektywa analizy transakcyjnej**

### **Streszczenie**

Edukacja w erze cyfrowej ewoluuje w kierunku wykorzystania nowych technologii takich jak generatywna sztuczna inteligencja, która w coraz większym stopniu uwzględnia psychologiczne aspekty uczenia się. Obecnie może ona oferować spersonalizowane i skuteczne środowisko edukacyjne, które dostarcza spersonalizowanych informacji zwrotnych. Może jednak zaburzać procesy poznawcze i relacje oraz generować i rozpowszechniać dezinformację czy utrzymywać uprzedzenia. Analiza transakcyjna, opracowana przez Erica Berne’a, opiera się na modelu komunikacji międzyludzkiej, który pozwala na identyfikację i modyfikację wzorców zachowań w relacjach interpersonalnych. Połączenie obu tych dziedzin tworzy potencjał do bardziej efektywnego wspierania procesów edukacyjnych. W artykule analizowany jest wpływ ChatGPT na procesy edukacyjne przez pryzmat *analizy transakcyjnej* (AT), ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem dynamiki *stanów Ja* oraz *transakcji* w relacjach nauczyciel–uczeń. Dlatego też ważne jest pokazanie różnych aspektów wykorzystania AI – szczególnie w kontekście wpływu na relacje.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja cyfrowa, genAI w edukacji, spersonalizowane uczenie, analiza transakcyjna.

**TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS**  
**IN OTHER DOMAINS**  
ANALIZA TRANSAKCYJNA  
NA INNYCH POLACH



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## The development of the psychotherapy of psychoses in Transactional Analysis

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to reconstruct the process of development of the practice of psychotherapy of psychoses in Transactional Analysis. This development is studied using the framework of Kurt Danziger's historical psychology which assumes that every psychological practice should be studied in its social and professional context. Three main moments in the development of psychotherapy of psychoses in TA are analyzed: Eric Berne and psychotherapy of psychoses; Schiffs' Catexis School; and contemporary developments in TA psychotherapy of psychoses. The article discusses social, professional, and theoretical contexts that shaped the evolution of TA practice in the field of psychotherapy of psychoses.

**Keywords:** history, psychoanalysis, psychoses, psychotherapy, transactional analysis

### Introduction

Categories of psychosis and psychotherapy both were and still are, subjects of continuous evolution and it is hard to provide their fixed definitions. Psychosis is a controversial psychiatric category. The notion was introduced by Austrian psychiatrist Ernst von Feuchtersleben in 1845 (Beer, 1996). In the nineteenth century, the word was often used as a synonym for madness (Bürky, 2008). The development of psychiatric taxonomies in the second half of the nineteenth century – by Karl Kahlbaum, Emil Kraepelin, and Eugen Bleuler – introduced psycho-

sis into medical practice (Beer, 1996; Berrios, 2008; Gilman, 2008). There are still major disagreements between professionals regarding taxonomy, etiology, pathomechanisms, and treatment of psychosis (see, e.g. Lavretsky, 2008).

According to Cautin (2010, p. 3), psychotherapy can be broadly defined as “[...] the treatment of emotional or physical ills by psychological means”. Attempts at psychotherapeutic treatment of psychoses were first undertaken by psychoanalysts in the first half of the twentieth century. There are many historical accounts of the development of the psychotherapy of psychoses (see e.g. Alanen, 2009a, 2009b; Eells, 2000; Fenton, 2000; Hoffman, 2009; Karon & VandenBos, 1994; Silver, 2009; Silver & Stedman, 2009; Stone, 1999).

In Transactional Analysis literature there has been a recent interest in a reevaluation of Schiffs’s legacy in psychotherapy of psychoses in TA – the whole volume 52, issue 1 of *Transactional Analysis Journal* was devoted to this subject (Cornell, 2022; Gheorghe, Brunke, Deaconu, Gheorghe, Ionas, 2022; Landache III, 2022a, 2022b; McNeel, 2022; Mountain, 2022). The articles published in this volume raise issues concerning the history of psychotherapy of psychoses in TA, although they are not exclusively devoted to tracing the development of psychotherapy of psychoses in Transactional Analysis. Zefiro Mellacqua’s article *When a Mind Breaks Down: A Brief History of Efforts to Understand Schizophrenia* (2020) focuses on some aspects of the history of concepts and treatment of schizophrenic psychosis, namely the evolution of the psychiatric concept of schizophrenia, the development of biological theories of schizophrenia, and the aspects of trauma studies in understanding schizophrenia. He mentions Berne’s contribution, Schiffian Cathexis School as well as some contemporary developments in TA’s approach to schizophrenia. Nevertheless, Mellacqua’s (2020) article doesn’t systematically trace the development of the psychotherapy of psychoses in Transactional Analysis.

This article aims to reconstruct the development of the psychotherapy of psychoses in Transactional Analysis within a framework of the historical psychology of Kurt Danziger. Historical psychology “[...] explores transformations of specific objects posited in the discourse and targeted by intervening practices” (Danziger, 2003, p. 2). These “specific objects” Danziger (2003) calls “psychological objects” and defines them as things toward which professionals aim their theories, research, and practices. Psychosis is one such psychological object, and psychotherapy is one of the intervening practices by which psychologists, or psychotherapists for that matter, target the object. According to Danziger (1993), the development of a particular psychological object and related practices in a particular professional environment (e.g. TA society) should be studied considering the broader sociocultural and historical context as well as psychological practices of other professional environments related to the same object of interest (e.g. psychoanalysis). Following Danziger’s instructions, I will aim to place

the development of the psychotherapy of psychoses in TA in a broader socio-cultural and professional context.

I shall divide the paper into three parts, representing three main moments in the development of psychotherapy of psychoses in TA: 1) Eric Berne and psychotherapy of psychoses; 2) Schiffs' Catexis School; 3) Contemporary developments in TA psychotherapy of psychoses.

## **Eric Berne and psychotherapy of psychoses**

The father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, was pessimistic about the possibility of the psychoanalytic treatment of psychotic patients. In his 1914 paper *On Narcissism*, Freud (1957/1914, p. 74) stated that due to the regressive narcissistic withdrawal of libido from the external world, "[...] they become inaccessible to the influence of psychoanalysis and cannot be cured by our efforts". Nevertheless, many physicians decided to apply psychoanalytic ideas in the treatment of psychoses. In Europe, the earliest attempts at psychotherapeutic work with psychotic patients were made in Burghölzli Hospital by Eugen Bleuler and his students: Karl Abraham, Carl Gustav Jung, Abraham Arden Brill, Max Eitingon, Alphonse Maeder and Ludwig Binswanger (Hoffman, 2009). In the United States, it was Edward Kempf, William Alanson White, and, after coming back from Switzerland, Abraham Arden Brill, who were the first to believe in the possibility of psychoanalytic treatment of psychotic patients (Stone, 1999). In the following decades, Harry Stack Sullivan and Frieda Fromm-Reichmann can be considered particularly influential in the field of the psychotherapy of psychoses (Silver & Stedman, 2009; Stone, 1999)

It is known that Eric Berne was trained to be a psychoanalyst but was denied becoming a member of the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Society (Cheney, 1971). He was analyzed for two years (1947-1949) by Erik Homburger Erikson, an author of the theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950), associated with American ego psychology. The 1940s and 1950s saw the dominance of psychoanalysis in American psychiatry, specifically ego psychology (Mitchell & Black, 1996; Schwartz, 2003). Ego psychology was a trend in psychoanalysis based on Sigmund Freud's (1961/1923) text introducing the concept of the ego, *The Ego and the Id* from 1923, and Anna Freud's (1966/1936) *Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*, and had ambitions to become general psychology based on the assumptions of psychoanalysis, encompassing not only the unconscious but also the conscious properties of the psyche (Mitchell & Black, 1996; Schwartz, 2003; Wallerstein, 2002). It assumed that within the ego there is a so-called conflict-free zone, that is, a healthy, mature part of the personality that is able to integrate different levels of functioning of the individual, regardless of the strivings

of the id or the pressures of the superego. The center of ego psychology was New York and the New York Psychoanalytic Institute, and its most important proponents were emigrants from Europe: Heinz Hartmann, Ernst Kris, Rudolf Loewenstein, Edith Jacobson, Kurt Eissler, Ruth Eissler, René Spitz, Margaret Mahler, Annie Reich (Wallerstein, 2002). Besides Erik Erikson, other ego psychologists who greatly influenced Eric Berne, especially his theory of ego states, were Edoardo Weiss and Paul Federn. Federn was Berne's psychoanalyst in the years 1941-1943 when Berne was in training at the New York Psychoanalytic Institute (Cheney, 1971). Federn was one of the pioneers of the psychotherapy of psychoses (Alanen, 2009b; Stone, 1999). He had started working psychoanalytically with psychotic patients in Vienna already in the first decade of the twentieth century, but accounts of his Viennese efforts were published decades later (Federn, 1952), compiled by his pupil Edoardo Weiss in 1952, two years after Federn's suicide. The works of Federn (1952) and Weiss (1950) were a direct inspiration for the Bernean theory of ego states (Clarkson, 1992; Mellacqua, 2021). As Mellacqua (2021, p. 3) writes:

[...] the Bernean definition of ego state decisively contains the original contribution introduced by Federn [...] and Weiss [...] into the analytical tradition as a phenomenological critique of Freud's vision of the ego as a psychic entity that originates from the id. For Federn, as for Berne, the ego is a phenomenological reality that can be experienced directly by the subject: "The ego is felt and known by the individual as a lasting or recurring continuity of the body and mental life in respect of time, space, and causality, and is felt and apprehended by him as a 'unity'" [...]. This formulation of the ego, originally produced by Federn, corresponds to the concept of ego state expressed by his greatest pupil, Edoardo Weiss (1950): "Every ego state is the actually experienced reality of one's mental and bodily ego with the contents of the livedthrough period" (p. 141).

Despite his analyst' and mentor's interest in the psychotherapy of psychoses, Eric Berne only scarcely related to this subject in his writings. As Zefiro Mellacqua (2014) observes, in the book *A Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis*, Berne (1969a/1957) presented the case of Cary, a psychotic patient, whose condition Berne explained using the notion of splitting. Berne (1969a/1957, p. 188-189) wrote:

Cary's mind was split in another way, besides being cut up into separate pieces each acting as though the others didn't exist. The sights which met his eyes and the sounds which came to his ears were split off from his feelings so that the reality did not call forth the normal emotional responses. His feelings seemed to have no connection with what went on around him. His mind was split two ways, so to speak, up and down, and also across.

*A Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis* was written before inventing Transactional Analysis<sup>1</sup>, so in this publication, Berne was using notions derived from general psychiatry and psychoanalysis.

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<sup>1</sup> Berne first introduced Transactional Analysis in 1958 article titled "Transactional analysis: A new and effective method of group therapy" (Berne, 1958).

In the book *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*, published in 1961, we find a chapter entitled “Therapy of Functional Psychoses” (Berne, 1961). Interestingly, there are no references in this chapter to any of Federn’s works. In the list of references, there are only four positions including B. Lewin (1950), J. Rosen (1953), M. Sechehaye (1951), and F. Fromm-Reichmann (1950). Berne (1961, p. 139) divided “functional psychoses” into “active” and latent”:

The functional psychoses include all those conditions commonly diagnosed as manic-depressive and schizophrenic. For therapeutic purposes [...] they are not classified as different nosological entities but as structural states. In this respect, psychoses exist in two forms: active and latent.

In the following pages, he describes the psychopathology encountered in active and latent psychosis respectively, in terms of the structural model of ego states, and then he gives step-by-step instructions on how to handle these states therapeutically. According to Berne (1961, p. 139):

An acute psychosis exists when the Child has the executive power and is also experienced as “real Self” while the Adult is decommissioned [...]. The situation of the Parent varies and is a strong determinant of the specific form of psychosis [...].

The therapist’s treating acute psychoses aim is “[...] re-establishment of the Adult as the executive and as «real Self»” (Berne, 1961, pp. 139-140). Berne (1961, p. 140-141) formulates four therapeutic rules of the psychotherapy of acute psychoses:

(1) Psychotherapy should be initiated only during periods of minimal confusion. (2) No active psychotherapeutic moves should be made until the patient has had a chance to appraise the therapist, and he should be given an opportunity to do this [...]. (3) Let the Child have his way first [...] (4) the initial overture to the Adult should be made in well-timed, firm, and unmistakably Adult language.

When it comes to latent psychosis<sup>2</sup>, according to Eric Berne (1961, p. 143), it

[...] is said to exist when it can be inferred that the binding capacity of the Child is defective. Depending on the boundary conditions, there will be areas of pathological activity where the Adult is heavily contaminated, or outbursts when the Adult is temporarily decommissioned, or both.

“Decommissioned” in terms of Bernean structural pathology meant “excluded”. Exclusion is a mechanism by which one ego state cathects all the energy leaving the other two unable to act, a mechanism defensive in nature:

Exclusion is manifested by a stereotypical, predictable attitude which is steadfastly maintained as long as possible in the face of any threatening situation. The constant Parent, the constant Adult, and the constant Child all result primarily from defensive exclusion of the two complementary aspects in each case (Berne, 1961, p. 44).

<sup>2</sup> The category of *latent psychosis* was introduced by New York based, Polish emigrant psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Gustaw Bychowski (1953).

For Berne (1961, p. 143), psychotherapy of latent psychoses consisted of two main aims: “First, the boundary between the Adult and the Child must be realigned and strengthened [...]. The second aim is the psychoanalytic one of deconfusing the Child”. Unfortunately, Berne didn’t define here what “deconfusing the Child” was – even in the subject index at the back of the book we find “decontamination process” but no “deconfusion process” (Berne, 1961, p. 268).

To sum up, Eric Berne considered psychosis in structural terms, as an exclusion of the Adult Ego State – in acute psychosis – or as heavy contamination of the Adult Ego state by the Child Ego State – in latent psychosis. Therapeutic efforts in treating psychoses, for Berne, concentrated on, first and foremost, recathecting the Adult, decontaminating the Adult, and deconfusing the Child.

Berne was clearly influenced by American ego psychology, which is visible by his emphasis on ego boundaries and the strengthening of the adult part of the personality (neopsyche), although his references to American psychoanalytic literature on the psychotherapy of psychoses – which was already quite rich at that time (see e.g. Bychowski, 1943, 1952, 1954; Federn, 1952; Fromm-Reichmann, 1959; Searles, 1960; Sullivan, 1931, 1947, 1962) – are surprisingly scarce. The reason for this may be Berne’s resentment towards the psychoanalytic community and his desire to cut himself off from psychoanalysis (Cornell, 2010, 2020; Cheney, 1971; Dusay, 1981).

## Schiffs’ Cathexis Institute

In the 1960s, against the backdrop of a broader social phenomenon—the hippie counterculture—the antipsychiatry movement developed in the United States. Its representatives, including Ronald Laing, Thomas Szasz, David Cooper, and Erving Goffman, pointed out the flaws of institutional psychiatry, with its stigmatizing diagnostic labels, objectification of the psychically suffering individuals, and the use of coercive measures (Nasrallah, 2011; Nasser, 1995). This resulted in the emergence of so-called Therapeutic Communities, which tried to organize help for people with mental problems outside the framework of institutional psychiatry (Cornell, 2022). It was on the wave of this movement that the Schiffs began to construct their idea of working with psychotic patients. In the Cathexis Reader, Schiff (1975, as cited in: Cornell, 2022, p. 47) explicitly introduces Cathexis Institute’s antipsychiatric stance:

[...] people who get such drugs are not allowed to find their natural self, Natural Child and are subjected to the uncomfortable side effects of such drugs which reinforces their not OKness (p. 76).

It is significant to our philosophy that we use structure instead of medication. As a research organization, we have found that medication sufficiently confuses affectual and behavioral reactions so as to seriously interfere with our goals (p. 99).

In 1966, Jacqui Schiff and her husband Morris, then living in Fredricksburg, Virginia, who were attending the Transactional Analysis Seminar in Washington, DC, took two schizophrenic patients into their home and began their therapy (Cornell, 2022). Three years later, Eric Berne proposed Jacqui Schiff to edit an issue of the Transactional Analysis Bulletin, devoted to her work with schizophrenic patients. In his introduction to the issue, Berne (1969b, p. 46) wrote, uncritically praising Schiff's work: "The contract was to cure schizophrenia, and it worked". A year later, Eric Berne died, and the Schiffs, sometime later, fleeing legal and ethical charges, moved to California, where they founded the Cathexis Institute (Cornell, 2022).

The Schiffs understood psychosis as a state of disturbed thinking, which was caused by discounting and passive behavior. Discounting was understood by Schiff (1975, p. 14, as cited in: Cornell, 2022, p. 47) as:

[...] an internal mechanism which involves people minimizing or ignoring some aspect of themselves, others, or the reality situation. Our position is that there is a consensually definable reality, and that discounting involves a frame of reference which distorts or is inconsistent with that reality [...]. Discounting is not operationally observable. However, we can see such external manifestations of discounting as passive behaviors, redefining transactions, ulterior transactions, and behavior from positions in the Karpman Drama Triangle. It is important to bear in mind that these external manifestations issue from discounting, but are not discounts themselves.

In Schiff's opinion, the pathological Parent ego state was responsible for this condition. According to the Schiffs, the Adult and Parent ego states "are both adaptations [...] structured out of the external environment and subject to cultural influences" (Schiff, 1975, p. 24, as cited in: Cornell, 2022, p. 44). So they came up with the idea of completely decathecting this flawed introject and replacing it with a "good" parental introject, which was supposed to come from therapists (Cornell, 2022). They called this procedure "reparenting". Schiff, and after them, therapists they trained at the Cathexis Institute, literally took on the role of parents of their psychotic patients – they adopted them and took them in to live with them in their home. One method of reparenting was to confront passive behaviors:

Psychotic patients have consistently demonstrated that they will escalate [passive] behaviors related to problems. This is generally in the desperate hope that someone external will define, understand, and confront the problem which the patient, because of a thinking disorder, is unable to resolve (Schiff, 1975, p. 98, as cited in: Cornell, 2022, p. 48).

These interventions aimed to "produce a more appropriate Child adaptation to replace the pathological adaptation", and the methods were designed to achieve this "adaptation": "There are many ways to elicit adaptation when there

is resistance. It is possible to use authority, force, unconditional and conditional stroking, teasing, threats, and many others. And we use them all" (Schiff, 1977, p. 74, as cited in: Cornell, 2022, p. 48).

In the 1980s, other Transactional Analysts still tried to use Schiffian re-parenting, although in some cases greatly modifying the procedure (e.g. Del Casale et al., 1982; Moroney, 1989; Wilson et al., 1985). For example, as Cornell (2022, p. 44) reports, in the case of Del Casale et al., "[...] the re-parenting process included, whenever possible, the clients' own parents. His article did not demonize or pathologize the parents; in fact, it humanized the struggles of both clients and their parents [...]". On another note, Wilson et al., (1985, p. 211-212, as cited in: Cornell, 2022, p. 44) concerned themselves with deep regression to do the re-parenting work in a psychiatric hospital:

[...] the point of re-parenting work is the resolution of unresolved developmental issues through rather direct means. This is done primarily but not exclusively when the patients are doing their "little work," that is, when they are contractually regressed to an earlier ego state. When the patients are regressed to a very young age, they frequently receive bottle feedings which facilitates the healthy bonding and trust believed paramount in the treatment of schizophrenia.

Schiff's therapeutic approach violated many ethical obligations of a psychotherapist and a TA practitioner. For a detailed account of those transgressions, see the adequate literature (Cornell, 2022; Gheorghe, Brunke, Deaconu, Gheorghe, Ionas, 2022; Landaiche III, 2022a, 2022b; McNeel, 2022; Mountain, 2022).

Besides Schiffs, in the 1970s there are very few propositions on how to understand psychosis in TA. For Claude Steiner (1974) psychosis, or "madness" as he preferred to name it, is a manifestation of a specific script construction, called "No Mind Script". "Going crazy" is the most extreme expression of the "No Mind Script":

Mindlessness, or incapacity to cope in the world, the feeling that one has no control over one's life—seen in folk terms as having no will power, being lazy, not knowing what one wants, being stupid or crazy—is based on early childhood injunctions which attack the child's capacity to think and to figure out the world. Training against the use of the Adult in the early years of life is the foundation for the No Mind script with the discounting transaction as its cornerstone (Steiner, 1974, p. 92).

Gouldings understood psychosis in terms of contamination between all ego states, resulting in identity confusion, and incapacity to answer the basic question "Who Am I?" (Goulding & Goulding, 1979, p. 24).

## Contemporary developments in TA psychotherapy of psychoses

For decades after resolving the Cathexis Institute, psychosis had been unwelcome in Transactional Analysis theory and practice. Goulding's (1979) re-decision therapy was known for practicing "no psychosis contracts" to ward off

psychosis from TA therapists' offices (Cornell, 2022). Cornell cites Harry and Laura Boyd, therapists working in the re-decision framework:

In fact, when patients talk of "going crazy" they are referring to having enough accumulated feelings to warrant either a public display of unacceptable behavior or an opportunity to abdicate from personal responsibility for their behavior.

We believe that the majority of instances of "going crazy" in western cultures are decisional [...] (Boyd & Boyd, 1980, p. 318, as cited in: Cornell, 2022, p. 50).

Tony White, another TA therapist from the re-decision school, employed "no psychosis contracts" still in the 1990s. Such a contract "means keeping the Adult ego state functioning as the primary means of dealing with the reality of day-to-day life" (White, 1999, p. 134) and states "I will not go crazy. Should I begin to lose a sense of strength in my Adult, then I will go to Plan B" (p. 136). Cornell (2022, p. 51) thinks that the "no psychosis" approach "[...] seem to have more to do with the control of psychotic behaviors than with the effort to address the meanings of such periods of breakdown".

The change of attitude toward the psychotherapy of psychoses began in the twenty-first century. Partially, it can be attributed to the re-evaluation and embracing of TA's psychoanalytic roots (Cornell, 2010, 2020). Starting in the 1980s and 1990s, more and more Transactional Analysts, such as Blackstone (1993), Erskine (1991), Moiso (1985), Novelino (1984, 1990, 2003, 2005), Moiso & Novelino (2000), Novellino & Moiso (1990), Müller (2002) and especially Hargaden & Sills (2001, 2002) started incorporating psychoanalytic ideas, allowing TA to become a comprehensive, relational perspective, and overcoming "narcissism of small differences" (Cornell, 2020).

In 2001, Ray Little (2001), in his article *Schizoid Processes: Working with the Defenses of the Withdrawn Child Ego State*, attempted to integrate Transactional Analysis and British object relations theory in understanding the schizoid processes. Four years later, he further developed his views in the article *Integrating Psychoanalytic Understandings in the Deconfusion of Primitive Child Ego States* (Little, 2005). Little (2005) develops an understanding of basic psychotic phenomena. One of them is a lack of an integrated sense of self and identity confusion, which is a consequence of not having good enough parental introject to make sense of different, often contradictory experiences of self and others, leading to a severe splitting of good and bad self- and object-representations (Little, 2005, p. 133). Different, often chaotic and fragmented dyads of self- and object-representations are replayed in the therapeutic relationship through a transference-countertransference matrix and can be understood, in TA terms, as "[...] manifestations of particular ego states, for example, a rageful aggressor Parent ego state and a masochistic Child ego state" (Little, 2005, p. 134). After a brief presentation of psychoanalytic views on primitive defenses, and Kernberg's concept of levels of personality functioning, Little (2005, p. 136) returns to Transactional Analysis:

Kernberg describes one therapeutic goal as the transformation of early part-object relational units into whole-object relational units. From a transactional analysis perspective, we could describe these part-object relational units as primitive ego state relational units. I think it is essential when considering primitive processes to hold in mind how the Child and Parent ego states are linked together as self and other relational units [...]. Therefore, when a client is cathecting a Child ego state, his or her Parent is linked to it with affect and is likely to be involved in what is happening. Primary developmental Child-Parent relational units are an active part of primitive processes.

Then, Little (2005, p. 136-137) concentrates on the process of unconscious level of communication, which Novellino (1984) called “unconscious communication” and psychoanalysts term “projective identification”. Little refers here particularly to Thomas Ogden’s (1979, 1982) understanding of projective identification as at once a primitive defense mechanism, and a form of communication and object-relationship, and his emphasis on its transformative potential, if the therapist is capable of containing primitive, preverbal experiences, understanding them and communicating back to the patient as meaningful thoughts. Other psychoanalytic concepts Little (2005) utilizes are: the paranoid-schizoid position (Klein, 1975a/1946, Ogden, 1989); psychotic mind and non-psychotic mind (Bion, 1967); transference psychosis (Hedges, 1994; Little, 1981; Rosenfeld, 1987); defenses against separateness, such as Rosenfeld’s (1987) “narcissistic omnipotent object relations” or Klein’s (1975b/1948) manic defenses. Little (2005, p. 139) describes his therapeutic approach when working with psychotic patients as “relational” which means “[...] working primarily in the here and now within the therapeutic dyad and the transference-countertransference matrix”, and “[...] entails working with the client’s various defenses and being able to be impacted and affected by the client”. In Transactional Analysis terms “[a]n integrated relational approach to therapy involves addressing in the here and now of the therapeutic relationship of the patterns, games, and transactions that occur between the client and the therapist” (Little, 2005, p. 140). The therapeutic interventions with which, Little (2005) describes, he approaches his patients, are empathic transactions, as understood by Clark (1991) as moments “[...] when the therapist communicates his or her understanding of what the client is experiencing [...]”.

Arguably the most comprehensive model of psychosis in Transactional Analysis literature has been developed by Zefiro Mellacqua (2014, 2021). Mellacqua is a psychiatrist and Certified Transactional Analyst in psychotherapy working in London who was trained in TA in Italy. His point of departure in approaching psychoses was Berne’s reflections on two types of splitting he observed in Cary’s case. Mellacqua (2014), elaborating on that, distinguishes *horizontal* splitting and *vertical* splitting. Vertical splitting is a split of the self and object into two opposite parts. In Mellacqua’s (2014, p. 13) words: “[...] vertical splitting involves a type of dissociation that has a particular alternating pattern” and “[i]t directly

relates to splitting in Klein's [...] sense of bipolarity (good-bad) and Berne's [...] sense of opposite ego states (Fairy Godmother and Witch Mother)". Horizontal splitting is for Mellacqua (2014, p. 14):

[...] similar to the notion of repression in the sense that some experiential information is not made available to Adult ego state awareness (A1 or A2). However, with regard to the structural pathology of schizophrenia, the kind of horizontal splitting described here is a type of pathological dissociation essentially distinct from Freudian repression. It keeps unconscious thoughts out of awareness in order to maintain the cohesion of the ego-self. This form of splitting is a more primitive strategy that the emerging self (C1) may use to cope with early, persisting traumatic object relationships that the person cannot articulate or resolve.

According to Mellacqua (2014, p. 14) "[...] in schizophrenia the peculiar combination of vertical and horizontal splitting within the Child ego state (C2) is responsible for a noncohesive disorder of self-experience that leads to a unique type of ego/self-pathology [...]".

Splitting for Mellacqua is a Child ego state pathology that leads to self-fragmentation. Self-fragmentation is a state of self when there exist multiple, unintegrated parts of the self, dissociated from one another. The structural pathology of psychosis, besides fragmentation of the Child ego state, consists of the presence of an Unintegrated Adult and a Differentially Excluded Parent. Mellacqua (2014, p. 13) observes that Berne, in his writings following *Layman's Guide to Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis*, abandoned the term "splitting" in favor of the notion of exclusion, which "[...] embraced various psychodynamic processes such as splitting, dissociation, denial, isolation, withdrawal, and even repression in order to describe the structural pathology of schizophrenic psychoses". Schizophrenic "primal exclusion" is for Mellacqua an exclusion of the structural Parent ego state following the early, pre-verbal traumatic maltreatment of a child by a caregiver. In Mellacqua's (2014, p. 14-15) words:

[...] the Parent exclusion is meant to represent an extended and extremely debilitating deficit in the psychotic structure resulting from early and pre-egoic misattuned and variously traumatic relationships between the developing child and the father and/or mother and/or any other caregivers who played a parental role in the individual's life (P2 – P1 – P0).

In Mellacqua's view, severe fragmentation of the self as well as the Parent's exclusion, results in a profoundly weakened Adult ego state in its capacity for the integration of dissociated and fragmented experiences.

Based on the notions of vertical and horizontal splitting, and primal exclusions, Mellacqua builds structural ego state models of two basic pictures of psychoses: paranoid and dissociative. In the case of paranoid psychoses:

[...] the primarily excluded Parent (P1), which mainly contains the precipitates of traumatic object relations with one or more parent figures (persecutory, bullying, verbally

and/or physically violent, psychologically abusive and therefore symbiotic), looks through a one-way glass down to the Child (C1) and the Adult (A1). Through this process, hallucinations (usually auditory and/or visual), persecutory delusions, and ideas of self-reference arise in paranoid schizophrenia [...].

In dissociative psychoses, such as catatonic, hebephrenic, or simplex:

[...] the primarily excluded Parent (P1), which contains precipitates of highly dysfunctional or chaotic relationships with one or both parental figures (physically and/or sexually abusive, mentally disturbed, neglectful, disinterested, incompetent), presents the same situation of a one-way glass but turned upside down. The frightened and anguished C1 searches for the Parent in the presence of a relatively less differentiated and underdeveloped A1 that has been traumatized by and dissociated from relatively early and highly dysfunctional object relations.

Mellacqua's therapeutic instructions for working with patients experiencing psychosis are rooted in Hargaden's and Sill's (2002) relational approach and involve a careful examination of transference/countertransference processes which, as he underscores, are often operating on Somatic Child's level (C1), and are frequently overwhelming, incomprehensible and confusing.

Zafiro Mellacqua's *magnum opus* is his book on TA psychotherapy of schizophrenia, titled *Transactional Analysis of Schizophrenia: The Naked Self* (2021)<sup>3</sup>. It further develops his views on splitting, fragmentation, and exclusion. Mellacqua (2021) elaborates on the Bernean notion of script protocol and its importance for understanding somatic transference and countertransference processes with schizophrenic patients. Mellacqua (2021, p. 20) defines protocol as follows:

As the internalization of the earliest unconscious patterns of the person's relationship with significant others, the protocol is considered to be a crude and preliminary version of the later life script, the latter understood as transference drama, the origin of which, as mentioned earlier, is notably located in the earliest infant period.

Mellacqua distinguished several types of transference and countertransference in work with patients with psychosis. First of all, he distinguishes between paranoid and schizoid<sup>4</sup> transference. Paranoid transference is based on the mechanism of projective identification: "[i]n paranoid schizophrenia, transference to the therapist is actualized primarily through processes that can be defined as ambivalent projective identification (or idealizing-persecutory transfer-

<sup>3</sup> As the note in the book says, "Chapters 3 and 4 contain passages from Zefiro Mellacqua's (2014) article «Beyond symbiosis: The role of primal exclusions in schizophrenic psychosis»" and "Chapter 2 appears as the (2020) article «When a mind breaks down: A brief history of efforts to understand schizophrenia»" (Mellacqua, 2021, p. xxii).

<sup>4</sup> In the book *The Naked Self*, Mellacqua calls schizoid psychoses the same phenomena that in his 2014 article *Beyond Symbiosis: The Role of Primal Exclusions in Schizophrenic Psychosis*, he called dissociative psychoses, including such nosological categories as catatonia, hebephrenia, and schizophrenia simplex.

ence)" (Mellacqua, 2021, p. 75). Such transference involves alternating projections of good and bad self- and object-representations. In turn, schizoid transference, as having its source in an earlier developmental trauma, is somatic, visceral in nature. Mellacqua (2021, p. 77) writes that at first glance it seems that transference does not exist, which is "[...] actually a phenomenological marker of the historical relational deficit between the individual and his or her parental figures". Schizoid transference

[...] becomes clinically evident in the patient's increasing preoccupation with bodily sensations. This fear-laden somatic-affective state within the patient's Child is thus essentially preverbal and intimately related to an early nonverbal, often traumatic experience of more extensive self-fragmentation and annihilation (Mellacqua, 2021, p. 77).

The communicative, and potentially therapeutic, dimension of this type of transference lies in the fact that through it "[...] the psychotic person seeks to shift his or her bodily discomfort onto another person (i.e., the therapist) or onto another body or object [...]" (Mellacqua, 2021, p. 77). If the therapist is able to experience, live through, and understand this bodily, preverbal anguish, he or she can help the patient symbolize this experience, and make it thinkable and thus bearable.

Regarding the types of countertransference in the therapy of patients with psychosis, Mellacqua (2021) lists the following: projective counteridentification, aggressive-paralyzing countertransference, schizoid countertransference, and anaclitic countertransference. Projective counteridentification is countertransferentially experiencing these parts of the patient's self or object, which the patient projected into a therapist through a mechanism of projective identification. Mellacqua (2021, p. 85) underlines how difficult such countertransferential experience may be:

The transferential projections—simultaneously positive and negative—to which the psychotic patient subjects us show us those aspects of his or her interior world, a world that also becomes ours and that is not immediately comprehensible. They also exacerbate, while distorting, the inconsistency and perplexity linked to emotional and cognitive experiences that are often irreconcilable among themselves and that, therefore, though pitched at a less intense and explosive level, also color the intersubjective life of those who are supposedly "healthy".

Such an experience entails a specific kind of danger that may occur in a therapeutic relationship with a psychotic patient:

Projective counteridentification may finally lead, after more or less and often extenuated work with the paranoid person, to a condition of progressive affective estrangement. As a result of this, the therapist may risk distancing himself or himself defensively from the therapeutic relationship, often rationalizing—as happens when using the scalpel of unilateral interpretation—his or her own experiences and those of the patient, thereby inhabiting rather anxiously the role of the "expert" and simultaneously the "controller" of his or her own, the patient's, and others' safety" (Mellacqua, 2021, p. 85-86).

Agresive-paralyzing countertransference can manifest itself while working with the psychotic patient during his or her acute breakdown (most frequently in a psychiatric hospital or prison). The therapist becomes identified with a viciously hated part of the self and objectified, which means putting him or her to a level of deanimated object. The therapist is susceptible to experience, countertransferentially, this very aggression and destructiveness which may severely threaten his or her sense of psychological, or even physical, security (Mellacqua, 2021, p. 86).

Schizoid countertransference is characterized by the therapist's experiences of fragmented bodily states of self. Verbal communication is often absent in these moments – in Mellacqua's (2021, p. 87) words:

[...] the meeting room [...] becomes filled with long, almost intolerable silences. The few words pronounced by either the patient or the analyst remain suspended between long pauses, while the analyst still tries to establish a verbal connection with the patient. Often such an attempt at verbal dialogue will, instead, take the therapeutic couple somewhere else, a place where both the patient and the analyst surprisingly find themselves increasingly absorbed in a different dialectic. This is a nonverbal, sensory, and viscerally mediated unconscious communication that is typically structured as an interbodily narrative, the special semiotics of which are grounded in breathing, subtle features of posture, muscular tension, tone as well as volume and rhythm of the voice, gestures, and even the use made of clothing and appearance (including hairstyle or hair color, beard, tattoos, etc.) during the same session and between one session and another.

Finally, anaclitic countertransference refers to being in a position to fill the void existing in the intrapsychic structure following the exclusion of the Parent<sup>5</sup> (P0 and P1). Mellacqua (2021, p. 90) believes that there is an inherent need, even in individuals severely traumatized by others, to seek any object relations, even in the most rudimentary forms, to move "Other-wards" in a hope of fulfilling frustrated developmental needs or Bernean hungers, such a strive for recognition. Anaclitic countertransference is an experience on the side of the therapist, of the patient's internal relational void and feeling of being compelled to help develop Parental structures. Mellacqua (2021, p. 90) writes about it touchingly:

The therapist's anaclitic countertransference can also unfold in terms of relational dynamics aimed at guaranteeing relief from the pain that the individual in schizophrenic psychosis is suffering. The nuclear pain of the schizophrenic is an anonymous pain, similar to visceral pain, a deep and dull pain. It is a pain of living that, even when acute,

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<sup>5</sup> Mellacqua often uses a Lacanian term "Other" to denote the social world outside of the self. His understanding of Bernean ego states model is related to this notion of Other: Child (C2) = "me through the Other(s)"; Adult (A2) = "me (that is not the other)"; Parent (P2) = "the Other(s) within me" (Mellacqua, 2021, p. 2). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, other (a) is another person as an object, while Other (A) denotes the symbolic structure of language, the Law, the Otherness as something radically alien to the Subject (Evans, 2006, pp. 135-136).

maintains the “object void” to the point of becoming existential anguish. The “void of the Other” left by the exclusion of the historical parent figure(s) leads to the emptying of the person’s own ego. Structurally, from a transactional analysis perspective, this process of Parent exclusion will affect primarily the internal coherence and organization of the Child self. This progressive erosion of the Parent within the Child (P1 and P0) is the premise for the subsequent leak of the patient’s deepest sense of self outside its primitive ego boundaries. In other words, the repeated primal exclusions of the Parent will ultimately be responsible for the “denudation” of the patient’s nuclear self. Such a nude self (C1 and C0), without the containing and sustaining function of the Parent, either alienates itself in its own body [...] or finds refuge and respite in the body-ego of a new Other.

Mellacqua’s (2021) psychotherapeutic work with psychotic patients concentrates on experiencing, and understanding transferential and countertransferential processes, and consequently illuminating this understanding to the patient through the use of such interventions as: illustration (metaphor and allegory), crystallization, and interpretation.

Mellacqua’s influences in creating an integrated TA model of psychosis are broad and varied. Besides TA authors such as Allen, Berne obviously, Blackstone, Erskine, Moiso, Novellino, Hargaden and Sills, Cornell, Schiffs, Little, Stuthridge, O’Reilly-Knapp or Yontef, he also refers to pioneering works on dissociation and trauma by Janet, Jung or Breuer and Freud. He is also heavily influenced by psychoanalytic authors: Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, Thomas Ogden, Esther Bick, Wilfred Bion, Christopher Bollas, Wilma Bucci, William Ronald Fairbairn, Riccardo Lombardi, Donald Meltzer, Harold Searles, Frances Tustin, Salomon Resnik, Paul Williams, Donald Winnicott or even Jacques Lacan, to name only a few.

## Summary

Psychotherapy of psychoses was outside the scope of the main interests of Transactional Analysis’s father, Eric Berne, even though it was a primary interest of his analyst and mentor – Paul Federn. This neglect can be explained by Berne’s antipathy toward psychoanalytic society and theory after he was declined psychoanalytic certification at the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute. While early in his work, Berne conceptualized psychotic psychopathology using the notion of splitting, later he reconceptualized it in terms of the structural pathology of ego states, namely exclusion and contamination.

The next step in the development of psychotherapy of psychoses in Transactional Analysis, was, supported by Berne, Schiffian reparenting procedure, focused on “erasing” faulty parental introjects, and re-introjecting good Parent of the therapist. Fueled by the anti-psychiatry movement and alternative approaches to mental health, Schiffs rejected traditional, medicalized treatments of psychoses but with it, unfortunately, virtually all then-contemporary litera-

ture concerning psychotherapy of psychoses. Schiffs contributed to TA theory by developing notions of discounting and passive behaviors. Besides Schiffian Cathexis School, psychosis, and its psychotherapy were rarely mentioned and scarcely conceptualized in TA – some attempts are to be found in Steiner's and Gouldings' works. In the 1990s, re-decision school members started developing a method of challenging psychoses, called "no-psychosis contract".

Contemporary TA's approaches to understanding and working psychotherapeutically with patients experiencing psychoses are founded on re-evaluation and assimilation of TA's psychoanalytic roots and opening up to new influences. Ray Little and Zefiro Mellacqua, drawing from psychodynamic and relational TA as well as rich psychoanalytic literature on the subject, developed approaches emphasizing the relational nature of psychotic suffering and highlighting transference-countertransference phenomena as therapeutic means of diagnosing and alleviating this suffering.

The development of psychotherapy of psychoses in Transactional Analysis leads from Bernean negation of psychoanalytic heritage, through Schiffs' unethical anti-psychiatric experiments, carried out in isolation from broader context, to embracing psychoanalytic tradition in the search of a careful, attuned inquiry for meaning in psychotic symptoms as well as in therapists own affective and somatic experiences. The Schiffian approach to psychoses can be seen as manic/omnipotent, the re-decision school as disavowing, while contemporary relational approach represented by Little and Mellacqua, is characterized by humility and respect for the psychological reality of psychotic experiences.

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## Rozwój psychoterapii psychoz w analizie transakcyjnej

### Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest rekonstrukcja procesu rozwoju praktyki psychoterapii psychoz w analizie transakcyjnej. Badanie przeprowadzono, opierając się na założeniach psychologii historycznej Kurta Danizgera, która zakłada, że każda praktyka psychologiczna powinna być analizowana w jej kontekście społecznym i profesjonalnym. Analizowane są trzy główne momenty w rozwoju psychoterapii psychoz w AT: Eric Berne i psychoterapia psychoz; Szkoła Catexis Schiffów oraz współczesne kierunki rozwoju psychoterapii psychoz w AT. Artykuł przedstawia konteksty społeczne, profesjonalne i teoretyczne, które ukształtowały ewolucję praktyki AT w dziedzinie psychoterapii psychoz.

**Słowa kluczowe:** analiza transakcyjna, historia, psychoanaliza, psychoza, psychoterapia.

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## Embrace Therapy® – The Use of Inner Child Work in The Context of Transactional Analysis and Spirituality

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### Abstract

Embrace Therapy® (ET®) is a therapeutic approach that integrates elements of psychotherapy with profound spiritual insight. Central to this method is the work with the Inner Child, which aligns with the *Child ego state* in Transactional Analysis (TA). What distinguishes ET®, however, is the incorporation of a *fourth ego state*—the spiritual dimension of the Self, referred to as the “God-state”—which facilitates the transcendence of emotional limitations. This article presents an analysis of empirical findings regarding the effectiveness of ET® and explores its theoretical placement within the broader framework of Transactional Analysis.

**Keywords:** Emotions, Inner Child, Transactional Analysis, Embrace Therapy, Spirituality

### Introduction to the Inner Child

Transactional Analysis (TA) is based on the concept of three ego states — Child, Parent, and Adult — which shape our behaviors, emotions, and ways of relating to the world. As Professor Jarosław Jagieła (2020, p. 330) notes, referring to the work of Tony White, approximately 60% of therapeutic interventions focus on the Child ego state, while only 20% relate to the Parent and 20% to the Adult. This structure has been described by numerous theorists, including Kahler (1974), Clarkson (1988), Bradshaw (2008), Capacchione (1991), Stewart & Joines

(1987), and Jagieła (2015, 2020). The enduring focus on this domain highlights its foundational role in human emotional development and healing. As Jagieła (2020, p. 331) adds, every new scholarly contribution enriches our understanding of deeply embedded childhood experiences that significantly influence adult decisions and behaviors. Embrace Therapy® expands the classical TA model by introducing a spiritual dimension that enables deeper emotional transformation and the possibility of transcendence. At the core of this approach is the connection with a *fourth ego state* — the spiritual Self —whose archetype is identified as God. Traditional therapeutic work with the Inner Child, as described by Jagieła (2020, p. 331), is typically framed as healing the wounded child through the strengthening of the adult personality. In contrast, Embrace Therapy® views the healing process as a union of two realms: the psychological and the spiritual. Rather than rationalizing trauma through established psychotherapeutic techniques, ET® facilitates a direct experiential encounter with the presence of the *spiritual I Am* — what the model refers to as the *God-Self* ego state. Here, “God” is not understood as a doctrinal or religious figure but as a universal principle of infinite Life that is accessible to all beings. In this perspective, *WE ARE THAT* — an affirmation of the inherent divinity within each person. Recognizing that resistance may arise when confronted with the concept of the *God-Self* ego state, ET® invites an initial openness to a holistic and integrative understanding of spirituality. As noted by Professor Jagieła (2015, p. 322), there can be multiple variants of both the Child and Adult ego states. In Embrace Therapy®, the *Adult* ego state — traditionally considered the rational and balanced component in TA—is reinterpreted. It is likened to a “Kindergarten Teacher” whom the Child trusts and feels safe with, but by 4:00 p.m., no matter how kind, the Child longs for its Parents. The *Kindergarten Teacher* becomes a metaphor for the mind, which, as the Italian etymology suggests, may mislead:

- *La mente* (noun) – the mind
- *Mentire* (verb) – to lie, to deceive

Accordingly, ET® replaces the conventional Adult ego state with the concept of the *Divine Parent (DP)*, a symbolic representation of God. In line with many cultural and spiritual beliefs, this Divine Parent embodies unconditional love, nonjudgment, presence, and deep listening. It is this presence that offers the love, safety, attention, recognition, and acceptance the Inner Child so profoundly longs for (Szymańska, 2023, p. 121–148).

## Emotions of Inner Child in Embrace Therapy®

Difficult emotions such as fear, anger, sadness, grief, guilt, shame, helplessness, apathy, and similar feelings—which cause us to lose joy, a sense of mean-

ing, and the will to live—are present in every human life. However, they are most often not adequate to the actual circumstances of the individuals who seek therapy. People usually come for help when they appear to be struggling with something, but in truth, their pain originates from a completely different place along the timeline of their lives — most often in the distant past, especially in childhood. Because a child does not have the resources to meet its own needs for attention, love, recognition, acceptance, and a sense of safety, it depends on an adult caregiver for support. Yet, for many individuals who attend sessions, these childhood needs were not fully met. The expectations from the child's perspective, and the unmet needs, were in a way absorbed into the adult, permeating their adult world. Despite the age listed on their birth certificate confirming adulthood, within these individuals, the Inner Child remains very much alive, still demanding the fulfilment of those unrealized needs. Berne distinguished three ego states depending on the social situation we find ourselves in: the Child, the Parent, and the Adult. What are these states? They are nothing more than a coherent system of feelings combined with corresponding patterns of behaviour (Krzemiński, 1998, p. 87). While the Parent ego state may manifest as the Nurturing Parent, the Rescuing Parent, or the Critical Parent, and the Child ego state as the Rebellious Child, the Adapted Child, or the Free Child, the Adult ego state is the most factual and pragmatic. It is the state of balance between social norms and emotions. It focuses on facts and tasks, does not seek excuses, nor does it “drift in the clouds” as the Child ego state often does. The Adult is capable of being responsible for itself, focuses on the here and now, is independent, and emotionally competent. It is characterized by high maturity. In contrast to the other two ego states, the Adult has no derivative forms. (Berne, 1998, pp. 29–32.) Although it may seem that the Adult ego state is comparable to the God-Self state in the ET® model, it is not the same. The God-Self state is not the one that knows better than the other two (Child and Parent) because it is “God” — but rather the one that asks questions in such a way to both the Child and the Parent ego states that they return into integration, forming a single Adult ego state. One could say that as the Inner Child matures, the Parent ego state fades proportionally, and the Adult ego state remains. Working with the ET® method involves uncoupling the emotions attached to the mental images of past events, and through a process in which the God-Self state emerges, one can ultimately experience the Adult ego state and be freed from emotions that originated in the unmet emotional needs of the Inner Child.

## **Methodology**

The study included 26 participants who had undergone Embrace Therapy® (ET®) sessions. Respondents completed questionnaires designed to assess emo-

tional changes following therapy, with particular focus on the durability of effects, the role of Inner Child work, and the influence of spirituality on the therapeutic process. The questionnaires were administered at various intervals — ranging from two months to four years post-session — allowing for the assessment of both immediate and long-term emotional and spiritual outcomes. Rather than being structured around thematically similar life events, the analysis was centred on emotional patterns themselves. The responses were coded and grouped according to the emotional states associated with specific memories or experiences. Each questionnaire was analysed in terms of the emotions that accompanied difficult or traumatic memories. This approach made it possible to observe emotional transitions — for example, an initially reported emotion of *fear* often transformed into *calmness* or *relief* over time. For clarity, emotional states were categorized into those predominating *before* the ET® session (e.g., “fear,” “anger”) and compared with those reported *after* the session. A consistent phenomenon observed across all responses was what can be described as emotional dissolution — a transformation of emotional experience, such as “fear → calm.” During the initial intake interview, participants were guided to identify their so-called “emotional sandwich” — a structured grouping of emotions, ordered from the most intense to the least noticeable. This emotional composition would then shift as a result of the therapeutic process. Importantly, since the questionnaires were completed by individuals at varying intervals following their sessions, the data highlight that the elapsed time did not significantly affect the persistence of therapeutic outcomes. In all cases, ET® was associated with immediate emotional relief and a shift in the subjective perception of the problem addressed in therapy. The long-term follow-ups — ranging from 18 months to four years — further confirm the sustainability of these emotional transformations.

## Research Results

To evaluate the effectiveness and long-term impact of Embrace Therapy®, a structured questionnaire comprising six open-ended questions was administered. This section presents the synthesized findings from 26 completed questionnaires, revealing several key emotional and therapeutic outcomes:

- Calmness and Relief – These emotional states emerged immediately following the session and, in many cases, persisted for several years. Respondents frequently noted that while the original problems may have resurfaced, they no longer triggered the same emotional intensity: *“The problems returned, but without the emotions—or they felt much weaker.”*

- Shift in Perspective – Participants often described a transition from perceiving a problem as a threat to interpreting it as a meaningful developmental experience. This shift was frequently immediate and tended to deepen over the following 3 to 6 months, with the effects remaining stable over time.
- Emotional Release and Increased Detachment – A majority of respondents reported that previously unresolved emotions — such as anger, fear, shame, and sadness—had “dissolved.” Many described functioning more from an *observer stance*, allowing them to acknowledge and accept emotions without becoming overwhelmed by them.
- Increased Self-Confidence, Awareness, and Boundary-Setting – Many participants indicated an enhanced sense of self-awareness and emotional regulation. They described greater ease in articulating their needs, letting go of emotional burdens, and setting healthy interpersonal boundaries, along with a growing acceptance of their inner experiences.
- Long-Term Stability of Effects – Notably, all respondents reported enduring therapeutic benefits, with emotional improvements sustained even up to four years after a single ET® session.

Table 1

*Emotional and Therapeutic Outcomes at Various Time Points After Embrace Therapy® Sessions*

Time After Session	Main Emotions and Effects
1 week	Absence of negative emotions, inner calm, harmonious family relationships
2–6 months	Release of fear, increased self-confidence, adaptability to new situations
1 year	Stable emotional release, developmental outlook, Adult-Self as a conscious state
1.5–2 years	Long-term emotional distance from traumatic events, self-acceptance, physical and psychological calm
3–4 years	Lasting dissolution of negative patterns, emotional freedom, lightness in daily life

Source: own research.

The analysis of the questionnaires indicates that Embrace Therapy® produces rapid, profound, and enduring outcomes, consistently observed across all respondents. These include:

- A reduction in the intensity of difficult or distressing emotions,
- A reframing of personal challenges, shifting perception from threat to opportunity for growth,
- An increased sense of inner strength and self-awareness,
- The integration of emotional experiences within a developmental and transformational framework.

Overall, the therapy facilitates a transformation of emotional responses into states of love, acceptance, and inner freedom. These shifts were not only immediate but also continued to deepen and stabilize over extended periods, confirming the long-term effectiveness of the ET® process.

Based on the collected questionnaires assessing the effectiveness of Embrace Therapy®, several key findings emerged:

1. **Inner Child Work and Transcendence** Respondents reported that engaging with the Inner Child facilitated profound emotional healing, particularly in releasing childhood traumas and deeply rooted fears. By incorporating a spiritual dimension, Embrace Therapy® enabled participants to transcend painful emotions and attain a higher state of inner peace—an outcome frequently described as pivotal in daily functioning. Many participants emphasized that ET® helped them connect with unresolved emotional experiences from childhood, leading to their transformation into more constructive emotional states such as calmness, acceptance, and compassion. This deepened relationship with the Inner Child also clarified the origins of various present-day emotional challenges.
2. **Reduction in Emotional Intensity** Respondents observed a significant decrease in the intensity of negative emotions such as anger, sadness, and fear. Through connection with the Inner Child and the fourth ego state—referred to as the God-Self—these emotions were transmuted into more harmonious affective states, including spiritual calm and acceptance. These once-dominant emotional responses became far less intrusive in daily life. Following therapy, participants described themselves as more composed and conscious in the face of triggering situations.
3. **Heightened Spiritual Awareness** One of the most profound outcomes noted by participants was an increased sense of spiritual awareness. The inclusion of the God-Self in the therapeutic process allowed individuals to integrate emotional experiences within a transcendent framework, contributing to greater resilience and longer-lasting therapeutic change.
4. **Growth in Self-Awareness and Self-Acceptance** Many respondents indicated that ET® contributed to an expanded awareness of their emotional world and an enhanced ability to accept themselves. They described learning to identify, understand, and prioritize their emotional needs. Working with the Inner Child helped them reconcile with difficult past experiences and fostered a more compassionate and integrated sense of self. This often led to a discovery of self-love and a greater commitment to both emotional and physical self-care.
5. **Improvement in Interpersonal Relationships.** Participants frequently reported improved interpersonal functioning following ET® sessions. The increase in both emotional and spiritual awareness allowed for more mindful

communication of needs, enhanced empathy, and greater authenticity in relationships.

6. **Durability of Emotional Change.** The analysis revealed that even a single session of Embrace Therapy® led to lasting emotional shifts. Many respondents stated that the therapeutic effects endured for one, two, or even four years following the session. Emotions once linked to distressing past experiences became significantly less intense—or in many cases, ceased to be problematic altogether. Participants described a persistent sense of calm, emotional clarity, and enhanced emotional regulation.
7. **Sense of Inner Peace and Harmony.** A recurring theme among responses was the emergence of a stable inner sense of peace and harmony. This newly acquired equilibrium enabled participants to navigate daily challenges with greater mindfulness and composure.
8. **Improved Coping with Similar Situations.** Finally, respondents noted that they were better equipped to handle situations that previously triggered intense emotional responses. The emotional tools and insights gained during therapy empowered them to approach similar circumstances with increased emotional mastery and inner calm.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study indicate a high subjective effectiveness of Embrace Therapy® in fostering emotional, spiritual, and existential integration. The transformations reported by participants are consistent with the framework proposed by John Bradshaw (2008), who emphasized the central importance of Inner Child work in restoring self-connection and converting childhood wounds into sources of inner strength. Similarly, Lucia Capacchione (1991) underscored the value of emotional expression and creative dialogue with the Inner Child as foundational to psychological integration. Within Transactional Analysis (TA), the Child ego state plays a pivotal role in shaping emotional personality and intrapsychic scripts (Clarkson, 1988). The findings of this study support the assertions of Tony White (1994), who argued that the majority of effective therapeutic interventions target this ego state. Embrace Therapy® offers a secure and supportive context for confronting emotional imprints from the past. It enables participants not only to become aware of painful experiences but also to reframe and transform them into more adaptive and conscious emotional responses. A particularly distinctive element of Embrace Therapy® is the introduction of a fourth ego state—the God-Self — which expands beyond the classical TA model. While this spiritual dimension may initially appear unorthodox, it finds conceptual resonance in Transpersonal Psychology (Wilber, 2000), as well

as in developmental models of consciousness such as the “observer self” in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes et al., 1999) and Loevinger’s (1976) theory of ego development. Participants’ descriptions of spiritual transformation and the transcendence of emotional pain are also aligned with Maslow’s (1962) concept of “peak experiences,” which can catalyse lasting shifts in self-perception and identity. The durability of emotional change — often observed after a single ET<sup>®</sup> session — may raise questions when viewed through the lens of traditional psychotherapeutic models. However, similar long-term outcomes have been documented in modalities emphasizing intense emotional processing (Greenberg, 2011) and in systemic or constellation-based interventions (Hellinger, 1999). The integration of emotional material through the lens of spiritual presence (the God-Self ego state) may act as a critical mechanism in reorganizing meaning structures and reshaping habitual emotional responses. Notably, participants also reported increased levels of self-awareness and self-love — findings that correspond with a growing body of research on the psychological benefits of self-compassion and acceptance (Neff, 2003). ET<sup>®</sup> thus appears to support not only emotional relief but also the development of a more coherent, compassionate, and resilient sense of self. By consciously engaging with emotional content, incorporating spiritual perspectives, and maintaining a relational focus, Embrace Therapy<sup>®</sup> offers an alternative approach to emotional healing—one that avoids pathologizing psychological distress and instead addresses it through the lens of inner transformation. This non-normative and integrative perspective may be particularly well-suited for individuals functioning within the range of psychological normativity. In conclusion, the findings of this study are in alignment with existing literature on Inner Child healing, emotion-focused therapy, and spiritually oriented developmental work. Embrace Therapy<sup>®</sup> may serve as a bridge between psychotherapy and coaching by offering a structured, yet holistic tool for emotional, spiritual, and identity-level transformation — without encroaching upon the clinical or medical domain.

## Conclusions

Embrace Therapy<sup>®</sup> has demonstrated effectiveness in facilitating meaningful work with the Inner Child, as evidenced by lasting emotional transformation and improved quality of life among participants. Beyond enabling the release of difficult emotions, the therapy fosters the integration of the Inner Child in a way that positively influences other ego states, contributing to a more coherent and resilient self. Accordingly, Embrace Therapy<sup>®</sup> may be regarded as a valuable complement to classical Transactional Analysis (TA) techniques, particularly in addressing unresolved emotional wounds originating in childhood. It is also

noteworthy that the questionnaires were completed at varying intervals post-session—ranging from two months to as long as four years—allowing for an assessment of both short-term and long-term therapeutic outcomes.

## Summary

Embrace Therapy® has demonstrated considerable effectiveness as a tool for emotional healing among the majority of respondents. A central component of the therapeutic process is the release and transformation of difficult emotions — such as fear, anger, and sadness—into more constructive emotional states, including calmness, acceptance, and self-love. These changes have proven to be durable over time, underscoring the therapy's efficacy in fostering emotional regulation and resilience in the face of life's challenges. Participants frequently reported that Embrace Therapy® enabled them to establish a meaningful connection with their Inner Child. This facilitated deeper self-reflection and the identification of emotional deficits rooted in early life experiences. Engaging with this aspect of the self-allowed individuals to better understand the origins of their emotional patterns and to cultivate greater inner peace and acceptance. The findings suggest that Inner Child work is a key contributor to the long-term effectiveness of the therapy, leading to sustained emotional transformation and enhanced self-awareness. Moreover, the integration of the spiritual dimension — specifically the God-Self ego state—introduces a distinctive and powerful dimension to the healing process. By bridging classical therapeutic techniques with a spiritually grounded perspective, Embrace Therapy® supports profound, lasting transformation that encompasses both emotional and spiritual aspects of the self. The introduction of the fourth ego state — the God-Self — serves as a gateway to deeper emotional integration and more comprehensive healing.

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## **Embrace Therapy® – zastosowanie pracy z Wewnętrznym Dzieckiem w kontekście analizy transakcyjnej i duchowości**

### **Streszczenie**

Embrace Therapy® (ET®), jako metoda terapeutyczna, łączy w sobie elementy psychoterapii z głęboką duchowością. Kluczowym elementem terapii jest praca z Wewnętrznym Dzieckiem, co ma swoje odniesienie do stanu Ja-Dziecko w analizie transakcyjnej (AT). Jednak unikalność ET® polega na wprowadzeniu czwartego stanu Ja – duchowego aspektu Boga, który pozwala na transcendencję emocjonalnych ograniczeń. W artykule analizowane są wyniki badania nad skutecznością ET® oraz jej miejsce w kontekście AT.

**Słowa kluczowe:** emocje, Wewnętrzne Dziecko, analiza transakcyjna, Embrace Therapy, duchowość.

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## Demand contracts

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### Abstract

This article is an examination of demand contracts, an idea originally presented by the author a few years ago. It seeks to further develop this idea of such contracts which often occur unstated in many therapy situations. Further clarify what a demand contract is, impacts on how it can contribute to client's lying, permissions given by the therapist can how games and enactments can be played out in psychotherapy. This paper also demonstrates how client's and therapist's always have a dual relationship in their work together and how demand contracts play a role in the formation of such a dual relationship.

**Keywords:** contracts, introjection, permission, lying, dual relationship, bystander, game, enactment, psychotherapy.

### Introduction

Demand contracts are contracts the therapist demands the client makes. White (2021) has discussed these before and this article seeks to elaborate that theory more so. Often therapy will not proceed unless the client agrees to making a number of such contracts with the therapist. In this way demand contracts have quite an authoritative quality and can be seen as a parental statement by the therapist. These are statements by the therapist to the client that are usually non negotiable.

Examples of demand contracts may be:

I require you to agree to not use any illicit drugs.

I require you to close all the escape hatches.

I require you to agree to have 2 sessions per week.

I require you to make a no suicide contract.

I require you to have an exit consultation before ending therapy.

I require you to not look at any child pornography.

I require you to not self harm

I require you to not beat your wife.

Holidays are taken by the therapist at these times.

Confidentiality is kept except for these exceptional circumstances such as a subpoena.

## Demand contract transaction

One would hope that the transaction of a demand contract would be an Adult to Adult exchange between the client and therapist. The social level transactions as shown in Diagram 1.

Social level

Therapist: This is the contract I propose for these reasons.

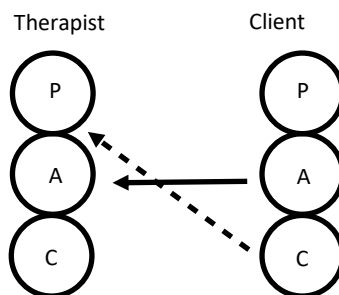
Client: I understand and agree to the contract

Unfortunately that may not happen and the client may see the demand contract process not as an Adult exchange but as a Parent to Child and Child to Parent exchange as shown in diagram 1 at the psychological level transactions.

Psychological level

Therapist: Parent to Child: You have to do what I demand

Client: Child to Parent: I don't like being forced by you. I resent it.



*Diagram 1*

Social and psychological transactions in establishing a demand contract

Source: own materials.

By its nature a demand contract is a demand by the therapist to the client and as stated before it can then have an authoritative or parental quality to it. It would be quite easy for a client to perceive the psychological level transactions shown in diagram 1. Thus setting up a parent and child structure to the therapeutic relationship. The diagram shows the client responding in a resistant or rebellious way. They could just as easily respond in a conforming way. However as is often the case the person may switch between conformity and rebellion at various times in the therapy process. This is one of the unwanted consequences of demand contracts in that it perpetuates a parent child relationship with the client. Which can then lead to the client rebelling against the therapist at times.

## **Demand contracts and lying**

Another problem with demand contracts is they encourage lying. A good example of this is the demand contract required by some drug treatment services. They will require the client to agree to be abstinent while receiving treatment from that drug treatment centre.

Significant research has been done on client's lying to therapists. For example as Blanchard and Farber (2020) note some clients will conceal from a therapist that they have suicidal thoughts because of the unwanted impacts of that, like possible involuntary hospitalisation. Additionally Curtis and Hart (2020) note that whilst it is widely regarded that all people lie most people tell fewer than two lies per day. However with regards to psychotherapy some personality types are more prone to lying than others. The most obvious example being the anti social personality, borderline and paranoid personalities could be more prone to lying.

Clients tend to lie more than therapists generally believe as most have the view that the therapeutic relationship has truth and honesty as its basis. Martin (2006) states, "It was concluded that lying in psychotherapy is a common phenomenon that may be influenced by clients' perceptions of their therapists and the therapeutic alliance." (p. v). Blanchard and Farber (2016) report their findings that 93% of people report they have lied to their therapist with 72% lying about a therapy related topic. Common lies are about liking the therapist's comments, wanting to end therapy, lying about self harming, romantic feelings towards the therapist, the value of therapy, lies because of embarrassment or feelings of shame.

Some of these lies are of little therapeutic consequence but others can be vitally important. For example a client lying about their drug use, saying they have not used when in fact they have. It is crucial for a therapist to know what the drug user is using, how often they are using and how much they are using.

This is critical information when making therapeutic decisions about the client. Lies like this can have important negative therapeutic consequences.

If the therapist has a demand contract that the client will be abstinent during treatment then lying about drug use is likely to increase. If a client has invested three months of their time and all the money as well in their treatment, are they going to say they used when they know it may result in them being refused more treatment? The motivation to lie is high because of that demand contract. In addition as White (2023) demonstrates, there is saying in the addictions field, "If you don't want to be lied to about a drug user's drug use, then don't ask the question." The vast majority of drug users at some point will lie about their drug use. The possibility of lying about that is high because drugs users are lying to themselves as much as they are lying to the therapist.

One must be aware that having demand contracts about illegal activity such as physically assaulting a partner or looking at child pornography can significantly increase the likelihood of the client lying. Most countries and most professional organisations require a therapist to mandatorily report such client behaviour to the authorities. Most client's would know this and know that if they told the truth about not keeping to the demand contract then their treatment from that point would usually cease and they would also have to deal with the legal consequences.

Some therapists can take the lying by client's personally. Curtis and Hart (2015) note that some therapists can respond with feelings of anger, negativity to the client, embarrassment, reduced trust, increased suspicion and a reduced desire to continue counselling when they discover a client has lied to them.

Such reactions would seem to be most unfortunate and counter productive. My view is that most clients (people) do the best they can with the resources they have available to them at the time. If they lie that's what the Child ego state feels it needs to do at that time. It seems the therapist must learn how to not take it personally. Also it is just part of the business of counselling at times. As White (2023) notes if you are going to work with drug users then you are going to be lied to, multiple times. It is just part of how that world works. In addition lying is often seen as a diagnostic criteria of the anti social personality type. If you are working with clients like this then you are guaranteed to be lied to. Samenow (1980, 1986) has done significant work on the process and role of lying in the anti social personality and he notes that at times such lying is simply habitual. In some instances there may not even be a reason for the person to lie but it is done purely out of habit.

Also therapists are often asking very private questions. For some self harmers, they perceive their self harming to be a very intimate and private thing they do. If you are asking a young female if she cuts herself and she says no, one needs to keep an open mind about that answer as later more information may

come to light. Also the type and degree of self harming may not be fully disclosed at first. To such a person it can be a very private matter so if they lie then don't take it personally. If you, the therapist were a client being asked about very private things then you may do the same as well.

However the main point at hand is some demand contracts can significantly increase the likelihood of lying by the client. If a client agrees to the demand contract not to look at child pornography and then does, he is left with a critical decision either to lie or to disclose that knowing it could result in the cessation of treatment and possible reporting to some kind of authority.

Some say you can't do successful treatment if the client lies in any significant way. For example Newman and Strauss (2003) note that the whole process of case conceptualisation can be thwarted by such deceptions. Kernberg (1992) says that such deceptions can "...infiltrate and corrupt the entire psychotherapeutic process and are a major reason for stalemates and failure." He goes on to say when such lying occurs the therapist must open up the communication and resolve the client's psychopathic transference.

I generally don't agree with these sentiments. However there are some lies that do significantly impact the treatment strategy and case conceptualisations the therapist has for the client and if that is based on false information then treatment can be significantly impacted in a negative way. It is in this way that demand contracts can have a negative effect on positive therapeutic outcomes. One needs to accept that this is sometimes just a part of the psychotherapy profession. However in the majority of instances significant lies may slow down or way lay the therapeutic progression of the client but most often sooner or later the therapy gets back on track and psychological growth in the client continues.

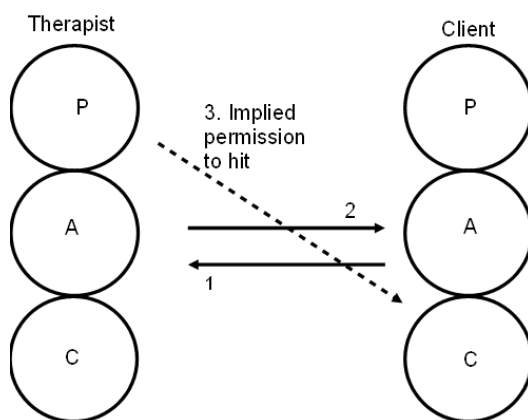
## **Demand contracts and implied permissions**

One could then argue that it is best not to have demand contracts. However there are also significant advantages from requesting some demand contracts for the client. A demand contract is a potent way for a therapist to impose their value system onto the therapeutic process with the client.

If a client reports that he hit his wife and the therapist says nothing, moves onto something else then the client can take that as an implied permission that violent behaviour is okay. If the therapist says nothing then they are taking the bystander role in the therapeutic relationship at that point in time. The client gets the message from the therapist that the behaviour is okay or at least not objectionable enough to say anything about it. Hence there is an implied permission from the therapist to the client. This has been discussed before by Clarkson (1992) who addresses the idea of the bystander role and states, "Many peo-

ple may participate passively in violent or oppressive situations. By not challenging or intervening they give tacit permission to the abuse of power occurring in their environment.” (p. 286). See diagram 2. In that transaction there are three transactions as shown.

1. Client reports that he hit his wife
2. Therapist says and does nothing in response to the client reporting such behaviour. Therapist moves on and talks about something else thus taking the bystander role.
3. Client can take a tacit or implied permission from the therapist that it’s okay to hit his wife.



*Diagram 2*

Mechanism of implied permission through therapist inaction

Source: own materials.

A demand contract moves the therapist out of the bystander role in a powerful way. Not only is the therapist stating and identifying the not okay behaviour he or she is requiring that a demand contract be made about it. The therapist is saying to the client, “This therapy cannot proceed unless you contract not to continue that behaviour.” Such a demand contract is a good and potent way a therapist can introduce their value system into the therapeutic relationship. Once done the therapist has clearly moved out of the bystander role and is taking some direct action to deal with the unacceptable behaviour. No implied permission is given to the client to behave that way.

However a demand contract has even further psychological implications in these circumstances. If the client and therapist have an ongoing therapeutic relationship then introjection of the therapist by the client is inevitable. When this happens clients will say things like, “I was talking with my boss the other day and then I heard your voice in my head say....”. Such a comment means the client

has introjected the therapist into their Parent ego state as shown in diagram 3. A demand contract, as stated before, is a powerful way by which a therapist can communicate their value system.

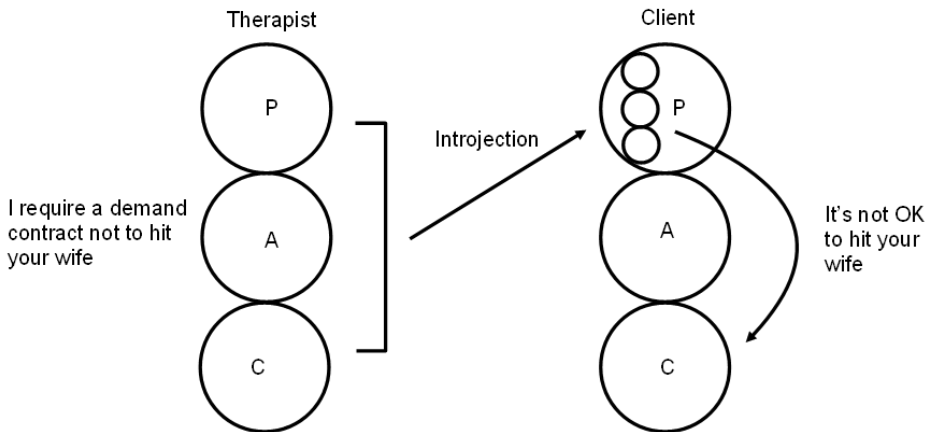


Diagram 3

*Introjection of the therapist's value system through a demand contract*

Source: own materials.

The demand contract communicates to the client the therapist's value system and beliefs about physical violence. Over time this will be introjected by the client. Once done the introjection remains in the client's Parent ego state. This results in the client then having an internal voice saying that it's not okay to hit people. The demand contract ends up becoming part of the client's personality and an internal prohibition about the behaviour starts to play a role in the client's future decision making. As you can see demand contracts can play a significant role in the permissions given to the client and the introjections they can take from the psychotherapy relationship over time. These are notable therapeutic advantages of demand contracts.

### Three types of contracts in psychotherapy

Eric Berne (1966) identified three types of contracts which the therapist and client must address if psychotherapy is to proceed. First there is the administrative contract where the administrative aspects of the relationship are defined and understood by both client and therapist. This is mainly a series of demand contracts by the therapist. For example the therapist states to the client that therapy can occur on:

These days  
At these times  
At this location  
For this fee  
The cancellation policy is this  
This is the type of therapy done  
Sessions are this long and this frequent  
I work with these clients  
Confidentially happens except in these instances

All these are defined and stated by the therapist and if the client does not agree with any of them then therapy is probably not going to occur. These are in essence a set of demand contracts that the client has to agree with. As mentioned before demand contracts tend to set up a child parent relationship dynamic in the therapy relationship. Even before the client has had their first session they are confronted with a set of demand contracts which will remind them of how things were as a small child with his parents. Parents also define many aspects of a small child's life which it essentially has to agree with. Indeed it may be this that sets the stage for strong transference reactions to occur and could explain why this particularly happens in the therapeutic relationship. The set of demand contracts they are required to make contribute to a heightening of transference feelings by the client in this particular relationship.

Berne then talks of the professional contract or goals of treatment. These are not demand contracts and the client has much more input into what these are. Sills (2006) talks of this being a 'shared articulation' of the desired outcomes of therapy. These are mutually agreed upon goals of therapy.

Finally Berne talks of the psychological contract. These are often the unspoken, unconscious expectations that are brought to therapy mainly by the client but they occurs in the therapist as well. Berne (1966) talks of people coming to therapy to confirm their life script or to learn how to play games better. The unassuming woman seeks out others to tell her how to live her life and may look to the therapist to do the same. Or the man who felt abandoned by his mother, who was always sick and tired and never there for him emotionally. He will seek to recreate this with the therapist and end up feeling rejected and abandoned by him. As one can see these also are not demand contracts

These three types of contracts that Berne talks about, illustrate how the therapist and client always have a dual relationship. They have two concomitant relationships that exist at the one time. They have a administrative or business relationship defined by the administrative contract and a psychological or therapeutic relationship defined by the psychological contract. All clients and therapists have these dual relationships. The boundaries of these two relationships can and do get blurred at times especially by the client, but the therapist can also confuse these boundaries.

It is the demand contracts that form the administrative contract that provide fertile ground for blurring the two relationships. In the therapeutic relationship, at times clients will develop strong emotional reactions to the therapist that can include negative and hostile feelings. These can provide the basis for creating enactments and relationship ruptures with the therapist by using the demand contracts the client initially agreed to.

The client can use the transference relationship to create an enactment where she can fulfil her psychological contract. This may include such unconscious psychological motives like

She will be rejected and abandoned by the therapist

Her needs and wants are not important

That she is unloveable

That you can't trust anyone

To create the psychological contract game or enactment the client can blur the boundaries with the therapist by using the business relationship demand contracts of the administrative contract. The client may say such things as:

They have reduced my hours at work so could you reduce your fee?

I know we have the no self harm contract but my dog died and so I did cut myself this week.

I missed the appointment because my daughter cut her hand and I had to take her to the emergency centre at the hospital so could you not have your cancellation fee in this case?

I have had a lot of expenses this week so can I pay you at the next session?

I am feeling particularly vulnerable at this time so can I have an extra session per week for the time being?

In these cases the lines between the business relationship and therapeutic relationship have been blurred by the client. The dual relationships are being used by the client to invite the therapist into an enactment with the therapist. The demand contracts are a clear way to blur such boundaries. For example a client may say, "I have had a big conflict with my mother so could I make a session with you on Saturday? I feel very vulnerable and want to renew my no suicide contract.". The client also has previously agreed to the demand contract that the therapist does not work on weekends. As soon as the client starts to try and negotiate with the non negotiable demand contracts a red flag should be raised in the therapist's mind. Of course this may not be the first move in a game but it certainly could be and the therapist needs to remain alert to that possibility.

At the psychological level in this case the client may be saying:

Prove to me that I am a special client and that you will bend the rules for me.

Prove to me that I am loveable.

Say 'No' to me and show that I am rejected and really have no one I can trust and rely on.

Most therapist's are kind compassionate people and want to help the client so many will feel some kind of angst at such request for a weekend appointment. They also want to keep to their boundaries as defined by the demand contract and at the same time will feel for the client's distress. At some level most client's will also know this attempted negotiation of the demand contract it is likely to create some kind of emotional angst in the therapist as well. As soon as a client seeks to negotiate with the non negotiable demand contracts a red flag must be raised as this could end up as a relationship rupture as the game progresses. The administrative relationship is being blurred with the therapeutic relationship by using the demand contract.

Of course the therapist can do the same. If he is feeling dislike of a client because he has worked on the weekend with them, then the therapist can start (often unconsciously) to restrict the number of available appointments knowing that this will have a punishing effect on the client. In this case the therapist is blurring the lines of the dual relationships with the client by using a demand contract to express his dislike of the client.

## Conclusion

Demand contracts, lying, games and enactments and dual relationships are all connected in the ways explained above. This is a new area, the study of what demand contracts are and how they play a role in psychotherapy. They have both positive effects on the therapeutic process by allowing the therapist to give permission to the client and negative effects such as by increasing the likelihood of the client lying to the therapist. There is certainly more theory development to be done on this topic.

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## Kontrakty narzucone w psychoterapii

### Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi analizę zjawiska kontraktów narzuconych, koncepcji pierwotnie przedstawionej przez autora kilka lat temu. Celem tekstu jest dalsze rozwinięcie tej idei, dotyczącej kontraktów, które często pojawiają się w sposób nieuświadomiony w wielu sytuacjach terapeutycznych. Autor precyzuje, czym jest kontrakt narzucony, oraz omawia jego wpływ na skłonność klienta do kłamstwa, znaczenie udzielanych przez terapeutę pozwoleń, a także sposób, w jaki gry i odgrywanie ról mogą przebiegać w procesie psychoterapii. Artykuł pokazuje również, że relacja terapeutyczna zawsze ma charakter podwójny — klient i terapeuta funkcjonują jednocześnie w dwóch płaszczyznach relacji — oraz że kontrakty narzucone odgrywają istotną rolę w kształtowaniu tej podwójnej struktury relacyjnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kontrakty, introjekcja, pozwolenie, kłamstwo, relacja podwójna, obserwator bierny, gra, odgrywanie, psychoterapia.



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## Agency and community orientation and social participation of young people aged 14 to 19 – research report

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the results of research diagnosing the agency and community orientations of young students aged 14 to 19 in relation to the social participation of young people in activities undertaken for the benefit of their communities. The commitment and social activity of members of a given community are one of the factors determining its development (Potoczek, 2001). The presented research results are an attempt to examine the importance of the sense of agency for conscious, responsible engagement in activities and social participation among students of selected secondary schools in a medium-sized city. It was assumed that the dimension of agency (the act of exerting or not exerting) by a person's influence on events can be an important aspect of building one's self-image, one's perception of one's role in the surrounding world, motivation to undertake specific activities, but also understanding and interpreting the world and the phenomena occurring in it. Ultimately, the issue raised seems to be important due to the social consequences of forming or not forming a belief in the possibility of constructing one's own biography, but also a belief in the possibility of influencing the surrounding reality. The

results can also be related to Eric Berne's transactional analysis theory, in which the Adult ego state enables conscious, rational assessment of situations and social activity, which may provide a better understanding of the mechanisms of building engagement and social responsibility among young people.

**Keywords:** agency orientation, community orientation, social participation, responsibility, social action, transactional analysis

## Introduction

The Anthropocene epoch of man! Man responsible for a changing world, aware of the changes taking place in his immediate environment. The era of humans burdened with responsibility for the planetary crisis, climate change, melting glaciers, cataclysms – mass extinction of various species, ocean acidification, cancer clusters, severe droughts, and torrential rains. The Anthropocene is identified with a sense of division between human domination of the world and a lack of control over environmental degradation processes. This places humans in a situation where they seem to be seriously losing their agency, maintaining the belief that their activities have set in motion a process of decay that humans can no longer stop or reverse (Andrzejewska, 2018, p. 124). As a result, the crisis becomes a kind of collective trauma that generates a mechanism of differentiation<sup>1</sup>: the human race as such faces the mortal threat of annihilation (Humeniuk, 2024, p. 29). The term “Anthropocene stagnation” is used in scientific discourse (Bińczyk, 2018). perfectly capturing the mood of the inevitable end of the human era, a conviction made present in the public sphere not only by scientists, but also (and perhaps above all) by representatives of the media, activists, artists, and ordinary participants in social life. On the other hand Jason W. Moore's analysis of anthropocentric theory allows us to see that

contemporary phenomena such as global warming and the financialization of the economy are neither purely social nor purely environmental processes, but rather [...] a dialectical combination of capital accumulation, the pursuit of power, and processes of nature production (Bińczyk, 2018, s. 158).

There is a fairly widespread belief that the way to solve problems related to caring for the environment is through reliable public education. Education that promotes the concept of sustainable development, leading to an understanding of the basics of sustainable management of the natural environment, the introduction of modern environmental protection technologies, promoting the economical use of natural resources, shaping cultural habits and creating moral atti-

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<sup>1</sup> A mechanism that pits people against each other while standardizing their behavior. The theory of mimicry and scapegoating Rene Girard R. Girard, *Kozioł ofiarny*, trans. M. Goszczyńska, Łódź, 1991.

tudes, and implementing holistic thinking skills based on understanding the needs of humans and nature (Sobczyk, 2003).

For many years, there has been scientific reflection on the shape of education for the future. The search for ways to prepare future generations for responsible participation in community life. Education that allows for the construction of individual biographies combining the fulfillment of one's own individual needs with the needs of the wider environment. Education that takes into account the offer coming from the current socially constructed system of values, negotiated in the context of meanings shaping the sphere of political and social life and contemporary culture (Melosik, 1998 pp. 54 – 56). Education that provides experiences that build a sense of agency, provides opportunities to carry out activities based on needs and expectations, and gives a sense of influence on the environment (Wawrzyniak-Beszterda 2018, p. 471).

**Education that incorporates the development of social awareness extending also to the natural environment manifests itself not only in individual thinking and experience but also in the socially established standards of perceiving, experiencing, and valuing the biosphere. This form of education, often referred to as civic education, combines the culturally conditioned content of human participation in the community with a broadly understood responsibility for the living environment.**

However, it may be that “too much of the literature on civic education borders on desperation and not only fails to construct a vision but also ‘freezes’ dreams, imagination, or the idea of a better world” (Giroux & Witkowski, 2010, p. 184). Therefore, our intention is not to delve into the complexity of the concept of citizenship but to confront the assumed goal of civic education in the context of developing a sense of agency among secondary school youth.

Those who co-create civil society participate consciously and autonomously in public life, engaging in (and initiating) grassroots actions that contribute to real changes in their surroundings. The idea of civil society assumes a consensus around values<sup>2</sup> and norms (especially fundamental ones<sup>3</sup>), as these are neces-

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<sup>2</sup> Fundamental values such as freedom, truth, solidarity, justice, and social equality are not only given to society but also entrusted to it as a task. They can develop properly only with the unchanging recognition of the transcendent dignity of the human person. As a social being, the human person is called to grow and fulfill their vocation within a community of others. A proper social order one that is indispensable in helping individuals realize their humanity is based on fundamental values. Granting a person absolute autonomy, contrary to the nature of things, is equivalent to taking a destructive path both for authentic freedom and for a society truly worthy of the human being. A democratic state exists, develops, or collapses along with the fundamental values it expresses and promotes. Fundamental values (Mariański, 2015, pp. 893–898).

<sup>3</sup> The lack of consensus regarding fundamental values, especially among young people, may determine the future of society. On the other hand, educating the youth in a spirit of fidelity to

sary for shaping a responsible and active civic attitude and for eventually achieving axiological maturity. Activities aimed at discovering and consciously affirming values strengthen orientation toward proper (desirable), ethical, and moral behavior, protecting individuals from manipulation by others (Wereszczyńska, 2011, p. 396), and guaranteeing internal cohesion within communities, collectives, nations, and states. Values that are understood and accepted by individuals can become a source of inspiration for activities undertaken for the common good. Activity, understood as an individual's action within society, results not only in their contribution to transforming reality but undoubtedly shapes their personal development<sup>4</sup>.

An individual's involvement expressed through civic actions and activities undertaken in the service of the public interest is considered beneficial both for the acting individual and for social cohesion (Millon-Delsol, 1995, p. 58). Building a civil society based on the awareness of collective action thus requires its members to demonstrate both individual and social civic engagement<sup>5</sup>.

Civic education becomes particularly significant in contemporary pluralistic societies, which are marked by individualistic, libertarian, rationalist, and hedonistic tendencies and often present people with extreme values: elitist and egalitarian, focused on work and pleasure, regional and national, or even supranational. We observe low social engagement among youth, who tend to be self-focused. Research and analyses indicate the need for actions aimed at guiding young people's activity within the realm of citizenship (IKE, 2022). Introducing the concept of citizenship, pointing out opportunities for involvement, and offering appropriate motivation can realistically translate into civic engagement (e.g., Chałas & Szewczak, 2021). There is a need, therefore, for an interdisciplinary reflection on how to prepare young people for conscious participation in community life.

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the fundamental values that should be present in society has a strong influence on the beliefs of the younger generation. It is therefore essential to determine which fundamental values hold a central place in the consciousness of young people both on the "operational" level (what exists in reality) and on the normative level (the reality that is desired or postulated) (Piwowarski, 1991, p. 108).

<sup>4</sup> We consider intellectual, emotional, and practical activity as essential components of comprehensive education (Okoń, 1998; Wereszczyńska, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Social civic activity involves the collective and conscious articulation, pursuit, and defense of the interests (needs and aspirations) of a given social group by its members. Individual activity refers to the fulfillment of civic duties particularly through voting behavior, participation in local government bodies, active engagement with administrative institutions, involvement in campaigns and non-governmental organizations, and demonstrating civic responsibility in undertaken actions, such as responding to threats to the state or providing assistance to fellow citizens in need. (Gliński & Palska, 1997, p. 365).

At the core of this multidimensional understanding of civic education should be, it seems, an authentic experience of having an impact on reality based on negotiated content that allows for critical analysis of current events and phenomena in real social life. This could foster the development of young people's sense of agency and authentic participation in community life. A key element of this is the inclusion of democratic principles, participation, and cooperation in everyday life.

Participation understood as a process involving dialogue and mutual respect among social actors, the sharing of information, the opportunity to express opinions, and the right to be heard allows individuals to experience a sense of agency. It teaches them that their actions can shape reality, influence others' decisions, and that their opinions matter. The concept of participation is closely related to transactional analysis theory, in which it should be an invitation to engage in dialogue and action from the Adult ego state and signify the ability to take real action. In other words, participation is a process conducive to generating transactions that should activate the Adult state (Wieczorek, 2013, p. 111). Eric Berne, the founder of Transactional Analysis, defines ego states as coherent systems of thoughts and emotions, which are manifested through consistent sets of behaviors (Pankowska, 2001, pp. 29 – 30). When communicating from the Adult ego state, the individual objectively evaluates reality and, based on incoming stimuli and experience, analyzes their options akin to the functioning of a machine (Berne, 2008, p. 31 – 32), or a self-programming computer (Pankowska, 2001, p. 32). This allows for objective perception and evaluation of reality. The Adult state is the sober, conscious part of the personality that gathers data about the external and internal world using the senses, then processes it according to logical rules and draws appropriate conclusions (Rogoll, 1989, p. 15), estimating probabilities (James & Jongeward, 1994, p. 44). Thanks to this, the person acts independently of emotions and moods, which is important for objective understanding of the environment. The Adult ego state can influence the other ego states. If it receives insufficient or false information, it cannot assess reality correctly (Rogoll, 1989, p. 15). This state is organized, flexible, and intelligent (James & Jongeward, 1994, p. 44). Although this ego state may not initially seem connected to emotions, some authors argue that emotions can be experienced in this state. These relate to the current situation and include emotions such as outrage in response to real injustice, despair resulting from a tragic situation, or genuine respect for another person (Pankowska, 2001, p. 32). With the development of this ego state, the so-called Integrated Adult may emerge. Within the Adult, certain ethical aspects (Ethos), personal attractiveness and emotional spontaneity (Pathos), as well as rationality (Logos) may be internalized. Ethos i.e., the Parent within the Adult contains well-processed and integrated commands and prohibitions inherited from the Parent state. Logos the

Adult within the Adult is the most rational part of the personality structure, responsible for objectively perceiving reality and interacting with the external environment. Pathos the Child within the Adult contains rethought and integrated feelings previously located in the Child ego state (Pankowska, 2001); (Pierzchała, 2012); (Jagięła, 2011). A person in the Integrated Adult state, without losing rationality, would demonstrate both “childlike” naturalness and ethical responsibility. Integrating the Adult state is a conscious process involving the transformation and incorporation of certain elements from the other ego states into this structure (Pankowska, 2001, p. 36; Łęski, 2016, p. 24).

We may therefore assume that one of the fundamental competencies paving the way toward social responsibility for oneself and others is the development of a sense of agency. The concept of agency is a subject of interest across various fields (philosophy, psychology, neuropsychology)<sup>6</sup>, though it does not belong to a single, dedicated field of study. It is the result of exploring various aspects of human experience and understanding of the world and oneself (Nowakowski & Komendziński, 2010, pp. 251 – 252). The sense of agency combines self-awareness with the experience of oneself as the initiator and controller of actions, processes, and events. This experience is essential not only for self-understanding but also for understanding perception and the world of social relationships (Whitson & Galinsky, 2008, pp. 115 – 117). Discussions on agency often distinguish between the sense of agency understood as a volitional act and the sense of ownership, i.e., the feeling that “I” am the recipient of certain experiences (Gallagher, 2000, pp. 14 – 21).

For the purpose of this study, we adopted (following D. Bakan) the assumption of two main aspects of human existence: agency meaning that every person is a pursuer of their own goals and communion the belief that every individual is also a member of a community and a participant in social relationships (Bakan, 1966). Vicki (Helgeson, 1994); (Helgeson, 2003) instead refers to agency orientation, which involves a focus on pursuing individual goals, and communion orientation, which is defined as a focus on others and one’s relationships with them. Both orientations can take extreme forms, lying on a continuum from unrestrained agency, where the focus on oneself and one’s goals is so strong that it disregards communal demands and leads to the denial of relationships with others (often ignoring their goals and causing conflicts) (Helgeson, 2003), to unrestrained communion, characterized by such intense focus on others and one’s relationships with them that it leads to the denial of one’s own agency (Helgeson, 1994); (Helgeson, 2003).

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<sup>6</sup> e.g. (Mrówka, 2002).

## Research Method

The survey was conducted in April 2025 in secondary schools (high schools and technical schools) in Koszalin using an online questionnaire, which students received for voluntary and anonymous completion. The study utilized a scale measuring agentic and communal orientations, developed by Bogdan Wojciszke and Monika A. Szlendak (Wojciszke & Szlendak, 2010, p. 69). The questionnaire included a demographic section with basic information: age, gender, and school profile. The scale consists of 22 statements to which participants responded on a scale from 1 to 7, ranging from “definitely no” to “definitely yes”. Additionally, we included 6 closed-ended questions concerning social engagement.

The study began with a thesis directly related to subsequent stages: agentic and communal orientations are factors associated with participation in social activities, including environmental protection actions.

The subject of the research was the agentic and communal orientations of young people and the social participation of students in social activities, including those related to environmental protection.

Purpose of the research were:

1. To determine the agentic and communal orientations of young students.
2. To identify differences in orientations between females and males.
3. To examine the relationship between orientations and students’ social participation in school-based activities.
4. To examine the relationship between agentic and communal orientations and participation in environmental protection activities.

We formulated four research questions:

1. What agentic and communal orientations do young students have?
2. Are there any differences in these orientations between genders, and if so, what are they?
3. Is there a relationship between these orientations and students’ social participation in school activities, and if so, what kind of relationship?
4. Is there a relationship between agentic and communal orientations and students’ social participation in environmental protection activities, and if so, what kind of relationship?

The study involved 117 students (70 females, 44 males, and 3 non-binary individuals) from two secondary schools. They included high school students (53 students) and technical school students (64 students) from third-year classes, aged 14 to 19. Among them, 58 were under 18 years old, and 59 were 18 or older.

## Research results

### 1. What type of orientation (agentive or communal) do young students have?

Table 1

*Distribution of the communality index in the studied group*

Communality	Girls		Boys		Non – binary		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1-1,99	0	0,0	2	1,7	0	0,0	2	1,7
2-2,99	9	7,7	6	5,1	0	0,0	15	12,8
3-3,99	20	17,1	17	14,5	0	0,0	37	31,6
4-4,99	28	23,9	12	10,3	1	0,9	41	35,0
5-5,99	10	8,5	7	6,0	2	1,7	19	16,2
6-7	3	2,6	0	0,0	0	0,0	3	2,6
Total	70	59,8	44	37,6	3	2,6	117	100,0

Median: 4; mean: 3.99; standard deviation: 1.054

Source: Own research.

Table 2

*Distribution of the agency index in the studied group*

Agency	Girls		Boys		Non-binary		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1-1,99	3	2,6	0	0,0	0	0,0	3	2,6
2-2,99	4	3,4	4	3,4	0	0,0	8	6,8
3-3,99	27	23,1	13	11,1	1	0,9	41	35,0
4-4,99	30	25,6	22	18,8	2	1,7	54	46,2
5-5,99	6	5,1	33	28,2	0	0,0	9	7,7
6-7	0	0,0	2	1,7	0	0,0	2	1,7
Total	70	59,8	44	37,6	3	2,6	117	100,0

Median: 4; mean: 4.01; standard deviation: 0.812

Source: Own research.

The distributions of both indices (communality and agency) follow a normal distribution, confirmed by the Kolmogorov – Smirnov test (for agency: test value 0.785,  $p=0.568$ ; for communality: test value 0.536,  $p=0.936$ ). Both distributions have similar central tendency measures, with average values near the middle of the scale and standard deviations around one point on the scale.

There is a strong negative correlation between the communality and agency indices: Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is  $-0.298$  ( $p=0.0011$ ). This means individuals with lower communality scores tend to have higher agency scores, and vice versa those with high communality have lower agency.

The negative correlation between agency and communality is stronger among older students. In the 18+ age group, the correlation coefficient is -0.333 ( $p=0.0107$ ), whereas in the under-18 group it is -0.280 ( $p=0.0316$ ). While no differences in agency were found between age groups, those aged 18 and over show a lower communality index. This difference was confirmed by a median test ( $p=0.033$ ), and Spearman's correlation between age and communality was -0.208 ( $p=0.0247$ ).

This negative correlation is evident both among technical school students (correlation -0.265,  $p=0.0343$ ) and high school students (correlation -0.318,  $p=0.0203$ ). These two subgroups do not differ significantly in agency or communality indices, which was also verified with a median test.

The negative correlation between agency and communality is much stronger among girls (-0.36) than among boys (-0.20), where it is statistically insignificant.

## **2. Are there any differences in these orientations between genders, and if so, what are they?**

Differences between gender groups were tested using the median test. No significant differences in agency or communality levels between girls and boys were found. Girls tend to have a slightly higher communality level (mean 4.11) than boys (mean 3.75), while boys have a slightly higher agency level (4.18) than girls (3.89). From Tables 1 and 2, it is also visible that extremely low communality values do not appear among girls, whereas extremely low agency values are absent among boys. A similar pattern is observed with extremely high values: girls do not show extremely high agency, and boys do not show extremely high communality. Thus, gender differences in these variables might exist but proving this would require a larger sample size.

As discussed in Problem 1, communality and agency are inversely related across the entire group, but this relation is much clearer among girls (Spearman's correlation -0.363,  $p=0.002$ ), and less so and statistically insignificant among boys.

## **3. Is there a relationship between these orientations and students' social participation in school activities, and if so, what kind of relationship?**

Students' social participation in the school environment was examined using three questions:

1. Have you ever been a member of the student council?
2. Have you ever held the role of class representative, deputy, or treasurer?
3. Have you been part of a school volunteer group?

For each question, respondents answered “yes” or “no,” dividing the sample into two subgroups. The median test was used to check for significant differences between these subgroups regarding agency and communality indices.

Table 3

*Distribution of responses to questions about students' social participation in the school space*

Question	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
1. Have you ever been a member of the student council?	33	28,2	84	71,8	117	100,0
2. Have you ever held the position of class president, vice-president, or treasurer?	60	51,3	57	48,7	117	100,0
3. Have you been a member of a school group involved in volunteering?	50	42,7	67	57,3	117	100,0

Source: Own research.

It is worth noting that as many as 37 students (32.5%) answered “no” to all three questions (including 17 girls and 20 boys). Eighteen students out of 117 gave a positive answer to all three questions, of whom only three were boys. These gender differences were particularly noticeable in questions 1 and 3.

A relationship was observed between the response to question 3 and the level of communal orientation. Students with a higher level of communal orientation were more likely to respond positively to this question than those with a low level. The arithmetic mean of the communal orientation index among students who participated in volunteering was 4.27, while among those who answered “no” to question 3, the average was 3.79. This difference, tested using the Student's t-test, is statistically significant at the 0.014 level. It is also noteworthy that younger students were significantly more likely to answer positively to the question about volunteering.

#### **4. Is there a relationship between agentic and communal orientations and students' social participation in environmental protection activities, and if so, what kind of relationship?**

Students' social participation in environmental protection activities was examined using three questions:

1. Have you participated in school activities for environmental protection?
2. Have you initiated any school activities for environmental protection?
3. Would you describe yourself as someone who cares about the natural environment?

Each of these questions could be answered with “yes” or “no.” Thus, each question divided the surveyed group into two subgroups. The median test was

used to assess the significance of differences between these subgroups in terms of two orientation indicators: agentic orientation and communal orientation. In addition, the significance of differences between the mean levels of these orientations in the subgroups was tested using the Student's t-test.

Table 4

*Distribution of responses to questions about students' social participation in environmental protection activities*

Question	Yes		No		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
4. Have you participated in school activities for environmental protection?	71	60,7	46	39,3	117	100,0
5. Have you initiated any school activities for environmental protection?	24	20,5	93	79,5	117	100,0
6. Would you describe yourself as someone who cares about the natural environment?	88	75,2	29	24,8	117	100,0

Source: Own research.

No significant relationship was found between the responses to questions regarding participation in environmental protection activities and the indicators of agency and communion. It can be assumed that neither agency nor communion is associated with activity in favor of the natural environment, at least within the studied group. No differences were found in the distribution of responses to questions 4 – 6 based on gender, age, or type of school either.

## Discussion of Results

Measurements of agency and communion levels among young people have been conducted using various tools, which makes it difficult to directly compare the results obtained with those from other populations. The scale of agency and communion by Wojciszke and Szlendak used in this study proved to be a tool that effectively differentiates the examined traits, as evidenced by the normal distribution of agency and communion scores in the studied group.

As for the sense of agency, previous studies (Valås, 2001; Jones, de-Wit, Fernyough et al., 2008; Donald, Koolwal, Annan et al., 2017; Wojciszke & Cieślak, 2014) have indicated higher levels of this trait among boys/men. Hurault, Broc, Crône et al. (2020) demonstrated that men show higher levels of so-called *positive agency* (capacity for active action), while women tend to report higher levels of *negative agency* (perception of limitations in action).

A study on adolescents from 14 countries showed higher agency levels among boys (Zimmerman, Moreau, Wilopo et al., 2019), although this pattern is likely shaped by cultural factors. For instance, Chinese girls displayed higher agency levels than boys, whereas in Muslim-majority countries (e.g., Egypt, Burkina Faso) and in India, boys showed significantly higher agency. Sczesny, Nater, and Eagly (2018) also highlighted the importance of cultural and economic contexts in shaping agency.

Communal orientation is also differentiated by gender and cultural background. In Spanish/Latino cultures, men demonstrated a higher sense of social integration than women (Lardler, Opara, Cantu et al., 2022).

According to existing research, social participation is a characteristic strongly influenced by life conditions and personal experiences. Speer, Peterson, Armstead et al. (2013) identified a positive relationship between social participation and agency, although one of the two examined aspects of agency – **interactional agency** – was linked to participation only among individuals with low income. Gender differences were also observed in the second aspect – **intrapersonal agency** – again, only within low-income populations.

Among the surveyed group, the level of communal orientation decreases with age. This pattern was also observed by Cicognani, Zani, and Albanesi (2012), who additionally pointed out ambiguities regarding the relationship between gender and communal orientation, suggesting the need for further research in this area.

The social engagement of the students studied can be described as average, with more declarations than actual participation. According to a comparative study covering 141 countries (Global Youth Participation Index), Poland ranks 37th in overall youth participation and 39th in the civic space component (score: 76/100, equal to Portugal and Slovenia), while the top scores (over 90/100) are held by New Zealand, Malta, and Norway.

## Conclusion

The results of this study allow for several conclusions regarding agency and communion, and their relationship to social participation among young people.

Most students demonstrated medium levels of both agency and communion, situated around the midpoint of the measurement scales. A strong inverse relationship was observed between agency and communion: individuals with low agency tended to have high communion, and vice versa. This pattern was particularly prominent among girls. Communal orientation decreases with age among the studied participants. Young people are increasingly focused on themselves and their own goals, often disregarding the needs of the community. Iso-

lation and the lack of social engagement for the common good can have disastrous consequences. Flood, earthquakes, wars, and terrorism are social phenomena that are easier to overcome within a group that communicates and cooperates with one another.

Girls showed higher levels of communion, while boys scored higher in agency, a pattern typical for Western cultural contexts. However, a changing trend can be observed. Young women are increasingly prioritizing their own needs over communal ones. This may, in the future, completely transform the structure of the family and the roles traditionally associated with it. A probable outcome of these changes may also be that the majority of women will abandon plans to start a family and become unwilling to devote part of their lives to caregiving and raising children. Professional development may become the primary life goal for woman.

Social participation among the surveyed students was moderate many had not engaged in any concrete activities for their school or local environment. Girls and younger students (regardless of gender) showed higher levels of social engagement.

Students with higher communion were more likely to report involvement in volunteering. No relationship was found between either agency or communion and involvement in environmental activities.

A potentially valuable next step would be to conduct a study using various tools for measuring agency and communion and to develop a conversion algorithm that would allow for comparison across different populations and measurement methods.

A more in-depth diagnosis of social participation attitudes could be achieved through the development of a more comprehensive diagnostic tool. Such a tool would enable the creation of a model linking motivational and volitional traits in young people with their behavior in the social sphere. This model should take into account socio-cultural determinants, which would also need to be diagnosed.

In the context of this study, it can be inferred that the level of agency is associated with the dominance of the Adult Ego State in an individual's personality this allows for responsible and conscious influence on and shaping of social reality. Similarly, communion understood here as the ability to build relationships and collaborate may result from the integration of the Adult Ego State with other ego states, allowing for a balance between individual agency and group needs.

One could also interpret that effective social participation among young people requires the functioning of the Integrated Adult a state that enables rational decision-making, adherence to social values and norms, and emotional engagement and creativity.

Given the results, the higher level of communion observed in girls, and the higher level of agency in boys, may be interpreted through the lens of differing dynamics in the development and use of ego states. Girls, when in social relations, may be more inclined to engage both the Parent and Child ego states alongside the Adult, while boys tend to prioritize the Adult Ego State, focusing more on task-oriented activity. The age-related decline in communion might reflect either development or limitations in the growth of the Integrated Adult, which is key to mature, conscious social participation.

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## **Orientacja sprawcza i wspólnotowa oraz partycypacja społeczna młodzieży w wieku 14–19 lat – raport z badań**

### **Streszczenie**

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie wyników badań diagnozujących orientacje sprawcze i wspólnotowe młodych uczniów w wieku 14–19 lat w odniesieniu do partycypacji społecznej młodzieży w działaniach podejmowanych na rzecz ich społeczności. Zaangażowanie i aktywność społeczna członków danej społeczności są jednym z czynników warunkujących jej rozwój. Prezentowane wyniki badań stanowią próbę zbadania znaczenia poczucia sprawstwa dla świadomego, odpowiedzialnego angażowania się w działania i partycypację społeczną wśród uczniów wybranych szkół średnich w średniej wielkości mieście. Przyjęto założenie, że wymiar sprawczości (działania lub ich braku) jako wpływu osoby na wydarzenia może być istotnym aspektem budowania własnego obrazu siebie, postrzegania swojej roli w otaczającym świecie, motywacji do podejmowania określonych działań, ale także rozumienia i interpretowania świata oraz zachodzących w nim zjawisk. Ostatecznie poruszona problematyka wydaje się istotna ze względu na społeczne konsekwencje kształtowania lub niekształtowania przekonania o możliwości konstruowania własnej biografii, jak również przekonania o możliwości wpływania na otaczającą rzeczywistość. Wyniki można też odnieść do teorii analizy transakcyjnej Erica Berne’a, w której stan ego Dorosłego umożliwia świadomą, racjonalną ocenę sytuacji i aktywność społeczną, co może przyczynić się do lepszego zrozumienia mechanizmów budowania zaangażowania i odpowiedzialności społecznej wśród młodzieży.

**Słowa kluczowe:** orientacja sprawcza, orientacja wspólnotowa, partycypacja społeczna, odpowiedzialność, działanie społeczne, analiza transakcyjna.



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## Transactional analysis in the education of art therapists: “The Book of My Life”

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### Abstract

The study explored the integration of Transactional Analysis (TA) and art therapy in postgraduate studies of art therapy. Participants were 52 students who completed the Ego State Questionnaire (Egogram) before and after a five-hour workshop entitled “The Book of My Life.” During the workshop, students created art books representing the Parent, Adult and Child ego states and wrote short reflections. Quantitative analyses showed a significant increase in the Creative Child scale ( $p < .001$ ,  $SMD = 0.264$ ) and a trend toward growth in the Spontaneous Child scale ( $p = .065$ ). Other scales remained stable. In interpreting the Egogram results, increases in the Creative and Spontaneous Child scales were understood as indicators of enhanced expressive freedom, playfulness, and emotional authenticity — features associated with greater psychological flexibility and integration of the self.

Qualitative analysis indicated that self-awareness was the most frequently reported theme. Reflections on childhood were significantly associated with negative emotions (Fisher  $p = .04$ ,  $OR = 5.44$ ), while ambivalence was less common when self-awareness was explicitly mentioned (trend  $p = .08$ ). These findings suggest that combining TA with art therapy promotes personal reflection, activates creativity and spontaneity, and strengthens readiness for professional practice. Limitations include a convenience sample and the absence of long-term follow-up.

**Keywords:** Transactional Analysis, art therapy education, ego states, self-awareness, creativity.

## Introduction

Art therapy is a discipline that integrates diverse theoretical and practical approaches, supporting the personal growth, awareness, and self-awareness of participants in the therapeutic process. In the context of this study, which focused on the personal development of postgraduate students in the program *Art Therapy with Elements of Pedagogical Therapy*, who during their studies are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and their impact on personal and professional life, particular importance is given to the analysis of ego states. A useful framework for this process is Transactional Analysis developed by Eric Berne (Berne, 2008). Concentrating on the ego states of Child, Adult, and Parent provides a deeper understanding of one's thoughts and behaviours. The ability to reflect on them plays a significant role in preparing art therapists for self-exploration and for their future professional practice with clients.

## Self-awareness as a foundation in the education of art therapists

Contemporary education of art therapists increasingly emphasizes not only theoretical knowledge and technical skills, but also the necessity of personal development and the systematic deepening of self-reflection. Self-awareness, understood as the ability to recognize one's emotional states, behavioral patterns, and defense mechanisms (Filice & Weese, 2024, p. 585), constitutes a key professional competence that directly influences the quality of the helping relationship. Its absence fosters transference and projection, which in turn creating a risk of disrupting the therapeutic process (Prasko et al., 2022, p. 2132). For this reason, educational programs include elements of personal work, supervision, and workshops focused on insight, and they also require a coherent, accessible language for describing internal experiences.

Art therapy provides such a language through image, metaphor, and narrative. The creative process evokes emotions and memories that are often inaccessible in therapeutic conversation, while artworks serve as a visible starting point for reflection, reinterpretation, and the integration of identity (Chmielnicka-Plaskota & Kompowska-Marek, 2025, p. 55; Malchiodi, 2014, pp. 79–173). In this context, Transactional Analysis, by offering a conceptual framework for self-exploration, supports the organization of experiences and their conscious processing.

This study is situated at the intersection of art therapy education and self-reflection. Its focus is the extent to which directed creative work may promote the development of self-awareness among students. Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis, based on the concept of three fundamental ego states: Parent, Adult,

and Child, provides a clear model for describing the inner dynamics of the individual (Berne, 2004, pp. 16–20). Within this framework, ego states are not permanent personality traits but functional aspects of the self, that manifest in thinking, feeling, and behaviour.

Importantly for the present study, reflecting on these states enables a better understanding of one's own reactions, patterns, and beliefs, thereby supporting the growth of self-awareness. The conscious recognition of active ego states makes it possible to distinguish automatic patterns from deliberate choices, which is of considerable importance in both therapeutic and educational contexts.

In art therapy, working with metaphor and image creates a space in which individuals can view themselves from a distance while maintaining a deeply personal perspective. The symbolic representation of one's experiences, for example in the form of an artist's book, supports the integration of different aspects of identity and facilitates insight into the inner tensions between ego states. In this way, the creative process becomes a tool of meta-reflection, combining artistic expression with a deeper self-understanding (Józefowski, 2012, p. 136).

Art therapy in the education of students in this field has a dual dimension: it supports the personal development of participants while simultaneously serving as a didactic method. On the one hand, it enables the safe expression of emotions, the reduction of tension, and the integration of experiences. On the other, it allows students to familiarise themselves with methods "from the inside", to experience their effects, and to develop interpretative competences. The creative process thus becomes both a tool of self-analysis and a form of professional practice, preparing students for future work with clients, through the cultivation of skills in understanding visual expression and engaging in reflection on its meaning.

Self-diagnostic workshops, such as creating the artist's book "The Book of My Life," support the recognition and naming of one's own ego states. Such workshops provide students with the opportunity to integrate different life roles and confront their personal stories, strengthening insight and self-awareness. In this way, art therapy becomes not only a therapeutic method, but also a vital element of education, in which personal development forms the foundation for professional competences in the helping professions.

## **Interdisciplinary connections between art therapy and Transactional Analysis**

Art therapy, as a method of therapeutic work using the medium of art, and Transactional Analysis, as a psychological theory and therapeutic method aimed at understanding and improving interpersonal relationships, converge

in a shared objective: supporting the development of self-awareness and the integration of experiences.

In Transactional Analysis, a key aspect is the recognition and naming of the dynamics of ego states (Berne, 2004, pp. 21–25). In art therapy, this dynamic can find symbolic expression through image, metaphor, and narrative, which facilitates its grasp and subsequent reflection (Bartel, 2024, pp. 71–77). This perspective corresponds well with the Expressive Therapies Continuum (ETC) model, proposed by S. Kagin and V. Lusebrink, which describes levels of creative functioning ranging from sensory-motor, through affective, to cognitive-symbolic and creative modes (Lusebrink, 2010, pp. 173–174). From this point of view, the artistic process becomes a space in which inner states and psychological dynamics may be observed in the form of creative expression. Both Transactional Analysis and art therapy are based on the idea of inner dialogue and the creation of a space, where the individual can recognise, name and work through personal experiences. In the educational dimension, combining these two approaches allows students not only to acquire theoretical foundations, but also to immediately relate them to personal creative practice, linking reflection with direct experience (see Bartel, 2024, pp. 71–138).

Seen this way, the connections indicate that integrating Transactional Analysis and art therapy creates a coherent framework, both for deepening self-reflection and for developing the practical competences of future art therapists.

## **The ego state as a category that can be operationalised in creative expression**

The ego states: Parent, Adult, and Child, are categories that can be identified not only in the observation of behaviour or interpersonal relations, but also in various forms of expression and modes of response. The Natural Child may be revealed through spontaneity, kindness, and emotional freedom, whereas the Adapted Child appears in behaviours marked by politeness, the pursuit of harmony, and the ability to adjust. The Nurturing Parent manifests in care, support, and readiness to help, while the Critical Parent is expressed through firmness, control, and authority. The Adult, in turn, becomes visible in logical thinking, analysis, problem-solving, and the capacity for detachment (see Hey, 2010, p. 100, as cited in Kraczla, 2023, p. 287). Each ego state may also be expressed in metaphor, narrative, and the structure of visual works, becoming a starting point for reflection on oneself and one's own mechanisms of action.

In visual arts, the expression of the Natural Child may take the form of a free, spontaneous line, intense colours, or experimentation with texture. At times, it is manifested in the bold combination of incongruent elements, indicating open-

ness, playfulness, and the authenticity of the creator. The Adapted Child may be expressed in orderly composition, in the pursuit of harmony and compliance with task requirements, in attention to detail, or in adherence to aesthetic rules. The Nurturing Parent may be reflected in themes depicting care, protection, bonds, and symbolic nurturing of others, whereas the Critical Parent may emerge in a rigorous order of composition, sharp contrasts, strong lines, and a tense structure of the image. The Adult, in turn, may be conveyed through clear spatial organisation, logical selection of elements, reflective manipulation of form, and the ability to maintain distance from one's own work (see Malchiodi, 2014, pp. 503–515).

Artistic creation thus offers the possibility of observing and analysing the dynamics of ego states in material form. The resulting visual works become not only form of expression but also a kind of “mirror” in which individuals can recognise their own emotions, attitudes, and patterns of response. In this way, they perform a self-diagnostic function, revealing content often difficult to express verbally and opening space for self-reflection (Hinkel, 2022).

It should be emphasised, however, that these are only possible ways in which ego states may manifest in visual creation. Their interpretation is never obvious or unambiguous but rather serves as a starting point for further reflection and dialogue with the participant in the art therapy process.

## Literature review

The literature on the applications of Transactional Analysis in education and therapy is extensive and encompasses both empirical studies and theoretical contributions. In this article, only selected examples are cited, those that most clearly illustrate the potential of TA in developing self-awareness and competences in the helping professions.

A good example of the use of TA in an educational process, and simultaneously in the context of supporting students' psychological well-being, is an experimental study conducted among nursing students at the University of Medical Sciences in Kerman (Iran). The study implemented a four-week training programme based on Transactional Analysis, including elements such as script analysis, work on ego states, games and contracts. The results showed a significant increase in cognitive flexibility in the intervention group compared to the control group, as well as improved emotion regulation within the intervention group (Abbasszade et al., 2025). These findings indicate that TA can be an effective tool for supporting both psychological well-being and practical competences in the education of future professionals working in helping professions.

The reflective-methodological aspect of competences developed in the training of psychotherapists is illustrated by a study conducted among psychotherapy students in the TA modality at the Metanoia Institute in London. The study compared second-year students beginning clinical practice with a group of fourth-year students. The results indicated differences between the groups consistent with their level of training, suggesting the development of self-awareness and the ability to engage in contact among the more advanced students (van Rijn et al., 2011, pp. 16–24).

At the level of theoretical-diagnostic frameworks, Z. Wiecezorek's model is particularly useful, as it integrates the key categories of Transactional Analysis into a coherent structure of practice: ego states, transactional analysis, games, contracts, and script. The model functions as a common language and set of criteria, facilitating the observation and description of behaviours, the formulation of hypotheses, and the planning of interventions. In education, it allows for the organisation of teaching and the assessment of learning outcomes, while in research such as the examples cited earlier it provides a framework for interpreting results and comparing changes in competences. In this way, it connects students' developmental perspective with educational requirements and clinical practice (Wiecezorek, 2016, pp. 17–27).

In this context it is relevant to briefly refer to studies on the creative process in art therapy, which highlight its role in the integration of the self and in deepening insight into personality structures. The first is a review article by Haeyen (2019), which synthesises recent approaches and findings on art therapy, organising a catalogue of interventions aimed at mature, integrated self-functioning. The author combines the perspective of schema therapy with positive psychology and emphasises the role of play, flexibility, and creativity in moving beyond destructive patterns and building self-efficacy (Haeyen, 2019, pp. 1–15).

In a subsequent study conducted by Haeyen (2020), clear benefits of art therapy were observed in the emotional and social functioning of individuals with personality disorders. These most prominently concerned emotional expression, stabilisation of self-image, autonomy, and insight into personal behaviour patterns. The effects increased over time and were not differentiated by age, gender, or diagnostic cluster. They were facilitated by the therapist's non-judgemental stance and by maintaining a balance between freedom and structure (Haeyen et al., 2020).

To conclude this section, it is also worth mentioning a study on online art therapy, which demonstrated its potential in supporting self-integration and adaptive functions among individuals with a neurotic personality organisation. In the study by Çataldaş (2024), a nine-week cycle of art therapy sessions conducted remotely contributed to improvements in ego functions and emotion regulation in the experimental group, regardless of age or other demographic

variables. These findings show that even in online settings, creative expression can effectively support processes of self-regulation and the development of interpersonal abilities (Çataldaş et al., 2024, pp. 74–84).

In the literature, there are few but significant attempts to combine Transactional Analysis with art therapy. This direction is particularly important, as both approaches focus on developing self-awareness, reflexivity, and the modification of maladaptive relational patterns. The integration of TA and art therapy opens new possibilities in both clinical and educational practice, and its potential calls for further exploration, including in the studies presented in this article.

The first example is an experiment conducted in South Korea among housewives with higher education, raising children in early school age. Group art therapy combined with methods of Transactional Analysis contributed to the modification of parenting styles in the studied group. Democratic and autonomous attitudes as well as consistency increased, while parental stress decreased, particularly stress associated with the child's difficult temperament (Lim et al., 2015, pp. 649–670).

Another example is the publication by I. Levkova and P. Minchev, which discusses the integration of art therapy methods with the Transactional Analysis approach. The authors show how techniques derived from the arts, such as collage or music therapy, can support the process of uncovering unconscious content, recognising ego states, and strengthening the therapeutic relationship. The presented case studies demonstrate that the use of these methods facilitates both emotional expression and insight into personal patterns, while also enabling therapists to deepen their understanding of transactional dynamics (Levkova & Minchev, 2021, pp. 582–587).

The integration of art therapy and Transactional Analysis was also applied by J. Bloomgarden and F. F. Kaplan (1993), who applied visualisation and artistic activities as elements of group work. Referring to J. Loevinger's concept of ego development, the authors pointed out that combining art therapy techniques with Transactional Analysis and existential therapy promotes self-awareness, integration of experiences, and the formation of mature modes of functioning. The described model illustrates how creative methods can support the process of personality development within the perspective of TA (Bloomgarden & Kaplan, 1993, pp. 201–207).

Finally, it is worth emphasising that the literature also contains descriptions of clinical practice in which art therapists consciously combine Transactional Analysis with creative methods. One such example is the approach of Australian art therapist P. Howfield, who, in her work with children, families, and couples, uses TA to structure relationships and communication, while employing artistic activities as a space for revealing ego states and interactional patterns. These applications indicate that the integration of the two approaches is not only possible, but also brings practical effects in various therapeutic contexts (Davidson, n.d.).

The preceding examples illustrate the potential of combining TA and art therapy, which provides the starting point for presenting the study undertaken in this article.

## **Aim and rationale of the study**

Incorporating Transactional Analysis into the curriculum of art therapy students can broaden opportunities for developing self-awareness and reflecting on one's own functioning. Previous research shows that TA supports the understanding of ego states and communication patterns, while art therapy facilitates self-integration and insight into personality structures. Nevertheless, the literature rarely combines these two perspectives in an educational context. The present study aimed to examine whether introducing elements of Transactional Analysis into the educational process of postgraduate students in *Art therapy with elements of pedagogical therapy* could deepen their self-awareness, enhance their ability to recognise ego states, and increase reflection on themselves and their experiences. In doing so, the study addresses a gap in the literature, where empirical evidence is lacking on whether TA can serve as a valuable tool for supporting the education of future art therapists.

## **Context and study design**

The study was conducted within the framework of the postgraduate programme *Art Therapy with Elements of Pedagogical Therapy* at the Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw. The participants were students of this programme (N = 52). The study structure followed a pretest–posttest structure: questionnaire measures (Egogram) were administered immediately before the workshop and after its completion. In parallel, short qualitative reflections were collected following the sessions.

The intervention was the art therapy workshop *“The Book of My Life”*, combining elements of Transactional Analysis and creative work. Participants created artist's books referring to the three ego states (Child, Adult, Parent), and then formulated brief descriptions of their experiences and insights from the process. This structure allowed for triangulation, juxtaposing changes in Egogram profiles with the narrative and emotional content expressed in the artworks and accompanying self-reflections.

## Participants

The study involved 52 postgraduate students of the *Art Therapy with Elements of Pedagogical Therapy* programme, aged 25–55. The group consisted of 49 women and 3 men. The inclusion criterion was participation in the workshop “*The Book of My Life*.” No exclusion criteria were applied beyond withdrawal from the workshop. Recruitment was natural, encompassing all students enrolled in the course in a given semester. Participation was voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent for inclusion in the project and for the anonymous analysis of their results.

## Research questions and hypotheses

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. Does participation in the *Book about My Life* workshop, based on the integration of Transactional Analysis and art therapy, result in changes in Egogram scores between the pretest and the posttest?
2. What kinds of themes and emotions related to ego states most frequently appear in participants’ self-reflections?
3. What themes and emotions most commonly accompany participants during the process of creating and discussing their books?
4. To what extent are participants’ reflections after the workshop consistent with their egogram results?

On the basis of the literature reviewed, three hypotheses were developed:

### Hypotheses

- **H1:** The creative process during the workshop will foster the activation of attitudes associated with spontaneity, expression, and creativity.
- **H2:** The workshop integrating TA and art therapy will be perceived by most participants as a valuable educational and developmental experience.
- **H3:** Participation in the workshop will contribute to an increase in self-awareness and insight into the functioning of ego states.

## Intervention

The workshop “*The Book of My Life*” was conducted using the artist’s book technique and lasted for five academic hours. The sessions followed these stages:

1. **Pretest** – completion of the Egogram questionnaire.
2. **Introduction** – a brief overview of E. Berne’s theory, with attention drawn to the division of the book into three stages corresponding to the ego states: Child, Adult, and Parent.

3. **Book creation** – each student individually created an artist's book using collage, with sketchbooks, coloured paper, magazines, fabrics, and self-brought materials. The task lasted 60 minutes, divided into three 20-minute parts corresponding to each ego state. Participants could adjust the time devoted to each section according to their needs, with an additional five minutes provided at the end to complete the state of their choice.
4. **Theory deepening** – a detailed discussion of the ego states and reflection on whether and how they were represented in the created books.
5. **Presentation and discussion** – each student had one minute to present their work. Afterwards, all books were displayed in a joint exhibition ("*The Library of Our Life*"), enabling participants to view all works and exchange insights.
6. **Posttest and reflection** – the Egogram questionnaire was completed again, results were calculated, and a group discussion followed concerning outcomes and personal insights. In addition, each participant was asked to provide a short written statement about their experiences and emotions related to the book-making process and the test analysis; these texts then served as material for qualitative analysis.

## Research measures – Egogram

To measure ego structures, the *Kwestionariusz Stanów Ego* [Ego States Questionnaire], developed by M. Cichocka and A. Suchańska (Cichocka & Suchańska, 1989, pp. 33–59), was employed as part of the diagnostic techniques of Transactional Analysis. The tool consists of 60 items rated on a four-point scale (0 – never, 1 – sometimes, 2 – often, 3 – always). Responses are assigned to six categories of ego states: Critical Parent (Rodzic Krytyczny), Nurturing Parent (Rodzic Opiekuńczy), Adult (Dorośli), Adapted Child (Dziecko Dostosowane), Creative Child (Dziecko Twórcze), and Spontaneous Child (Dziecko Spontaniczne). The results can be presented numerically and as a graphic profile (egogram). The instrument enables analysis of the balance between ego states and is frequently applied in studies on self-awareness, communication, and individual functioning.

## Data analysis and results

Results of participants assessed with the TA questionnaire – Egogram, obtained before and after the art therapy process (N = 52), were analyzed for the presence of differences across all test scales. A paired Student's t-test was applied for scales with distributions not significantly deviating from normality, and the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used for scales requiring nonparametric testing.

Table 1  
Paired sample comparison tests for TA questionnaire scales

Scale	$\Delta M$	SMD	Statistic	p
Critical Parent	-0.077	-0.026	$t=0.235$	.815
Nurturing Parent	-0.135	-0.026	$t=0.428$	.670
Adult	-0.231	-0.083	$t=0.834$	.408
Adapted Child	0.25	0.068	$t=0.849$	.400
Creative Child	1.13	0.264	$W=175.5$	<.001***
Spontaneous Child	0.538	0.166	$t=-1.883$	.065

t – tStudent test statistic

W – Wilcoxon signed rank test statistic

Source: own research.

The results presented above show a statistically significant effect: an increase in scores on the Creative Child scale (SMD = 0.264,  $\Delta M = 1.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ) across the pre–post measurements. A statistical trend can also be observed for the Spontaneous Child scale where an increase in mean score was measured (SMD = 0.166,  $\Delta M = 0.538$ ,  $p=.065$ ).

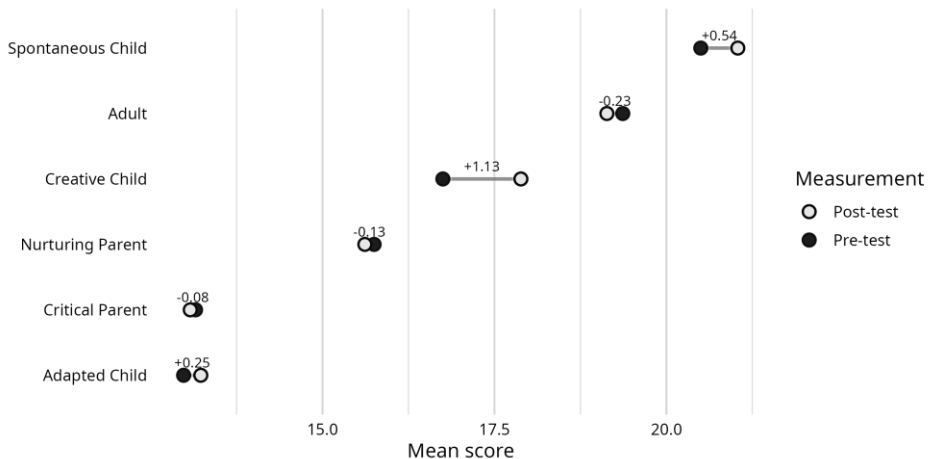


Figure 1  
Mean differences between pre-test and post-test score of TA questionnaire

Numbers show Post-Pre difference

Source: own materials.

According to the Ego State Questionnaire (Cichocka & Suchańska, 1989), the Creative Child is associated with imagination, originality, and the capacity for artistic and symbolic expression, while the Spontaneous Child reflects playfulness, emotional openness, and natural spontaneity in relationships. The observed increase in these two ego states suggests that the artistic process of creating the “Book of My Life” may have activated participants’ creative and expressive resources, reinforcing both reflective and experiential dimensions of learning. In line with this interpretation, the findings support Hypothesis 1, which predicted that the creative process during the workshop would foster attitudes linked to spontaneity, expression, and creativity.

## Qualitative Study – Data and Results

To complement the quantitative results, a qualitative analysis of participants’ written reflections was conducted, allowing for a deeper understanding of their experiences during the workshop.

### Qualitative Data Collection

At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to provide short written reflections on their experiences, emotions and insights. To facilitate this process, they were given five guiding questions:

1. *What feelings did you experienced while representing different ego states (Parent, Adult, Child) during the creation of your art book? Which of them felt most comfortable to you, and why?*
2. *Which chapter of your book turned out to be the richest in content? What contributed to its development, and what emotions or experiences dominated this part of your story?*
3. *What did you observe after calculating the results of the Egogram test? Did any of the results regarding your dominant ego states surprise you?*
4. *What new perspectives or discoveries about your life emerged during the workshop? How did these discoveries affect your perception of yourself and your past/future?*
5. *Did the process of creating an art book about your life affect your emotions and well-being, and if so, how? Do you think this effect will last after the workshop?*

It should be emphasized, that these questions served only as prompts to support reflection. Participants were free to address them selectively or to provide other observations they considered meaningful.

The collected statements were then imported into MAXQDA 24 software, which supported the coding and categorization process. The analysis combined quantitative information about the frequency of themes with qualitative exploration of participants' individual voices. A content analysis approach was applied, allowing us to identify recurring categories and patterns. Results are presented both quantitatively (as frequencies and percentages of themes) and qualitatively (through illustrative quotations from participants).

Table 2  
*Frequency of main categories in participants' reflections*

Category	N	%
Self-awareness	12	33.3
Negative emotions	11	30.6
Ambivalence	7	19.4
Confidence	4	11.1
Confusion	2	5.6

Source: own research.

The distribution of categories shows that *self-awareness* emerged as the most frequent theme, confirming H3, which predicted that the workshop would enhance participants' insight into ego states. A notable proportion of reflections also expressed *ambivalence*, suggesting that the process activated mixed or conflicting emotions, an expected element of personal exploration. *Confidence* was reported less frequently but highlights the empowering aspect of creative work with personal narratives. Finally, *confusion* and *negative feelings* appeared in a smaller but meaningful number of statements, indicating that for some participants, the art therapy process also surfaced unresolved difficulties, particularly when reflecting on childhood.

## Associations between themes and emotions

In order to identify areas that evoked deeper emotional reflections among participants in the art therapy process, the frequency of topics present in the feedback was compared with the emotional character of the statements using contingency analysis.

The results of the contingency analysis show a statistically significant dependence between the presence of negative feelings and references to childhood (Fisher's Exact test,  $p = .04$ , OR = 5.44). This suggests that the art therapy process may have evoked difficult childhood memories or experiences. Illus-

trative statements include: *“Part of my childhood was quite difficult for me, because of the strong emotions associated with it”* and *“Childhood feels oppressive to me.”*

Table 3

*Association between negative feelings and references to childhood*

Childhood Topic	Negative Feelings		Total
	Absent	Present	
Absent	22	6	28
Present	3	5	8
Total	25	11	36

OR= 5.44, Fisher’s Exact test p-value =0.04

Source: own research.

Another interesting trend was observed between ambivalent (emotion-free) statements and references to self-awareness, as shown in the table below

Table 4

*Relationship between ambivalence and self-awareness in participants’ reflections*

Self-awareness topic	Ambivalence		Total
	Absent	Present	
Absent	12	6	18
Present	17	1	18
Total	29	7	36

OR= 0.118, Fisher’s Exact test p-value =0.08

Source: own research.

The results indicate a trend suggesting that statements coded as *ambivalent* (neutral, mixed, or unclear in emotional tone) occurred less frequently when participants explicitly referred to self-awareness. Although this association did not reach conventional statistical significance (Fisher’s Exact test  $p = .08$ ), the pattern may suggest that reflecting on self-awareness was accompanied by more decisive and emotionally engaged statements. Illustrative quotes include: *“Balancing — no ego state dominates”* or *“The stages were strongly mixed, with concentration on myself.”*

To deepen the understanding of participants’ experiences, a qualitative analysis of their written reflections was conducted. Four overarching themes emerged, capturing both the challenges and developmental opportunities evoked by the workshop.

The first theme concerned **self-awareness and personal reflection**. Many participants emphasized that the process of creating the art book encouraged them to analyze their own ego states and patterns, often leading to insights about their past and present functioning. As one student noted, *"I realized how much responsibility I take for myself,"* while another reflected, *"Balancing — no ego state dominates."*

A second recurring theme was **difficult childhood memories**. The creative task often brought back experiences of pain, exclusion, or unresolved emotions from early life. This was particularly evident when working on the Child ego state, which aligned with the quantitative finding of a significant link between childhood content and negative emotions. As participants expressed, *"Part of my childhood was quite difficult, due to the strong emotions connected with it,"* and *"Childhood feels oppressive to me."*

The third theme involved **ambivalence and mixed emotions**. For some participants, reflections were marked by uncertainty or difficulty in identifying with one dominant ego state. Their narratives illustrated a sense of inner conflict or confusion, for example: *"The stages were strongly mixed, with concentration on myself,"* or *"I couldn't find myself among my peers; I felt excluded."*

Finally, a fourth theme highlighted a **sense of responsibility and self-efficacy**. The workshop not only surfaced challenges but also reinforced feelings of autonomy and readiness to face adult life with maturity. One participant described this as: *"Taking care of myself, being responsible for myself. Even if adult life is difficult, it is worth it."*

Together, these themes demonstrate that the integration of transactional analysis and art therapy stimulated deep personal exploration, simultaneously activating difficult emotions and fostering greater awareness, creativity, and responsibility. In summary, the qualitative findings confirm that the workshop was perceived as a valuable educational and developmental experience (H2). Participants emphasized its role in fostering deeper self-awareness and reflection on ego states, which aligns with the assumption that the integration of transactional analysis and art therapy supports personal growth (H3). At the same time, the presence of difficult childhood memories and ambivalent emotions shows that the process not only promoted insight and agency but also encouraged participants to confront unresolved experiences. In addition to the written reflections, participants' artistic books themselves provided valuable qualitative material, visually expressing the same emotional and cognitive processes captured in their narratives.

## Artistic outcomes as qualitative material

The resulting art books provided a visual counterpart to participants' written reflections. They varied widely in form and mode of expression — some resem-

bled visual diaries, others narrative collages or spatial objects made from fabric, string, or textured paper. Participants often used symbols and short written fragments to represent relationships between the Parent, Adult, and Child ego states. These artistic forms revealed a broad emotional spectrum and diverse creative strategies, complementing the self-reflective narratives. The article includes selected photographs documenting the workshop process and examples of participants' books (figs. 1–6).



*Fig. 1, 2*

Students during the process of creating their artist's books.

Source: own materials.



*Fig 3,4*

Students presenting pages from their books on ego states.

Source: own materials.

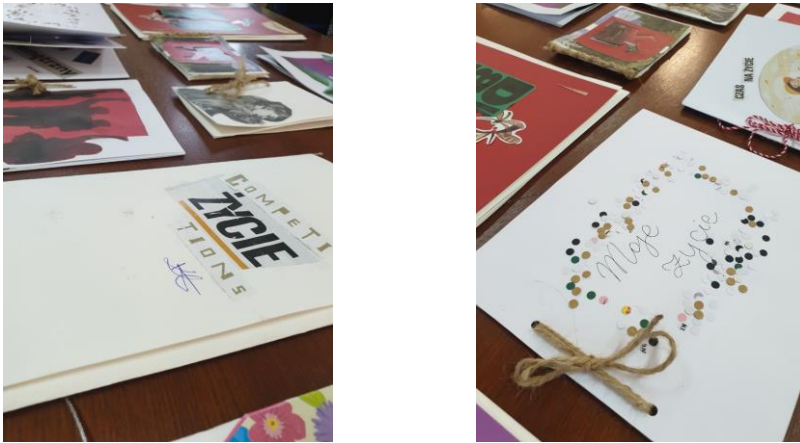


Fig 5,6

"The Library of Our Life" – exhibition of the artist's books created during the workshop.

Source: own materials.

## Discussion and Conclusions

The present study examined the integration of Transactional Analysis (TA) and art therapy in the educational context of postgraduate training for art therapists. Quantitative results showed a significant increase in the Creative Child ego state, with a trend also observed for the Spontaneous Child. These findings suggest that creative and expressive resources were activated during the workshop, aligning with the central role of artistic creation in facilitating spontaneity and imagination. In turn, the qualitative analysis revealed that participants most frequently reflected on self-awareness, emotional processing, and life narratives, with some statements pointing to difficult childhood experiences. Taken together, the results indicate that the workshop was perceived as a valuable developmental experience, supporting both personal reflection and professional training goals.

These findings are consistent with earlier reports showing that art therapy enhances integration of the self and fosters emotional insight (Haeyen, 2018; Haeyen et al., 2020). They also resonate with studies where combining TA with creative methods supported reflection on ego states and communication patterns (Bloomgarden & Kaplan, 1993). Importantly, the observed strengthening of the Creative Child mode is in line with the theoretical role of creativity as a resource for flexibility and problem-solving (Berne, 1961/2016).

Nevertheless, some participants also reported ambivalence or recalled difficult childhood experiences, which suggests that art therapy can bring unresolved material to the surface. This aligns with the broader view of art therapy as a safe but emotionally evocative process (Malchiodi, 2014). Such outcomes highlight the importance of the therapist's supportive stance, balancing freedom of expression with structure — factors already noted as critical for effective outcomes in art therapy with personality disorders (Haeyen et al., 2020).

Additionally, the study was conducted with a naturalistic, convenience sample of postgraduate art therapy students ( $N = 52$ ) from a single university, predominantly women. The limited sample size reflects the actual enrollment structure of the postgraduate program, which typically includes around 30 students per year. The study was carried out over two consecutive academic years, allowing data collection from two cohorts; however, not all students were present during the workshop session. The gender imbalance mirrors the reality of art therapy education and practice, where women strongly prevail due to the helping and interpersonal nature of the profession. The absence of randomization and a control group resulted from the educational context and small cohort size, which did not allow for random assignment. Given the 1.5-year duration of postgraduate studies, a long-term follow-up was not feasible at this stage. Consequently, the present project should be regarded as a pilot study exploring the feasibility of integrating Transactional Analysis with art therapy in educational settings. Future research could address these issues by introducing control groups, longer-term outcome measures, and additional instruments for assessing self-awareness and integration.

In conclusion, the integration of TA and art therapy in postgraduate training appears to be a promising approach. It not only supports self-awareness and insight into ego states but also strengthens creative and spontaneous aspects of functioning. For art therapy education, these results provide an argument for including TA concepts in curricula, both as a diagnostic framework and as a tool for personal development.

Other approaches to developing self-awareness in helping professions, such as mindfulness training, reflective journaling, or supervision, also aim to enhance insight and emotional regulation. However, these methods typically rely on verbal reflection and cognitive processing. In contrast, combining Transactional Analysis with art therapy introduces a visual and symbolic dimension that allows participants to externalize and reframe inner dynamics between ego states. This multimodal approach may therefore facilitate a deeper, embodied form of reflection, bridging cognitive understanding with emotional and creative expression.

From an educational perspective, such workshops can be effectively integrated into art therapy curricula as experiential learning modules that support

both professional growth and self-awareness. Participation in reflective creative work based on Transactional Analysis concepts enables students to better understand their inner mechanisms, empathy, and relational patterns essential in therapeutic practice. The integration of TA and artistic expression may also serve as a valuable component of supervision and continuing professional education for art therapists.

At the practical level, the workshop model described in this study can be incorporated into art therapy curricula as a structured yet creative method for fostering reflective competence. Integrating Transactional Analysis with art-based exploration allows students to experience theoretical concepts in action, deepening their understanding of interpersonal dynamics and internal dialogue. Such experiential learning may enhance both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills that are essential for professional art therapy practice, including self-awareness, empathy, and the ability to analyze relational processes.

Future studies will aim to extend this pilot project by including students from other postgraduate art therapy programs in Poland, thereby increasing the diversity and representativeness of the sample. It is also planned to introduce a control group completing the Ego State Questionnaire at two time points without participation in the art therapy workshop, which will allow for comparison of spontaneous and intervention-related changes. A short-term follow-up is further envisaged to examine the stability of observed effects. Such an expanded design will enable a more comprehensive evaluation of the educational and developmental impact of integrating Transactional Analysis into art therapy curricula.

## Final remarks

The findings of this study highlight the practical value of integrating Transactional Analysis into art therapy education. Beyond confirming its developmental benefits for students, the approach offers a structured yet creative framework that may enrich curricula and better prepare future art therapists for reflective professional practice. Further research is needed to examine the long-term effects of this integration across diverse educational and clinical contexts.

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## **Analiza transakcyjna w kształceniu arteterapeutów – „Książka o moim życiu”**

### **Streszczenie**

Celem badania była analiza możliwości łączenia analizy transakcyjnej (AT) i arteterapii w kształceniu arteterapeutów. W projekcie uczestniczyło 52 studentów studiów podyplomowych, którzy wypełnili Kwestionariusz Stanów Ego (Egogram) przed i po pięciogodzinnym warsztacie artetera-

peutycznym „Książka o moim życiu”. Podczas zajęć tworzyli książki artystyczne odnoszące się do stanów ego: Rodzica, Dorosłego i Dziecka, a następnie formułowali krótkie refleksje pisemne. Wyniki ilościowe wykazały wzrost w skali Dziecka Twórczego ( $p < 0,001$ ) oraz tendencję wzrostową w skali Dziecka Spontanicznego ( $p = 0,065$ ), przy stabilności pozostałych skal. Analiza jakościowa pokazała, że najczęściej pojawiającym się wątkiem była samoświadomość. Refleksje dotyczące dzieciństwa łączyły się częściej z emocjami negatywnymi, natomiast ambiwalencja była rzadsza, gdy uczestnicy odnosili się bezpośrednio do samoświadomości. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują, że integracja AT i arteterapii sprzyja autorefleksji, aktywizuje kreatywność i spontaniczność oraz wspiera przygotowanie do praktyki zawodowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** analiza transakcyjna, kształcenie arteterapeutów, stany ego, samoświadomość, kreatywność.

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## Passivity in Transactional Analysis and the Susceptibility of Users to Cyber Threats

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### Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between passivity strategies in transactional analysis and users' susceptibility to cyber threats. The main research problem concerned identifying which passive strategies are most strongly associated with risky online behaviours. The study was conducted in Poland using the CAWI method on a sample of 357 adults. Two tools were employed: the Passivity Questionnaire (Pierzchała, 2024) and the author's experimental Cyberthreat Susceptibility Questionnaire (Łęski, 2024). The results revealed statistically significant correlations between the strategies of Overadaptation and Doing Nothing and susceptibility to cyber threats, partially confirming the hypothesis that all forms of passivity increase risk. A positive relationship was also found between the Violence strategy and displaying one's private life on social media, which may indicate reduced sensitivity to privacy and a link to sharenting. These findings highlight the importance of psychological factors in cybersecurity and may inform preventive and educational initiatives aimed at strengthening users' digital self-protection competences.

**Keywords:** transactional analysis, passive strategies, cybersecurity, susceptibility to digital threats

### Introduction

Cybersecurity is currently one of the key and most frequently discussed areas of research. It encompasses not only technical issues related to the security

of hardware and software, but also social and personality aspects. Ultimately, it is the human being – the user of information systems – who determines whether the implemented protective mechanisms prove effective or not. Maalem Lahcen et al. (2020) point out that most cybersecurity incidents stem from the human factor. Effective protection therefore requires an interdisciplinary approach, integrating knowledge from computer science, psychology, criminology, and the behavioural sciences.

Recent studies have confirmed that human factors significantly impact cybersecurity, and that a holistic approach considering human behaviour and performance is crucial for both achieving and maintaining security principles (Al-Badayneh et al., 2025). Similarly, Nikum (2025) emphasises that attackers deliberately exploit psychological traits such as trust, curiosity, or cognitive shortcuts to gain unauthorised access through social engineering techniques like *pretexting*. This demonstrates that cybersecurity is not only a technological issue but also a deeply psychological and behavioural challenge. Wiederhold (2014) likewise argues that incorporating psychological insights addressing phenomena, such as bounded rationality and optimism bias, can substantially improve decision-making and reduce susceptibility to cybercrime.

In this context, it is particularly important to address the behavioural and social aspects of cybersecurity. As Kennison and Chan-Tin (2020) emphasise, in addition to users' knowledge and skills, their risk-taking tendencies and personality traits should also be taken into account. The authors suggest that such an approach can account for as much as 34% of the variance in engaging in risky online behaviours. Significant predictors of susceptibility to online threats also include internet addiction and impulsivity (Hadlington, 2017). In contrast, Łęski (2024) found a positive correlation between susceptibility to cyber threats and the tendency to enter negative affective states, as well as a negative correlation with orientation towards positive states.

These findings indicate that prevention in the field of cybersecurity should involve not only the transfer of knowledge about technical safeguards but also concern for the mental and emotional well-being of users. Concepts that enable a clear and accessible description of complex mechanisms of human behaviour are particularly useful here. One such framework is transactional analysis, which meets these conditions and makes it possible to interpret susceptibility to cyber threats in terms understandable to a broad audience.

## Passivity in Transactional Analysis

In this article, susceptibility to cyber threats is analysed in relation to the phenomenon of passivity, defined within the framework of transactional analy-

sis. Passivity does not merely denote a lack of action, as it is commonly understood, but also encompasses behavioural strategies that fail to lead to constructive problem-solving. According to the *Lexicon of Transactional Analysis Concepts and Terms*, passivity is defined as 'a failure to take responsibility for one's thinking, actions, and feelings. It is characterised by doing nothing or acting ineffectively, while at the same time withholding information about oneself. Passive behavioural strategies indicate the presence of discounting (ignoring information) and, through manipulation, compel another person or the wider environment to resolve one's problems' (Jagiela, 2023).

Five basic strategies of passivity are distinguished:

- **Doing Nothing:** directing energy towards refraining from action rather than addressing the problem.
- **Overadaptation:** excessive conformity to the expectations of others.
- **Agitation:** expending energy on repetitive, purposeless actions.
- **Incapacitation:** presenting oneself as incapable of acting and shifting responsibility onto others.
- **Violence:** expressing frustration through aggression towards the environment.

In the context of cybersecurity, each of these strategies may constitute a significant risk factor. Doing Nothing encourages neglect of basic security principles, such as using strong passwords or updating software. Overadaptation may lead to behaviours that conform to group expectations but fail to address individual risks. Agitation manifests as thoughtless, repetitive online actions, increasing the likelihood of incidents. Incapacitation may result in relinquishing responsibility for one's own digital security, and, when combined with Violence, can also involve behaviours that jeopardise the safety of other users.

In summary, the passivity strategies described in transactional analysis can serve as useful predictors of susceptibility to cyber threats, underscoring the need to consider psychological factors more fully in digital security research.

An important point of reference in the study of passivity is the work of A. Pierzchała, who addresses the issue from both a practical and a scholarly perspective. Her research explores, among other aspects, the phenomenon of passivity in the school environment, revealing its significant prevalence among both students and teachers (Pierzchała, 2013). In the context of this study, this is particularly relevant: if the hypothesis of a positive correlation between passive behaviours and susceptibility to cyber threats is confirmed, then a high level of passivity in schools – Institutions intended to foster attitudes conducive to cybersecurity – must be regarded as a serious concern.

In her work, Pierzchała does not confine herself to identifying the phenomenon of passivity but also investigates its sources and potential protective factors. In one of her projects, she demonstrated that a high level of emotional

intelligence shields individuals from the destructive manifestations of passivity. In the same publication, she also examined *reflectivity*, analysed through the dimensions of lack of self-confidence and caution. The results suggest that lack of self-confidence reinforces passivity in all its aspects, whereas caution functions as a protective factor (Pierzchała, 2024). Pierzchała's findings show that passivity is a complex phenomenon, the intensity of which depends both on risk factors and on the resources available to the individual. These conclusions affirm the value of exploring the relationship between passivity and susceptibility to cyber threats.

## Methodological Assumptions

The aim of this study was to examine potential correlations between users' tendencies to apply specific passive strategies and their engagement in behaviors that may compromise cybersecurity. The research was conducted in Poland using the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) method on a sample of 357 adults.

The group comprised 276 women and 81 men. The respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 76 years, with a mean age of 27.6 years for women and 31.6 years for men (median age: 23 in both groups). Most participants assessed their own competence in using new technologies as average, which suggests a relatively typical level of digital literacy among Internet users.

The central research question was formulated as follows: *Are there statistically significant correlations between individual passive strategies and users' tendencies to engage in risky online behaviors and to disregard basic cybersecurity principles?*

Accordingly, the following hypothesis was proposed: *There are statistically significant correlations between each of the passive strategies and the propensity to engage in potentially dangerous online behaviors.*

Two research instruments were employed. The first was the Passivity Questionnaire (PQ), developed by A. Pierzchała. This tool has undergone validation procedures and is scheduled for publication in the *Przegląd Badań Edukacyjnych* (Polish Journal of Educational Research) in 2025. It was previously used by Pierzchała (2024) to investigate the relationship between passivity, emotional intelligence, and reflectiveness.

The second instrument was the Cyberthreat Susceptibility Questionnaire (CSQ), developed by the author. It consists of 16 items addressing potentially risky online behaviors and adherence to basic cybersecurity principles. The questionnaire can be analyzed at both the item level and as a single scale meas-

uring susceptibility to cyber threats. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was approximately 0.7, which, given the exploratory character of the instrument, indicates acceptable reliability. This tool has already been used in the author's earlier research on relationships between ego states in transactional analysis, affective tendencies, and susceptibility to cyber threats (Łęski, 2024).

Similar diagnostic tools have been developed in other countries, including the Human Aspects of Information Security Questionnaire (HAIS-Q) (Parsons et al., 2017) and the Visual Analogue Scales (VAS) for modelling cyber-secure behaviour (Raywood-Burke et al., 2021). These instruments demonstrate that psychological and behavioural dimensions of cybersecurity can be measured reliably. However, they are typically designed for corporate or institutional environments, focusing on employees' compliance with organisational security policies. In contrast, the CSQ was designed to capture broader psychosocial aspects of cybersecurity relevant to ordinary Internet users, including personality-related and emotional factors described within the framework of transactional analysis. Thus, the tool extends the existing research tradition by addressing cybersecurity as a human–psychological phenomenon, not merely a technological or procedural one.

It is important to acknowledge certain limitations of the research. Conducting the survey online may have favoured individuals already comfortable with technology, potentially less susceptible to digital threats. Moreover, the gender imbalance in the sample, with women constituting nearly 77% of participants, may influence the generalisability of the findings. Future studies should therefore strive for a more balanced sample and include variables such as the intensity and context of Internet use, which could moderate the relationships between passivity strategies and susceptibility to cyber threats.

The study was conducted in Polish. For the purposes of this publication, the results and instruments were translated into English. It should be noted, however, that no validation studies have yet been conducted for English-language versions of the tools.

## Research Results

Due to the specific characteristics of the study group, Spearman's non-parametric correlation was used to identify potential relationships between variables. A summary of the correlations between the five passive strategies and statements from the Cyberthreat Susceptibility Questionnaire, where the coefficients were statistically significant, is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

*Correlations between passive strategies and behaviors potentially affecting cybersecurity. Statistically significant correlations are indicated in bold and with an asterisk.*

Cybersecurity:	Passive Strategies:				
	Violence	Incapacitation	Agitation	Overadaptation	Doing Nothing
I am able to effectively search for and select information on the Internet.	0.083	-0.062	0.051	<b>-0.167*</b>	0.035
I like to use the Internet late in the evening or at night – that's when I have peace and no one bothers me.	0.030	0.096	0.093	0.090	<b>0.204*</b>
In my online relationships, I sometimes react with anger and aggression.	0.050	<b>0.174*</b>	0.033	<b>0.166*</b>	0.091
Inviting people I've never met in real life to my circle of friends/followers on social media is OK.	0.035	-0.006	0.020	0.029	<b>0.107*</b>
I try to use strong passwords, containing combinations of different characters, and different ones for each important service I use.	-0.079	-0.041	0.004	<b>-0.120*</b>	0.013
On social media, I like to show my friends what I'm doing, where I'm going, what I'm watching, etc.	<b>0.106*</b>	0.053	0.017	0.013	-0.050
If I encounter violence on the Internet, I don't do anything – reacting in this environment is pointless.	-0.102	-0.056	-0.061	0.022	<b>0.155*</b>
Sometimes I visit sites with content like sex or violence – everything is for people.	-0.073	0.024	-0.102	0.027	<b>0.125*</b>

Source: Author's own research.

The statistical analysis revealed no strong associations. It should be emphasized that the Cyberthreat Susceptibility Questionnaire used in this study is an experimental tool that requires further refinement and validation. Nevertheless, the analysis of statistically significant correlations allowed the identification of noteworthy tendencies. Among the examined strategies, Doing Nothing and Overadaptation displayed the highest number of significant associations with risky behaviors. No statistically significant results were obtained for the Agitation strategy.

The Doing Nothing strategy was positively correlated with the statements:

- 'I like to use the Internet late in the evening or at night—that's when I have peace and no one bothers me.'
- 'Inviting people, I've never met in real life to my circle of friends/followers on social media is OK.'
- 'If I encounter violence on the Internet, I don't do anything—reacting in this environment is pointless.'
- 'Sometimes I visit sites with content such as sex or violence—everything is for people.'

These results suggest a user profile characterized by a passive and conformist attitude. Such individuals may opt for solutions that demand minimal cognitive and emotional effort (e.g., not verifying the identity of people on social media, not reacting to violence). Preference for nighttime activity may reflect a search for comfort, while accessing potentially harmful content may stem from its easy availability and its role as an accessible outlet for negative emotions.

The Overadaptation strategy was negatively correlated with declared competencies in searching for and selecting information and in using strong passwords. At the same time, it was positively correlated with a tendency to react with anger and aggression in online interactions. The negative correlations with digital competencies raise important questions. Do they reflect actual deficits, or rather low self-esteem and lack of confidence, consistent with the construct of Overadaptation? This issue requires further investigation, preferably with objective measures of competence. At the same time, the positive correlation with online aggression suggests that over-adaptive individuals may use cyberspace as an outlet for negative emotions. While in direct interactions they may suppress their needs to meet the expectations of others, the anonymity of online settings can facilitate the expression of frustration, consequently leading to risky behaviors.

A positive correlation was also found between the Incapacitation strategy and the propensity for anger and aggression online. Similar to individuals using the Overadaptation strategy, this may suggest that helplessness or passivity in the offline world is compensated for by aggressive behavior in the digital environment.

An interesting result was observed for the Violence strategy, which showed a positive correlation with the statement: *"On social media, I like to show my friends what I'm doing, where I'm going, what I'm watching, etc."* At first glance, this connection is not obvious. However, interpretation should be approached with caution. It can be assumed that both phenomena are underpinned by a need to demonstrate control and influence over the environment, as well as a limited respect for others' boundaries. In this context, it is worth referring to the increasingly debated phenomenon of "sharenting" (parents publishing images of their children), which some researchers classify as a form of digital violence that infringes on a child's privacy and autonomy. Nevertheless, this relationship requires in-depth analysis in future research.

When the analysis was conducted not at the level of single statements, but on the entire Cyberthreat Susceptibility scale, only one statistically significant correlation coefficient was observed for the Overadaptation strategy. Prior research by Pierzchała (2013) indicates that Overadaptation is among the most frequently observed passive strategies. The present results show that reliance on this strategy significantly increases cybersecurity risks, as confirmed by both the overall scale and item-level analysis. Over-adaptive individuals, seeking above all to conform to external demands, may neglect issues important from their own perspective, including those related to digital security.

## Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of the research presented in this publication was to determine potential correlations between users' tendency to employ specific passive strategies and their susceptibility to cyber threats. The main risk profiles identified are related to the strategies of Overadaptation and Doing Nothing, which displayed the highest number of significant correlations with risky online behaviours. Therefore, the hypothesis proposed in the methodological section was only partially confirmed.

The Overadaptation strategy was the only one that also showed a significant relationship with the overall scale of susceptibility to cyber threats, suggesting its dominant role as a potential risk factor. The results indicate that individuals who rely on this strategy may be less confident in their digital skills and more prone to compliance with external demands, which can reduce their attention to personal online safety. Similarly, the Doing Nothing strategy reflects a tendency to avoid effort or responsibility, which may indirectly increase exposure to online risks.

Some relationships, such as the correlation between aggressive tendencies and self-disclosure on social media, should be treated as hypothetical interpretations rather than confirmed empirical findings. While they may point to a reduced sensitivity to privacy or phenomena like *sharenting*, such assumptions require further verification.

The results obtained here are partly consistent with international research highlighting the role of human factors in cybersecurity (e.g. Hadlington, 2017; Parsons et al., 2017; Wiederhold, 2014; Al-Badayneh et al., 2025; Nikum, 2025), which confirm that psychological traits and behavioural patterns significantly influence vulnerability to digital threats. By applying the framework of transactional analysis, this study extends that perspective, emphasising the relevance of passivity as a psychological correlate of cyber-risk exposure.

It is important to note several limitations of the study. The online form of data collection may have favoured participants already familiar with digital technologies, while the gender imbalance (77% women) limits the generalisability of the findings. Moreover, the Cyberthreat Susceptibility Questionnaire used in this research is still in its experimental stage, and the results should be interpreted as exploratory.

Future studies should include more balanced and cross-cultural samples, and combine self-report data with behavioural indicators of cybersecurity practices. Such research would help determine whether the observed relationships are context-specific or universal, and contribute to the development of comprehensive psychological models of user susceptibility to digital threats.

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## **Pasywność w ujęciu analizy transakcyjnej a podatność użytkowników na cyberzagrożenia**

### **Streszczenie**

Badanie dotyczy związku pomiędzy strategiami pasywności w analizie transakcyjnej a podatnością użytkowników na zagrożenia cybernetyczne. Główny problem badawczy koncentrował się na identyfikacji tych strategii pasywności, które najsilniej wiążą się z ryzykownymi zachowaniami w sieci. Badanie przeprowadzono w Polsce metodą CAWI na próbie 357 osób dorosłych. Zastosowano dwa narzędzia badawcze: Kwestionariusz Pasywności oraz autorski, eksperymentalny Kwestionariusz Podatności na Cyberzagrożenia. Wyniki ujawniły istotne statystycznie korelacje pomiędzy strategiami nadadaptacji i bierności a podatnością na zagrożenia cyfrowe, co częściowo potwierdza hipotezę, że wszystkie formy pasywności zwiększają ryzyko. Dodatkowo odnotowano dodatni związek pomiędzy strategią agresji a ujawnianiem życia prywatnego w mediach społecznościowych, co może wskazywać na obniżoną wrażliwość na prywatność i związek ze zjawiskiem sharentingu. Uzyskane wyniki podkreślają znaczenie czynników psychologicznych w cyberbezpieczeństwie i mogą stanowić podstawę dla działań profilaktycznych oraz edukacyjnych ukierunkowanych na wzmacnianie kompetencji użytkowników w zakresie ochrony cyfrowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** analiza transakcyjna, strategie pasywne, cyberbezpieczeństwo, podatność na zagrożenia cyfrowe.

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## Let's work or play game! The teachers' lounge in the light of transactional analysis theory

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse the school space of the teachers' lounge from the perspective of students in the context of transactional analysis. The research was based on the concept of time structuring in TA. The research method was a survey conducted using a questionnaire and mapping techniques. This allowed for the identification of places preferred by students for structuring time in particular forms. The research was conducted in three high schools in Częstochowa, where 781 completed questionnaires were collected for analysis. The results indicate that the teachers' lounge is perceived by students primarily as a space for formal work and transactional games, while it lacks elements of pastime, fun and intimacy, which influences the perception of this place as a confined, inaccessible zone. This may hinder the establishment of sincere, empathetic, open and accepting relationships between teachers and students. Analyses emphasise the need to consciously shape (physically and relationally) the space of the teachers' lounge as an open place for cooperation and dialogue, which would foster trust, positive relationships and reduce tensions in the school community. This may contribute to improving the school climate and increasing the effectiveness of educational processes.

**Keywords:** the teachers' lounge, teacher-student relations, time structuring, transactional analysis, school culture

### Space of the teachers' lounge

Space, together with time, constitutes a frame of reference for contemporary social relations (Pawełczyńska, 1986). School, as a building in which an ed-

educational institution is situated, is composed of several spaces. These spaces are the centres of activity, defined with the application of three parameters: a place, a typical standard of behaviour and also a location on a timeline. As an example, the school classroom can be referred to as one of the centres of school activity in which the given manners of students' and teachers' behaviour at a particular time (e.g., in the course of lessons or breaks) are determined. Other such centres are the corridor, cloakrooms, gym, school secretary's office, head's room or the teachers' lounge. These places can be characterised in the aspect of behaviours manifested in them. This proxemics of school is demonstrated as a collection of social correlations connected with using the physical space of this institution (Sztejnberg, 2007). An interesting proposal of connecting the principles of the proxemics of E. T. Hall (cf. Hall, 2003) with the time structuring of E. Berne was developed by Jarosław Jagieła, claiming the existence of a temporal-spatial model of school transactions and depicting four meeting places between a teacher and students in time and space. These places are composed of three significant elements: a determined form of time structuring and existing spatial distance and also a particular manifestation of their mutual behaviours. The author of the model is of the opinion that, by means of analysing the particular places of school transactions, it is possible to observe certain patterns, conduct the analysis of them and, finally, interpret them (Jagieła, 2011).

Most frequently, two kinds of places: public places (open) or private (confined) are differentiated, with various ways of restricting access to either. In a school building, part of the space is an open place, accessible to every individual entering from outside (for example, space behind the main entrance to school, the corridor on the ground floor, usually leading to the school secretary's office), whereas part, in turn, is a confined one (Pawłowska, 2020). According to A. Nalaskowski, 'students find themselves in a space which is entirely public [...], whereas teachers can enjoy the privilege of building their own, private and intimate space' (Nalaskowski, 2002, p.35).

While analysing the private (confined) spaces of school, it is possible to differentiate four kinds of their confined character. The confined space of the first kind are the remaining corridors, school canteen (if there is one in a given school), cloakrooms, restrooms on the ground floor and school day-room. These are accessible to all the employees of school, students, parents and guardians. The confined spaces of the second kind can be defined as including the restrooms on the higher floors, classrooms, library, nurse room and school counsellor's room. These are places accessible to teachers, janitor, the remaining members school staff (in the case of need), students in the course of lessons and, sometimes, also in the course of breaks and parents in the course of collective meetings with teachers. As to the next group, it is possible to refer to the confined spaces of the third kind, including the teachers' lounge and also head's

room and deputy head's room. The teachers' lounge is accessible, first and foremost, to teachers. As a matter of principle, this space is not made available to parents, apart from extraordinary situations or emergencies. Conversations or consultations with teachers are conducted in dedicated classrooms or in the school corridor (frequently, in front of the closed teachers' lounge). The confined space, constituting the fourth and the last kind of it, is the school secretary's office, from which the head's room is entered (Pawłowska, 2020).

Authority hidden in the school spaces of the third kind is most visibly demonstrated, among others, in the teachers' lounge, serving as the place in which teachers rest from the presence of students and hide from them; it serves as a place of isolation between the two parts of school community. It is the only part of the school premises equipped with a door handle only on one side of the doors, namely, the internal one and entering it frequently requires entering a pre-set code on an electronic lock panel. The fact that there is no door handle on the external side of the doors or the presence of a special lock makes it impossible for intruders, i.e. students, to gain access to it because they have no key to this 'sanctuary'; nor do they know the access code to it. It is a frequent practice of teachers staying inside the teachers' lounge in the course of breaks not to react to knocking at the doors. In this very manner, adults (class teachers, head and teachers) make their contacts with students formal (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2014; Pawłowska, 2020). Locked doors or the necessity to enter a code to enter the teachers' lounge are the examples of the school culture of distrust towards students in action. Such a behaviour symbolically demarkates the places of both of these groups in the school space life as the members of one of them have to patiently and obediently await being called if they wish to experience a meeting with the representatives of the dominating group. That may lead to a certain ghettoisation of school space because, in many schools, such a practice is a part-and-parcel of daily reality, which exerts influence on the shape of the school culture dominating a given institution (Dudzikowa, 2010). A significant importance for the culture of school is, first and foremost, of its participants, who construct it and then live according to its code. Their mutual relations determine the mutually-permeating dimensions: of the teachers (the culture of the teachers' lounge), of the students (the culture of breaks), of the parents and also staff not employed in teaching capacity (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2015, Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2018).

The teachers' lounge is an informal heart of school performing many functions: is a place of rest, having conversations and collaborating between teachers. It is the subject of many a joke circulating among students, resulting from their reluctance to enter it (Wileczek, 2022). If a song by Pink Floyd *Another Brick in The Wall* is recalled, it is a good idea to close your eyes and think also about the video clip coming with that and using a metaphor of a factory to present

school. The video clip begins with a certain image, showing teachers leaving the teachers' lounge formed in ranks as if they were a shooting squad, holding registers in their hands as if these items were rifles (Jaskulska, 2014). The teachers' lounge is for them a 'fortress', in which they can allow themselves to be frank and open for a short moment and engage in a discussion with colleagues sharing similar convictions. In this room, teachers can vent their frustrations and find confirmation for their own vision of reality, different from the one officially seen as 'supreme truth' (Babicka-Wirkus, 2019, pp.200-201). However, why is it so? In school, it is possible to differentiate between the dominating and opposing aspects of the culture of school. The first ones are the components of blocking cultures: appearances, avoidance and distrust/suspicious mindset, whereas the second ones are the components of liberating cultures: laughter and war (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2015). The culture of fortress is situated on the borderline between the two. According to A. Babicka-Wirkus, 'its position is conditioned by the duality which is the inseparable part of its nature. On the one hand, it symbolises the walls separating the school space life reserved students (restrooms, *cul-de-sacs* of the corridors) and teachers (the teachers' lounge). On the other hand, it is an expression of struggle and a stronghold of values represented by the culture dominating and the culture of resistance' (Babicka-Wirkus, 2018, pp.65-66).

Therefore, the teachers' lounge is the space in which the conscious and unconscious narrations of the faculty are dominating; the place of resistance against change smoulders (Knowles et al., 2009). For teacher, the teachers' lounge is, first and foremost, a space of work, being the 'area of contacts between teachers, exchanging views, experiences and daily interaction and also the place in which the meetings of teachers' body, important from the school's point of view, take place' (Tomczak, 2012, p.84). It may as well be a place at which emotions generated by the daily reality of school are expressed, particularly, before the next lesson is commenced, when it is not yet really known what the future holds. E. Goffman refers to that with a certain dose of exaggeration, claiming that 'students leaving for a break during which they behave as they please and impolitely, are frequently not aware that their teachers withdraw to the teachers' lounge, in which they will use bad language and smoke, availing themselves of a freedom of a similar kind' (Goffman, 2008, pp.159).

However, the teachers' lounge, which should be a place of rest and support, at times is for many teachers only 'a kind of cloakroom and a place in which to use the Internet, photocopy teaching aids and leave a register' (Papugowa, 2010, p. 70). Frequently, entering the teachers' lounge, one may initially think that each and every of the teachers were there alone and only to meet their own needs. The presence of a glass curtain, fragile and invisible, hanging in the air which is not conducive to establishing closer contact and becoming familiar

with each other can be felt (Borukała & Kiciński, 2012). The practices of claiming for oneself the space of the teachers' lounge that are meant to provide places to relaxation, rest and meet the needs of isolation or affiliation can be noticed (Nowotniak, 2011). Frequently, numerous divisions can also be seen, among others, between those who know each other very well, who are united by the fact of working in the same team of teachers of the same subject or the same project team, or division into 'greenhorns and young teachers' and also those who 'have learnt all the ropes of working at school' (Borukała & Kiciński, 2012). What is also visible is the differences in the aspect of prestige between teachers, being the basis of the hierarchy of the teachers' lounge. Most frequently, that hierarchy is dependent on the length of service and the importance of a subject taught. However, the determinants of a holding a high position may be different from those which are relevant, for example, to contacts with students' parents.

In many cases, teachers deciding to engage in effective communication with their students' parents feel the disapproval of their colleagues, who see a parent as a *sui generis* intruder in school and do not treat him or her as one of the members of school community possessing equal rights (Smak & Walczak, 2015). This is the vision of a sullen version of the teachers' lounge, in which teachers are mainly interested in the activities of others, of a place in which it is best not to stand out, not to show more dedication or appear to possess more knowledge, of a place in which it is best to confine to bare minimum (Molenda, 2010). In this manner, 'the teachers' lounge frequently becomes a place that hinders all kinds of activity. Intimidation, lack of self-confidence and fear of appraisal kill initiative, making one inclined to listen rather than to speak' (Skorecka, 2009, p.138). The teachers' lounge is a place for open and also of a more subtle and camouflaged, criticism of other teachers. Such a form of negative assessment, even though it is apparently to serve the purpose of solving problems, contributes, in a matter of fact, to rising tensions and making the ambience among the teaching staff unbearable (Zubrzycka-Maciąg & Kirenko, 2023; Piotrowska, 2006; Pyżalski, 2008; Papugowa, 2010; Zubrzycka-Maciąg, 2011). These antagonistic attitudes emanate beyond the circle of teachers and are noticed by students. What results from that, is the appearance of many internal dividing lines in school. Because of that, it seems to be important to undertake actions building the unity of teachers as this very unity, in turn, exerts influence on the effectiveness of teaching and upbringing young people and also on the ambience at workplace (Maliszewski, 2017). Non-constructive criticism, commenting on events and the students' (and fellow teachers') behaviours in a scornful manner, laughing at the current and past experiences of school life is what can frequently be observed in the teachers' lounge. An example of that can be the words of D. Chętkowski, who writes that before his 'contact with young people brought fruit, he had become disgusted with conversations in the

teachers' lounge, giving reasons to think he was surrounded by miserable dim-wits and morons' (Chętkowski, 2007, p. 130; Łukasik, 2011).

As it is well known, faculty and students, constituting a community of a given school, spend there a lot of time, however, not always are the existing forms of staying in this institution conducive to establishing closer relations. It is currently becoming a standard to isolate within one's milieu, which is contributed to by an inappropriate design of school buildings' layout. On the premises of this institution, confined areas (for example, the teachers' lounge and the head's room) are dominating. In spite of the fact that teachers and students spend relatively a lot of time in school, the system of habits and also school buildings' layout, prevent them from more frequent, direct, frank and open interpersonal contacts (Brzozowski, 2013). It goes without saying that positive teacher-student relations ensure that educational processes are conducted in school in a proper and effective manner. In school conditions, relations are entered into and maintained, mainly in the space of classrooms and in the presence of a group of students, or in the head's room, in the presence of a student and their parents. They may have an individual character as well, taking place between particular students, teachers, teachers and students, for example, in the course of a break, in the corridor, in the teachers' lounge or on the school playground (Węgrzyn-Białogłowicz, 2017).

Depending on the place in which a relation exists, each and every of them may be set in a different emotional context, which becomes positive or negative. B. Dusza's analyses indicate that 78% of the teachers participating in the survey declared that individual meetings with a parents or parents are conducted by them in classrooms. The place for such conversations are also: the teachers' lounge (27%) and backoffice or equipment room (22%). The fact that nearly every 20 percent of respondents declare that such conversations are held in the school corridor, which undeniably is not a circumstance conducive to conducting a normal conversation, not to mention solving a problem, reaching a consensus or raising personal and difficult matters is disturbing (Dusza, 2018). Other studies, concentrated on the feeling of safety of students in the physical school space, indicate that the most dangerous spaces (in students' opinion), apart from the cloakroom and restroom, are the classrooms and the teachers' lounge. It can be presumed that it is in these very two places that various forms of violence take place for part of teachers. If teachers resort to violence in the classroom and in teachers' lounge, or acquiesce to it, school becomes a place of modelling such behaviours and they, with time, become something natural (Kosowska, 2024).

As it is indicated by A. Kopcińska, teachers in relations with students behave despotically, conduct conversations in a bizarre manner, exert influence with the application of orders or threats, *ipso facto*, discouraging students from in-

dependence and resourcefulness, that would allow the latter to formulate their own opinions and express it. Students frequently do not treat such teachers as partners for conversation because they are afraid that their feelings, convictions and opinions will not be accepted. A skillfully-conducted dialogue makes communication more effective and one of its aims is also to understand an interlocutor as well as to accept them unconditionally (Kopcińska, 2018). A conversation with a teacher whose principle is to understand and to accept may be, for a student, immeasurably significant and formative. Undertaking a dialogue with such a teacher becomes, therefore, a *sui generis* reward, honour or a token of recognition and evidence of fondness for a student (Holeksa, 2011). Unfortunately, school communicational situations still bring to mind the imbalance of rights and decisive power to the detriment of young peoples' interest, the fact that the teachers' and students' positions in communication are opposite (Bochno, 2004). Part of the faculty seems to have come to terms with the fact that an absence of understanding between a teacher and a student is an unremovable fault. All that they strive to achieve is to minimise the effort, costs and losses, the risk of which results from this perpetual confrontation. The mutual lack of interest and sometimes downright hostility, displayed towards each other, is not conducive to developing appropriate interpersonal relations between teachers and students. Each of the parties blames the other one for this state of the matters (Holeksa, 2011). Even though it is most frequently a student that expects 'external initiative in the aspect of communication, which a student willingly joins and even takes it from the other interlocutor', it is, unfortunately, teachers themselves that manifest 'little care for the quality of communication' with their students (Bochno, 2004, p.133, 172).

Therefore, students fill their school life with relations with others (students and teachers). These relations may have a positive or negative profile and also a conditional or an unconditional one, depending on an interpersonal recognition and form of support which is provided by a person to others and which is received from them. One of the methods of the temporal conceptualisation of interpersonal relations dominating in different institutions, including the educational ones, is time structuring in transactional analysis (Motyl, 2020). The manner of spending time has a psychological dimension here and consists in determining closeness in contact. The forms of time structuring were arranged on a continuum from those associated with least involvement and keeping a person farthest from others to those most intimate, most open and frank (Pierzchała, 2015). School and in particular, a diversified space of its building, is a perfect place for researching this area of transactional analysis. In various places in school, students enter into diversified forms of time structuring such as withdrawal and also intimacy. It seems to be interesting what forms of time structuring in the teachers' lounge are declared by students. J. Jagieła ascertains even

that no one needs to be persuaded that the teachers' lounge is a true horn of Amalthea of transactional games (Jagięła, 2004) even though other forms of time structuring also occur in this place. Therefore, the aim of this article is to analyse the school space of the teachers' lounge within the scope of the level of the forms of time structuring observed there from the perspective of students.

## Time structuring in transactional analysis as the theoretical basis of research

Jadwiga Staniszkis refers in her texts to the need to ontologise time and that means, to treat this phenomenon as the part of existence. The researcher postulates adopting a new definition of time, the result of which would be recognising that various areas of human activity are governed by different forms of time structuring of the phenomena occurring within its frontiers (Staniszkis, 2004). The postulate hereinabove was met in transactional analysis and its reflection may be found in the concept of time structuring. Time structuring is one of the four complementary areas of analyses in the theory developed by E. Berne, apart from: personality structure analysis (transactional studies on *ego*), transactional analysis (referred to, in other words, as a proper analysis) and also script analysis (hidden scenario of the life of individuals and collective personalities) (Jagięła, 2012a). Its fundamental premise is the assumption that relations with other people are this part of life which allows to meet important needs of every human being. This is also the reason why every human being fills their life with such relations, which vary in their intensity. Depending on the quality of this interaction, it is possible to differentiate between 6 manners of time structuring: withdrawal, rituals, pastime, work, games and also intimacy (Stewart & Joines, 2016; Pankowska, 2010); this set has relatively recently been complemented by adding the seventh form, i.e. play (Cowles-Boyd & Boyd, 1980; Mokrzycka, 2015). The further part of this article is a succinct attempt to characterise all the above-mentioned forms.

For transactional analysis, **withdrawal** is an excessive, borderline case, in which human beings openly not communicate (Berne, 2008). It consists in a human beings isolation by means of taking refuge in the realm of own thoughts and focusing entirely on own thoughts (James, Jongeward, 1994). Withdrawal, even though is not a transaction between two individuals, frequently occurs in social structures (Harris, 2009). Fulfilling the need of solitude, engrossing in own thoughts, creating distance to other people allows to avoid many conflicts, worries and much suffering. However, there is a danger of too frequent a withdrawal resulting in the reduced ability to establish contact with a milieu and deprive one of the opportunity to receive support, which is significant for each and every

human being (Rogoll, 1989; Jagieła, 2012a; Jagieła, 2012b). Mental withdrawal frequently transfers one to the world of dreams, filled with violence or makes them indulge in uncontrolled pleasures, creative imagination, learned fears or the expectations of disasters (James & Jongeward, 1994).

**Rituals**, regarded in the light of transactional analysis as the safest kind of social behaviours, are more or less formal methods of communicating, relying on a particular style of communication, which may transform into ceremonies having a predictable course (Berne, 2008; Jagieła, 2012b). Ritual is a socially-planned manner of using time in which everyone agrees to do the same. It is a safe form of time structuring because it does not require entering into any relationships or undertaking commitments towards other people. The end is predictable and possibly pleasant if someone keeps up with others and behaves correctly (Harris, 2009; Jagieła, 2012a), or unpleasant if one of the persons involved fails to follow the pattern of an expected and stereotypical behaviour, which fact may be perceived as a failure to recognise (the value of others) or as an act of belittling (Pankowska, 2010). Similarly to withdrawal, rituals keep a human being at a distance from others. Rituals are to occupy a group of people for some time, without it becoming necessary to enter into closer relationships (Harris, 2009). They amount to a stock-in-trade maintained in relations with others, which is formed from stereotypical transactions. Thanks to rituals, it becomes possible to establish new contacts with other people, which do not require much commitment (Rogoll, 1989). The course of rituals is determined by the canons of traditions and social customs (Berne, 2008). For transactional analysis, rituals become a category of the analysis of human behaviours on the microscale (Motyl, 2014).

Another form of time structuring is **pastimes**, i.e. a kind of social sounding-out, in the course of which someone wants to acquire information about new acquaintances in a manner not obliging them to enter into closer relationships and not creating possible problems (Harris, 2009). These are simple transactions encountered in the course of a conversation on various trifle matters (Rogoll, 1989), exchanging quite general views and opinions, reporting past events or gossiping (Pankowska, 2010). This involves relatively safe and, simultaneously, polite, conversations, which people who do yet know each other well are willing to conduct (Rogoll, 1989). It allows them to become familiar with each other, so as to find, in the further course, a partner for a game, work or sharing intimacy (James & Jongeward, 1994). Pastimes provide more, usually positive, strokes than rituals even though they are less predictable (due to the increased risk of receiving negative strokes) (Pankowska, 2010).

**Work** (procedures, activities) occurs as another form of time structuring. This is the most common, convenient (in transactional terms) and utilitarian form of it, set on developing a plan of action in the realm of social world. By

participation itself in productive or creative work, a human being can find enormous satisfaction, or bring about receiving conditional strokes (Harris, 2009), positive or negative, depending on the final result of activities and its assessment by others (Pankowska, 2010). It is through this form that we can release ourselves of internal strain and anger. It protects us from boredom and keeps us alive in physical, mental and spiritual aspect. However, excessive workload may reduce opportunities to engage into other forms of time structuring, for example, to the detriment of experiencing intimate relationship with family, for example, due to frequent business trips (Rogoll, 1989; Jagieła, 2012a; Jagieła, 2012b). Therefore, although this form of time structuring, similarly to withdrawal and rituals, from the perspective of emotions does not determine strong interpersonal relations (Harris, 2009), however, it may become a very good opportunity to become familiar with each other (Pankowska, 2010). It is worth indicating that, while one activity (work) is in progress, sometimes other forms of time structuring, namely, rituals, pastimes, games and even intimacy, are engaged in (James & Jongeward, 1994).

**Play**, as a form of time structuring, was added to the other six forms by Laura Cowles-Boyd and also by Harry S. Boyd (Mokrzycka, 2015). It is defined as a series of transactions in which it is mainly positive strokes that occur, with the result constituted by positive emotions. Their feature is unrestricted creativity, expression and spontaneity, which ensure that congruent emotions such as joy and spontaneity at a social level, are experienced (Cowles-Boyd & Boyd, 1980; Jagieła, 2012b). They also cause many a pleasant experience, for example, phantasising, celebrating, engaging into sports and hobbies (Jagieła, 2012a; Jagieła, 2012b).

**Games (intrigues)** is a series of complementary transactions concealed and leading to a clearly determined result, decided about in advance. They constitute a periodical, frequently repeating set of transactions, which seem not to be driven by a hidden motive (Berne, 2000; Jagieła, 2012b). They have nothing to do with primary child's plays, but rather are a result of concealed transactions, which superficially seem the right things to do, however, in fact, are means to achieve hidden, insincere and constantly repeating goals (Rogoll, 1989). People engage in them unconsciously and that makes this kind of time structuring rather unpredictable and results in a lot of risk involved; however, in spite of that, they are engaged in not to obtain tangible benefits (they provide each other with very intensive strokes, mostly negative, but, at certain stages, positive as well) (Pankowska, 2010, Jagieła, 2012a). Each and every game is, by assumption, dishonest and its result is bound to be dramatic (Harris, 2009). Games are conducted to provide negative support, reduce cordiality and familiarity and also to maintain various substitute feelings (Rogoll, 1989). Games destroy relationships between people and cause suffering. However, they require quite a lot of involvement and familiarity with the participants (Harris, 2009).

Transactional analysis has developed as well its own understanding of **intimacy**, which will be the most attractive form of social contact (Berne, 2000) (as the borderline manner of time structuring (Berne, 2008)), in which giving and taking occurs without mutual exploitation (Rogoll, 1989). It will be understood as an interpersonal relationship which is open, honest and involving mutual sharing without exploitation (Berne, 2008), empathy, affectionateness and the feeling of emotional proximity (James & Jongeward, 1994) while not using games (Berne, 2008) and expressing true feelings, thoughts and experiences of those involved. Intimacy may exist between different people at different ages and vary in intensity (Rogoll, 1989). This can be a source of unconditioned positive strokes (conveying each other the feeling of love, friendship or deep sympathy) and the negative ones (speaking openly about is hurtful, annoying, or instilling fear in a mutual relationship). However, even when negative feelings are observed, these transactions still bring gratification because of mutual emotional proximity and trust. Intimacy provides highly-intensive strokes and is the least predictable manner of time structuring, therefore, it is frequently perceived as the most risky one (Berne, 2008; Jagieła, 2012b).

## Method

The objective of the conducted research was to identify the occurrence level of the forms of time structuring in the teachers' lounge's space according to students' opinion. By means of the analysis and interpretation of received results, it was attempted to answer the following research question: To what degree are, in the teachers' lounge, particular forms of time structuring manifested by students?

In the conducted research, the research method was constituted by a diagnostic survey with the application of a questionnaire. Another technique in use was mapping (treated as one of the techniques of diagnostic survey). Mapping, not very popular in scientific research, was proposed by A. E. Clark and determined as a situational analysis. As it was presumed, such research should produce a more in-depth description, presentation and explanation of the individual, collective, organisational, institutional, temporal, geographical, material, discursive, cultural, symbolical, visual and historical aspects of situation. The objective of mapping is to understand the complexity and heterogeneousness of individual and collective situations, discourses and interpretations of situations. Its analysis aims to shed light on and explain, the processes of changes and constant patterns and also permanence in a situation being researched. The author, referring to Clifford Geertz and (introduced by him) category of thick description, proposes an analogical 'thick analysis' (Clarke, 2003; Clarke, 2005),

which will be the result of the application of situational maps, i.e. conducting data analysis by means of constructing cartographical diagrams.

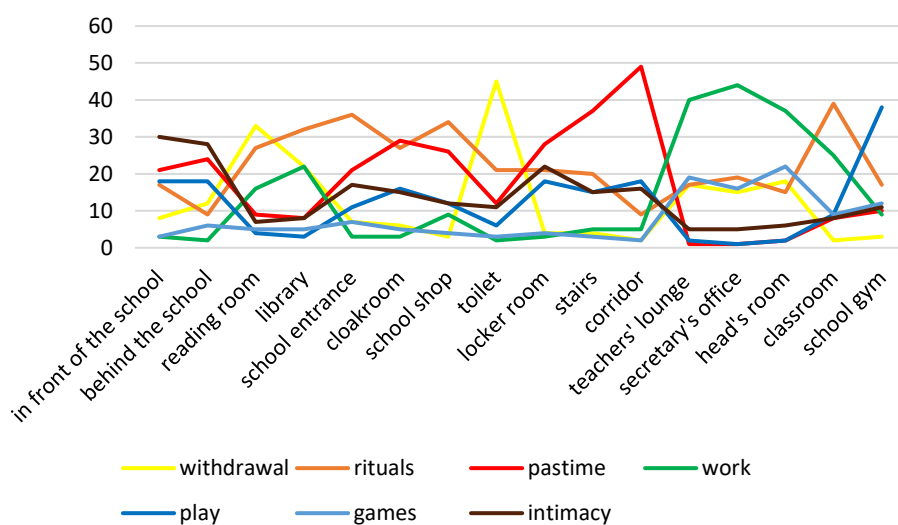
As part of the research conducted by me, I used two original research tools: questionnaire collecting data relevant to the forms of time structuring by secondary school students in school. It consisted of a number of statements on which a student could express their opinion, by means of ticking next to each statement and on a five-point Likert scale the degree of accuracy (relevance to themselves). The second questionnaire was constituted by a map in the form of a typical school building plan, on which places where a given form of time structuring was most frequent were to be marked by a student.

The research was conducted in three general secondary schools in Częstochowa, with the participation of students, who filled in the questionnaire in the course of classes. The classes were chosen at random; in each of the general secondary schools, classes representing a particular year took part in the research. Altogether, 781 questionnaires were collected.

## **Analysis and interpretation**

The first analysis performed in this part of the research will be comparing the results within the scope of the occurrence of particular forms of time structuring in school space throughout the entire school year. As it is shown by Diagram 1, reading room (33% choices) and restroom (45%) are conducive to withdrawal, which level is the lowest in the corridor and also in the classroom, in which, however, the dominating form will be that of rituals (39%). The latter ones were also noticed in the library (32%), at the entrance to the school (36%), in the cloakroom (27%) and next to the school shop (34%). Pastimes are seen in the corridor (48%), on stairs (37%), in the cloakroom (29%) and changing room (28%), whereas their level will be the lowest in the teachers' lounge, school secretary's office and the head's room. Those three spaces will be typical for work (the teachers' lounge 40%, school secretary's office 44% and head's room 37%), with the lowest level observed, in turn, at the back of the school building. Plays are the most frequent in the gym (38%) and least frequent in the teachers' lounge, school secretary's office and head's room. For the three latter spaces, a high level of the occurrence of games (the teachers' lounge 19%, school secretary's office 18%, head's room 22%) will be observed; these are not seen in the corridor and on stairs, in the restroom and also in front of the building. The last forms, intimacy, is typical for area in front of (30%) and behind the school (28%) and also in the changing room (22%), whereas it does not generally occur in teachers' lounge, school secretary's office or the head's room.

The analysis confirms that school, as an educational environment, is divided into spaces varied in emotional and social profile, which determine the dominating forms of time structuring. In private and intimate spaces, withdrawal is dominating, in the formal ones work and games are, whereas shared and open spaces are dominated by rituals and pastimes conducive to building social ties and integration, whereas play is more frequent than any other form in the gym. Such a distribution shows potential challenges, for example, excessive withdrawal or the presence of transactional games, which may make interpersonal relations significantly more complex; that emphasises the significance of designing, organising and managing school space so as to make it conducive to effective communication and positive teacher-student relations.



*Diagram 1*

Graphic interpretation of the frequency of the occurrence of forms of time structuring recorded in particular school spaces throughout the entire school year (N=781)

Source: own research.

The analysis referred to hereinabove gives rise to the conclusion that the dominating forms of time structuring among students in the space of the teachers' lounge are: work and also games. The research indicates that students perceive the teachers' lounge (and also the school secretary's office and the head's room), first and foremost, as places dominated by work in the transactional view of the notion, i.e. the activities of professional, formal, utilitarian and task-focused profile. That mean that they see these spaces as areas mostly dedicated

to performing official duties, planning activities, making decisions and dealing with administrative matters. This instrumental form of using time suggests that students perceive these places as rather inaccessible, formal and serious, associated with completing tasks and not with moments of an open dialogue or a private conversation. That may influence the feeling of distance and also conviction that this space is not accessible to students, especially, that the teachers' lounge is one of the confined spaces of the third kind. Students may perceive this space as connected solely with formal and pragmatic relations rather than with the emotional ones. In this manner, work may not be conducive to spontaneous contacts or building close interpersonal relationships with teachers. That may also be connected with perceiving the teachers' lounge as a not very friendly place, what, in turn, may be reflected in restricting, for the part of students, initiatives relevant to establishing and / or maintaining relations in that place.

In the context of the analysis of time structuring in school space, the presence of games in the teachers' lounge acquires a particular meaning and requires a more in-depth reflection. On the basis of the collected data, it is possible to ascertain that students notice there specific interactions, which may be understood as complex, marked with hidden manipulation mechanisms, full of domination or avoiding a congruent and open dialogue. From the perspective of students, the teachers' lounge appears, therefore, as a place in which a specific dynamics of teacher-student relations is observed, the one which is not directly visible for the latter ones, but the presence of which can be felt as a kind of school theatre, in which relations are unclear, disturbing, dishonest, frustrating and frequently humiliating. That may evoke in students the feeling of distance, danger or distrust towards teachers, treated as a group which is closed and which uses the internal codes of communication, deliberately not explained to students. In turn, among teachers such games may constitute informal and sometimes risky, forms of competition or building own positions in the hierarchy of the school faculty, which may hinder a transparent and congruent exchange of information, particularly, in the situations of conflicts or such as requiring support. For students, the presence of games in the teachers' lounge may also symbolise the lack of openness and accessibility in the case of this space, which might find reflection in the feeling of being excluded from major decision-making processes relevant to the life of school. Perceiving teachers as participants in transactional games in the isolated place makes the frontier between the world of adult decision-makers and the world of students, whose activity is ruled by these very decisions, even more visible, which may weaken relations based on trust, frankness, openness, acceptance and safety (i.e. transactional intimacy). Such a situation constitutes an educational challenge because the presence of games in the space of teachers' work, which is the teachers' lounge, proves the need to reflect on the culture of a given school, communicational

practices among faculty and also on the degree to which behaviours and relations manifested by teachers exert influence on the ambience of school and perceiving teachers' role by students. Reducing this form of time structuring and replacing it by more congruent and constructive forms of relations with a fellow human being may contribute to building a better educational environment, conducive to openness, understanding and mutual respect.

In contrast to the domination of work and games, the forms of time structuring which are not present in the space of the teachers' lounge are pastimes and plays. From the perspective of students, the absence of pastimes in the teachers' lounge may prove that they perceive this place as serious and deprived of freedom, which is not conducive to relaxation and informal relations. For students, the teachers' lounge is not a place in which teachers rest, enjoy short conversations or engage in activities which are the source of joy. The teachers' lounge is a space where attention is focused on duties, work and also on the actual tasks of school. Such a lack of entertaining profile may also result in perceiving the teachers' lounge even more as a confined zone, not accessible to students and isolated from their world; the zone in which there is no a cat in hell's chance for students to enter into relations of more relaxed and open kind. That, in turn, may strengthen their feeling of distance and also restrict the possibility of perceiving teachers as individuals with whom it is possible just to talk like with other people on various topics (not only related to school). As a result, students may feel that the teachers' lounge is a hostile space and an excessively serious one, which makes it difficult to build more personal and congruent relations. Moreover, the absence of pastimes in such a place may also reflect students' opinion that teachers while they are in the room in question do not seek relaxation or try to unwind after work, which may make young people even less inclined to establish contact and consolidate the perception of teachers as always serious, formal, official and keeping distance. In the context of school, in which positive teacher-student relations play a particular role in educational processes, such a profile of space is rather conducive to distance and maintaining the formal bearing of teachers, instead of open, partnership-based, frank communication. The lack of pastimes in the teachers' lounge, in students' eyes, may, therefore, indicate the need to reflect on how the space in question could be made more open and friendly not only to students, but also to teachers.

In turn, the lack of play in the teachers' lounge, in students' opinion, may be interpreted in many ways. Students, observing the teachers' lounge as a space dedicated, first and foremost, to adults, associate it with seriousness, professionalism and the formal duties of teachers. In their (students') eyes, this is a workplace and venue of discussions related to it, therefore, it seems inadequate or even downright illogical to expect spontaneity, reactive mindset or joy, which are the features of play. Moreover, from the perspective of students, the

ambience prevalent in the teachers' lounge may be seen as aloof, serious and, at times, even creating a distance, which naturally excludes ease and freedom typical in the case of play. The lack of play in this space may also reflect generation gaps and social roles; students see teachers as adults in charge of order and meeting educational goals and not as partners in collective, spontaneous, creative activity that brings joy. That, in turn, may strengthen the feeling of distance and formalism, which results in reducing emotional proximity and empathy in teacher-student relations. The lack of play in the place in question may also confirm the perception of this space as a confined zone of adults' workplace, far away from daily joys and freedom, which students find on the school playground, in the gym or other, less formal places within school premises, instead. That may indicate a clear frontier between the worlds of students and of teachers in the aspects of the function of particular school spaces, which is of importance for the quality of mutual relations and communication in school.

## Conclusion

The conducted analysis indicates that the teachers' lounge, as one of the most specific school spaces, is extremely interesting due to the forms of time structuring observed there. From the perspective of students, this space is frequently seen as a place of isolation and supervision, which, by means of restricted access and also exclusivity, makes the division between 'we' and 'they' more lasting and permanent. Such a spatial segregation leads to creating a specific school culture, in which the mechanisms of distrust and distance dominate and which, *ipso facto*, makes it difficult to build open and congruent interpersonal relations. The conducted research, based on students' opinions on the forms of time structuring in various spaces of schools, indicate a clear domination, in the teachers' lounge, of the two main forms: work and also transactional games. This space is seen, first and foremost, as the place of strenuous work, in which teachers organise their professional duties, exchange experiences and also make significant decisions on the functioning of school. Simultaneously, the teachers' lounge sees many games which may support the existing hierarchy, make the distance more lasting, result in the feeling of injustice and being not understood and also cause tensions and conflicts in teacher-student relations. It is accurately presented in a short form by a female student whose words were collected in the course of the conducted research: 'In the teachers' lounge, I feel ignored and inferior. As if I had to ask for a moment of attention'. It is worth indicating that the researched students do not notice the presence of pastimes or plays in this space. The lack of those forms of activity proves the limits of the space in question in the context of creating the ambience of free

and creative expression or positive emotions, which are significant for building trust and openness and also peculiar emotional hygiene, important in the work of a teacher.

The research indicates the need to reflect on the functioning of the teachers' lounge as a space not only of work, but also of collaboration, communication and building good relations. The domination of work over games, accompanied by the simultaneous lack of pastimes and play, may exert a negative influence on the development of positive teacher-student relations and also make it difficult to build the ambience of trust and mutual understanding. It is worth indicating that changing this state of the matters requires a conscious shaping of educational space and also the culture of school based on a dialogue and openness. Making it possible to introduce the elements of pastime and play, if in no other form, but as moments of integration and positive interactions, may contribute to 'tearing down the walls', reducing tensions and also strengthening social bonds, which is crucial for the effective and harmonious functioning of the entire school community.

Attention should also be paid to a low level of intimacy in the teachers' lounge, understood as relations which are congruent, frank and based on mutual trust. This space, rather than being conducive to openness and individual contacts based on understanding and also empathy, becomes the arena of formal behavioural interactions, in which distance and a certain kind of emotional reserve dominate as well a place where dishonest and harmful transactional games are in use. Understanding the teachers' lounge and engaging there in these forms of time structuring which, from the perspective of students (but also of teachers) are positive and beneficial may constitute a significant step towards the modernisation of school communication practices and also improving school ambience and changing its culture. This space changed into the forum of open collaboration might become a space for constructive teacher-student relations, conducive to becoming familiar with each other, understanding and acceptance. In this manner, the teachers' lounge would acquire a new and positive function in the structure of school.

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## **Pracuj albo graj! Pokój nauczycielski w świetle teorii analizy transakcyjnej**

### **Streszczenie**

Celem artykułu jest analiza szkolnej przestrzeni pokoju nauczycielskiego z perspektywy uczniów w kontekście analizy transakcyjnej. Przeprowadzone badania oparto na koncepcji strukturalizacji czasu w AT. Metodą badawczą był sondaż diagnostyczny realizowany za pomocą ankiety oraz techniki mapowania. Pozwoliło to na identyfikację miejsc preferowanych przez uczniów do strukturalizacji czasu w określonych formach. Badania przeprowadzono w trzech liceach ogólnokształcących w Częstochowie, w których zebrano 781 wypełnionych kwestionariuszy. Wyniki wskazują, że pokój nauczycielski jest odbierany przez uczniów przede wszystkim jako przestrzeń formalnej pracy i gier transakcyjnych, natomiast brak w nim elementów rozrywek, zabawy i intymności, co wpływa na postrzeganie tego miejsca jako zamkniętej, nieprzystępnej strefy. Może

to utrudniać nawiązywanie szczerych, empatycznych, otwartych i akceptujących relacji między nauczycielami a uczniami. Analizy podkreślają potrzebę świadomego kształtowania (fizycznej i relacyjnej) przestrzeni pokoju nauczycielskiego jako otwartego miejsca współpracy i dialogu, które sprzyjałoby budowaniu zaufania, pozytywnych relacji oraz redukcji napięć w społeczności szkolnej. Może przyczynić się to do poprawy klimatu szkoły oraz podnieść efektywność procesów edukacyjnych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pokój nauczycielski, relacje nauczyciel–uczeń, strukturalizacja czasu, analiza transakcyjna, kultura szkoły.



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## Personality functioning in self and social relations and profiles of functional ego states

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### Abstract

**Objective:** In current classifications of mental and behavioural disorders, i.e. ICD-11 (2022) and DSM-5-TR (2024), the dimensional approach prevails over the categorical one, especially with regard to personality disorders. The multidimensional approach poses new challenges for clinicians and psychotherapists in terms of both descriptive diagnosis and the structural-functional-dynamic personality. A question arises: whether personality theories, which form the basis of various psychotherapy modalities, including the assumptions of transactional analysis, provide a sufficient basis for a dimensional description of the functioning of the self and interpersonal functioning of a person. The objective of the research project was to attempt to answer the question of whether individuals with personality disorders differ from those without personality disorders in terms of their behavioural, social and communicative functioning profiles, i.e. their egogram of functional ego states. We assumed that differences between the profiles of positively and negatively used functional ego states could form the basis for diagnosing the level of personality functioning with regard to self and interpersonal relationships.

**Methods and subjects:** the level of personality functioning was examined using the Self and Interpersonal Functioning Scale (SIFS; Soroko et al., 2025), whereas the ego states were examined using the Ego States Questionnaire (Matkowski et al., 2016). The study group consisted of 106 people aged 18-65.

**Results:** The results indicate that individuals with personality disorders differ significantly from those with normal personalities in terms of the intensity of both positive and negative ego states. Participants with personality disorders operate out of the negatively used states of the Rebellious Child and Compliant Child more often than individuals without personality disorders and reveal less energy invested in the Adult. The description of the level of self and interpersonal functioning using the functional egogram of transactional analysis can provide a reliable basis for diagnostic decisions by clinicians and therapists.

**Keywords:** functional ego states, personality disorder, ego state profiles of disordered and normal personality

## Introduction

Research on mental health has confirmed the belief of most researchers and clinicians that mental disorders and behaviours should be approached dimensionally rather than categorically. In light of this research, the thesis underlying the categorical model of health, which assumes the existence of clinically significant differences between mental health and mental disorders, has been found to be unjustified (Avasthi et al., 2014; Haslam et al., 2020). In categorical classifications, a specific disorder is identified on the basis of a set of clinically significant manifestations of mental processes and behaviours with a “common core”. Whereas in the dimensional approach, health and disorders should be described by the same characteristics and properties of the individual, and the differences between the two states are mainly quantitative in nature (Bach & Simonson, 2021; Haslam, 2003; Hopwood et al., 2023). Transactional Analysis, like other psychosocial concepts describing manifestations of disorders and explaining the mechanisms and pathomechanisms of an individual’s functioning, faced both theoretical and diagnostic challenges in connection with the adoption of the categorical-dimensional and dimensional approaches in DSM-5-TR (APA, 2024, AMPD section III) and ICD-11 (WHO, 2022) in regard to personality disorders.

Key challenges in this area concern not only descriptive diagnosis but also monitoring the course of therapy and assessing its effectiveness in terms of psychosocial functioning. On the one hand, verification is undertaken by authors of integrative and trans-theoretical approaches (Haslam, 2003; Hopwood et al., 2023; Luyten & Blatt, 2011), and on the other hand, some researchers focused on comparisons of specific psychotherapy modalities (e.g., psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioural) (Clarkin, Caligor, Stern, Kernberg, 2019). Consequently, we assumed that it is important to verify whether there are correlations between the dimensions in the alternative model of personality disorders in DSM-5-TR

and the intensity of operating out of the negatively and positively used ego states in the functional model. We considered these to be behavioural manifestations of the level of functioning of the self and functioning in social relationships described in medical classifications. Empirical verification of the diagnostic usefulness of the functional analysis of ego states (egogram) in people with personality disorders is of significant clinical importance, as it would provide a basis for the use of this model in the diagnosis of personality disorders and the planning of therapeutic interventions.

## **Diagnostic criteria for personality disorders in DSM-5-TR**

The DSM-5-TR (APA, 2024) presents two models for classifying personality disorders. Part II identifies 10 specific personality disorder types, grouped into three clusters: clusters A, B, and C. Part III presents the Alternative Model of Personality Disorders (AMPD), referred to as the dimensional-categorical model. It includes both a multidimensional model of personality disorders with mild, moderate and severe pathology, as well as specific personality disorders – anti-social, avoidant, borderline narcissistic, obsessive-compulsive and schizotypal. Personality disorders are assessed along the dimensions of self and interpersonal functioning, as well as six pathological trait domains that constitute specific or nonspecific personality disorders as defined by these traits. (DSM-5-TR; APA, 2024).

The descriptive diagnosis of personality disorders in ICD-11 and AMPD in DSM-5-TR involves assessing the manifestations of various difficulties based on the severity of personality dysfunction, and the procedure should include evaluation and then a diagnostic decision. In DSM-5-TR, the first step is to assess whether the individual meets the general diagnostic criteria in two areas: 1) in the self area in the dimension of identity integration and self-direction, and 2) in the interpersonal relationships area in the dimension of empathy and intimacy (criterion A). Next, the severity of a specific set of pathological traits is assessed – negative emotionality, isolation, antagonism, disinhibition and psychoticism (criterion B, DSM-5-TR, 2024). In the next steps, it should be determined whether the abnormalities in the self and interpersonal areas are relatively rigid and occur in many personal and social situations (criterion C); relatively stable over time, with their origins present in adolescence or early adulthood (criterion D); they cannot be better explained by another mental disorder (criterion E); they are not solely the result of psychoactive substance use or other medical conditions (criterion F); and they cannot be better understood by certain developmental phenomena for a given period of an individual's life, as well as by socio-cultural influences (criterion G) (DSM-5 TR, AMPD,

p. 1012). The final step in DSM-5-TR is the diagnosis of one of the specific disorders already mentioned, i.e. one of the six distinct types of personality disorders: schizotypal, antisocial, borderline, narcissistic, avoidant and obsessive-compulsive. The diagnosis of a personality disorder is always based on criteria and characteristics, and the diagnosis of a non-specific personality disorder is possible when the criteria for one of the specific types of personality disorder are not met.

In the ICD-11 (2022) classification, the diagnosis is essentially multidimensional, and the distinction between categories of disorders has been abandoned, with one exception. The final step in the procedure may be to determine whether the clinical picture of the disorder in various areas of life corresponds to the manifestation of borderline personality disorder. In both classifications, the steps of the diagnostic procedure are very similar, but the difference between ICD-11 and AMPD in DSM-5 TR is that in the area of pathological personality traits, instead of antagonism, the trait of dissociality has been identified, and instead of psychoticism, the trait of anankastia has been identified (Bach & Simonsen, 2021; Gutiérrez et al., 2023; Mulder, 2021). The basis for hypothesising the occurrence of a personality disorder is the assessment of disorders in the self and interpersonal areas, which provides a basis for assessing the severity of the disorder on a five-point scale: no disorder (level 0), mild disorder (1), moderate disorder (2) and severe personality disorder (level 4) (Bach & Simonsen, 2021; Gutiérrez et al., 2023; Mulder, 2021; DSM-5 TR, 2024).

In relation to the research question about the relationship between the configuration and severity of positively and negatively used ego states and the level of personality functioning, the focus was on measuring personality disorder according to Criterion A. The self-area and the interpersonal relationships area were described by many aspects and characteristics of an individual's functioning (cf. Table 1).

Table 1  
*Dimensions of the self and dimensions of interpersonal functioning in personality disorders in AMPD DSM-5 TR (2024)*

Self-area	Interpersonal area
Identity was defined by three aspects: a) The experience of oneself as a separate entity, with clear boundaries between the self and the non-self. b) A stable sense of self-worth and accurate self-assessment of abilities. c) The ability to regulate a wide range of emotional experiences.	Empathy is defined by three aspects: a) Understanding and appreciating the experiences and motivations of others. b) Tolerance of diverse perspectives. c) Understanding the impact of one's own behaviour on others.

Table 1

*Dimensions of the self and dimensions of interpersonal functioning... (cont.)*

Self-area	Interpersonal area
<p>Self-management:</p> <p>a) Setting consistent and realistic short-term and lifelong goals in the context of one's own capabilities.</p> <p>b) Applying constructive and pro-social standards of behaviour in various areas of life to achieve these goals.</p> <p>c) The ability to self-reflect and assign constructive meanings to one's own experiences.</p>	<p>Closeness:</p> <p>a) Depth and durability of relationships with others.</p> <p>b) Desire and ability to experience closeness.</p> <p>c) Mutual respect for others, reflected in various behaviours.</p>

Source: DSM-5 TR, 2024 , p. 1013; Zetl et al., 2020.

## Ego state models in the diagnosis of personality functioning

The ego state model is one of the key concepts used to describe personality manifestations within the language of Transactional Analysis, proposed by Eric Berne (1961; see also: Cornell, 2018; Stewart & Joines, 2021). The ego state is understood as a coherent configuration of feelings and thoughts (phenomenological dimension) that triggers corresponding behaviour patterns (operational model; cf. descriptive model), rooted in internal cognitive-affective representations of script decisions (structural dimension; cf. structural-dynamic model) (Little, 2016; Tudor, 2010).

The phenomenological, structural and operational dimensions form the basis for diagnosing, on the one hand, behavioural, interpersonal, observable manifestations of ego states (functional model) and, on the other hand, inferring intrapsychic aspects, mechanisms and pathomechanisms of human functioning (i.e. structural model and script). Consequently, in TA research and practice, the ego state model is used in two ways: 1) the structural model describes the elements and structure of a person's personality (it answers the question: what intrapsychic mechanisms are activated and why), while 2) the functional model allows to describe the behavioural manifestations of activated states, intrapsychic processes at the behavioural-interpersonal, communicative level (it answers the question: what? and how?) (Cornell et al., 2018; Cox, 1999; Frączek, 2020; Stewart & Joines, 2021). Each person is characterised by internal ego states (structural model), that is intrapsychic representations which, under the influence of external and/or internal stimuli, activate specific experiences and behaviours, i.e. manifestations of characteristic ego states (Hay, 2009). Observation of the patient's interpersonal functioning allows for the identification of parts of the personality and interactions between them activated at a given moment (Cox, 1999).

In Transactional Analysis, diagnosis at the descriptive level of personality disorders involves presenting and assessing manifestations of a dysfunction in the self and interpersonal areas, referring to, among others: the functional model (positive and negative use of ego states), strokes and their economy, passive behaviours, and overt and covert transactions. The diagnosis explaining persistent symptoms and difficulties involves conceptualising their pathomechanism and pathogenesis by describing the dominant (characteristic) script decisions and their structure, script elements, life positions, levels of discounting, and psychological games (Frączek et al., 2022).

The diagnosis of a personality disorder based on behavioural analysis of ego states (functional model) is only one type (level) of assessing a patient's mental state and social functioning. Although it plays a specific role in the treatment process, transactionalist's diagnostic activities should not be limited to this type of description. According to Eric Berne (1961, 1966), a complete diagnosis of a patient at the descriptive and explanatory level requires four levels of diagnosis to be taken into account: behavioural, social, life history, and phenomenological. Omitting any of these levels can lead to reductionism and a one-dimensional approach, which limits the accuracy of the diagnosis. Tudor and Widdowson (Tudor & Widdowson, 2008) emphasise that moving from behavioural and social diagnosis to conclusions about personality disorders often results in oversimplification and is insufficient for undertaking TA therapy. Reducing complex mental processes to a single dimension, e.g. exclusively transaction types or stroke economy, can lead to misjudgement and misinterpretation of the patient's functioning. Similar limitations occur in attempts to diagnose personality disorders exclusively in terms of functional ego states. Berne (1961, 1966) pointed out that a complete diagnosis of ego states requires a consideration of both the social (relational) and the intrapsychic dimensions. Integrating these perspectives allows for a deeper understanding of personality dynamics and more effective planning of therapeutic interventions.

People with personality disorders are characterised by a specific script structure, understood as a configuration of injunctions, drivers, programs and permissions, which is anchored in a structural model, i.e. in the C<sub>2</sub>ego state (Cornell et al., 2018; Erskine, 2018). This internal organisation of personality affects the way an individual functions in interpersonal relationships, which manifests itself, among other things, in characteristic patterns of activation of positive and negative ego states in the functional model. An illustration of this can be found in the example of a patient diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder, whose script is based on the drivers: "be perfect" and "be strong", as well as the injunctions: "don't be yourself" and "don't feel" (Heathcote, 2006; Frączek et al., 2022). In the case of such a script configuration, the negatively activated Normative Parent dominates one's behaviour, which causes communication

problems and promotes conflicts in relationships. In social interactions, one often uses this ego state in a humiliating way, formulating statements in a critical or judgemental tone. One has difficulty accessing the positively used Adapted Child through subordination, which may reflect the activation of a script decision, e.g., dependence in a relationship is experienced as a sign of weakness (Frączek et al., 2022).

A review of available research on the profiles of positive and negative ego states characteristic of various mental disorders indicates their relative stability and diversity. In individuals addicted to alcohol (Craig & Olson, 1988; Williams & Glarino, 2023), the negatively used Adapted Child and problems in accessing the Adult ego state are more frequently observed. Depression is characterised by an excessive amount of energy invested in the negatively used ego states of the Normative Parent and Adapted Child (Widdowson, 2011). The literature also includes studies on the relationship between the egogram (Dusay, 1977) and obesity, atopic dermatitis and hospitalisation rates (Bando, 2018), anorexia and bulimia (Nakao et al., 1999), and psychoactive substance addiction (Williams & Glarino, 2023). It has been found that access to ego states (structural and functional), alongside adequate social functioning and a sense of self-efficacy, are strong predictors of the level of psychopathology and mental health, i.e. a person's overall well-being and sense of self-actualisation (Vos & van Rijn, 2021, 2022). Egogram analysis is also a useful tool in assessing personality traits (Yokoyama & Bando, 2019).

Based on the adopted theoretical assumptions and available research results, in our own research project we formulated a hypothesis according to which mentally healthy individuals use ego states in a positive way significantly more often, while individuals experiencing mental difficulties or disorders tend to use ego states in a negative way more often (Cornell et al., 2018; Frączek, 2020; Mellacqua, 2020; Vos & van Rijn, 2021, 2022).

## Research objective and questions

The objective of the study was to determine which ego states are most frequently activated by individuals diagnosed with personality disorders, as well as to examine whether the configuration of positively and negatively used ego states (egogram) can provide a reliable basis for diagnostic decisions about the occurrence of personality problems or disorders in an individual. In view of the above, the following research question was posed: Are there differences between a group of people with normal personalities and a group of people with personality disorders in the intensity of their use of positive and negative ego states?

## Participants and procedure

The study was conducted using paper-and-pencil as well as online methods in two voivodeships in Poland. A total of 106 people aged 18 to 65 participated in the study<sup>1</sup>. The average age of the participant was 25.8 years. The majority were aged 18-25 (72.7%; 77 people). Most were students (59.4%), and over a quarter held a higher education degree (26.4%). Over one-third of the study group declared that they had been diagnosed with a personality disorder (32.1%), and 22 participants had been hospitalised in a psychiatric ward (20.8%). Detailed characteristics of the group are presented in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Characteristics of the study group*

Variables	No of participants	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Woman	86	81.1
Man	16	15.1
Non-binary	4	3.8
<b>Age</b>		
18-25	77	72.7
26-35	20	18.8
>35	9	8.5
<b>Education</b>		
Primary	1	0.9
Secondary	14	13.2
Student	63	59.4
Higher	28	26.4
<b>Domicile</b>		
Village	20	18.9
City up to 100 thousand	32	30.2
City 100-150 thousand	26	24.5
A city over 500 thousand	28	26.4
<b>Diagnosis of Personality Disorder</b>		
Yes	34	32.1
No	72	67.9
<b>Hospitalization</b>		
Yes	22	20.8
No	84	79.2

Source: Author's own research.

<sup>1</sup> The analysed database was created in collaboration between Dominika Rusnak and the authors of the article.

## Research tools

*The Self and Interpersonal Functioning Scale* – SIFS (Gamache et al., 2019) Polish adaptation: (Soroko et al., 2025) is a tool that refers to an alternative, categorical-dimensional model of personality disorders in DSM-5. The questionnaire consists of 24 statements and examines two areas – self-functioning and interpersonal functioning. The results of the questionnaire allow for the assessment of the level of identity coherence, self-direction, empathy and intimacy. Respondents answer the questionnaire items on a Likert scale from 0 (does not describe me at all) to 4 (describes me completely accurately). Higher overall scores indicate deeper personality pathology. The reliability of the scales based on Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient ranges from 0.68 (questionable value) for the Self-Direction subscale to 0.84 (good value) for the Identity scale, indicating sufficient reliability. The results were good at the dimensional level ( $\alpha$  Self = 0.87 and  $\alpha$  Interpersonal = 0.85) and excellent for the entire scale ( $\alpha$  = 0.91).

*The Ego States Questionnaire* (Matkowski, Więclawski, 2016) is a tool that examines which ego states are used by respondents and how often. It consists of 72 statements that form the following subscales: Natural Child, Rebellious Child, Compliant Child, Adult, Normative Parent, and Nurturing Parent. In addition to the overall score indicating the frequency of ego state use, the questionnaire allows for the calculation of scales of positive and negative aspects of ego states. The points obtained are transferred to egograms. The results of all states are then compared in terms of positive and negative aspects. Responses to the questionnaire items are scored on a Likert scale from 0 (if you strongly agree with a particular statement) to 3 (if you strongly disagree). Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis showed low to high internal consistency of the subscales ( $\alpha$  = 0.43 to 0.83).

*The sociodemographic survey* consisted of five questions concerning the age, gender (female, male, non-binary), place of residence, education, psychiatric diagnosis and previous hospitalisations of the respondents.

## Statistical analyses used

The statistical analysis was performed using the jamovi 2.3.28.0 programme. In order to answer the research question, measures of central tendency and distribution of questionnaire results were calculated. Next, Spearman's rho correlation coefficients between variables and the significance of differences using the Mann-Whitney U test were calculated for the ego states used between the compared groups with low and higher levels of personality functioning.

## General characteristics of the results obtained

Measures of central tendency of the questionnaire results examining the variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

*Descriptive statistics of the results obtained*

	Variable	N	Average	SD	Min	Max	The Shapiro-Wilk Test	
							V	S
SIFS Questionnaire	SIFS_s	106	37.74	17.29	10.000	76.0	0.962	0.004
	IS	106	14.01	6.99	1	28	0.955	0.001
	SD	106	8.44	4.63	0	20	0.967	0.009
	INT	106	6.78	4.82	0	19	0.912	<.001
	EMP	106	8.50	3.63	3	19	0.940	<.001
Ego States Questionnaire	FC(p)	106	10.64	3.50	3	18	0.978	0.071
	RC(p)	106	10.95	3.97	1	18	0.971	0.021
	CC(p)	106	11.09	3.82	1	17	0.936	<.001
	NP(p)	106	11.04	3.75	0	18	0.962	0.004
	NRP(p)	106	10.87	4.22	1	30	0.948	<.001
	A	106	10.81	3.36	0.500	17.5	0.962	0.004
	FC(n)	106	8.46	3.41	1	18	0.975	0.040
	RC(n)	106	6.58	4.32	0	18	0.949	<.001
	CC(n)	106	7.68	4.58	0	18	0.972	0.024
	NP(n)	106	7.50	3.93	0	17	0.971	0.020
	NRP(n)	106	9.46	3.12	1	18	0.980	0.116

Key: N – sample size, SD – standard deviation, Min – lowest score, Max – highest score, V – Shapiro-Wilk test stat value, S – significance level; < – significance level less than 0,001; SIFS\_s – overall score of the level of personality dysfunction, IS – identity subscale, SD – self-direction subscale, INT – intimacy subscale, EMP – empathy subscale; A- Adult, FC – Free Child, RC – Rebellious Child, CC – Compliant Child, NP – Normative Parent, NRP – Nurturing Parent, (p) – positive use of the ego state, (n) – negative use of the ego state;

Source: Author's own research

Due to the Shapiro-Wilk test results indicating a lack of normal distribution of most variables, the research questions were verified using non-parametric statistical tests.

First, we examined whether there were any correlations between personality functioning and the use of positive and negative ego states. The verification was carried out on the basis of an analysis of the Spearman's rho correlation matrix.

Table 4

*Spearman's rho correlation matrix between the variables: the intensity of positive and negative ego states, and the level of personality functioning*

		SIFS_s	IS	SD	INT	EMP
FC(p)	Spearman's rho	-0.244 *	-0.272 **	-0.157	-0.122	-0.270 **
	p	0.012	0.005	0.107	0.213	0.005
RC(p)	Spearman's rho	0.014	0.031	-0.064	0.080	-0.006
	p	0.889	0.750	0.513	0.414	0.952
CC(p)	Spearman's rho	-0.423 ***	-0.430 ***	-0.308 **	-0.317 ***	-0.372 ***
	p	< .001	< .001	0.001	< .001	< .001
NP(p)	Spearman's rho	-0.280 **	-0.234 *	-0.254 **	-0.251 **	-0.241 *
	p	0.004	0.016	0.008	0.009	0.013
NRP(p)	Spearman's rho	-0.384 ***	-0.394 ***	-0.308 **	-0.266 **	-0.356 ***
	p	< .001	< .001	0.001	0.006	< .001
A	Spearman's rho	-0.520 ***	-0.477 ***	-0.567 ***	-0.347 ***	-0.419 ***
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
FC(n)	Spearman's rho	0.172	0.168	0.184	0.096	0.182
	p	0.078	0.086	0.058	0.326	0.062
RC(n)	Spearman's rho	0.440 ***	0.349 ***	0.409 ***	0.393 ***	0.426 ***
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
CC(n)	Spearman's rho	0.412 ***	0.476 ***	0.334 ***	0.225 *	0.325 ***
	p	< .001	< .001	< .001	0.020	< .001
NP(n)	Spearman's rho	0.157	0.058	0.096	0.260 **	0.191 *
	p	0.108	0.556	0.330	0.007	0.049
NRP(n)	Spearman's rho	-0.142	-0.179	-0.107	-0.066	-0.093
	p	0.147	0.066	0.277	0.500	0.341

Notes: \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

Key: A – Adult, FC – Free Child, RC – Rebellious Child, CC – Compliant Child, NP – Normative Parent, NRP – Nurturing Parent, (p) – positive use of the ego state, (n) – negative uses of the ego state; SIFS\_s – overall score of the level of personality dysfunction, IS – identity subscale, SD – self-direction subscale, INT – intimacy subscale, EMP – empathy subscale; MENT(sum) – the ability to mentalize the overall result, MentsS – Self-related Mentalization, MentsO – Other-related Mentalization, MentsM – Motivation to Mentalize

Source: Authors' own research

The statistically significant correlations between the positive and negative use of ego states and the level of personality functioning, measured using the

SIFS scale and its subscales: identity (ID), self-direction (SD), intimacy (INT) and empathy (EMP)<sup>2</sup>, are presented and marked above.

Analysis of the Spearman's rho correlation matrix revealed statistically significant relationships between the level of personality functioning and the ego states used. The strongest relationship was found between self-direction and the Adult ego state ( $\rho = -0.567$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Moderate negative correlations were found between:

- the overall SIFS score and the Adult ego state ( $\rho = -0.520$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and the positively used Compliant Child ego state ( $\rho = -0.423$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ),
- identity and the Adult state ( $\rho = -0.477$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and CC(p) ( $\rho = -0.430$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ),
- empathy and the Adult state ( $\rho = -0.419$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

Moderate positive correlations were obtained for:

- the Rebellious Child state used negatively with the overall SIFS score ( $\rho = 0.440$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), self-direction ( $\rho = 0.409$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and empathy ( $\rho = 0.426$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ),
- the negatively used Compliant Child state with SIFS ( $\rho = 0.412$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and identity ( $\rho = 0.476$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ).

These results indicate that higher levels of personality dysfunction are associated with more frequent use of negative ego states and limited access to the functional Adult.

## Ego state profiles of individuals with normal and disordered personalities

In order to answer the question about the differences between individuals with normal personality and individuals with personality disorder, a series of calculations were performed. Individuals with personality disorders and without personality disorders were identified on the basis of the results obtained by the respondents in the SIFS questionnaire, therefore comparative statistical analyses were performed on psychometrically identified groups. It was arbitrarily assumed that individuals with the so-called personality style fall within the range of average results, give or take one standard deviation from the arithmetic mean. In this way, individuals with a relatively integrated personality ( $N=22$ ,  $min=10$ ,  $max=20$ ,  $mean=16$ ,  $SD=3.32$ ) and those with personality disorders ( $N=23$ ,  $min=55$ ,  $max=76$ ,  $mean=62.5$ ,  $SD=6.52$ ) were identified

<sup>2</sup> The article is based on a statistical re-analysis of the research results presented in the article by Przybylski, Cierpiąłkowska, Rusnak (2023), where a full analysis of the results obtained can be found. The most important conclusions are presented below.

from the entire group of respondents. Further analyses excluded the group with results between one standard deviation in plus and in minus (61 individuals were excluded).

Table 5

*Mann-Whitney U test for significance of differences between groups with integrated personality and with personality disorder in terms of positive and negative ego states*

	Group	N	Average	Median	SD	SE	Mann-Whitney U test	p
FC(p)	1	22	11.86	13.00	3.77	0.804	164,0	0,044*
	2	23	9.57	10.00	3.84	0.800		
RC(p)	1	22	10.59	10.50	4.03	0.860	243,5	0,837
	2	23	10.57	11.00	5.06	1.055		
CC(p)	1	22	12.59	14.00	4.28	0.913	125,5	0,005*
	2	23	9.65	9.00	3.23	0.673		
NP(p)	1	22	12.00	13.00	3.98	0.848	165,5	0,048*
	2	23	9.87	10.00	4.40	0.918		
NRP(p)	1	22	13.09	13.50	5.69	1.213	130,5	0,005*
	2	23	9.48	10.00	3.53	0.736		
A	1	22	12.14	13.00	3.51	0.748	73,0	<0,001*
	2	23	8.67	8.50	2.32	0.484		
FC(n)	1	22	8.00	7.00	3.77	0.803	205,0	0,279
	2	23	9.57	9.00	4.68	0.976		
RC(n)	1	22	5.18	3.00	5.42	1.156	113,0	0,002*
	2	23	9.48	10.00	3.54	0.738		
CC(n)	1	22	5.09	5.00	4.89	1.042	118,5	0,002*
	2	23	9.57	9.00	4.70	0.980		
NP(n)	1	22	7.86	6.00	4.06	0.866	188,0	0,141
	2	23	9.35	9.00	3.72	0.777		
NRP(n)	1	22	10.23	10.00	2.39	0.509	211,0	0,343
	2	23	9.57	9.00	3.57	0.743		

Key: 1 – group of people with integrated personality, 2 – group of people with personality disorder, N – sample size, SD – standard deviation, SE – standard error, FC – Free Child, RC – Rebellious Child, CC – Compliant Child, A – Adult, NP – Normative Parent, NRP – Nurturing Parent, (p) – positive use of ego state, (n) – negative use of ego state, \* p < .05.

Source: Authors' own research



Figure 1

Profiles of positive and negative ego states in a group of people with normal personality and with personality disorder

Key: FC – Free Child, RC- Rebellious Child, CC – Compliant Child, NP – Normative Parent, NRP – Nurturing Parent, (p) – positive use of ego state, (n) – negative use of ego state.

Source: Authors' own research.

The significance of differences between groups of people with integrated and disordered personalities was calculated on the basis of positive and negative ego states. The results indicate statistically significant differences between the groups studied in terms of positively used ego states: Free Child, Compliant Child, Normative Parent, Nurturing Parent, and Adult ego state – individuals with integrated personalities obtained statistically significant higher scores on scales measuring the positive use of ego states, except for the Rebellious Child. Statistically significant differences between the compared groups were also found in the frequency of use of the Rebellious Child and the negatively invested Compliant Child.

## Conclusion and discussion

The research project and its results were an attempt to answer the question of whether and to what extent the diagnosis and analysis of the egogram (a pro-

file of positive and negative ego states; Dusay, 1977) of an individual can be used as a basis for inferring normal and disordered personalities to varying degrees (according to the DSM-5 TR and ICD-11 diagnostic classifications). Such research is justified, as shown by Joel Vos and Biljan van Rijn (Vos & van Rijn, 2021) in a review article containing references to constructs used in TA to terms in other personality concepts. A review of the available literature suggests that these are among the first studies in the field of TA to take up this challenge.

The analysis of differences between groups of individuals with integrated (normal/healthy) personalities and those with personality disorders in terms of the profiles of positive and negative ego states used yielded very interesting results. It transpired that individuals with personality disorders are characterised by less access to the Adult ego state and the positively used Free and Compliant Child ego states, as well as the Normative and Nurturing Parent ego states. At the same time, they show a greater tendency to react out of the negatively used Rebellious and Compliant Child ego states.

Individuals who more often use the Rebellious Child ego state in a negative way show a significantly lower level of personality functioning, difficulties in self-regulation, and a limited capacity for empathy. The negative Rebellious Child ego state may therefore reflect a pattern of functioning based on conflict and avoidance of dependence. These individuals more often display attitudes of resistance, provocation, avoidance of dependence, and impulsive reactions. In a clinical context, this may manifest itself in frequent interpersonal conflicts, outbursts of anger, disparagement of the therapist, or difficulty in maintaining the therapeutic contract. High intensity of negative Compliant Child use (submissiveness, withdrawal, suppression of needs and emotions) characterises individuals who may exhibit significant difficulties in personality functioning, particularly in terms of identity. High intensity of the CC(n) may be a sign of dominant script injunctions, such as “don’t feel” or “don’t be yourself”. Negative use of the CC may be clinically evident as a chronic sense of powerlessness, excessive submissiveness, internalised beliefs of “I have no right” or “I must conform”. This is often accompanied by a blurred or unstable identity. The strong negative correlation of the Adult ego state with all aspects of personality functioning suggests that the Adult ego state has a stabilising and integrating function. Frequent, flexible use of this state is associated with emotional maturity, a coherent identity, the ability to self-direct, and empathetic responses. A high Adult level in the egogram may be an indicator of a stable personality, the ability to reflect, a well-established identity, and mature relationships.

Egogram result profiles indicate that individuals with an integrated personality use the functional Adult state significantly more often, which reflects a greater ability to self-regulate, adequately assess reality, and make decisions. In the dimensional model, this corresponds to a low severity of disorders

in the areas of self-direction, identity and relationality. In turn, individuals with personality disorders are significantly more likely to activate negative forms of the Rebellious Child (impulsivity, resistance, aggression) and Compliant Child (submissiveness, dependence, withdrawal) states. This indicates a high level of disorders in the areas of identity, emotional regulation and adaptive relational patterns.

In light of the results obtained, the psychopathology of personality disorders is more strongly reflected in the Child and Adult ego states than in the Parent ego state. In other words, it is the profile of use of the Compliant Child, Rebellious Child and Adult ego states that provides more accurate information about the level of personality functioning. The contemporary evidence-based model of TA psychotherapy assumes that ego states represent the structure of personality, while functional states represent the way it is expressed (Vos & van Rijn, 2021). It can therefore be assumed that the configuration of positive and negative use of the above-mentioned ego states provides a more accurate basis for formulating diagnostic hypotheses than the Parent ego states.

The results of the study may serve as a starting point for further analysis, especially of the relationship between the profiles of positively and negatively used ego states and the specifics of script decisions, including dominant injunctions, drivers and permissions. Such research would have significant practical importance – the knowledge gained could support not only descriptive diagnosis, but also explanatory diagnosis, taking into account the pathogenesis and mechanisms of maintaining patterns of experience, thinking and interpersonal relationships. This would allow for more accurate therapy planning and more effective monitoring and rebuilding of the therapeutic alliance in situations where it has ruptured (Eubanks et al., 2019; Safran et al., 2009).

The research confirmed the hypothesis about the difference between the profiles of positively and negatively used ego states between groups of people with personality disorders and normal personalities in the self and interpersonal areas. This means that the behavioural manifestations of personality identified in Transactional Analysis can form the basis for diagnostic conclusions at the descriptive level. It should be assumed with some caution that normal and disordered personality can be diagnosed on the basis of a description of activated positive and negative ego states, which are manifestations of the script and its various elements described in the structural model (Cornell et al., 2018; Steiner, 1990; Tudor, 2010; Vos & van Rijn, 2021, 2022).

Competencies involving the ability to formulate and understand differential diagnoses based on the DSM-5-TR and ICD-11 classifications are essential for clinical practice. Transactional Analysis psychotherapists, especially those who work in interdisciplinary teams treating patients with various mental disorders, should be familiar with the language of psychopathology in order to communi-

cate and collaborate with clinicians from different specialties. Knowledge of the terminology used in nosological diagnosis facilitates cooperation with psychiatrists, paediatricians, family doctors and other specialists. Owing to the knowledge contained in this article, transactional analysts can more effectively integrate their practice with the medical approach. This increases their competence to cooperate and improves the exchange of diagnostic information, which enables the creation of more individualised treatment programmes and, consequently, more effective help for patients.

## Limitations

The limitations of our own research are related to several factors, four of which seem to be the most important. The operationalisation of variables, especially the use of the Ego States Questionnaire (Matkowski, Więclawski, 2016) to measure the intensity of positive and negative ego states, may have a significant impact on the results of the study. This is an experimental tool with low reliability of the Nurturing Parent ego state and only clinical knowledge about its validity. The study was conducted on a psychometrically clinical group, some of whom did not have a clinical diagnosis of personality disorder and was also somewhat heterogeneous in terms of age.

The selection of the study group also limits the possibility of generalising the results to other populations. Within the framework of Transactional Analysis, no research was conducted on the relationship between the severity of personality disorders and the positive and negative use of ego states, which made it impossible to relate the results of our own research to other results. The lack of knowledge significantly limits the formulation of various explanations for the results obtained.

## Ethics Committee

The research project received a positive opinion from the Ethics Committee for Psychological Research of the Institute of Psychology at the University of Zielona Góra.

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## **Funkcjonowanie osobowości w zakresie *self* i relacji społecznych a profile funkcjonalnych stanów Ja**

### **Streszczenie**

W aktualnych klasyfikacjach zaburzeń psychicznych i zachowania, tj. ICD-11 (2022) oraz DSM-5-TR (2024), dominuje podejście dymensionalne nad kategorialnym, zwłaszcza do zaburzeń osobowości. Podejście wielowymiarowe stawia nowe wyzwania dla klinicystów i psychoterapeutów zarówno w zakresie diagnozy opisowej, jak i strukturalno-funkcjonalno-dynamicznej osobowości. Pojawia się pytanie, czy teorie osobowości, będące podstawą różnych modalności psychoterapii, w tym założenia analizy transakcyjnej, wnoszą wystarczającą podstawę do dymensionalnego opisu w zakresie funkcjonowania *self* i funkcjonowania interpersonalnego osoby. Celem projektu badawczego była próba odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy osoby z zaburzeniami osobowości różnią się od osób bez zaburzeń osobowości profilem behawioralnych, społecznych i komunikacyjnych przejawów funkcjonowania, tj. egogramem funkcjonalnych stanów Ja. Założono, że różnice między profilami pozytywnie i negatywnie używanych funkcjonalnych stanów Ja mogą stanowić podstawę diagnozy poziomu funkcjonowania osobowości w zakresie *self* i relacji interpersonalnych.

Poziom funkcjonowania osobowości zbadano przy użyciu Skali Funkcjonowania Self i Interpersonalnego (The Self and Interpersonal Functioning Scale – SIFS;), stany Ja zbadano Kwestionariuszem Stanów Ja. Grupa badana liczyła 106 osób w wieku 18–65 lat.

Wyniki wskazują, że osoby z zaburzeniami osobowości istotnie różnią się od osób z osobowością normalną pod względem nasilenia zarówno pozytywnych, jak i negatywnych stanów Ja. Badani z zaburzeniami osobowości częściej niż osoby bez zaburzeń osobowości korzystają z negatywnie używanych stanów Ja Dziecka Zbuntowanego i Dziecka Podporządkowanego oraz ujawniają mniejsze doinwestowanie Dorosłego. Opis poziomu funkcjonowania w zakresie *self* i interpersonalnym przy użyciu egogramu funkcjonalnego analizy transakcyjnej może stanowić wiarygodną podstawę do podejmowania decyzji diagnostycznych przez klinicystów i terapeutów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** funkcjonalne stany Ja, zaburzenie osobowości, profile stanów Ja osobowości zaburzonej i normalnej.



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## Needs that are not included in the schedule – transactional analysis of students’ (future teachers’) experiences

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### Abstract

The aim of the article was to examine how pedagogy students, especially those studying part-time, experience the lack of satisfaction of basic existential needs and how they cope with it. The study was based on qualitative methods – individual in-depth interviews and focus groups – conducted with 23 students. Data analysis was carried out using thematic categorization and concepts from transactional analysis: hungers, strokes, games, and life scripts. I formulated the main problem in the form of a question: how do the unmet needs of pedagogy students, not resulting directly from the curriculum, influence their emotional, social and professional functioning – and how do they manifest themselves in terms of hunger, costumes, games and life scenarios in the context of transactional analysis?

The results indicate that students most often reported needs for rest, emotional closeness, safety, and recognition. The chronic unmet needs may lead to frustration, decreased motivation, and, in the long term, to reproducing destructive patterns in their future work with children. The authors emphasize the need for implementing systemic emotional support in academic environments.

**Keywords:** student needs; transactional analysis; psychological hungers; emotional support; higher education

## Introduction

The modern student – especially in education – lives at the intersection of many tensions: between university expectations and their own boundaries, between daily schedules and their internal rhythms, between the need to be authentic and the necessity of fitting into formal professional roles. In this context, voices are increasingly heard that the higher education system fails to address students' everyday real needs – those related to relaxation, relationships, personal development, and a sense of meaning. Young people report feeling exhausted, overloaded with responsibilities, and lacking space to “be human,” even though they are preparing for work with a strong relational and caring nature.

In today's world, higher education is increasingly no longer a period of “self-discovery,” but a stage of intense work, time management, and a struggle to survive in a maze of responsibilities. This is particularly true for part-time students of pedagogy, who often combine studying with professional work and family responsibilities. In their daily lives, needs such as rest, sleep, social relationships, and moments of peace are relegated to the margins – as “unproductive” or “too expensive” in the realities of academic pressure. Yet, these needs are fundamental – both biologically and psychologically. Their unmet needs lead to fatigue, decreased motivation, lower self-esteem, and difficulty establishing healthy interpersonal relationships (Flick, 2018, p. 29). Pedagogy and psychology often emphasize the importance of a balance between “being there for others” and “being there for oneself,” which is a prerequisite for the mental health and professional effectiveness of future teachers (Nowak, 2011, p. 88).

Transactional analysis – a concept proposed by Eric Berne – provides tools for understanding why and how people reorganize their needs in response to environmental demands. Berne (1961, p. 47) introduced the concept of psychological hungers – the need for stimulation, structure, and recognition – as driving forces behind human actions. Their unmet needs can lead to psychological games, i.e., repetitive and inauthentic forms of interaction, and, in the long term, to the creation of life scenarios that limit individual development (Berne, 1972, pp. 131–135). The purpose of this article is to present how pedagogy students – especially those studying part-time – experience the unmet need for basic existential needs and how they attempt to cope.

Also important here is the analysis of students' everyday, existential needs in the context of their university and personal experiences, using transactional analysis as an interpretive framework. Applying transactional analysis as an interpretive framework allows us to capture compensatory mechanisms, survival strategies, and the role of the university as a transactional space. Research based on qualitative methods gives voice to the students themselves – allowing us to understand what young people truly need before becoming teachers re-

sponsible for the development of others. Applying this concept – based on concepts such as psychological hunger, strokes, games, and life scenarios – allows us to capture mechanisms for coping with unmet needs and the hidden tensions between “need” and “ought.”

This article is based on qualitative research conducted among teaching students, which aimed to identify silenced, ignored, or suppressed needs, as well as ways to compensate for them in everyday academic life. This study gives voice to future teachers as conscious participants in the educational process, attempting to negotiate their own “self” in a space that often does not facilitate this.

Understanding the nature of human needs is a key issue in psychology, pedagogy, and the social sciences. From the classical concepts of Abraham Maslow, through the motivational theories of Ryan and Deci, to contemporary approaches integrating knowledge from neuroscience and psychotherapy, human needs have been viewed as fundamental to an individual's development, relationships with others, and functioning in the social world. One approach that offers a coherent and practical framework for needs analysis is the aforementioned transactional analysis (TA).

Although this theory originally developed in the field of psychotherapy, it has gradually become a universal tool for examining interpersonal interactions, personality structures, and motivations.

In transactional analysis, human needs are not treated solely as biological or psychological mechanisms, but as dynamic components of a life script, shaped by early decisions, parental messages, and social interactions. A special place here is occupied by the concept of so-called psychological hungers, which, according to Berne, encompass stimulus needs, structural needs, and esteem needs (i.e., the hunger for contact and validation). Their satisfaction or deficiency influences the quality of interpersonal transactions, the way emotions are managed, and the individual's capacity for autonomy. The purpose of this article is to present the categories of human needs from a transactional analysis perspective, discuss their importance for individual psychological and social development, and point to the practical implications of this concept in education, therapy, and parenting relationships. The article attempts to answer the question of how TA can expand our understanding of human needs beyond classical psychological models while offering tools for identifying and meeting them in a relational context.

## **Human Needs from an Existential and Psychological Perspective**

Human needs are a fundamental focus of psychology, pedagogy, existential philosophy, and health sciences. In Maslow's classic approach, they are pre-

sented as hierarchically ordered aspirations, ranging from physiological needs to self-actualization (Maslow, 1987, pp. 15–25). However, contemporary approaches emphasize the more complex and relational nature of needs, highlighting their contextuality, variability, and cultural determinants (Deci & Ryan, 2000, pp. 227–229). In the light of the latest pedagogical approaches, students' needs related to recognition, a predictable structure of teaching interactions and relational security are conditions for their well-being and lasting engagement. Analyses of the educational climate indicate that the lack of recognition (acknowledgement) increases the risk of a decrease in motivation and a sense of agency, and also intensifies the experience of loneliness in the study process, especially in fields where the intensity of educational contacts and social requirements is high (Tłuściak-Deliowska, 2023). In the context of transactional analysis, the described deficit of “hungers” (recognition and structure) promotes the development of maladaptive patterns of interaction and psychological games, which in the long run reduces the sense of well-being.

In the existential perspective, needs are understood as the necessity to give meaning to life, find a place in the world, and establish relationships with oneself and others (Frankl, 2009, pp. 72–74). They are not only a condition for survival but also for self-determination and freedom. In this context, needs such as rest, closeness, intimacy, emotional security, and the ability to be heard are as crucial as the need for food or sleep. From the perspective of education and professional work, it is important to recognize that students – including those preparing for the role of teacher – do not function as “pure minds,” but as individuals with specific needs, resources, and deficits. The inability to meet these needs, especially in work and study settings, can lead to burnout, frustration, and emotional withdrawal (Sęk, 2004, pp. 91–93). For students of pedagogy, these effects are particularly significant – a person who experiences chronic insecurity, fatigue, or misunderstanding will be unable to effectively support the development of others, especially children. Burnout during the educational stage can become a precursor to future difficulties in professional life, leading to a reluctance to accept the role of a teacher, professional inactivity, and even resignation from education. Therefore, institutions educating future teachers should not only impart knowledge and develop skills but also create an environment conducive to meeting the emotional, social, and existential needs of students. This approach, rooted in a humanistic model of education, recognizes people as subjects, not as “tools for achieving educational goals.” It is sensitivity to individual needs, the ability to identify and meet them in appropriate conditions, that determines the quality of education – and ultimately, the quality of teachers' future professional lives.

## **Need Classification in Transactional Analysis**

Transactional analysis (TA), pioneered by Eric Berne, is one of the most comprehensive theories explaining the mechanisms of human behavior in the context of interpersonal relationships. In the TA framework, needs are not merely biological or psychological categories but relate to the individual's functioning within the social system. Berne (1961) distinguished three key needs, which he termed “hungers”: hungers for stimulus, structure, and recognition.

**Stimulus hunger** refers to the basic need to receive sensory and emotional experiences. Their deficiency often results in compulsive stimulation seeking or social withdrawal.

**Structure hunger** indicates the need to organize time and activities in a predictable manner – through rituals, patterns, and norms.

**Recognition hunger** is the need to be noticed, perceived, and appreciated by others. In TA, particular importance is attached to so-called strokes, or units of recognition – both positive and negative (Stewart & Joines, 2012).

These needs determine the ways in which an individual manages relationships, recognizes their own boundaries, and builds identity. Their long-term unsatisfaction becomes the basis for the development of distorted adaptive mechanisms, often referred to in TA as life scripts – unconsciously adopted life plans that limit an individual's autonomy (Harris, 2010). A lack of positive impacts can result in scripts like “I don't exist if I'm not needed,” “I have to be perfect to deserve attention,” or “don't show emotion because you won't be heard.” Distorted patterns of adjustment contribute to internal conflicts, difficulties in forming close relationships, and professional and emotional burnout.

In the educational and parenting context, recognizing the role of impacts is crucial – both in peer and teacher-student relationships. Consciously managing impacts, i.e., providing authentic, unconditional positive impacts, can strengthen learners' self-esteem, psychological safety, and autonomy. In turn, their chronic lack, especially among young adults in academic settings, can deepen feelings of maladjustment and trigger compensatory behaviors – perfectionism, withdrawal, conformism, or rebelliousness.

## **Transactional Analysis as a Tool for Interpreting Human Needs. Psychological Hungers: Stimuli, Structure, Recognition, and Their Consequences.**

Unmet needs (psychological hungers) can lead to the pathologization of social relationships, as manifested by so-called psychological games – repetitive

and inauthentic communication patterns, often rife with manipulation or self-sabotage (Berne, 1964). For example, a person experiencing a chronic lack of positive recognition may deliberately provoke conflicts to obtain even negative attention, thus satisfying their hunger for connection. These hungers are satisfied through everyday interactions – family, school, and work. Individuals constantly engage in social transactions (conversations, gestures, reactions), which, depending on their quality, can enhance or undermine psychological well-being. As James (1973) notes, an imbalance in the satisfaction of these hungers results in the development of an internal compulsion to repeat destructive scenarios. In the educational context, lack of hunger in future teachers can impact the quality of their work with children. A teacher who, during their own socialization – especially in childhood and adolescence – did not experience positive strokes (units of recognition such as praise, acceptance, or attention) may unconsciously replicate this pattern in their work with students (Stewart & Joines, 2012). In practice, this translates to more frequent use of criticism and irony, ignoring children's emotional needs, or rigidly enforcing rules without simultaneously demonstrating support and recognition. A lack of positive strokes in the teaching relationship limits students' sense of agency, leading to passivity, fear of failure, and, consequently, reduced motivation to take on challenges (Schulz von Thun, 2013). Children deprived of a sense of emotional security do not fully develop social-emotional competencies, which negatively impacts their ability to think and learn independently (Branden, 1994). Furthermore, a teacher who fails to recognize the impact of their own socialization experiences may recreate old, destructive parenting patterns, failing to recognize the damage they are causing to relationships with students (Harris, 2012). The latest Polish studies confirm that meeting students' needs for recognition, relationships and emotional security is crucial for their well-being and engagement in the studying process (Ministry of Science and Higher Education, 2025; CBOS, 2024; EUROSTUDENT VIII – well-being module, 2024).

Therefore, developing self-reflection and the ability to work with one's own experiences and emotions is crucial in teacher education, which helps break this negative cycle and create a classroom environment conducive to each child's development (Rogers, 1995).

### **Between Need and Duty – The Context of Pedagogy Students' Functioning Student-University Relationships as a Transactional Space**

The relationship between a student and a university is not limited solely to the transmission of knowledge and the assessment of academic achievement.

From the perspective of transactional analysis (TA), it constitutes a transactional space in which repeated interactions occur, largely based on adopted psychological roles. Berne (1961, p. 23) distinguishes three ego states: Parent, Adult, and Child, each of which can be activated in various interpersonal contexts. In academic practice, the relationship between student and lecturer is often asymmetrical – the university communicates from the position of the “Normative Parent,” enforcing rules, deadlines, and regulations, while the student – especially part-time students combining studies with work – is sometimes relegated to the role of the “Obedient Child” or the “Rebellious Child” (Stewart & Joines, 2012, p. 66). As a result, students lack the space to express their true needs, as meeting external expectations becomes the priority. University, unintentionally, can thus become an environment that reinforces psychological games – e.g., “Look how much on my plate” or “I have to do everything myself, otherwise I don’t deserve recognition” (James, 1973, p. 109). In such conditions, students don’t feel entitled to rest or admit to overwork – instead, they seek reassurance through sacrifice, perfectionism, or complaining. This is particularly problematic for pedagogy students, as the lack of role models for authentically recognizing one’s own limits later spills over into their relationships with children – their future students. From a transactional analysis perspective, the student-university relationship can be viewed as a continuous sequence of social transactions, revealing dominant self-structures: Child, Parent, or Adult (Berne, 1961). Institutional messages (syllabuses, grading rules, email communication) often take the form of messages from the “Normative Parent” position, while students adopt a subordinate position – the “Obedient Child” or the “Rebellious Child.” Such an arrangement can lead to the creation of psychological games whose goal is not actual change or development, but rather the achievement of identity-affirming attire – even negative ones.

**Invisible Needs:** Rest, Acceptance, Relationships, Being “Enough”.

Among part-time students who simultaneously work professionally and have other commitments (e.g., childcare, shift work), needs beyond the “purely academic” are often suppressed, marginalized, or repressed. Analysis of qualitative student responses reveals recurring needs:

- Rest and sleep (“I’d like to finally get some sleep”),
- Emotional closeness (“I need someone who understands and supports me”),
- Guilt-free relaxation (“Time for a book, a movie, a bath – without thinking about what else I need to do”),
- Recognition (“I need to be appreciated – by my professors, by my loved ones, by myself”).

According to Berne’s theory, these are manifestations of an insatiable hunger for stimulation and recognition (Berne, 1961, p. 47). Students do not receive enough positive attire – and when they do receive it, it is contingent on produc-

tivity (e.g., “good grade” = “you are valuable”). This leads to an internal belief that deserving rest or attention depends on meeting external standards. This creates a so-called life script based on conditional acceptance (Berne, 1972, p. 132).

It's also disturbing that many students report a lack of self-worth independent of action – “I can't do nothing,” “I feel useless when I'm not working.” These are manifestations of an ingrained internal script that dismisses the need for regeneration and rest as “unnecessary” or “selfish.” As a result, many of them create narratives of survival, not well-being – focusing on how to “persevere” rather than “live well.” From a pedagogical point of view, if students do not learn to recognize and respect their own needs, it will be difficult for them to support the emotional development of their future students – especially since the teaching profession is strongly based on the ability to regulate emotions, relational presence and empathetic response.

## Own research methodology

This article uses a qualitative approach to capture students' subjective perspectives in the context of their everyday experiences and needs (Flick, 2018). The following research questions were proposed for this study:

1. What needs do pedagogy students declare that are not directly related to their curriculum?
2. What areas of life – emotional, social, and professional – are most frequently identified by students as sources of unmet needs?
3. What significance do these needs have for students' sense of security, agency, and satisfaction?
4. How do the categories of hunger, costume, games, and scenarios, as defined by transactional analysis (Stewart & Joines, 2012), emerge in students' statements?

The research objectives were:

- Identifying the most frequently expressed needs of pedagogy students that are not covered by the course schedule.
- Determining the importance of these needs for students' psychosocial functioning.
- Qualitative analysis of responses in light of transactional analysis concepts, including hungers (needs for recognition, structure, stimulation), outfits (units of recognition), games, and life scenarios.
- Formulating recommendations for the academic community regarding support for students in meeting their emotional and social needs.

The primary data collection method was individual in-depth interviews (IDI) and mini-focus groups (FGI), conducted among early childhood and preschool

education students (N = 23 students). Participants were recruited voluntarily through announcements within academic groups. Students in their second to fifth year of studies, aged 21 to 37, participated in the study. The interviews were conducted in person, on individually scheduled dates, without time constraints, allowing for responses to be provided without time pressure. Students responded to a set of prepared questions. I used a semi-structured interview script, including questions primarily about emotional, social, and academic safety needs. The material was analyzed in several stages. Initial content coding was conducted using qualitative analysis based on thematic categorization (Nowak, 2011), utilizing concepts derived from transactional analysis: cravings, outfits, games, and scenarios. The next step involved applying theoretical categories derived from transactional analysis, including cravings (needs for recognition, structure, stimulation), outfits (units of recognition), and identifying elements of psychological games and references to life scenarios. The coding process was iterative – categories were refined after each reading of the material. Fragments of statements used in the analysis were retained in their original wording to preserve their meaning.

Data analysis was conducted based on thematic categorization and preliminary coding of the material (Nowak, 2011), utilizing concepts derived from transactional analysis: hungers, costumes, games, and scenarios. Excerpts from the statements quoted in the text have been retained in their original form, with minimal linguistic editing.

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of humanities and social science research. Participation was completely voluntary, and students were informed of the purpose of the study and provided informed consent to the processing of their data. Data anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout all stages of analysis.

## **Research results – students' voices about everyday needs**

The analysis of the students' responses was conducted through thematic categorization and preliminary coding of the material, using transactional analysis concepts: hungers, costumes, games, and scenarios (Berne, 1964; Stewart & Joines, 2012). OECD reports highlight that the well-being of students (students and young adults) in OECD countries leaves much to be desired: according to OECD data, the average life satisfaction of students is around 6.75/10, and around 67% of students stated that they were satisfied with their lives (OECD, 2023). The results allowed us to identify four main thematic categories corresponding to the key areas of needs reported by students. Furthermore, the WHO report “World Mental Health Report: Transforming Mental Health for All” (2022)

highlights the global mental health crisis among young adults and students – the document states that mental health “is a state of well-being that allows people to cope with the stresses of life, learn and work” (WHO, 2022)

The results allowed for the identification of four main thematic categories corresponding to the key areas of need reported by the students.

**1. Hungers:** Need for Structure, Stimulation, and Recognition

Students often expressed a strong desire for rest and free time, for example, “I wish I had more time; (...) more peace in my life, less stress” or “I need a few days of doing nothing.” These statements indicate an unmet need for structure and stimulation

in a positive sense – students desire space for regeneration and fulfilling experiences beyond academic responsibilities.

At the same time, a hunger for recognition and appreciation emerges, e.g., “I need to feel appreciated and fulfilled” or “To be appreciated.” This indicates a deficit in positive reinforcement, which, according to transactional analysis, is crucial for developing self-esteem and agency.

**2. Appearances:** The Need for Units of Recognition

Many statements explicitly reveal the need to receive positive appearances: “I need love/warmth,” “I need to be heard,” “I need to be sure that someone truly loves me.” The lack of such positive appearances can lead to the reproduction of destructive communication patterns in students' future professional relationships as teachers, which is consistent with appearance theory (Stewart & Joines, 2012).

**3. Psychological Games Avoiding Open Expression of Needs**

Although most students expressed their needs directly, subtle manifestations of psychological games can be discerned in some students. For example, statements such as “I need to finally get some sleep; I want to have winter tea with a friend” may indicate strategies for avoiding direct communication of emotions by using “safe” topics (e.g., tea, trip), which may serve as a defense against confronting one's own emotions or against rejection.

**4. Life Scenarios: The Need for Security and Stability**

The theme of building a positive life scenario resonates strongly, expressed in needs related to closeness, a place of one's own to live, a sense of security, and planning for the future. Examples include: “I need a loving partner; a place of my own to live; peace; professional fulfillment” and “I want to find someone with whom I can go through life, start a family, and feel loved, safe, and understood.” Such statements demonstrate a desire to shape a positive, stable life scenario, which is intended to protect against repeating negative patterns from the past.

The analysis of the data obtained is presented below:

Table 1  
*Qualitative data analysis – codes, TA categories, and interpretative conclusions*

Selected student statements	Code	TA category	Interpretative conclusion
“I wish I had more time; more peace in my life, less stress.” “I need a few days of doing nothing.”	Lack of time for recovery	Hunger for structure / hunger for stimulation	Chronic overload → decreased motivation and well-being
“I need to be appreciated.” “I need recognition and fulfillment.”	Need for recognition	Hunger for recognition / positive strokes	Low self-esteem dependent on external evaluation
“I need love/warmth.” “I want a day spent with my closest people.”	Lack of emotional closeness	Emotional strokes	Deficit of bonding → risk of emotional isolation
“I can’t do nothing.” “I feel useless when I’m not working.”	Perfectionism; self-pressure	Psychological game “See how much I do”	Self-worth conditioned by productivity
“I want to find someone to go through life with, start a family...”	Desire for stability	Life script (safety)	Compensation for current deficits in future role
“I need to be heard.” “I want to feel understood and safe.”	Need for visibility and acceptance	Positive strokes	Feeling “invisible” within the academic environment
“I need free time only for myself, without thinking of what else I must do.”	Sense of pressure and control	Hunger for structure	Higher education perceived as an oppressive system
“I must earn my rest.”	Self-limitations; strict internal norms	Script: “Be strong” / “Earn to exist”	Pressure for productivity → risk of burnout before entering the profession

Source: own elaboration.

The analysis indicates a predominance of unmet needs: rest, recognition, security, and closeness, which, according to transactional analysis, are responsible for regulating psychological hunger. Consequently, students adopt compensatory strategies: games (e.g., perfectionism as a way to earn strokes) and scripts (“I have to earn attention”). The data suggest that the educational system reinforces conditional self-worth and limits the possibility of regeneration – which poses a risk of carrying these patterns into future teaching.

Table 2

*Extended student quotes assigned to TA categories*

TA category	Representative student quotes
Structure and stimulus hunger (need for rest and balance)	<i>"I am constantly on the run – work, university, home – I have no time to stop and catch my breath." "I dream of at least two days when I don't have to think about anything and can simply sleep."</i>
Recognition hunger (positive strokes)	<i>"I would like to hear that what I do matters, not only look at grades." "I feel noticed only when I do something extraordinary."</i>
Emotional strokes (need for closeness and relational safety)	<i>"Most of all, I need someone who truly understands me." "Being listened to gives me strength – and that's what I am missing here."</i>
Psychological games (perfectionism as compensation)	<i>"If I do everything perfectly, maybe I will finally feel worthy." "I can't rest – rest feels like a reward, not a need."</i>
Life script: security and future stability	<i>"I want to have my own place where I feel calm and safe." "I dream of a family that supports and loves me unconditionally."</i>
Conditional strokes (feeling invisible)	<i>"Sometimes I feel like I could disappear and no one would notice." "I have to earn attention; otherwise, I am nobody."</i>

Source: author's own analysis.

Analysis of the quotes indicates that students' unmet needs – primarily those related to relaxation, recognition, and a sense of emotional security – lead to the use of compensatory strategies described in transactional analysis, such as psychological games or condition-based life scenarios. Students attempt to gain positive reinforcement through overloading themselves with responsibilities, perfectionism, and suppressing their own needs, which temporarily alleviates the lack of recognition but long-term reinforces patterns of dependence on external evaluation and feelings of loneliness. These data confirm that the academic environment – rather than serving a supportive role – often perpetuates defensive mechanisms and a contingent sense of self-worth, which may have negative consequences for students' future professional roles as teachers.

## Summary of the analysis

The collected responses clearly indicate that students' key unmet needs revolve around relaxation, recognition, a sense of security, and emotional closeness. Failure to meet these needs can lead to a diminished sense of agency, reduced mental well-being, and difficulties in building healthy relationships in both

personal and professional life. These results emphasize the need to incorporate emotional support into the academic environment, which should be treated as an integral element of the educational process, not merely an optional supplementary activity. Students who experience chronically unmet emotional needs during their academic education – such as recognition, closeness, and security – are at risk of low motivation, burnout, and feelings of isolation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Their ability to acquire knowledge and develop interpersonal skills, crucial for the teaching profession, is significantly limited. Statements from study participants, such as “I wish I had more time, more peace in my life,” and “I need to feel safe and heard,” indicate that higher education, even when implemented in accordance with the curriculum, fails to address students' fundamental needs for mental well-being. Therefore, universities should implement emotional support strategies such as mentoring, tutoring, access to psychological counseling, and fostering an open, empathetic classroom atmosphere. Training academic staff to recognize signs of student mental overload and provide appropriate support is particularly important (Hughes & Byrom, 2019). Only then can universities serve as an environment conducive not only to intellectual development but also to shaping the emotional and social competencies of future teachers, which is essential when working with children and young people. Moreover, incorporating the topic of students' mental well-being into teacher education programs can prevent them from transferring their own unmet emotional needs to future students, as indicated by the analysis conducted in this study. Developing awareness of one's own needs and the ability to constructively meet them is therefore not only a matter of individual well-being but also a factor in the quality of pedagogical work and the social responsibility of the academic community.

### **Life Scenarios and Unmet Needs – in the Light of Qualitative Research with Students**

The results of the study clearly emphasize the need to consider emotional support in the academic environment, particularly for students of pedagogy, who will be responsible for the future well-being of children and youth. The students' responses were dominated by needs for rest, closeness, and a sense of security, including: “I would like to have more peace in my life,” “I need to be appreciated,” and “I need to be heard.” This indicates a deep emotional hunger, which – if unmet – can lead to feelings of frustration, decreased motivation to learn, and even emotional and social disturbances (Ryan & Deci, 2000). At the same time, many responses revealed a need for unconditional acceptance and closeness, such as “I need reassurance that someone truly loves me,” “I want a day spent with my loved ones,” which aligns with the desire for positive attire,

crucial for healthy personality development (Stewart & Joines, 2012). The lack of systemic support at the university level – understood not only as an offer of psychological help, but also as the creation of relationships based on trust and openness between lecturers and students – leads to a growing sense of loneliness and low self-esteem, which was clearly evident in statements such as “I need self-esteem,” “I want to feel understood and safe.” According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the needs for competence, autonomy, and social relationships are fundamental to the development of intrinsic motivation and well-being. However, your study results show that students feel overwhelmed by responsibilities, lack of time to recharge, and academic pressure, as expressed by statements such as “I'd like to have a few days to do nothing,” “I need to finally get some sleep,” and “I want free time just for myself, without a to-do list.” The lack of space to meet these needs in the academic environment leads to chronic stress, which can result in burnout even before they begin their professional careers (Flett et al., 2016).

Additionally, statements such as “I need a loving partner; my own place to live; peace and quiet; professional fulfillment” indicate students' strong desire to build a positive life scenario (Berne, 1964). Unfortunately, if the academic environment lacks emotional support and openness to discussing students' needs, they may recreate the same deficient patterns in their future interactions with students, limiting their sense of security and agency. Therefore, based on the collected results, it is recommended that teacher training programs include psychoeducation in recognizing one's own emotional needs, empathetic communication, and stress management techniques. Building an academic environment that strengthens a sense of community, provides space for expressing emotions, and encourages seeking support is also crucial. This can translate into higher quality work for future teachers and better prepare them to work with children. For this reason, the academic community should develop mechanisms of real emotional support: mentoring, support groups, access to professional psychological counseling, and training for academic staff in empathetic communication and recognizing signals of psychological overload in students. Only such systemic actions can break the cycle of reproducing destructive patterns and enable students to build healthy life scenarios based on a sense of agency, security, and value (Flett et al., 2016).

## **Summary and practical conclusions**

The contemporary academic environment, especially in pedagogical fields, does not fully address students' needs for relaxation, recognition, emotional security, and interpersonal relationships. The results of qualitative research clearly

indicate that students struggle with a chronic deficit of psychological needs, including recognition and structure, which, according to transactional analysis, can lead to the development of destructive life scenarios and psychological games. Students declared, among other things: "I need to feel safe and heard," "I want a day without responsibilities, just for myself," and "I need appreciation." These statements demonstrate a deep hunger for positive attire, which, in transactional analysis, is a fundamental building block of a healthy identity. Failure to meet these needs leads to feelings of loneliness, decreased motivation, and chronic overload, which, in the long run, can result in burnout even before starting a career in education. According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the needs for competence, autonomy, and social relationships are fundamental to the development of intrinsic motivation and well-being. The study revealed that students feel overwhelmed by numerous academic and professional responsibilities, which pushes needs related to rest, relationships, and free time into the background. As a result, life scenarios are shaped based on the belief that rest is a reward that must be earned, which reinforces perfectionism and fear of evaluation. The analysis of the results also shows that universities may unconsciously reinforce psychological games in which students strive to achieve positive attributes through overload, self-sacrifice, and a constant pursuit of perfection. Such mechanisms, if not recognized and addressed, can result in these destructive patterns being transferred to teachers' work, limiting their ability to build safe and supportive relationships with children. In turn, the results of international studies show that the deficit of positive recognition ("outfits") from lecturers and the lack of a stable communication structure contribute to a decline in well-being and engagement and increase the feeling of loneliness in the studying process (Al-Thowaihi, 2024).

Therefore, it is crucial for universities to develop systemic emotional support mechanisms, including: training for academic staff in empathetic communication, mentoring, access to psychological support, and creating spaces for students to openly express their needs. Only such actions can break the cycle of reproducing negative patterns and enable future teachers to build life scenarios based on autonomy, a sense of security, and satisfaction. In summary, the article indicates that the unmet needs of pedagogy students are not only an individual problem, but a challenge for the entire higher education system. Incorporating topics related to mental well-being and recognizing one's own needs into curricula becomes a prerequisite for preparing teachers capable of supporting children in their development. Understanding the role of psychological hunger and attire in the academic socialization process allows for the creation of an environment in which students can not only acquire knowledge but also develop as individuals capable of empathy and building healthy relationships – key competencies in teaching.

## Practical conclusions

1. **Introducing systemic emotional support** – universities should ensure the availability of professional psychological help and mentoring programs that enable students to share their difficulties in a safe environment;
2. Training for academic **staff – it is necessary to develop lecturers' competencies in empathetic communication**, recognizing signals of mental overload, and providing emotional support to students (Hughes & Byrom, 2019);
3. **Creating a space for open conversation about needs** – conducting workshops and integration activities that allow students to express their needs, dreams, and concerns, fostering a sense of community and security within the group.
4. **Self-discovery education** – introducing subjects or modules related to personal development and understanding one's own emotions into curricula, in line with the principles of transactional analysis (Stewart & Joines, 2012).
5. **Monitoring student well-being** – conducting regular diagnostic assessments of student needs and well-being, which will allow for a rapid response to emerging issues and the adaptation of support services.

## Conclusion

This article demonstrates that the needs of pedagogy students – including rest, a sense of security, and being heard and appreciated – are crucial not only for their well-being but also for the quality of their future professional work. Research findings clearly indicate that chronically failing to meet these needs in the academic environment leads to decreased motivation, poorer mental health, and the development of negative life scenarios that can be replicated in working with children. The use of transactional analysis allowed for a better understanding of the mechanisms by which students interact with the university and themselves – demonstrating that an insatiable hunger for positive attitude and structure fosters the development of destructive psychological games. The research results send an important message to the academic community: universities cannot limit themselves solely to developing substantive competencies, but must also create a space that fosters the emotional, relational, and social development of future teachers. Only in this way can the cycle of negative patterns be broken and educators be prepared to support children and young people in building their self-esteem, empowerment, and security. Therefore, it is necessary to implement systemic measures that demonstrate the practical conclusions drawn from these considerations. The proposed training for academic staff in empathetic communication, mentoring programs, psychological support,

and spaces for students to freely express their emotions will certainly yield positive results. These actions not only increase the chances of developing students' intrinsic motivation and well-being but also build a foundation for a better quality future education for children, to whom they will impart not only knowledge but also patterns of healthy interpersonal relationships.

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## **Potrzeby, które nie mieszczą się w planie zajęć – analiza transakcyjna doświadczeń studentów (przyszłych nauczycieli)**

### **Streszczenie**

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie na podstawie przeprowadzonych badań, w jaki sposób studenci pedagogiki, szczególnie studium w trybie niestacjonarnym, doświadczają niezaspokojenia podstawowych potrzeb egzystencjalnych i jak próbują sobie z tym radzić. Badanie oparto na metodach jakościowych – wywiadach pogłębionych i grupach fokusowych – przeprowadzonych wśród 23 studentów. Analiza danych została przeprowadzona w oparciu o kategoryzację tematyczną i pojęcia analizy transakcyjnej: głodów, znaków rozpoznania, gier i scenariuszy życiowych. Wyniki wskazują, że studenci najczęściej zgłaszali potrzeby odpoczynku, bliskości emocjonalnej, poczucia bezpieczeństwa oraz uznania. Ich chroniczne niezaspokojenie może prowadzić do frustracji, obniżonej motywacji, a w perspektywie długofalowej – do powielania destrukcyjnych schematów w pracy z dziećmi. Autorzy podkreślają potrzebę wdrażania systemowego wsparcia emocjonalnego w środowisku akademickim.

**Słowa kluczowe:** potrzeby studentów, analiza transakcyjna, głody psychiczne, wsparcie emocjonalne, edukacja wyższa.

**ON THE BORDER**  
NA POGRANICZU DZIEDZIN



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## Artificial intelligence in media education: potential, challenges and prospects

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### Abstract

This article discusses the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in media education, highlighting its potential for developing students' media literacy, the challenges associated with its implementation, its risks, and future directions for development. Particular attention is paid to the personalization of learning, critical thinking, disinformation, and the ethical implications of AI in the educational process. This article attempts to analyse the opportunities AI offers for media education in the context of the dynamically evolving information landscape. The development of artificial intelligence is radically transforming the way society functions, communicates, and processes information. In the context of media education, the emergence of AI, recommendation systems, and content personalization poses new challenges and redefines the competencies that should be developed in students and teachers. Media education can no longer be limited to the analysis of traditional media; it must encompass phenomena related to algorithmization, AI-generated disinformation, and the ethical aspects of using intelligent systems. The aim of this article is to analyse the application of AI-based tools in media education, with particular emphasis on their role in developing critical thinking, verifying information, and personalizing learning. Artificial intelligence in media education has enormous potential to support critical thinking and student autonomy. However, as the analysis through the lens of ETA (Educational Transactional Analysis) shows, technology alone is not enough; the ability to consciously manage one's own ego states is crucial. Due to the rapid development of artificial intelligence, the analysis is based on the current state of knowledge at the time of writing (2025). Long-term empirical research on the impact of artificial intelligence on students' media competences is lacking, so the conclusions are preliminary and analytical in nature.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence, media education, media competences, digital competences, ability to critically perceive media, new technologies in education.

## **1. Introduction.**

Contemporary education faces the challenge of adapting to functioning in a digital environment. The processes of digitalization and information convergence influence not only the way students communicate, but also the cognitive and social structure of the younger generation (Buckingham 2003). The dynamically changing world is impacting the education system, forcing a redefinition of the role of schools and the responsibilities of their principals and teachers. Education is facing challenges related to the need to develop competencies essential for the development of a knowledge-based economy, the necessity of using new technologies, and the emergence of social and ecological problems requiring innovative solutions. (Gorzeńska et al. 2019). Students are not only consumers of media content but also active creators. In this context, media education is gaining importance as a tool for developing communicative, critical, and civic competences (Tanaś 2017). The primary goal of media education is to foster conscious and critical reception of media messages. It has both didactic and educational aspects. Media education should aim to develop specific media literacy skills in the recipient, which entails critical analysis and reception of the content conveyed through them (Smyl 2007; see also Dyczewski, 2005; Strykowski 2007). In the context of media education, the teacher plays the role not only of an educator but also of a guide and facilitator of creative activities (Zając 2021). Media education in the school context is now taking on a cross-curricular, often hybrid, nature—combining elements of civic, digital, artistic, and philosophical education (Janta 2020). The development of information technologies and the growing importance of media in everyday life make media education an important element in educating citizens who are capable of critically analyzing content, understanding the mechanisms of media operation and consciously participating in the digital space (Livingstone, 2004). Artificial intelligence, one of the greatest achievements of modern technology, is increasingly being used in education. In the context of media education, this raises a number of questions about the possibilities, limitations, and threats posed by integrating AI into the teaching process. The question that needs to be asked is: Can AI support media education, and if so, how?

## **2. Methodology, objectives of the review article and guiding questions of the review.**

According to Stefan Nowak, “a research method encompasses typical and repeatable ways of collecting, describing, analyzing, and interpreting empirical data, serving to obtain maximally (or optimally [...]) justified answers to the

questions posed” (Nowak, 2011). This understanding of the method was adopted for the purposes of the planned research.

The study is desk research in nature, which means analyzing existing scientific literature, reports from educational institutions (e.g., UNESCO), and current examples of AI implementation in education. Data sources include scientific articles published in academic journals and reports from international organizations. According to E. Babbie (2003), it is a non-reactive method based on the analysis of the content of existing products: various types of document classes (expert opinions, forecasts, summaries, documents illustrating decision-making processes, etc.) (Babbie 2006). The analysis of this method focused on documents available in both traditional and digital formats, relevant to the research topic (Markowska 2013). The work is a review and theoretical-analytical in nature; it does not contain empirical research, but rather serves to systematize the current state of knowledge and indicate possible directions for development.

The subject of research in the sense of the methodology of social sciences is all objects, things and phenomena as well as the processes to which they are subject, with respect to which research questions are formulated (Pilch 2001). Therefore, it was assumed that the subject of the proposed research is artificial intelligence in the context of media education for children and youth. The subject of the research determines the research goals. Intuitively, the goals of any activity, including research, can be considered to be what the person is aiming to achieve, the action they are undertaking. For the purposes of this article, the understanding of the research goal adopted by Hubert Witczak is “establishing (scientific recognition), assessing, valuing (assigning scientific value and significance) and achieving a determined, future, expected and desired state of affairs (scientific shaping of the subject)” (Witczak 2012). The proposed research adopted a list of objectives related to specific aspects of the proposed research. The aim of this study is to analyse the role and potential of artificial intelligence in media education. Based on the methodological framework outlined above, the following research objectives and questions were formulated.

1. Identifying areas of AI application in media education (content personalization, critical analysis of sources, recognition of disinformation)
2. Examining the challenges and threats associated with the use of AI in the process of developing media literacy (e.g., algorithmic bias, privacy threats)
3. Defining future development directions and prospects for the integration of AI with media education in the context of changing technologies and social expectations.
4. Assessing the role of the teacher in an AI-supported learning environment.

**Guiding questions of the review:**

1. What AI functions and capabilities are most frequently used in media education (e.g. content analysis, personalization of learning, content generation)?
2. To what extent do AI-based tools support the development of media competences of pupils and students?
3. What are the main risks associated with the use of AI in media education (e.g. disinformation, technology addiction, ethical aspects)?
4. Are teachers and media educators prepared to implement AI tools in teaching practice?
5. How do students and teachers perceive the credibility of AI-generated content?
6. How can AI be integrated with media education to support the development of critical thinking? Can AI replace traditional media education methods or does it only support them?
7. What are the expected directions of AI development in media education in the next 5-10 years?

### **3. What is artificial intelligence (AI)?**

Artificial intelligence is a dynamically developing field of computer science that deals with the creation of computer programs and systems capable of solving and performing tasks that normally require human intelligence. Its subject is to research, analyze and identify the principles that govern intelligent human behavior and their use in algorithms and applications (Stylec-Szromek 2018). Artificial intelligence systems such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and Claude can generate realistic and coherent textual expressions, which carries both enormous educational potential and the risk of disinformation (Floridi 2023). Students using such tools are often unable to independently assess the source, credibility, or intentions of an advanced generative system. This necessitates teaching skills such as:

- Recognition of automatically generated content;
- Identifying AI errors and hallucinations;
- Understanding how algorithms work and their impact on the perception of reality (Metz 2024).

Artificial intelligence (AI) plays a significant role in educational processes and can be used to transform the entire structure of formal and informal education. Attempts to use AI in teaching and learning are becoming increasingly common. Artificial intelligence is a learning aid used by students and teachers (Góralski et al., 2019). The introduction of artificial intelligence into education presents teachers, students, and parents with entirely new challenges. Every day, new opportunities, tasks, and solutions emerge that can be successfully and crea-

tively applied to education in its broadest sense, including media education. However, new doubts, limitations, and threats stemming from the inappropriate use of artificial intelligence in educational activities also arise. The important role of media education led by teachers should be emphasized here, as they can explain and demonstrate how AI-based tools and applications should be used in education. (Nowicka 2024). Artificial intelligence, when properly utilized in education, can contribute to the effectiveness of learning. It can be used to personalize the learning process by adapting content to the individual needs and learning pace of each student. Furthermore, AI-based systems can analyze data, identify patterns, and provide teachers with valuable feedback, allowing them to better adapt their teaching methods to students' needs. However, it's crucial to properly regulate and monitor the use of artificial intelligence in education to ensure it's used ethically and for the benefit of all participants in the educational process. Artificial intelligence brings numerous benefits to education, both for students and teachers, as well as for educational institutions.

## **4. The potential of artificial intelligence in education**

### **4.1. Personalization of Learning**

AI enables educational content to be tailored to individual student needs. By analyzing behavioral data and user preferences, AI-based learning systems can recommend content, adjust difficulty levels, and delivery formats, which impacts learning effectiveness (Holmes et al., 2019). In media education, this could mean better tailored materials for source analysis, identifying fake news, and media manipulation. Artificial intelligence can analyze student information, such as assignment and test results, academic progress, preferences, and learning styles, to tailor teaching materials and methods to their individual needs. This allows teachers to provide personalized and effective instruction tailored to the abilities and learning pace of each student. Using artificial intelligence, teachers can create learning plans tailored to specific student goals and needs, including tests, reports, and programs. AI allows for monitoring learning progress and adapting materials to interests and abilities, making the teaching process more effective and tailored (Buckingham 2003).

Today's media education must prepare audiences to recognize AI-generated content, from deepfakes and automated text generation to the manipulative use of recommendation algorithms in social media (European Commission 2023). These competencies are referred to as "AI literacy" or "algorithmic media awareness" (Livingstone 2020). In media education, personalizing learning can mean:

- Selection of materials consistent with the student's level of media competence;
- Adjusting the difficulty of analyzed media content (e.g. memes, articles, advertisements)
- Interactive learning of critical media reading.

#### **4.2. Content analysis and validation**

AI algorithms can be used to detect fake news (e.g., tools like NewsGuard, Logically), analyze information sources, and classify content based on credibility or emotional tone. Artificial intelligence can analyze student performance, identify strengths and weaknesses, and pinpoint areas that require additional support. This, in turn, allows teachers to quickly detect learning difficulties in their students and take appropriate action based on thorough data analysis. This allows for faster intervention and provision of support at an early stage when learning difficulties are noticed (Koziej, 2023). AI-generated tasks can support students in developing critical thinking skills through simulations, interactive scenarios, and case studies. Contemporary tools, such as educational chatbots or platforms based on semantic analysis, can support students in understanding the narrative and rhetorical structures of media (Luckin et al., 2016). Data analysis and early problem detection help teachers make better educational decisions.

Artificial intelligence can analyze students' written expression, assess their understanding of media texts, and generate automatic feedback, reducing teacher workload and enabling faster student development. AI can act as an interactive tutor, supporting students in their learning by helping them understand new material, answering questions, and providing additional exercises. Such support can be available without a time limit, giving students greater flexibility in adapting their learning to their individual schedules. Advanced translation mechanisms utilizing artificial intelligence also play a significant role in foreign language learning. Appropriate programs can be helpful in translating texts into other languages. Such assistance greatly enhances communication between people speaking different languages.

According to Stanisław Koziej (2023), AI-based applications can be successfully used in various areas of education. Writing and text editing tools are very useful for students in correcting spelling and grammatical errors. AI-based applications can support students in solving mathematical exercises, analyze data, and solve equations in a more interactive and advanced way.

#### **4.3. Content creation support.**

Learning by creating is an effective method for media education. AI tools support students in generating graphics, sound, and text (e.g., Chat GPT and

Dalle), editing and modifying audiovisual materials, and simulating social perception (e.g., content testing using predictive algorithms). Artificial intelligence offers numerous tools and applications that can be used in educational processes. Tools based on generative AI are excellent for revision, can support lesson preparation, and can plan exercises and tasks in a highly individualized way, tailored to the needs of specific students. They can be used to create engaging and engaging learning experiences (Kostecka, 2024).

AI-based tools can also be helpful in designing animations and graphics, generating simulations, and creating virtual learning experiences that allow students to explore diverse areas of knowledge in an interactive manner. Furthermore, AI-based tools allow students to process large amounts of data more quickly and efficiently, then present it clearly using graphs and presentations. This facilitates a better understanding of their research findings and facilitates their communication with others.

## **5. Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis as a Tool for Interpreting Educational Interactions with AI.**

Educational Transactional Analysis (ETA) is a psychological and pedagogical model that describes internal “ego states” and their interaction in the communication and learning process (Barrow & Newton, 2016). In the context of the growing role of artificial intelligence in media education, it becomes necessary to take into account not only technological aspects, but also psychosocial ones that shape the way students interact with digital tools. One approach that allows for an in-depth analysis of such relationships is transactional analysis (TA), developed by Eric Berne – a theory of communication and personality that allows for the interpretation of interpersonal interactions (and nowadays also (human-machine) in terms of the exchange of messages between three ego states: Parent, Adult and Child. From the TA perspective, each interaction (including the one conducted with the use of artificial intelligence) can be perceived as a transaction in which the user (student) enters a specific mental state and expects a specific reaction. (Berne, 2008). For example, students can address the AI from the position of “Child”, expecting ready-made solutions and instant gratification, or from an “Adult” position, treating AI as a source of information for independent educational decision-making. Similarly, AI itself, when simulating communication, often adopts the tone of a parent supporting or informing an Adult, which influences how users receive and interpret the message.

A child's ego state, responsible for emotions and spontaneity, can influence uncritical acceptance of information or, conversely, creative use of AI for their own creative purposes. By utilizing the EAT framework, teachers can better rec-

ognize these states and adapt their teaching methods to develop students' ego states. Critical and conscious attitudes toward media and technology. According to the EAT framework, the creative process activated by AI tools can enhance the positive attributes of the Child ego state, such as creativity, expression, and spontaneity. However, it is important that this process is moderated and integrated with the critical reflection typical of the Adult state.

In this context, media education should develop not only technical competences but also students' communicative awareness. The key question becomes: what kind of relationships do we create with AI tools and what roles do we assign to ourselves and technology in the learning process? Transactional analysis indicates that unconsciously duplicating the roles of Critical Parent or Subordinate Child can lead to ineffective, dependent use of AI, for example, treating it as an unquestionable authority

Equally important is the concept of “psychological games,” or repetitive patterns of interaction that students can engage in, even in the context of digital education. Consciously recognizing and deconstructing these mechanisms is becoming a crucial element of modern media education, especially in a world where interactions with AI increasingly resemble natural interpersonal communication.

Tab.1  
*Model TRANS-MEDIA-AI*

component	description	function/ educational purpose	example application
I- AI relationship	analysis of the user's ego state in interaction with AI	increased awareness of how we react emotionally vs. rationally	The student answers the question “Do I often agree with AI without checking?” – Adult vs. Child State Survey
adult competences	understanding AI operation, critical thinking, logical analysis	prevention of manipulation, independence	lessons on AI bias, how AI learns, and what data it uses
the role of a parent	standards, ethics, rules for using AI, responsibility	shaping ethical and moral attitudes	students and teachers jointly develop regulations for the use of AI in the classroom
the role of a child	Creativity, imagination, experimentation	creative support	AI projects – idea generation
functional fluidity between states	the ability to switch between states depending on the context	Reflective exercises – when I feel like a Child with AI and when I act from the position of a Parent	discussion

Tab.1  
Model TRANS-MEDIA-AI (cont.)

component	description	function/ educational purpose	example application
transactional reflection	tracking what scripts, e.g. AI, will do will have a better impact on students' attitudes towards AI	changing beliefs from those that are harmful to those that are beneficial	discussions, case studies

Source: the author’s own study.

6. Challenges and Limitations of AI in Education.

Effective use of artificial intelligence in education requires an appropriate and sensible approach from users. It's essential to be aware of the dangers that can arise from irresponsible use. Various measures should be taken to prevent these threats. Therefore, a balance between modern AI solutions and traditional methods in the educational process is crucial. The greatest threats include:

- **Lack of critical thinking due to overreliance on AI.** When students use AI as their primary source of information, they risk not developing analytical skills, in-depth thinking, and independent problem-solving. This can lead to a limited ability to effectively analyze and evaluate content from diverse sources.
- **Mistrust of AI:** Students may uncritically accept AI-generated content as truthful and verified, without further verification or comparison with other sources of knowledge. This situation can contribute to the spread of false and misleading information.
- **Loss of face-to-face interaction:** Excessive use of AI in education can disrupt social relationships between students and teachers. Face-to-face interaction plays an important role in the development of children and adolescents because it teaches cooperation, interpersonal communication, and relationship building.
- **ICT addiction:** Students may be susceptible to addiction to AI, which is a key support tool in the learning process, which can negatively impact the development of problem-solving skills and independent thinking. Lack of emotional understanding: AI can be used to generate conversations and interactions with students, but one of its limitations is its inability to properly understand and interpret emotions, which are crucial in direct relationships between students.
- **The threat of automated thinking.** Using AI to support media education may paradoxically lead to a reduction in student independence and a reliance on

“artificial verification” instead of self-reflection. Instead of teaching critical thinking, it may replace it with a “click and check” mechanism.

- **Algorithmic errors.** AI systems, like any software, can: make errors (e.g., falsely labeling content as “fake news”), replicate biases present in training data, and promote specific worldviews hidden in the algorithm's structure.
- **Ethical and privacy issues.** Collecting data about students, analyzing their interactions with the media, and assessing attitudes—these activities require caution and compliance with regulations (e.g., GDPR). This is particularly sensitive in the education of children and youth.

## 7. Assumptions of media education in the context of artificial intelligence

Media education is a key element here, as it allows students, with the help of teachers, to gradually acquire knowledge about the possibilities and limitations of artificial intelligence. According to Magdalena Maziarz (2024), minimizing the risks of using AI in education can take various forms. One such approach is media education, which teaches critical thinking, information verification, and the appreciation of diverse perspectives in presenting content and cultural diversity. It also demonstrates the limitations of artificial intelligence, while simultaneously demonstrating the limitless potential of humans who can use its products wisely and safely.

Media education can be understood as a variety of activities organized by parents and teachers that aim to develop media competences in children and adolescents (Łuc, 2018). On the one hand, media education allows young people to use media wisely, and on the other, it teaches them a critical and informed approach to evaluating the content they receive. According to Anna Kaczmarek (2013), the primary goal of media education is to develop media competences in early childhood, as well as among young people actively using new technologies. Media education, both in school and at home, should provide free access to information and communication technologies and teach students how to analyze media messages and explore the communication possibilities in contemporary media. Media literacy, on the other hand, encompasses the ability to critically evaluate content, recognize false information, use various media consciously and responsibly, and create one's own media content. Media education cannot be merely a course explaining how to use information and communication technologies. Its purpose is to develop conscious and thoughtful users of new media (Juszczuk-Rygałło, 2015).

The primary goal of media education is to promote appropriate attitudes toward the media and develop the ability to recognize the techniques used by

them, enabling informed decisions regarding their use (Lepa, 2002). It is crucial to use information and communication technology in such a way that it serves as a tool for understanding the world, intellectual development, and mutual communication. Practicing media education among children and youth provides a foundation for human development, imparts knowledge and experience, and, above all, teaches how to function in an information and communication society (Bis, 2018).

Agnieszka Ogonowska and Grzegorz Ptaszek (2016) argue that possessing media skills that are continually honed and developed allows for a necessary distance from the media. Media competences do not guarantee complete freedom, awareness, or a critical approach to media, but they significantly increase the likelihood of achieving them. A. Ogonowska argues that the youngest children who demonstrate an interest in new media should be adequately prepared to use them appropriately in play and learning.

## **8. The role of the media education teacher in the age of artificial intelligence.**

Today's students expect their teachers to be open to the new possibilities offered by information technologies. Modern teachers, in turn, should update and develop their knowledge and practical skills to freely use them (Przyborowska, 2003). Media skills are becoming increasingly important in the work of the modern teacher, encompassing the conscious and balanced use of various media in the pedagogical process, critical and active perception of content, and knowledge of basic theories of media influence (Siemieniecki, 2007). Teacher skills enable proper media analysis and assessment in terms of their usefulness in the educational process (Juszczuk, 2007). The educator's task in media education is to possess knowledge of media and multimedia, but above all, to use them exemplarily in everyday life (Godzic, 2005).

According to Marta Kostecka (2024), we need to consider how to teach using artificial intelligence. We should also try to understand how AI works and then transfer this knowledge to students. Understanding the potential of AI and its limitations will help teachers, students, and parents use it correctly, avoid misinformation, and create new ways to safely apply it.

Niklas Humble and Peter Mozelius (2022) argue that artificial intelligence will improve education, but only with the support of teachers who will be willing to introduce new solutions into the teaching process. According to Wacław Strykowski (2005), adequate teacher training in media education should encompass two basic goals:

1. developing students' skills to consciously, critically and correctly analyze various types of media messages;
2. enabling students to effectively use media devices as tools for intellectual work and media creativity.

In the age of artificial intelligence, students' competencies and skills will become more important than specific knowledge, as the canon of knowledge in every field will constantly change, and a willingness to learn throughout life and from many different sources will become a priority skill (Luckin, 2018). Artificial intelligence will not replace a media education teacher, but it can be a valuable assistant, provided it is used consciously and critically.

In the age of artificial intelligence, teachers will be the ones to organize when and how to use artificial intelligence tools. Together with their students, they will play a key role in designing and utilizing AI-based tools (Górecka-O'Connor et al., 2019). It will be crucial for teachers to use technology effectively and creatively to increase student engagement and enable them to develop digital competencies. A key element of the teacher's new role will be motivating and inspiring students to learn independently and develop the skills necessary to function in a changing world.

## 9. Conclusion and recommendations.

Integrating artificial intelligence into media education offers enormous potential for personalization, analysis, and creativity. However, only a critical, informed, and responsible approach to these technologies will allow them to be used as an empowering tool. It is the teacher, not the algorithm, who guides the student in the world of media. It is the teacher, not the algorithm, who remains the student's guide in the world of media. Artificial intelligence applied to education offers enormous opportunities, but it also presents many uncertainties and limitations. Krzysztof Walczak and Wojciech Cellary (2023) believe that AI is still actively developing, making it essential to develop principles and rules that will govern the responsible and informed use of AI-generated content in various fields of knowledge. Raising awareness of these tools, using them, and engaging in discussions with students about their advantages and risks will significantly improve sustainable development than banning their use. Students' understanding of the drawbacks and limitations of artificial intelligence should be coupled with knowledge of successful and creative examples of its use in science (Lim, Gunasekara, Pallant, Pallant, Pechenkina, 2023).

In the era of artificial intelligence, situations in which students interact increasingly often not only with teachers but also with digital educational tools—including chatbots, intelligent recommendation systems, and disinformation de-

tection applications. Transactional analysis allows for a novel understanding of these relationships—as communicative transactions between human ego states and simulated AI states. Applying ETA to the analysis of these interactions allows for a better understanding of why some students unthinkingly accept AI-generated content (e.g., disinformation), while others maintain a healthy distance.

A thoughtful approach to implementing and monitoring the impact of artificial intelligence in educational activities is essential. This will help avoid many threats and thus enable the use and implementation of many innovative AI-based solutions in education. This will help avoid many threats and thus enable the use and implementation of many innovative solutions based on artificial intelligence in education. Media education practiced by teachers in schools plays an extremely important role. Children and young people require a value system that helps them distinguish good from evil, useful things from harmful things. Young users of information and communication technologies need help and support in navigating freely and sensibly in a media-driven society. Media education initiated in a child's immediate environment should serve as an introduction to fundamental media education, which will be continued by teachers in primary and secondary schools. In current media education, the need for further work to understand both the opportunities and threats associated with artificial intelligence in teaching and learning should be strongly emphasized. Research is needed to help understand what the new educational reality will look like and what new skills will be needed to effectively implement the educational process in schools (Giannakos et al., 2024).

Artificial intelligence plays a significant role in the development of media education, offering opportunities to personalize the learning process, analyse data, and create interactive and engaging teaching materials. Integrating AI promotes the development of digital literacy and critical thinking, crucial in the age of disinformation. AI technologies enable students to actively participate in the learning process, while teachers gain support in preparing content, assessing work, and monitoring progress. At the same time, challenges arise related to the ethical nature of use, the threat of manipulation, and the lack of transparency of algorithms, which require a conscious and responsible approach. In the context of ETA (Educational Transactional Analysis), this concept provides reflective tools for teachers, helping them better recognize students' ego states and respond appropriately to their needs. This can strengthen educational processes and research on AI in media education.

In conclusion, it is crucial to introduce systematic training for teachers and educators, as well as to create transparent AI tools supporting the analysis, creation, and interpretation of content. AI and algorithmic issues should be incorporated into media education curricula and promote critical and reflective attitudes based on EAT toward AI-generated content, with particular emphasis on

recognizing disinformation, deepfakes, and algorithmic manipulation. Interdisciplinary research on the impact of AI on media literacy, educational processes, and the information culture of the young generation is also necessary to dynamically adjust teaching approaches and ensure safe, responsible use of AI in media education. The use of AI in media education will increase in the coming years, but it will not completely replace traditional methods or the teacher.

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## **Sztuczna inteligencja w edukacji medialnej: potencjał, wyzwania i perspektywy**

### **Streszczenie**

W artykule omówiono rolę sztucznej inteligencji (AI) w edukacji medialnej, wskazując na jej potencjał w rozwijaniu kompetencji medialnych uczniów, wyzwania związane z jej implementacją, zagrożenia oraz przyszłe kierunki rozwoju. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono personalizacji nauczania, krytycznemu myśleniu, dezinformacji oraz kwestii etycznej obecności AI w procesie edukacyjnym. Artykuł stanowi próbę analizy możliwości, jakie AI niesie dla edukacji medialnej w kontekście dynamicznie zmieniającego się krajobrazu informacyjnego. Rozwój sztucznej inteligencji radykalnie zmienia sposób, w jaki społeczeństwo funkcjonuje, komunikuje się i przetwarza informacje. W kontekście edukacji medialnej pojawienie się AI, systemów rekomendacyjnych oraz personalizacji treści wyznacza nowe wyzwania i redefiniuje kompetencje, które powinny być kształtowane u uczniów i nauczycieli. Edukacja medialna nie może już ograniczać się do analizy tradycyjnych mediów, musi obejmować zjawiska związane z algorytmizacją, dezinformacją generowaną przez AI oraz etycznymi aspektami korzystania z inteligentnych systemów. Celem artykułu jest analiza zastosowania narzędzi opartych na AI w edukacji medialnej, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ich roli w rozwijaniu krytycznego myślenia, weryfikacji informacji oraz personalizacji nauczania. Sztuczna inteligencja w edukacji medialnej ma ogromny potencjał jako wsparcie krytycznego myślenia i autonomii uczniów. Jednak, jak pokazuje analiza przez pryzmat EAT (Edukacyjnej Analizy Transakcyjnej), sama technologia nie wystarczy, kluczowa jest umiejętność świadomego zarządzania własnymi stanami ego. Ze względu na szybki rozwój sztucznej inteligencji, analiza opiera się na stanie wiedzy aktualnym na moment pisania (2025). Brakuje długofalowych badań empirycznych nad wpływem sztucznej inteligencji na kompetencje medialne uczniów, dlatego wnioski mają charakter wstępny i analityczny.

**Słowa kluczowe:** sztuczna inteligencja, edukacja medialna, kompetencje medialne, kompetencje cyfrowe, umiejętność krytycznego odbioru mediów, nowe technologie w edukacji.

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## Needs and opportunities for student participation in decision-making for sustainable development at universities

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### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the importance of student participation in decision-making for sustainable development at universities. In the article a pedagogical model that empowers and motivates students to become active and critical citizens, able to participate in shaping a sustainable future is briefly presented. Additionally some of conceptual frameworks of students participatory practices in school presented the research literature are discussed. The last part of the article presents two international programs aimed at strengthening student activity for sustainable development at universities: eco-campus and green office.

**Keywords:** students, participation, university, sustainable development, education

### Introduction

Education for sustainable development is commonly recognized as a key element of quality education and a crucial enabler for Sustainable Development. Recognizing that proper education is a key condition for achieving the assumptions of sustainable development, education was established as one of the sev-

enteen Sustainable Development Goals adopted at the 70th session of the UN General Assembly held on 25-27 September 2015 in New York with the participation of 100 representatives of states, heads of government and leaders of civil society. SDG 4 Quality Education in target 4.7 aims in

by 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development<sup>1</sup>

Higher education sector is a particularly important place for undertaking education for sustainable development (ESD). It is universities that prepare future generations of professionals and political and social leaders, thanks to whom it should be possible to transform current paradigms and introduce the principles of sustainable development in all spheres of functioning of societies and individuals (Kalinowska & Batorczak, 2017, p. 283). The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the importance of student participation in decision-making for sustainable development at universities. This is a result of my observations as a lecturer in education for sustainable development and someone involved in sustainable development activities both at university and in the formal education sector. The literature on the required competencies in ESD, transformative teaching and learning objectives is very extensive. Reference can also be made to numerous studies and recommendations from UNESCO itself, the institution responsible for initiating and shaping education for sustainable development in the world. Many models have also been described that promote active student engagement within and beyond the school community. In my article, I address two of the most recognizable models of student engagement in sustainable development at universities: eco-campus programs and green office programs. These are programs I have had the opportunity to experience first-hand as member of the Council of the Eco-Schools Program in Poland and through promoting the green office concept.

## **The role of sustainable development at universities and students' perception of it – example from the University of Warsaw.**

We are seeing increased involvement of universities in sustainable development activities in the world and in Poland. An example is the University of Warsaw (UW). In 2021, the Rector's team for ecology and the climate crisis developed a strategic document presenting the strategic actions that the University

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

wants to take in connection with climate change and the biodiversity crisis – Agenda for Climate and Sustainable Development. The adoption of the Strategy resulted in practical actions coordinated by the initiative “Smart Green University” also established in 2021. Common practices of waste segregation at the university, promotion of bicycle transport, vegetarian meals in canteens, sharing food points are just examples of practical actions taken at the University of Warsaw towards sustainable development. The University of Warsaw was the first university in Poland to join the “Race to Zero” initiative supported by the United Nations. The entities involved in the campaign declare taking immediate action to halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

Activities undertaken for sustainable development at the university and individual faculties are popularized through, among others, the organization of the “Green Day”. During this event, lectures as well as workshops and events such as preparing vegetarian meals or clothes exchange are organized

Particularly noteworthy is the Green Dialogue Platform, a place promoting research, publications and events undertaken at the University of Warsaw that serve the implementation of the principles of sustainable development and related partnerships.

In 2024 a report on the social responsibility of the university was developed by the University of Warsaw. It is the first strategic document of this type at the University of Warsaw, which contains information on the activities and achievements of the university in terms of its responsibility towards members of the UW community, the social environment and the natural environment. The UW Social Responsibility Report was distinguished in a competition organized by the Responsible Business Forum.

Despite the efforts of the University of Warsaw and all achievements in taking actions for sustainable development, students do not rate the actions taken highly. In January 2024, the University of Warsaw and the Charles University in Prague started a project financed from the mini-grant fund of the Copernicus Alliance aiming to activate students from both Universities for initiating activities supporting sustainable development at their universities. Part of the project was survey aiming in students' assessment of environment and sustainable development activities undertaken by the University. At the University of Warsaw the survey was completed by 24 students of the inter-faculty master's degree studies: Sustainable Development and Inter-faculty Environmental Protection Studies – thus students aware of the issues of sustainable development. As many as 71% of these students stated that the university is not taking sufficient action to protect the environment and sustainable development. In case of students from the Charles University in Prague of the same opinion was 33% of students, while 67% students found the university's activities satisfactory.

## In Your opinion, does the University take sufficient actions to protect the environment and sustainable development?



Figure 1

Results of students' survey undertaken at the University of Warsaw and the Charles University in Prague

Source: own materials.

In the survey, students commented on what, in their opinion, were barriers to the effective implementation of sustainable development principles at the university.

Systemic failures on the university side:

- lack of infrastructure (transport infrastructure, sorting bins, ...),
- buildings & facilities in need of reconstruction,
- community: lack of opportunities for out-of-school activities,
- study & expertise: lack of relevant programmes/courses, lack of methodological guidance & data for evidence-based decisions.

Shortcomings on the part of students:

- low awareness of strategic documents,
- lack of demand for data (watchdog role not required),
- low participation and empowerment,
- scepticism: "Not really. I can only participate as a spectator".

The answer to the question why not all students notice the university's activities for the environment and sustainable development may be insufficient promotion of "green university activities" and poor communication. This is not easy in such a large and complex institution as the University of Warsaw. However, it is noteworthy that students themselves emphasize that they are not sufficiently and appropriately involved in the decision-making process.

## **Participation as an important indication of effective ESD implantation.**

Education is commonly recognized as an instrument to achieving sustainable development however to ensure effectiveness the concept of teaching and learning must be transformed to enable individuals to lead sustainable development as agents of change (Leicht et al., 2018, p. 32). Educational initiatives that are characterized by multi-stakeholder engagement, dialogue and active participation at school level are supported by the United Nations, which is the initiator of sustainable development actions from Agenda 21 to the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Education is more than just a cognitive experience and learning goes beyond the traditional classroom setting towards engaging students with real-world problems and solutions (Leicht et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2017). A pedagogical model that empowers and motivates students to become active and critical citizens, able to participate in shaping a sustainable future, is described by Rieckmann. According to the researcher the pedagogy of education for sustainable development should be learner centred, action oriented and transformative (Rieckmann, 2018, p. 48).

- (1) Learner- centred approach. In this approach, instead of passively transmitting knowledge, the teacher strengthens students' independent, active development of knowledge. The teacher recognizes students' autonomy and their prior knowledge and experiences are the starting point for stimulating learning processes in which students build their own knowledge base.
- (2) Action-oriented learning approach is based on the experiential four-stage learning cycle developed by Kolb in 1984. Kolb's Learning Cycle includes (i) gaining concrete experience, (ii) observation and reflection, (iii) creating abstract concepts for generalization, and (iv) application to new situations. In action-oriented learning, students engage in action and the experiences they gain provide a basis for reflection in relation to the intended learning process and personal development.
- (3) The transformative learning approach aims to enable students to question and then change the ways they see and think about the world to develop their understanding. The role of the educator is to empower students and challenge them to change their worldview.

The above-mentioned theoretical pedagogical approaches, in order to be implemented in practice, require the use of participatory teaching and learning methods that will direct students to take actions for sustainable development (Rieckmann, 2018, p. 50).

A common feature of action-oriented transformative pedagogy is that, apart from highlighting the student's role in the teaching -learning process, it also refers to the surrounding reality. Students not only learn through their own experience, but also influence it through conscious choices and decisions.

### **About students' participation – some theoretical notes.**

The starting point of children's right to participation is considered to be Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) which states that children have the right to express their views freely in all matters concerning them and that their views must be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the children. It is emphasized that children's right to participate is more than just the right to express opinions or participate in decision-making, but also has a profound meaning related to the status of children in society. This is an exceptional human rights provision as it concerns the legal status of children, who do not have the full autonomy of adults but are subjects of rights. This means that the child, who is still dependent on care, protection, upbringing and education, also gains an independent social status through participation rights (Kosher & Gross-Manos, 2024, p. 2).

Since then children's participation has been explored and framed in various theoretical models (Sevon et al., 2023, p. 2). The most well known theoretical framework is Roger Hart's "Ladder of Children's participation" (1992). This model of children's participation in society is presented as a metaphorical "ladder," with eight ascending rungs representing increasing levels of children's inclusion in decision making process. The three lowest rungs (manipulation, decoration and tokenism) are all recognized as "non-participation" while the top five rungs are different forms of effective participation with top one: youth initiated shared decisions with adults. Roger Hart's ladder of children's participation is adapted from Sherry Arnstein's conceptual framework: "ladder of citizen participation" (1969) which related to adult participation in planning processes. Ten years later after developing the model of children participation Hart clarified that the term "children" covers all legal minors from preschool-age children to adolescents (Hart, 2008, p.22). The children participation must be implemented in the private sphere, as in the family context as well as in the public and formal settings, as in school.

The scope of children's participation in everyday life in the family, school and community was examined by Kosher and Gross-Manos (2024) on a sample of 46 000 children from 32 countries based on the third wave of the Children's Worlds – a worldwide survey of children's subjective well-being. According to their findings neither school nor community context are perceived by children

as places where they can realize their right to participate to the same extent as in the family context. As the authors note, especially in relation to school, this is a cause for concern. School is the central arena of everyday life for children, where they acquire knowledge and develop skills. Thus, the (perceived) lack of opportunities for children to participate in decision making process at school can be considered a social problem (Kosher & Gross-Manos, 2024, p. 17).

The document “Bucharest EU Children’s Declaration” developed during the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council in 2019 emphasized that school should become a place where children can learn about participation and exercise participation outside their families. It was pointed out that the full recognition of children’s rights to participate in decision-making can have beneficial implications for the implementation of sustainable development principles:

The way children think, their openness to change, their unbiased views, and their out-of-the-box thinking, are critical traits that can help find solutions to the world’s most persistent issues, be it poverty, climate change or migration.<sup>2</sup>

## **A review of selected programmes supporting student participation in decision-making for sustainable development at universities.**

In the research literature conceptual frameworks of students participatory practices in school are well recognised. In literature based review researchers Perry-Hazan and Somech list, among others, conceptual frameworks of student participatory practices at school by Mannion et al. (2020) and Thomson and Holdsworth (2003). In the first framework four ‘grounds’ of student participation are identified: (1) participation that takes place in and through teaching and assessment processes in traditional classrooms and spaces such as laboratories and sports halls; (2) participation as opportunities to participate in and shape school life outside formal lessons, e.g. in clubs, societies, trips, fundraising, competitions and awards; (3) participation in formal or structured groups such as student councils, but also groups dedicated to specific school policy issues; and (4) connections with the wider community. Thomson and Holdsworth identified three key factors: (1) student participation in curricular projects; (2) student leadership activities such as student councils; (3) accountability measures, such as surveys of students to amplify the review of school performance (Perry-Hazan & Somech, 2021, p. 7).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/romania/stories/story-bucharest-eu-childrens-declaration-drawings>  
z dn.27.12.2024

Though, in relation to student participation in decision-making at universities, there is lack of research and scientific studies. Observations of practices at universities also do not indicate that in practice such activities, except the statutory activities of student councils, are common. This does not mean, however, that such practices do not exist. On the contrary, especially when it comes to strengthening students' activities for sustainable development at universities, there are at least two well recognized programs: eco-campus and green office.

#### (1) Eco-campus

Eco-campus is one of the programs developed by Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE). It should be emphasized that FEE is one of the world's largest environmental education organizations founded in 1981.

Eco-campus is the equivalent of the largest global sustainable schools programme Eco-schools developed by FEE in response to the recommendations contained in Agenda 21 to conduct education for sustainable development. While the Eco Schools program is aimed at school students and the school community, the Eco-campus program operates at universities. Both are award programs and based on the seven – step methodology:

- Form an Eco Committee
- Environmental Survey
- Monitoring & Evaluation
- Curriculum Integration
- Networking and Collaboration
- Eco Code

On the program's website, its goal is presented as follows:

...to guide higher education institutions on their sustainable journey and model sustainability as an integral part of campus life while involving staff, teachers and the student body by empowering them to become forward thinkers and lead the way towards sustainable development<sup>3</sup>.

The growing interest in this program is evidenced by the organization of the 1st International Conference of FEE EcoCampus in 2024. The conference was held at Lisbon School of Education of the Polytechnic University of Lisbon. The event was attended by the 110 participants including students, academics, facilities staff, and administrators from 15 countries. Recently the Eco-campus programme has 214 institutions in 19 countries.

#### (2) Green Office Model

Green Office model is a network of university student initiatives aimed at motivating the university community to act for sustainable development. The aim of the Green Office initiative is to inform, connect and support the university community in actions towards sustainable development. Green Offices also ini-

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ecoschools.global/ecocampus-about>

tiate their own projects aimed at implementing the issues and principles of sustainable development in the university's educational, research and economic activities. Students and employees of the university jointly make decisions and implement projects for the sustainable development of the university community.

The Green Office model was the subject of a diploma thesis conducted under the supervision of dr. Batorczak in 2029 at the University Center for Environmental Studies and Sustainable Development Research at the University of Warsaw. The results of the work were included in a joint publication. According to the findings the Green Office model operates on six key principles:

1. Students and staff: A dynamic team of student interns, volunteers and university staff form the core of the Green Office. They are directly responsible for running the unit and its projects.
2. Mandate: The Green Office receives an official mandate from the university to implement sustainability projects and policies, or to manage specific goals of an existing sustainability strategy.
3. Resources: The university provides a budget to pay for salaries, project expenses and office space. The team may also use other internal resources, such as design or catering services, event venues.
4. Integration: The Green Office is integrated into the organizational structure of the university, is overseeing a steering committee and participates in meetings of relevant committees.
5. Collaboration: All team activities are conducted in close cooperation and partnership with internal and external stakeholders, including student groups and student community representatives, academics, management and administration of the university.
6. Training: The student team and volunteers receive workshops and training to ensure the quality and effectiveness of their work.

The first Green Office was set up in Maastricht in 2010. The Green Office Model currently exists at 60 universities across Europe and one African country. In 2015, Model Green Office received the Japan-UNESCO Award for Education for Sustainable Development.

The above comparison addresses only the operational aspects of both models, not their impact. Both the Eco-Campus and Green Office programs are characterized by their inclusive and action-oriented approach, where universities and students engage, demonstrate commitment, and implement concrete actions for sustainable development. In both cases, their actions are supported and respected by the university authorities.

The success of the Eco-campus model (219 institutions in 19 countries) can be attributed to its long tradition and recognition, which originates from the world-renowned Eco-schools programme. A transparent operational methodology and provision from national operators strongly support the Eco-campus

model. The Green Flag award also contributes to the model's recognition and, therefore, attractiveness.

The Green Office model is less structured and lacks evaluation and monitoring. However, its major advantage is that the university is responsible for financing the Green Office and provides permanent office space. This provides a solid foundation for operational continuity and may also be more attractive to students willing to get involved.

Table 1  
*Operational comparison of the Eco Campus and Green Office models*

Operational comparison of the Eco Campus and Green Office models											
model	Clear operational framework	Support from the national operator	Employed students	Volunteers	University employees	Financing	Office space	Mandate – recognition by the university authorities	Regular monitoring and evaluation	Award	Numbers
Eco-Campus	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	219 institutions in 19 countries
Green Office movement			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			60 offices in 7 countries

Source: own research.

Summary

This article attempts to draw attention to the importance of involving students in the decision-making process regarding actions for sustainable development at universities. Research shows that involving students in decision-making processes, when done effectively, can benefit everyone involved. It is an important aspect of promoting children’s rights, ensuring their well-being and creating a more inclusive and democratic society. Moreover, UNESCO recommendations clearly emphasize that education is a key instrument in achieving sustainable development, but for this education to be effective, the concept of teaching and learning must be transformed to enable individuals to lead sustainable development as agents of change (Leicht A. et al., 2018, p. 32). There are many examples of engaging students in sustainable development activities at schools. In each of these approaches takes into account actively initiating and

implementing changes for sustainable development, while taking into account aspects of learning, school-community relations, school practices, ethos, vision, and leadership. For the long-term impact of such actions, a clearly presented methodology and support from both external structures responsible for the functioning of a given model and internal structures—the institutions where these activities are undertaken—are crucial. However, it seems that the key factor in the success of this type of initiatives is that these activities are initiated by young people from the very beginning. They decide whether they want to get involved and what types of activities interest them.

This type of approach is much rarer in university practice. It can be stated that the practices of engaging students in undertaking activities at universities, including activities aimed at achieving sustainable development, are not widespread. They are also not perceived and studied as an element of transformative pedagogy.

The conceptual framework for student participation in decision-making and sustainable development activities at universities is widely discussed in the academic literature. However, there is a lack of research and studies examining how student involvement in decision-making and activities at universities impacts both the learning process and the functioning of the university itself. The main conclusion of this publication is to indicate the need to popularize student activation and involve them in decision-making in practice, but also to undertake research on the effectiveness of action-oriented pedagogy in higher education.

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## **Potrzeby i szanse partycypacji studentów w procesie decyzyjnym na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju na uniwersytetach**

### **Streszczenie**

Celem tego artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na znaczenie udziału studentów w podejmowaniu decyzji na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju na uniwersytetach. W artykule zwięźle przedstawiono model pedagogiczny, który wzmacnia i motywuje studentów do stawania się aktywnymi i krytycznymi obywatelami, zdolnymi do udziału w kształtowaniu zrównoważonej przyszłości. Ponadto omówiono niektóre z koncepcji praktyk partycypacyjnych w szkole przedstawianych w literaturze badawczej. W ostatniej części artykułu zaprezentowano dwa międzynarodowe programy mające na celu wzmocnienie aktywności studentów na rzecz zrównoważonego rozwoju na uniwersytetach: eko-kampus i zielone biuro.

**Słowa kluczowe:** studenci, udział, uniwersytety, zrównoważony rozwój, edukacja.



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## Education through work as a consciously organized activity to prevent risky behaviours of children and adolescents

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### Abstract

The article focuses on the issue of education through work as the subject of own research. The aim of the research procedure was to get to know the opinions of pedagogy students on the effectiveness of this form of education in the context of the prevention of risky behaviours. The following question was formulated for this purpose: Does, and if so, what are the advantages of education through work in preventing risky behaviours of children and youth? The study was conducted within the paradigm of pragmatism, using qualitative content analysis. The research project involved 45 students of part-time pedagogy studies. The analysis of the responses revealed a number of positive aspects of education through work in preventing risky behaviours of children and youth. The own research shows that engaging young people in responsible tasks develops their independence, responsibility and time management skills. In addition, education through work shapes social attitudes, such as cooperation, respect for others and a sense of belonging to the community. It also translates into a reduced tendency to deviant behaviours (aggression, ad-

dictions, belonging to inappropriate peer groups). Based on the opinions of pedagogy students, it was emphasized that the concept of education through work can support the preparation of minors for independent life after leaving the family or institutional environment.

**Keywords:** education through work, education for work, work, education, risky behaviour of children and youth.

## Introduction

Life's difficulties are part of almost every person's life (Hayes, Ciarrochi, 2019). On the one hand, they can be a challenge that needs to be faced, but on the other hand, they are threats that are hard to escape from. There are cases in which escape is not a good solution, which is why an important educational task is to prepare a young person to cope with difficult situations.

The upbringing process involves not only those difficulties that directly concern young people themselves. Their parents, legal guardians and teaching staff also often have to deal with various problems. The more difficulties there are, the greater the likelihood that risky behaviour will occur among children and young people.

The issue of risky behaviours of children and adolescents is not a new phenomenon. The interest in this topic is reflected in numerous articles, books and fiction films, the main theme of which is the behaviours undertaken by adolescents (Dzielska & Kowalewska, 2014, p. 139). Analysing individual sources, one can see a change in the approach to risky behaviours of young people. This is primarily the result of updated, and often new, knowledge on their etiology, consequences, and phenomena accompanying the processes of adolescence. The knowledge obtained has to some extent translated into legislative, educational and preventive, educational, therapeutic and resocialization actions.

In the context of risky behaviour prevention, education through work becomes a particularly important tool in working with minors at risk of social maladjustment. Young people who grow up in families that are educationally inefficient or in a marginalized society can regain their self-esteem and integrate with a peer group that displays socially desirable attitudes through work.

The concept of education through work should not, however, assume treating work as a punishment for the improper behaviour of a young person. Otherwise, it could lead to the conviction that work is a form of punishment, not a socially useful activity. Work should be perceived as a value that gives a sense of fulfilment, enables personal and professional development, and allows for the satisfaction of basic life needs.

In practice, education through work is widely used in care and educational facilities, resocialization facilities and other institutions dealing with children and youth. Pedagogical programs based on education through work include var-

ious activities, from cleaning work, through manual work, to classes related to learning a profession. An example of this are programs implemented by resocialization facilities, which combine manual work with cooperation with representatives of various industries, enabling minors to acquire practical professional skills.

Risky behaviours, such as addictions, aggression, crime, and other forms of social deviations, pose a serious threat to the development of society and its stability. This text highlights that one of the solutions that can indirectly counteract these problems is education through work, which is a conscious activity aimed at preventing risky behaviours in children and youth.

## Education through work

In pedagogy, there are many different terminological approaches to the role of work in the process of educating a person. T.W. Nowacki (2008, p. 75) stated that educational sciences perceive work from an anthropological perspective. Referring to the works of F. Schlieper, C. Baumgart and W. Stranetenwerth, he emphasized that in the pedagogical approach, work does not result from instincts or pleasure, but is the result of individual abilities, knowledge and will of an individual. Nowacki saw the educational source of work in its essence, in activities requiring both physical and intellectual effort, aimed at realizing valuable works and overcoming the resistance of matter, as well as in developing the ability to select appropriate means (Nowacki, 2008, p. 76).

The pedagogical significance of work was defined differently by W. Okoń (2007, p. 433), who considered it as a collective or individual activity aimed at obtaining a material or non-material product. Due to the value of this product for an individual or society and the need for effort, the work process is usually accompanied by a conviction about its usefulness, but also by an internal compulsion resulting from the requirements of collective life. In this definition, work is linked to economic and social aspects (Oleska, 2010, p. 14), and its undertaking is primarily the result of social obligations, and not only personal motivations.

The relationship between man – upbringing – work is undertaken primarily in the context of a pedagogical subdiscipline, referred to as work pedagogy (Szłapińska, 2015, p. 154). This is a field of knowledge with a relatively short history, as it is associated with the establishment of the Institute of Vocational Education in Warsaw in September 1972 (Baraniak, 2012, p. 5). The aforementioned Nowacki is considered to be the main forerunner of work pedagogy in Poland. The works of Z. Wiatrowski, who defined it as a “scientific subdiscipline, the subject of research of which are aspects of the relationship: man – upbringing – work, although the second three-part relationship: man – citizen – em-

ployee, is often emphasized, as also well reflecting the essential problems and tasks of this new pedagogical discipline" (Wiatrowski, 2005, pp. 32-33), contributed to its particular development. Taking into account the realities of the labour market, SM Kwiatkowski proposed expanding the indicated areas to include pre-vocational education, vocational education and professional development (Kwiatkowski, 2006, p. 241). This proves that the issue of work is developing dynamically and must respond to changes in the employment market (Wołk, 2018, p. 105). Pedagogy of work was also established to examine the attitude of a person in terms of their preparation for professional independence (Nowacki, 2004, p. 174), referring to its scientific theories (Wiatrowski, 2010, pp. 50-60). A. Solak emphasized that "we can talk about the relationship of work to a person and of a person to work, as long as they decide about it" (Solak, 2004, p. 64). The pedagogical significance of work was also considered in two ways, as it was reflected mainly in education through work and education for work.

Education through work begins in the youngest years of life, starting with the family, and then continues in kindergarten and at later stages of education. The family is the first environment in which a child comes into contact with education through work, which is why it plays a key role in shaping attitudes and patterns regarding work. It is in the family that a child makes its first attempts at independent work and experiences failures related to them. The work ethic presented by parents has a significant impact on these attitudes (Królicza, 2010, pp. 32-33; Sztaba, 2013, p. 101), because it determines the development of such traits as diligence, responsibility, punctuality, dutifulness, systematicity, and accuracy.

The family should provide the child with opportunities to undertake various jobs, adapted to the stage of their development. Thanks to this, the child develops the habit of work, a sense of responsibility and respect for others who do it. In kindergarten, education through work is carried out through self-service, cleaning, organizational, production activities and activities for the benefit of others. The next stages of education, based on education through work, consist in independent performance of various tasks and gaining practical experience related to work in various professions.

Similar views on education through work also appeared in the concepts of the forerunners of work pedagogy. Nowacki wrote that "the main principle of education through work should be the inclusion of children from the youngest years in the universal, social process of work in order to prepare a citizen-employee who is able to cooperate in the everyday creation of cultural life" (Nowacki, 1974, no p. no. in the typescript). In turn, according to Wiatrowski, education through work is "an intentional and purposefully organized type of educational activity, the special feature of which is the use of work in the processes of influencing an individual and making changes in his personality" (Wiatrowski, 2005, pp. 154-155).

The concepts of education through work have a long tradition. Their origins go back to the works of T. More, who saw work as a spiritual source of wealth, and to the views of utopians such as R. Owen and K. Fourier, who propagated the view that education through work should be based on the abilities, preferences and activity of children (Kaczor, 2015, p. 172). The basic tasks of education through work include (Piekarski, 2015, pp. 163-164): acquiring basic knowledge about human work, its essence and complexity, understanding the role it plays in human life and the conviction that work is one of the most important and inseparable elements of human functioning both physically and mentally.

Another goal is to acquire practical work skills and motivation to do it, to develop a proper attitude towards one's own and other people's work, as well as towards the effects of human work. Another important element is the development of character traits necessary for effective work performance and the shaping of a work culture, treated as part of the general culture of society. The implementation of these tasks should be the task of the family, school and other environments in which the upbringing process takes place.

When considering the topic of education through work, it is impossible to ignore the issue of education for work. This aspect of education allows for the acquisition of basic knowledge about a specific profession, related duties, threats and working conditions. It also includes the development of professional qualifications and instilling the right approach to work and its social significance. The issue of education for work plays a special role in the works of A.F. Modrzewski, who repeatedly emphasized the educational role of work in his views. In one of his treatises, he encouraged parents "so that boys and girls do not spend their first years in idleness; let them always try to give them some work, and let them also demand that they give an account of this work" (Modrzewski, 1953, p. 113).

Education for work is part of education aimed at specific professions, therefore this process includes activities aimed at vocational preparation. These activities are largely organized, as they are defined by the core curriculum, which must be completed in an appropriate time. At subsequent stages, the knowledge acquired is assessed by conducting special exams.

The main role of education for work is realized primarily in schools and institutions that prepare for the profession (Baraniak, 2015, p. 144). However, the educational activities undertaken do not end in educational institutions, because the next area of their implementation is the work environment, in which a person fulfils himself professionally.

Education through work and for work is treated in work pedagogy as pre-vocational education and training. In principle, these are activities preceding pro-vocational and vocational education. The aim of pre-vocational education is to familiarize a person with work, to shape knowledge about work and a positive

attitude towards it (Surma, 2014, p. 33). Education through work and for work was one of the main slogans of the thinkers of the Polish Enlightenment (Opiela, 2015, p. 158), who considered diligence to be one of the most important secular virtues.

Analysing the two educational aspects of work, it can be stated that education through work is a process carried out primarily in the family and school. It takes place through work assigned by parents and teachers. This element of education is a kind of bridge to the next area, which is education for work. Its implementation is possible thanks to education preparing for the performance of a profession. Actions undertaken in this area are more organized, because they are educational in nature, which means that education for work is often identified with vocational education.

Work plays a unique role in the upbringing of children and young people. It can be assigned three basic educational tasks: activating (achieving results through activity itself, and the aim of introducing work is to develop positive attitudes towards the environment and the belief that changes are possible thanks to taking action), socializing (through work, the child is introduced to social interactions) and productive (shaping respect for work and the products that are created thanks to it) (Kukla, 2016, pp. 114-115).

One of the forerunners of pedagogy – J. Amos-Komeński, in his educational and didactic system placed great emphasis on preparing children and young people for manual work (crafts) (Szłapińska, 2015, p. 157). He believed that the most effective way to activate an individual and eliminate boredom is to engage them in work. He postulated that from an early age, children should be introduced to various types of work, which would allow them to discover their interests and professional predispositions. B. Suchodolski (1982) also referred to the educational aspect of work in the context of social participation, arguing that preparation for a profession should be an important element of this participation, at the same time enabling an individual to realize their own aspirations. In the process of education, human work is one of the most important factors shaping the comprehensive development of personality. J. Baran put forward the claim that work develops the intellectual, spiritual, moral, cultural and physical spheres of people (Baran, 1989, p. 49; Chałas, 2007, pp. 72-80). It is difficult to argue with this way of thinking, because it integrates almost all the most important spheres of human functioning, provided that we assume that the cultural and moral factor refers to the social sphere.

The educational role of work is reflected in school. B. Śliwerski pointed out in this regard that “the school environment and the process of acquiring knowledge and skills must develop those features that enable a young adult to enter family, social and professional life without difficulty” (Śliwerski, 2001, pp. 6-15). In this approach, school plays not only an educational role, but also

an educational one. The activities undertaken by educators are not limited to imparting general knowledge, but also focus on preparing the student for professional independence.

## Methodological foundations of own research

The subject of my own research was education through work. Its aim was to learn the opinions of female pedagogy students on the effectiveness of this form of education in the context of preventing risky behaviours. The research problem corresponded to the adopted aim and was formulated in the form of a question: Does education through work have any advantages in preventing risky behaviours of children and youth? The research was conducted within the framework of the pragmatism paradigm. Its main determinant is focusing on the research problem, which determines the selection of appropriate methods, which allows for flexibility in constructing methodological assumptions. Pragmatism also emphasizes the practical effectiveness of solving problems (Creswell, 2013, p. 37). It was assumed that the most rational methodological approach to the research problem would be to use a qualitative strategy. When adopting the methodological assumptions, we decided not to formulate initial hypotheses, because the selected qualitative research strategy allowed for this.

The answer to the adopted research problem was sought using the qualitative content analysis method, which can also be used in pedagogy (Goriszowski, 2006, pp. 18-24; Guzik-Tkacz, 2011, pp. 236-237). Qualitative content analysis is one of many research methods that involves the analysis of textual data, which occurs in oral, printed or electronic form. This data can be obtained using open questions, interviews, focus groups, observations or printed media such as articles, books or textbooks. Content analysis goes beyond simple word counting. Its main goal is to provide knowledge and understanding of the studied phenomenon through a systematic process of classification, coding and identifying individual topics (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, pp. 1277-1288).

In this work, text data were analysed. For this purpose, original research tools were constructed for the selected method, consisting of only one open-ended question – identical to the research problem – preceded by a metric (gender, age, origin). The task of the research participants was to provide a written response to an anonymous, specially prepared questionnaire. The research tool was distributed to each person taking part in the study for self-completion.

The research was carried out at the Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa, because one of the co-authors of the article is an employee of the local university. Due to the fact that qualitative research is characterized by a small number of research samples, it was not decided to include a larger number of people

from outside the indicated university. A total of 45 women joined the project. Only 6 of them came from the city, while 39 from rural areas. The average age of the study participants was approximately 27 years (26.86 years). All of them were third-year students of part-time studies in the field of pedagogy. This field is characterized by a large percentage of women, therefore the research group was represented exclusively by the female sex. The selection of the group was purposeful, because the participants of the research had to meet the criterion of a part-time student of pedagogy. It was assumed that people studying part-time have more professional experience, are more often professionally active and are more likely to be parents. These features were considered important in the context of the conducted study. The participation in the research was preceded by ethical issues. All students were assured that participation in the project is anonymous, voluntary, will not affect the final grade of the course, and the results obtained will be used only for scientific purposes.

## Own research

Analysis of statements on the value of education through work in preventing the occurrence of undesirable behaviours in children and adolescents allowed us to distinguish several main themes and observations that appear in the written statements of the research participants. They can be divided into different categories, reflecting the positive effects of education through work.

According to the students, education through work teaches children and young people responsibility for the actions entrusted to them, which translates into conscious decision-making and taking care of their duties. Minors who perform household chores or participate in household work develop the ability to organize and manage their time. A tendency to avoid undesirable behaviours is often noticed when children and young people are involved in work and are responsible for specific tasks. The participants of the study pointed out that thanks to education through work, young people also learn to bear the consequences of their actions, which is an important element in the educational process.

Education through work has certain advantages in preventing the occurrence of undesirable behaviours. Thanks to this, children and young people learn responsibility for their actions, conduct and behaviour (...). [W<sup>1</sup>\_13, woman, 27 years old, rural area]

Education through work has positive aspects – children and young people learn responsibility for their actions through work, they learn to live in society. [W\_27, woman, 25 years old, village]

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<sup>1</sup> W\_1-45 – essay number.

Raising children is a difficult and responsible task. Among the many methods supporting it, we can mention, among others, work, or rather entrusting the child with tasks to do. Household and small tasks that are assigned to the child, for example: collecting blocks, dusting, watering flowers, feeding the dog, make the youngest learn independence, responsibility, allow them to appreciate the value and burden of work that their parents bear. Education through work, i.e. entrusting children with certain activities, teaches them to organize, how to spend time efficiently. [W\_33, woman, 25 years old, rural area]

A child who has tasks to perform reinforces certain patterns that are necessary in development and psyche. Having a task to perform, while completing it, the child does not think about things that are bad. The child learns how to perform certain activities. He takes responsibility for his actions and considers the consequences of completing the task. [W\_34, woman, 35 years old, village]

Many statements emphasize that minors who have responsibilities do not have time to engage in negative behaviours, such as aggression and inappropriate company. Activities consisting of household chores or school duties result in a decrease in free time, which in turn reduces the possibility of engaging in destructive activities. Rational management of free time also helps children and young people not to spend too much time in virtual space (the Internet). Due to the lack of appropriately filled free time, children and young people may watch too much television or play computer games constantly.

Children and young people who have responsibilities and tasks feel appreciated, important and do not have much time to think about undesirable behaviours. [W\_3, woman, 32 years old, city]

Children and young people learn responsibility and independence. If they are busy with work, they do not think or have no time for undesirable behaviour. They feel needed. [W\_6, woman, 36 years old, city]

Education through work has a great impact on preventing undesirable behaviours. Children and young people, when they have responsibilities, are satisfied with their work and spend less time on the Internet. [W\_28, woman, 24 years old, rural area]

Children or young people who do not have any household chores, mainly watch TV, play games or simply surf the Internet in their free time, and there they encounter various phenomena, such as aggression. [W\_32, woman, 24 years old, rural area]

According to the students, education through work can have an impact on the development of social attitudes in children. In this respect, the youngest learn cooperation, work organization, and respect for others, which contributes to an increased sense of belonging to society. In this aspect, it is worth noting that people who feel needed and involved are less likely to isolate themselves or seek out inappropriate peer groups.

Children and young people <author's note> learn to cooperate, feel needed, appreciated and valuable. [W\_13, woman, 37 years old, village]

Education through work is very important, because through their duties children and young people learn, above all, independence, organization and planning. These things

are needed in life, because they help in adult life choices [W\_23, woman, 25 years old, rural area]

(...) duties introduced at the youngest age teach one to be conscientious, humble, they also teach one to be organized (...). [W\_32, woman, 24 years old, village]

Education through work teaches pupils to respect others, which helps prevent undesirable behaviours. [W\_35, woman, 28 years old, rural area]

The statements also indicate that working at a young age translates into the development of self-esteem. Participation in various tasks, rewards for completing them, and a sense of job satisfaction contribute to building strong internal motivation. Minors who are involved in work have a greater sense that their efforts are appreciated, which results in increased motivation to continue working and avoid undesirable behaviours.

The child learns to cooperate in a given society and feels needed there. [W\_20, woman, 24 years old, rural area]

Thanks to being brought up through work, children/youth are less aggressive. Thanks to their duties, they feel that they are doing "something for something", they feel appreciated, thanks to which they are more motivated, they learn responsibility and independence, they have a higher sense of self-worth. [W\_25, woman, 32 years old, city]

The participants of the research project noticed that education through work supports the development of many life skills, such as organization, planning, responsibility, and the ability to cope with difficulties. Work prepares children for adulthood, strengthens their sense of responsibility, which results in a lower risk of engaging in social or emotional problems.

Education through work has positive aspects – children and young people learn responsibility for their actions through work, they learn to live in society. [W\_27, woman, 25 years old, village]. [W\_25, woman, 32 years old, city]

Education through work prepares children for life in different environments, for life in adulthood. [W\_37, woman, 37 years old, village]

Education through work teaches discipline, independence and responsibility. It introduces children and young people to the stage of adulthood, which to some extent reduces undesirable behaviours. [W\_42, woman, 23 years old, city]

In some essays, a context emerged from which it resulted that education through work shapes in children a culture of work and respect for effort, both their own and that of others. Children and young people learn that everything they achieve is the result of their work and effort, and this can build their self-esteem over time.

Work ennobles, it allows a young person to understand that not everything comes easily. [W\_10, woman, 34 years old, village]

Education through work has many advantages. Thanks to work, children and young people learn responsibility and understand the effort their parents put in to earn money to raise them. [W\_41, woman, 22 years old, rural area]

Education through work teaches pupils to respect others, which helps prevent undesirable behaviours. The child learns that in order to have something, it must be preceded by appropriate effort. As a result, this can result in the occurrence of appropriate behaviours in the future. [W\_35, woman, 28 years old, rural area]

Education through work also plays a role in preventing negative attitudes, including addiction to psychoactive substances. Keeping a child busy with duties and engaging them in various forms of work reduces the risk that they will seek destructive sources of satisfaction, such as drugs, alcohol or other addictions.

Children who have responsibilities and are involved in “something” are less likely to reach for stimulants. [W\_11, woman, 32 years old, rural area]

If children can find something to do, they will be less likely to reach for drugs and spend time in inappropriate company. [W\_22, woman, 32 years old, rural area]

Too much fragment time can lead to various types of addictions. [W\_32, woman, 24 years old, village]

The statements also indicate the importance of education through work in the context of learning about social responsibility. Children and young people who learn about work and responsibilities are less likely to engage in antisocial behaviour because they understand the value of engaging in various activities that are important not only for them, but also for other members of society.

Children learn responsibility, bearing the consequences of their inappropriate behaviour for society. [W\_5, woman, 36 years old, rural area]

## **Summary**

Our own research shows that education through work was recognized by students of pedagogy as an effective method of preventing risky behaviours of children and youth. Analysis of the statements of the research participants reveals a number of positive effects resulting from this form of education, which translate into the development of young people in various aspects of their lives. In the opinion of the students, education through work contributes to the development of responsibility and independence, allowing children and youth to make conscious decisions and manage their time. Engaging charges in responsible tasks reduces the tendency to deviant behaviours, such as aggression, addictions or belonging to inappropriate peer groups. In addition, minors learn to bear the consequences of their actions, which is an important element of the educational process.

Education through work helps shape appropriate social attitudes. In its assumption, it is based on cooperation, respect for others and a sense of belonging to the community. Children and young people involved in various duties feel appreciated and needed, which reduces their tendency to social isolation and

searching for destructive sources of satisfaction. Additionally, they develop a sense of self-worth and internal motivation, which can translate into their further personal and professional development.

Education through work also supports the development of life skills, such as organization, planning or coping with difficulties, preparing children and young people for adult life after leaving the family home or institutional environment. It shapes the culture of work, respect for effort and teaches that achieving success requires commitment. To sum up, we can support the thesis based on the opinions of pedagogy students that education based on work helps to develop social, professional and emotional competences in minors, and this supports the prevention of deviant behaviours.

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## **Wychowanie przez pracę jako świadomie organizowana działalność w zapobieganiu ryzykownym zachowaniom dzieci i młodzieży**

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł koncentruje się na zagadnieniu wychowania przez pracę jako przedmiocie badań własnych. Celem postępowania badawczego było poznanie opinii studentek pedagogiki na temat skuteczności tej formy wychowania w kontekście profilaktyki zachowań ryzykownych. W tym celu sformułowano następujące pytanie: Czy, a jeśli tak, to jakie walory ma wychowanie przez pracę w zapobieganiu ryzykownym zachowaniom dzieci i młodzieży? Badanie przeprowadzono w ramach paradygmatu pragmatyzmu, stosując jakościową analizę treści. W projekcie badawczym wzięło udział 45 studentek niestacjonarnych studiów pedagogicznych. Analiza odpowiedzi ujawniła szereg pozytywnych aspektów wychowania przez pracę w zapobieganiu ryzykownym zachowaniom dzieci i młodzieży. Z badań własnych wynika, że angażowanie młodych osób w odpowiedzialne zadania rozwija ich samodzielność, odpowiedzialność oraz umiejętność zarządzania czasem. Ponadto wychowanie przez pracę kształtuje postawy społeczne, takie jak współpraca, szacunek dla innych oraz poczucie przynależności do społeczności. Przekłada się również na zmniejszenie skłonności do zachowań dewiacyjnych (agresja, uzależnienia, przynależność do nieodpowiednich grup rówieśniczych). Na podstawie opinii studentek pedagogiki podkreślono, że koncepcja wychowania przez pracę może wspierać przygotowanie nieletnich do samodzielnego życia po opuszczeniu środowiska rodzinnego lub instytucjonalnego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wychowanie przez pracę, wychowanie do pracy, praca, wychowanie, ryzykowne zachowania dzieci i młodzieży.

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## Conceptualization of the Value Intelligence Model within a Comprehensive Scientific-Innovative Framework: Theoretical Foundations and Modeling Principles

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### Abstract

The article presents a theoretical and methodological justification and conceptualization of the Value Intelligence (VI) Model as a complex psycho-pedagogical phenomenon integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral mechanisms of self-regulation within a value-based coordinate system. The model was developed within a comprehensive scientific and innovative framework that combines the principles of system organization, hierarchy, emergence, reflexive-adaptive regulation, interdisciplinary integration, and axiological orientation.

It has been found that Value Intelligence functions as an open, dynamic, and emergent system capable of transforming environmental challenges into resources for growth and maturity. For this purpose, the modeling method and theoretical empirical methods were used.

It has been established that the proposed model serves as a theoretical and prognostic construct defining the structural and functional organization of Value Intelligence, its key components, variables, and levels of development. It provides a foundation for further empirical validation, the creation of diagnostic tools for assessing VI, and the design of value-oriented educational programs aimed at fostering moral maturity and humanistic competence in individuals.

**Keywords:** axiological integration, humanistic approach, model, self-regulation, value Intelligence.

## Introduction

A person of the twenty-first century is compelled not only to adapt to a rapidly changing world but also to continuously reinterpret personal meanings while preserving integrity and the ability to act in accordance with inner convictions. In this context, the need arises for an integrative psychological mechanism that enables the coordination of emotional, cognitive, and moral processes – namely, Value Intelligence (VI).

The problem of value regulation of consciousness and behavior has deep roots in axiopedagogy and axiopsychology, humanistic psychology (A. Maslow, C. Rogers), logotherapy (V. Frankl), and contemporary models of emotional and social intelligence (D. Goleman, R. Bar-On) (Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1946; Goleman, 1995, 1998; Bar-On, 2005). However, most existing frameworks focus primarily on emotional-social or cognitive effectiveness, while leaving aside the value dimension of consciousness, which underlies moral maturity, meaning-making, and ethical self-regulation. This value dimension becomes central to the development of a modern individual who acts not only rationally but also humanistically.

Within educational, psychotherapeutic, and cultural practices, there is a growing need for a model that can describe and explain how values become a system-forming factor of human thinking, emotions, and behavior. Such a model must not only integrate insights from multiple disciplines – psychology, pedagogy, and philosophy – but also elucidate the mechanisms by which a person transitions from reactive behavior to reflexive, conscious activity, aligned with both personal and universal values.

The purpose of this article is to provide a theoretical rationale and construction of a model of Value Intelligence as an integrative system that unites cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and axiological components of personal self-regulation. The objectives include defining the structural and functional organization of Value Intelligence, uncovering its internal dynamics, clarifying the role of the axis of the Self as a psychodynamic center of integrity, and describing the deep-level processes of personal transformation triggered by value experiences.

The study draws on system-synergetic, axiopedagogical, axiopsychological, and humanistic perspectives, combining elements of cognitive, emotional, and moral psychology. The proposed model is viewed as an emergent open system in which the interaction of cognitive and value processes generates new levels of consciousness that determine the individual's maturity and inner freedom.

## Theoretical Framework

The importance of modeling in scientific research is discussed in the works of modern scientists, who describe this process in detail and in various ways. These are works on graphical modeling (Allen, 2020), digital modeling (Lewis, 2016), and others model systems that present images as empirical research data (Late et al., 2024). All these models are able to consolidate large flows of information, while leaving the advantage of interpreting data to the researcher, not to the machine (e.g., AI). In our work, we were guided by Chassanoff that images are objects that “become information through the connections and meanings we put into them” (cited in: Late et al., p.325), which we will reflect in our description of the VI model, based on this system-forming regularity.

The Value Intelligence model was created by us after a detailed theoretical description of this concept (Pelekh, 2021). The concept of Value Intelligence derives from Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1983, 1993, 2006) and Daniel Goleman's concept of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995, 1998), but focuses on a specific area of competencies related to values and connections in a complex system. Value Intelligence encompasses the ability to recognize values in various contexts, understand their meaning, interpret them in relation to professional and social situations, and apply them in practice. The concept of Value Intelligence, understood as

[...] the ability to think in a coordinate system of values (taking into account universal human values, and if necessary, professional values), to respond adequately to challenges (especially those related to the order of values) arising from the social and natural environment, to make accurate and timely decisions and take responsibility for them (Pelekh, 2021, p. 351).

It was later clarified that

...Value Intelligence can be reasonably defined as a specific cognitive quality of an individual, which is evidenced by a set of mental intellectual processes that provide a person with the possibility of value-oriented self-determination based on internalized axiological knowledge and hierarchical individual-personal values, which act as the basis for solving life (value) conflicts (Pelekh, Matviichuk, 2024, p. 175).

If we consider the above definition in the context of building a model of Value Intelligence from the standpoint of the humanities – in particular, based on the

comprehensive approach of axiological and cognitive psychology, as well as the concepts of emotional, social, and moral intelligence – then Value Intelligence can be understood as an integral cognitive-value characteristic of a person. In this case, creating a model is necessary for the theoretical substantiation and building integral connections between the cognitive, emotional, and value components of the psyche and other characteristics, abilities, mechanisms, and levels of development of Value Intelligence. We also created a research group that tried to empirically measure Value Intelligence in university students during a pilot project with great caution regarding the validity of the tool (Pelekh et al., 2025). After this experimental work, we were faced with the question of developing a model of Value Intelligence as an indicator of the practical significance of the research concept and the method of its implementation (for example, as a tool for measuring the elements of VI in their relationships separately (to measure certain aspects) and holistically (when people do not know that they are being observed, but act naturally in accordance with their Value Intelligence, which is integrated in a natural way)). In our opinion, the development of a theoretical model of VI is an important and necessary stage, given that it allows clarifying and structuring three main parameters of the study: a) ordering the conceptual apparatus of the object under study; b) a clear vision and description of the organizational and operational aspects of the implementation of the research; c) designing scientific approaches and diagnostic tools. During the research, we took into account the basic provisions for modeling living systems (Andras, 2011) (the model is self-regulating by analogy with living systems). In particular, we consider our model to be an open emergent system that is constantly evolving and does not function in a permanently stable environment. A living system is open, dynamic, and emergent, that is, it is in constant development and self-organization.

Applying the modeling method to VI, we take into account the global problems, including the formation of human responsibility at three levels: a) for one-self; b) one's activities in the social and natural environment, taking into account and correcting, in addition to one's own actions, the actions of others according to self-regulation mechanisms; c) activities related to functioning as a "citizen of the world" in conditions when mental stability is more important than IQ, when relationships, emotions, and values are more important than knowledge, and human readiness is also important.

Since the system of values and value orientations of an individual formed in the process of value interiorization have a direct impact on the above-mentioned processes, Value Intelligence is an important personal ability of an individual (one of the abilities of general intelligence "g" (Spearman, 1904) who has the ability to act purposefully, think rationally, and respond effectively to the environment (Wechsler, 1958), as well as generate and regulate actions, deter-

mining the nature of behavior. Therefore, the model that we have created establishes the nature of the origin, functioning, and application of VI (in particular, in the field of education). In addition, it defines a certain list of specific psychological and pedagogical problems that need to be solved at the stage of globalization. Its content outlines several specific problems related to the functioning of VI. These are, first of all, the mutual coordination of the three main components and the achievement of practical results – value-based mature and morally refined practice.

In the context of the Value Intelligence model, the external environment plays the role of a dynamic field of influences, which can both stimulate the development of the system and create conditions for value imbalance. The problematization that puts pressure on the system includes both socio-cultural and psychological factors that affect the stability of the value core and the coherence of its components. In the modern globalized world, an individual is constantly exposed to the influence of contradictory information flows, relativization of moral guidelines, fragmentation of identity, and emotional overload. These factors create the effect of value noise, which destabilizes the internal harmony between the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels of the system.

The external pressure manifests itself in the form of value polarization (when an individual is forced to balance between opposing social or cultural norms), information overload (which makes it difficult to form stable cognitive value structures), emotional fatigue (which reduces the ability to empathize and reflect), and behavioral disorientation (due to the blurring of moral boundaries and social uncertainty).

An additional dimension of problematization is associated with modern transformations in the field of humanitarian thinking, caused by post- and trans-humanist trends. In the context of the development of artificial intelligence, bioethics, robotics, and technological improvement of humans, the very concept of subjectivity, and therefore the value status of humans as moral agents, is changing. This creates a new type of challenge for Value Intelligence: the need to adapt to an environment where moral, social, and technological boundaries of the human are no longer clear. This situation makes relevant the need to rethink human values in the context of coexistence with non-human agents, including artificial intelligence systems, and requires the development of value reflection capable of maintaining a humanistic balance in a world that exceeds the human level.

In such conditions, the system of Value Intelligence is forced to activate its own self-regulation mechanisms primarily through reflexivity and adaptability, which perform the function of stabilizers.

It is due to these mechanisms that Value Intelligence is able to maintain internal balance, responding to external challenges not through destruction, but

through transformation. Under the influence of the problematized environment, there is a reassessment of meanings, renewal of value structures, and deepening of the level of the Self, which allows the system to reach a new level of integration. Thus, the external environment not only creates tension, but also acts as a catalyst for development – it provokes the evolution of the system from reactive to proactive, in which an individual begins not just to react to social influences, but to meaningfully transform them, building own moral and value autonomy. This is what happens at a deep level when Value Intelligence is involved at the level of personality changes: preserving one's uniqueness and control over one's life; understanding and respecting differences; understanding one's limits and possibilities; feeling of one's own security within the limits of certainty in one's coordinate system; not always correlating oneself with status or victory; feeling of one's identity, responsibility for one's own development (if there is suffering as a part of life, it can be a signal for self-improvement, which includes cognitive, emotional, and conative components, which are activated gradually and integratively with available resources and correlate with VI); avoiding manipulation by others; open dialogue and communication; ability to delegate to a person who is different; avoiding power and subordination by inviting others to joint activities on the basis of shared values, i.e. temporary ecosystems, where values can act as a skeleton for building living systems with further coordination of principles and rules of interaction, and so on according to the fact that a person has his/her own system of values (although it may coincide with the one that is socially and culturally instilled in accordance with the common goal of the social era and thus the periphery influences the core of the personality).

That is, problematization as “environmental pressure” generates in the VI system:

- value crises and cognitive dissonance → stimulus for rethinking;
- behavioral uncertainty → search for value-consistent solutions;
- information overload → development of cognitive selectivity and metacognition;
- the desire to preserve one's own uniqueness → the formation of an authentic Self as the axis of internal stability;
- emotional instability → activation of emotional reflection mechanisms;
- the need for control over life → development of internal self-regulation instead of external domination;
- encountering the differences of others → expanding axiological tolerance and empathic understanding;
- awareness of one's own limits and capabilities → strengthening psychological security and the ability to self-limit;
- reduction of orientation towards status or victory → reorientation towards the value of process, meaning-making, and interaction;

- sense of identity → integration of experience into a stable “I”, based on one’s own value system;
- responsibility for one’s own development → activation of meta-motivation and self-education;
- encountering manipulation → formation of ethical sensitivity and limits of personal freedom;
- the need for community → developing the ability for open dialogue and horizontal communication;
- the need for delegation → trust in otherness as a condition for collective development;
  - avoidance of power and subordination → transformation of relationships towards co-creation and shared responsibility;
- creating joint actions based on values → forming temporary ecosystems, where values act as the structural “skeleton” of living systems;
- harmonization of various principles and rules of interaction → formation of cultural competence and axiological integration in the system “person – community – world”.

The author’s concept does not have such a *c o m p r e h e n s i v e* analogue and is aimed at increasing the effectiveness of the functioning of an individual in a constantly changing society, activating at the cognitive, emotional, and activity levels the entire range of values and attitudes that an individual managed to form in the process of upbringing, training, being in the environment, practical activity, and personal life experience. The higher this level of functioning of Value Intelligence, the higher the expected results at different levels of functioning and self-realization of an individual can be. The proposed concept is the author’s first experience submitted for wide scientific discussion. This model is a theoretical construct that will serve to develop, first of all, a diagnostic tool for measuring the concept of “Value Intelligence” and to continue the study of axiological theory in pedagogy, psychology, philosophy, and other sciences. In this paper, we describe the theoretical concept, but in the future we will also need to test the hypothesis whether VI interacts (and if so, to what extent) with general, emotional-social intelligence, or whether they are not strongly related and are separate constructs. This will be done by clarifying the degree of overlap between the VI test and cognitive and emotional-social intelligence tests confirmed by David Van Rooy and his colleagues (Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004; D. L. Van Rooy, personal communication, April 2003; Bar-On, 2004), who suggests that no more than 4% of the variance of the EQ-i can be explained by cognitive intelligence according to a recent meta-analysis including 10 studies ( $n > 5,000$ ). In addition to shedding light on the construct validity of the Bar-On model and measure of ESI (i.e., what it is and is not describing), these findings indicate that emotional-social intelligence and cognitive in-

telligence are not strongly related and are most likely separate constructs. Not only is this assumption statistically supported by the findings presented by me and others (Bar-On, 2004; Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004), but there is also neurological evidence suggesting that the neural centers governing emotional-social intelligence and those governing cognitive intelligence are located in different areas of the brain. More succinctly, the ventromedial prefrontal cortex<sup>12</sup> appears to be governing basic aspects of ESI (Bar-On et al., 2003), while the dorso-lateral prefrontal cortex is thought to govern key aspects of cognitive functioning (Duncan, 2001).

### Detailed research hypothesis

Therefore, our main hypothesis is that Value Intelligence measures not only personality traits, but *is* an integrative functional construct that encompasses: Value-cognitive processes – mental operations aimed at evaluating, choosing, and prioritizing values. Motivational-semantic(meaningful) regulation – the ability to orient activities towards moral, ethical, and socially significant goals. Moral-empathic mechanisms – a combination of cognitive empathy, moral judgment, and ability to ethical foresight. Axiological self-reflection – awareness of one's own values and their alignment with universal ones. Value-behavioral integration – the ability to transform value orientations into real actions, decisions, and deeds. That is, this concept is much broader and more diverse. In other words, VI reflects the level of awareness, hierarchy, and implementation of values in the individual's activities, that is, the ability to act in accordance with one's own value system in complex social and moral contexts.

Thus, if cognitive intelligence describes how a person thinks and emotional-social intelligence describes how a person interacts with others, then Value Intelligence shows why and with what moral and value orientation a person does it. Van Rooy and Viswesvaran expanded the number of studies in their original analysis of the construct validity of emotional intelligence. Their most recent meta-analysis suggests that the degree of overlap between the EQ and personality tests is probably no more than 15% based on 8 studies in which more than 1,700 individuals participated (D. L. Van Rooy, personal communication with Bar-On from April 2003; Bar-On, 2004; Van Rooy & Viswesvaran, 2004; Van Rooy et al., 2004). This overlap is smaller than was previously thought and strongly suggests that the EQ must be measuring something else other than personality traits.

We will also strive to prove that our conceptual model is capable of predicting the foundations and principles of human behavior and life for the effective building of the future, and therefore has the right to life. The Bar-On model of ESI predicts various aspects of human performance. In addition to demonstrat-

ing that the Bar-On model is able to describe what it is meant to describe (ESI), it must also be shown that it is capable of predicting various aspects of human behavior, performance and effectiveness in order to argue that it represents a robust and viable concept.

## Principles of Value Intelligence modeling

The process of Value Intelligence modeling is based on a combination of methodological principles of systemic, axiological, and humanistic approaches.

1. The principle of integrity involves considering Value Intelligence as a unity of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes integrated around a common core.
2. The principle of hierarchy defines the structure of the model as a multi-level system in which each component is subordinate to higher semantic levels of value organization.
3. The principle of dynamic equilibrium describes a flexible balance between the stability of the value core and the plasticity of its peripheral processes, which ensures the development of the system.
4. The principle of reflective-adaptive interaction emphasizes the role of self-reflection and adaptability as internal mechanisms for maintaining the integrity of the system in a changing environment.
5. The principle of interdisciplinary integration is implemented through the synthesis of knowledge from philosophy, psychology, pedagogy, neuroscience, and axiology, which forms the scientific and innovative framework of the model.
6. The principle of emergence assumes that the holistic properties of a system are not reduced to the sum of individual components, but arise in the process of their interaction.
7. The principle of axiological orientation sets the vector of system development – an orientation towards the formation of moral maturity, meaning making, and harmonization of the individual's relationship with the world.

The use of these principles allows us to consider the Value Intelligence model as an open, self-regulating, evolutionary system capable of combining knowledge, emotions, and actions into a single semantic integrity.

Principles of modeling psychological phenomena in developing the Value Intelligence model

The development of the Value Intelligence model is carried out taking into account general scientific and special psychological principles of modeling, which ensure its conceptual coherence, theoretical validity, and applied relevance for educational practice. Modeling in psychology involves not only a de-

scription of the structural elements of a phenomenon, but also the reproduction of the internal mechanisms of its functioning, dynamics, and development. Therefore, the developed model is based on the following basic principles.

The principle of systematicity defines the understanding of Value Intelligence as a holistic psychological formation in which all components – cognitive, emotional, and behavioral – are interconnected and interdependent, and their integration is ensured by a central value core. The system is characterized by openness, self-organization, and the ability to self-regulate.

The principle of structural-functional correspondence requires that each element of the model not only has its place in the structure, but also performs a specific psychological function. The cognitive component provides the understanding of values, the emotional component provides their energetic and motivational support, and the behavioral component provides their practical implementation. Such correspondence ensures the reflection of psychological reality in the theoretical structure.

The principle of dynamism emphasizes the procedural nature of psychological modeling. The model is not a static scheme, but reflects constant changes, development, and transformation of personal values. Value Intelligence functions as a living system in which the interaction of components generates new qualities and meanings.

The principle of emergence reflects the regularity of the emergence of new properties of a system that are not reduced to the sum of its parts. In the context of Value Intelligence, this means the emergence of higher integrative qualities such as moral self-regulation, empathy, and reflective maturity, which are formed only in the process of interaction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes.

The principle of meaningful (axiological) determination defines the dominant role of the value core as a source of meaning, motivation, and internal regulation of the entire system. This principle is based on the provisions of axiopsychology (M. Scheler, V. Frankl, D. Leontiev) and axiopedagogy (Pelekh, 2024), according to which values are the highest regulators of personal development and behavioral decisions.

The principle of reflexive-adaptive regulation reveals the system's ability to self-knowledge, self-correction, and flexible adaptation to changing environmental conditions. Reflexivity provides internal awareness and value consistency, and adaptability provides variability of response strategies and openness to development.

The multi-structural (multi-level) principle involves considering the model at several levels of psychological analysis: intrapersonal (cognitive-emotional regulation), interpersonal (value communication), social (value integration into cultural norms). This allows describing Value Intelligence as a system that functions at different levels of mental organization.

The integrative and interdisciplinary principle ensures the scientific innovation of the model. Its construction is carried out at the intersection of philosophy of values, personality psychology, pedagogy, cognitive science, and neuropsychology, which allows synthesizing different paradigms in a single analytical field.

The principle of verifiability and operational character implies that each structural component of the model can be described through specific indicators and parameters that are subject to empirical verification. This ensures the further development of methods for diagnosing the level of Value Intelligence and the possibility of applying the model in psychological and pedagogical practice.

The principle of reflexivity shows the internal dynamics of the model: reflection acts as a mechanism of self-knowledge, self-regulation, and reassessment of values, which ensures the development and transformation of the system. The principle of adaptability determines the ability of the model to reflect the living, flexible nature of the human psyche, its ability to adapt to changes in the social environment, cultural contexts, and crisis events. The principle of eco-psychological coherence orients the model to harmonious relationships between a person and the environment, other people and own internal system, which is the basis of value-oriented education and personal growth.

An important methodological basis is the principle of holism, which means considering the personality as a single psycho-spiritual organism, where cognition, feeling, and action do not exist separately, but mutually shape each other. In this context, the model is based on the ideas of psychosynthesis of R. Assagioli, transactional analysis of E. Berne, and the theory of selfhood of H. Kohut (Berne, 1961; Kohut, 1971; Assagioli, 1965), which emphasize the integrity of the person's internal structures, the importance of reflective integration of subpersonalities, and mature self-regulation as an indicator of psychological maturity.

Thus, the model of Value Intelligence is not a purely descriptive construct, but represents a psychodynamic model of personality integration, in which the central axis of the Self performs a coordinating and harmonizing function between the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions of personal existence.

Therefore, the application of these principles ensures not only the structural and functional coherence of the Value Intelligence model, but also its compliance with modern scientific requirements for psychological modeling. The model appears as a dynamic, self-organized system capable of integrating knowledge, emotions, and actions into a single axiologically oriented structure of personal development.

## The concept of “Model” and the method of modeling psychological and pedagogical phenomena

Despite the fact that some researchers refrain from a normative definition of the concepts of “model” and “modeling” (Ciula et al., 2018), the closest and most understandable for our study is the definition of the concept of “model” (Fr. *modèle*, mod. *modèle*; It. *modello*; Lat. *modus*, *modulus* – measure, image...) as a certain image of the object under study, which actually exists and whose size is constructed imaginatively, and the properties need to be copied (Boltzmann, 1974). Further, these properties are usually studied and tested in theory and practice. In the general sense, we treat the model as an ideal (abstract), simplified image. But at the same time, unlike the concept (which is a set of ideas about what we understand, how we describe a phenomenon, and is not a forecasting tool), a Model requires greater structuring: it does not just show the idea, but also describes the relationships, patterns, mechanisms, shows the stages and blocks for empirical testing and verification of hypotheses, predicting consequences as the embodiment of the concept (i.e. how we apply this idea for analysis and forecasting). Our model is a graphical representation used in the humanities and more recently – in the digital humanities. The research plan is visualized using geometric shapes filled with the specific content of the concept under study. Such visualization is a structured analysis and transmission of the results of scientific research, which contains network analysis to show the connections between the components of a single whole, its essence. We can also say that this is a certain system of a certain form, consisting of interconnected components that are placed in a clear sequence (central, peripheral, and additional) and constitute a single whole. They can complement each other and/or have a mutual influence within the system. As is known, the system resists if it experiences external influences that disrupt the functioning of its components. Therefore, in this research it was important for us to describe the external environment that accompanies the functioning of the model. Another argument in favor of data visualization and infographics presented in our model drawing is that it presents complex, grouped, and systematized information on the topic of studying the structure of Value Intelligence in a more understandable way (Banu, 2014, p. 40).

On the other hand, Eastern European scholars interpret a model as a material object or a system that plays the role of an intermediary between the researcher and the object under study and acts as a method of direct study of the original. In their opinion, a model can also be considered as a product and result of active research, created by a person to achieve the goals of cognition (Duraj-Nowakowa, 2010, p. 147). The purpose of modeling in our study is also related to a deeper cognition of the general object and subject of research and its elements in particular. After all, a model, as noted above, is a logical construct, presented as a picture, a graphic image, which often causes difficulties for under-

standing. Here we deal with data visualization, which is associated with the construction of information about the studied object and its properties. Therefore, with the help of a theoretically grounded and proven model, we aim to launch the process of a more detailed study of the object of cognition, namely, Value Intelligence. On this path, we will need to apply clear measures of each element of the author's model or criteria, which in humanitarian research are often quite abstract. Therefore, the description of the model is quite detailed and is based not only on the authors' practical experience in the fields of pedagogy, psychology, and psychotherapy, but also on already proven theories and facts.

## Presentation of the main content

The modeling method in humanitarian research is determined by a variety of approaches. The modeling approach can be information processing (IP), formal-logical (FL), factor-analytical (FA), interactionist (INT), instrumentalist (INS), or skill-based (SB). The measurement approach can be performance metrics (PM), psychometric (PSY), or observational (OBS) (Da Silveira & Lopes, 2023). Therefore, the model type in our study is combined, namely: Interactionist–Instrumentalist–Skill-Based (INT–INS–SB), structural organization: Formal–Logical (FL), measurement type: Psychometric + Observational (PSY–OBS). Justification: Interactionist (INT): the model contains an inter-component structure and describes how different mental systems interact in the formation of value decisions, i.e. the interaction of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes as components;

Instrumentalist (INS): since the model serves as a tool for explaining and predicting behavior based on values, it is used as a tool for predicting moral and value-based behavior; the presence of a “value core” and peripheral characteristics (flexibility, adaptability, contextuality): the model shows dynamic self-regulation, similar to living systems. Skill-Based (SB): it involves the development and improvement of the levels of VI – the pyramid of levels (ego-centric → conventional → reflective) reflects the developmental dynamics, i.e. the transition between levels of complexity of thinking and value integration. This development logic is typical for skill-based (SB) models that consider intelligence as a competence that is being formed. The model contains elements of the formal-logical (FL) approach, because the structure is built in a clear hierarchical manner, with clear definitions, i.e. it contains formal structures and levels (components, connections, factors, key changes): For further empirical research, the model logically involves adding the Measurement approach: *psychometric (PSY) + observational (OBS)*, since some indicators (value orientations, ethical autonomy, reflexivity) can be assessed

through questionnaires, and others (value behavior, adaptive ethics) can be assessed through observations or behavioral indicators.

In an attempt to investigate the divergent construct validity of the Bar-On model, the EQ-i was used concurrently with various indicators of cognitive intelligence (including the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, Raven's Progressive Matrices, and the adult general intelligence scale) to a total of 4,218 individuals in six studies (Bar-On, 2004). The results show that there is only minimal overlap between the EQ-i and tests of cognitive (academic) intelligence, which was expected since the tool was not designed or intended to assess this type of achievement.

Therefore, regarding modeling approaches, we are developing an Interactionist–Instrumentalist–Skill-Based (INT–INS–SB) model with the elements of formal-logical (FL) organization.

## **Theoretical prerequisites for developing a model**

In the center, there is the value core, which symbolizes stability, centrality, motivation, and the very essence of values. It is the inner core of the personality, due to which a person has orientations in life, understands the meaning of own actions, and is able to build harmonious relationships with the environment. Around the core, there are its peripheral characteristics – flexibility, adaptability, contextuality, and development. They are included in the model in order to emphasize that even the deepest values are not absolutely unchangeable, they can be clarified and developed under the influence of new experience, different situations, and social context (Figure 1).

The Self, as an integrated coordinating axis of the Value Intelligence system (and the primary energy of integrity), appears as the central organizing factor of personal development. It functions as an internal core of equilibrium, where the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components of the value system converge, ensuring their coherence and dynamic integrity. In the psychological dimension, the Self can be considered as the primary energy of integrity – an internal source of integration that allows an individual not only to preserve own identity, but also to constantly rethink it in the process of interacting with the world. It is an internal psychodynamic center that ensures the integrity of an individual, moral stability and ability to self-regulate in the face of change. It helps to choose what makes sense to me when I do not see the sense, which is currently a significant problem of the present.

The axis of the Self is not a fixed point, but a living coordinate of the internal balance between cognition, feeling, and action, between stability and flexibility. It manifests itself in a person's ability to maintain psychological metabolism – the process of constantly transforming life experience into meaning, trauma – into growth, and interaction – into internal integration.

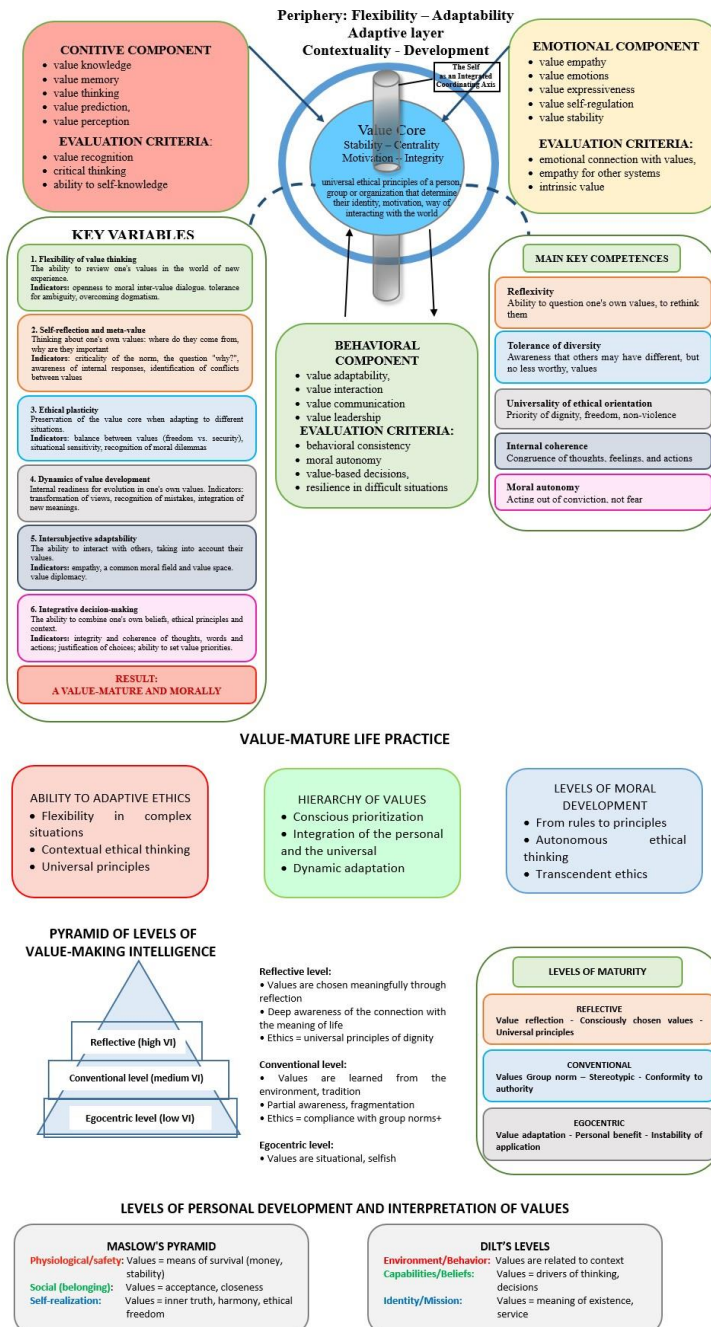


Figure 1  
Model of Value Intelligence

Source: authors' own elaboration

According to F. Perls (Perls, 1969), a psychologically mature person does not try to change others or circumstances, but works with own self, moving from external to internal regulation. Such a transition occurs due to the formation of an internal axis – a value structure that keeps a person in a state of fragile equilibrium (common sense as a process, not a state), allowing not to collapse under the pressure of the environment, but to transform, renew own meanings and boundaries.

A mature Self functions as an integrating core of Value Intelligence. It ensures ecological interaction with the environment when a person does not create worse conditions for another in order to win, but acts from a position of equality, coexistence, and joint presence. In this context, co-presence is not emotional sympathy, but a deep ethical quality: the ability to be next to another without control, without competition, but with attention, acceptance, and respect for the autonomy and values of the other through the right to his/her initial conditions for the formation and implementation of these values, which are important to us.

The axis of the Self in the Value Intelligence model is the axis of internal coherence, where an individual not only learns values, but also lives according to them in every act of being. It is the coordinate axis around which the dynamic balancing between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, between individual and social responsibility, between meaning and action takes place.

Thus, the “axis of the Self” can be considered as a metaphor for psychological integrity, combining reflexivity, empathy, and axiological stability. It is the system-forming basis of Value Intelligence, which makes possible the transition from reactive adaptation to conscious, sense-making interaction with the world.

From a pedagogical point of view, the Self plays the role of a coordinating axis that gives direction to the Value Intelligence and determines the individual way of including a person in the cultural, social, and moral context. It acts as a tool through which a person is able to reflect the world within him/herself and form an attitude towards the world. That is, the Self integrates the internal and external: on the one hand, it absorbs socio-cultural experience, norms, and values; on the other hand, it transforms them into internal guidelines that determine a unique way of life.

In the pedagogical process, this coordinating axis manifests itself through the individual’s ability to reflect, moral autonomy, and adaptability. It ensures the integrity of development – not only the accumulation of knowledge or the assimilation of norms, but also the harmonization of personal experience with the universal values of humanity. Due to this, the Self is not a static construct, but a dynamic principle of balance: it combines the constancy of the value core with the flexibility of adaptive changes, giving an individual internal integrity and at the same time openness to development.

Thus, from a psychological and pedagogical perspective, the Self in the structure of Value Intelligence appears as an integrative axis that coordinates all its components, directs personal development, ensures the unity of internal and external experience, and acts as a means of forming a value-mature life practice.

## The Self in Transactional Analysis

The Self in transactional analysis (TA) is not a “part”, but a center of integration.

Eric Berne did not directly use the term “Self”, but his entire system is aimed at ensuring that a person comes into contact with own true self-identity, that is, with the authentic center of decisions and feelings. Later, his disciples (for example, Ian Stewart, Van Joines, Erskine) actually understood this level as the Self – the core of personal integration.

In the TA, the Self is not one of the Ego-states, but the reflective ability to be a conscious observer between them.

It manifests itself at the moment when a person *can choose* from which Ego-state to act – that is, not to react automatically (from the Child or the Parent), but to consciously respond from the position of the Adult or even from the metaposition – “I, who observes the process”. The Self in the TA is a “place” of consciousness where all three Ego-states can coexist without conflict.

Richard Erskine (one of Berne’s followers) developed transactional analysis in the direction of relational integration, where the idea of Self-in-relationship became central: “The Self is the experience of oneself in a relationship, where authenticity meets acceptance of the other”.

That is, in a mature personality, the Self is not isolated, but exists through dialogical presence – when I am both myself and am able to experience the other without losing myself. This is what we interpret as “*co-presence*” or “*ecological interaction*”.

Erskine describes the integrated Self as the ability to simultaneously keep:

- contact with one’s own feelings, needs and meanings;
- empathy for another person;
- responsibility for boundaries and authentic behavior.
- “axis of the Self”.

This axis passes *through the center of the Adult*, which in the TA performs the function of integration between the Parent and the Child. However, the mature “axis» is not reduced to cognitive control (the rational Adult), it includes the emotional, bodily, and spiritual dimensions – what Erskine called the *integrative Adult Self*. In this sense, the model of Value Intelligence that we invented has a direct parallel: the axis of the Self = the center of integration of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels, and in the TA – it is the Adult in dialogue with

the Parent and the Child, which allows each to manifest oneself without dominance. The practical level includes the functions of the Self in the TA:

1. Self-reflection – the ability to see what is currently activated (what Ego state).
2. Self-regulation – choosing a form of response consistent with one's own values.
3. Self-presence – being “here and now” in contact with oneself and the other.
4. Integration – combining past experience (Parent), emotional resource (Child), and realistic assessment (Adult) into a single meaningful action.

According to Richard Schwartz, inner presence has the following characteristics (1995): compassion, calmness, clarity, confidence, courage, creativity, curiosity, connection that are characteristic of the “Good Parent”, which is part of the transfer from the imaginary figure of God, who created for us the original sense of security and value – from where, accordingly, students make a psychological transfer to the mentor, teacher in the educational process.

## Key components of the VI model

The model consists of three key components. The first is cognitive, that is, related to thinking, knowledge, and awareness. It includes value knowledge, memory, thinking, forecasting, and perception. This block is added to the model, because without understanding and realizing one's values, they remain superficial and cannot function as an internal guide. The criteria for its manifestation are the ability to recognize and understand values and to make self-assessment.

The second component is emotional. It is responsible for how a person experiences values, how much they become part of the person's inner world. It includes empathy, emotions, expressiveness, self-regulation, and value stability. This block is included in the model because values cannot exist only at the level of knowledge – they must be experienced through feelings, then they become sincere and affect behavior. Its criteria are the ability to empathize with one's own and others' values, and the intrinsic value of emotions.

The third component is behavioral. It reflects the ability to act in accordance with values. Adaptability, interaction, communication, and leadership are highlighted here. This block is included because the true test of value maturity is not in words, but in actions. A person demonstrates values when they are manifested in the choices, in how a person interacts with others, and in how a person influences the society. The criteria for this component are consistency in actions, the ability to cooperate, and social coherence.

In addition to the three components, the model includes key variables. They show how values can transform. These are flexibility of value thinking, self-re-

flection and metacognition, ethical plasticity, value development, dynamics of value development, intersubjective adaptability, and integrative decision-making. These variables are added to emphasize that a value system is not something frozen; it develops through reflection, interaction with other people, and new experiences. Due to them, a person learns to rethink own beliefs, while remaining internally coherent.

The main key abilities are distinguished separately. These are reflexivity, tolerance for diversity, universality of ethical orientation, internal coherence, and moral autonomy. They are included in the model as indicators of personality maturity. Without reflexivity, it is impossible to realize one's own values, without tolerance – to live in a diverse world, without ethical orientation – to have a moral compass, without internal coherence – to avoid contradictions between words and actions, and without moral autonomy – to remain free and responsible in one's actions.

Due to the interaction of all these blocks, a value-based and morally mature life practice is formed. The model shows that the person's maturity consists not only in the presence of certain beliefs, but also in the ability to realize them, emotionally experience them, apply them in practice, rethink them, and agree with other people.

The second part of the scheme illustrates a value-mature life practice through a combination of the levels of Value Intelligence, moral development, and personal growth. Its purpose is to show how a person moves from an ego-centric perception of the world to a mature reflective position, when values become conscious, universal, and internally accepted. Value-mature life practice with the help of Value Intelligence goes through three stages: value maturity (I know what is important to me), psychological maturity (I can manage myself and live responsibly), personal maturity (I see the meaning and purpose of my life).

The first important block is the ability to adaptive ethics, which is included in the model, because values are manifested not only in theory, but also in complex life situations. Flexibility, contextual thinking, and orientation to universal principles of dignity are important here. The second block is the hierarchy of values. It reflects that the maturity of value development is impossible without conscious prioritization, integration of the personal and the universal, as well as the ability to adapt the hierarchy to new conditions. The third block is the levels of moral development. It is needed to show that a person moves from simple compliance with rules to conscious acceptance of principles, up to the level where ethics becomes transcendent and autonomous.

The central part is the pyramid of levels of Value Intelligence, which combines three levels. At the lowest, egocentric level, values are situational and related only to personal benefit. Next comes the conventional level, where values are learned from a group or society, often without deep awareness. The highest

level is reflective, where values are chosen consciously through reflection, become universal principles, and are combined with a deep sense of the meaning of life. Such a structure shows the path from a superficial perception of values to a mature and internally integrated one.

The levels of maturity that refine this pyramid are presented separately: the egocentric level focuses on personal gain, the conventional level focuses on group norms and traditions, and the reflective level focuses on internally accepted principles. This reiterates the logic of development and demonstrates why these levels are included: they reflect the natural dynamics of ethical growth.

The connection to the levels of personal development and the interpretation of values is also important. This combines Maslow's pyramid, the levels of child development, and the general idea that at the basic level, values serve for survival, at the social level – for belonging and closeness, and at the level of self-realization, they become inner truth, harmony, and freedom. At the same time, in the development of a child, values are first associated with the environment and behavior, and then become drivers of thinking and beliefs, and later – the meaning of life and mission. This block is included in order to emphasize that the interpretation of values changes depending on the level of development of an individual.

Thus, the model integrates the cognitive, moral, and personal dimensions of values. It shows that value maturity is achieved through the integration of universal principles into behavior, the conscious choice of values, and the ability to apply them in different contexts of life.

## Discussion

The first scheme showed the structure of the value core of the personality (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components, key variables and key abilities), and the second – the stages of value development (levels of Value Intelligence, maturity, and moral development). Together they form a holistic concept that explains both the internal structure of values and the path of their formation.

Generalizing, this unified model shows that the development of values has two dimensions: structural and dynamic. Structurally, values are embodied through knowledge, emotions, and actions, and dynamically they move from egocentric use through conventional assimilation to reflective awareness. The final result is a value-mature life practice when a person is able to consciously choose values, integrate them into own life, maintain autonomy in decisions, and at the same time be open to others and to new contexts.

The presented model implements the most detailed typology of the system of Value Intelligence as a complex psychological and pedagogical phenomenon, structured along several dimensions: structural, functional, and methodological. The structural typology of the model assumes its multicomponent nature, that is, the presence of several interconnected elements that reflect different levels and aspects of the value functioning of an individual, and also form a single system. The model has three properties at the same time. It is hierarchical, as it assumes a level organization (it assumes different levels of organization and subordination, where there is a transition from elementary forms of value awareness to high levels of integration, from egocentric to reflective value forms). It is concentric because the organization and all processes revolve around the central core – the Self as the integrative axis of value integration. In addition, it is dynamic through the built-in logic of development, transformations, adaptations, and transitions between levels of value maturity.

Functionally, the model performs several main roles. It is *integrative*, combining cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and existential dimensions of personality functioning; *procedural* – describing the mechanisms of functioning of values in consciousness, experience, and behavior; *productive* – given its practical orientation toward the formation of value-mature life practice; and *diagnostic* – since it makes it possible to verify the levels of value maturity, moral development, cognitive integration, and self-actualization.

In the methodological dimension, the model has a multi-paradigmatic nature, combining various scientific approaches in its basis. As an interdisciplinary construct, it is based on philosophical, psychological, pedagogical, sociocultural, and neurocognitive foundations. At the same time, it is empirically substantiated: its concepts can be verified through psychodiagnostics, content analysis of value statements, interviews, and observation of the individual's life practices.

The dominant approach in explaining the structure of the model is the axiological approach, within which values are considered as a system-forming phenomenon of the personality. Its philosophical basis is the phenomenology of values (M. Scheler), which treats values as objective entities, existentialism (V. Frankl), which reveals values as the basis of the meaning of being, and personalism, which emphasizes the importance of values as a manifestation of the uniqueness and freedom of an individual. In the psychological plane, the model integrates the concepts of M. Rokeach about terminal and instrumental values, the theory of basic universal values of S. Schwartz, as well as the semantic approach of D. Leontiev, where values appear as leading semantic formations (Scheler, 1973; Schwartz, 2012; Frankl, 1985; Rokeach, 1973; Leontiev, 1975, 1992, 2003).

The system approach serves as the foundation for describing the general principles of the model's organization. The model is interpreted as an open, self-

-organized system with a hierarchical structure, capable of emergent generation of new qualities in the process of development. Dynamic equilibrium and adaptability allow the system to maintain the constancy of the value core while simultaneously changing behavioral strategies in response to new social challenges.

The personal approach focuses on the unique nature of the value structure of each person. In the humanistic tradition (A. Maslow, K. Rogers), self-realization and growth appear as processes of revealing authentic values, leading to integrated personal maturity. In this approach, attention is important to individual differences in value profiles, typology of orientations and the ability of an individual to harmonize conflicting value impulses.

The activity approach highlights values as internal motives that set the direction and quality of activity. The theories of A. Leontiev and S. Rubinstein emphasize the active role of an individual as a subject who realizes values in behavior (Rubinstein, 1999; Leontiev, 2003, 1975). The practical plane is important here: life practice appears as a space for the embodiment of values through strategies of choice, decisions, and responsible actions.

The cognitive approach studies values as mental representations, schemes and mechanisms of information processing. The metacognitive level is especially relevant – awareness of the processes of value thinking. Through the constructivist perspective (Kelly, 1955), values appear as personally formed cognitive constructs that organize the perception of the world and self-identity.

The developmental approach reveals the evolution of value consciousness over time and embodies the idea of stages and gradualness of value formation. Theories of moral development (L. Kohlberg), ego development (J. Loevinger), and spiral dynamics (C. Graves) (Kohlberg, 1984; Loevinger, 1976; Graves, 1970) allow considering the model as a stage phenomenon, where progress to higher levels of value reflection involves crisis transitions, sensitive periods, and gradual complication of internal structures and patterns of transformations throughout the life cycle.

In this aspect, value maturity appears not as a given constant, but as the result of the integration of many years of experience, self-reflection, and life choices.

Thus, the model of Value Intelligence is a multi-faceted, multi-level, and methodologically heterogeneous construct that allows for a comprehensive description, diagnosis, and development of an individual's ability of conscious, holistic, and responsible value-based functioning in life.

The detailed typology of the model and scientific approaches to its understanding demonstrate the multidimensionality of the phenomenon of Value Intelligence. It appears as a structurally multilayered and at the same time dynamic system that has integrative, procedural, productive, and diagnostic functions, develops at the intersection of axiological, systemic, personal, activity, cognitive, and developmental concepts, and ensures the formation of a value-mature personality.

Horizontal connections between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components reflect a multi-level system of interactions, in which each of the elements not only influences the others, but is also transformed under their influence. The most complex is the connection between the cognitive and emotional dimensions, because it is here that the transformation of rational assessment into sensory reactions occurs and vice versa: mental judgments about the value of a situation cause affective states, while emotional experiences determine to what a person pays attention and how a person structures knowledge. Such reciprocity creates holistic emotional-cognitive schemes, which are the basis for the formation of stable value orientations.

In the interaction of cognitive and behavioral components, the realization of internal beliefs in specific actions occurs. What is perceived as significant is transformed into behavioral scenarios that may have a moral-ethical or strategic basis. At the same time, the reverse effect is manifested in the fact that one's own actions and their consequences become the basis for reassessment of values, correction of beliefs, and development of cognitive strategies. Thus, behavioral experience is a source of both learning and strengthening or transformation of the internal value system.

The emotional-behavioral connection shapes the dynamics between affective states and external actions. Emotions prompt impulsive or controlled forms of behavior, influencing both prosocial and individually oriented reactions. In turn, human actions not only lead to social and material consequences, but also cause corresponding emotional experiences: from pleasure and resonance to tension or disappointment. Thus, behavior becomes a channel of emotional self-expression and at the same time a mechanism for the formation of emotional stability.

All these connections demonstrate that the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels do not exist in isolation, but are in a state of constant exchange and interdependence. Their interaction forms the integrity of the system of human Value Intelligence, where thinking provides orientation in the world of senses, emotions set energy and significance, and behavior is a specific way of implementing and verifying value orientations in reality. This determines the complex synergy, due to which a person is able to not only reflect, but also actively create own attitude to the world.

Vertical connections with key abilities, such as reflexivity and adaptability, perform an integrative function and ensure the integrity of the system. Reflexivity acts as an internal mechanism of self-observation and critical assessment, due to which a person can become aware not only of his/her own thoughts and of beliefs, but also of deep emotional states and real behavioral actions. It unites the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels through the ability to analyze own motives and results, creating the opportunity for meta-reflection – under-

standing of the process of self-knowledge itself. This makes the value system more transparent for an individual and capable of self-correction.

Adaptability, unlike reflexivity, focuses not on internal observation, but on the external dynamics of adaptation. It manifests itself in cognitive flexibility, when thinking changes strategies in accordance with new conditions, in the emotional ability to regulate states and rebuild them to maintain internal balance, as well as in behavioral variability, which allows a person to adjust own actions depending on the circumstances. Adaptability functions at different levels: tactical – when quick and situational decisions are needed, strategic – which provides long-term changes, and transformational – which concerns a deep restructuring of the entire value system.

Thus, reflexivity and adaptability create a vertical axis that provides both internal awareness and external adaptation. Together, they form a dynamic balance between stability and development, due to which the value system of an individual remains intact and at the same time is capable of evolution.

Systemic connections and interactions in the Value Intelligence model reflect not linear, but circular and cascading processes, due to which the components constantly influence each other and the core. Circular connections provide feedback mechanisms: positive loops reinforce significant value processes, creating an accumulation and strengthening effect, while negative feedback loops perform the function of self-regulation and stabilization, preventing destructive distortions in the system. Complex multi-level loops combine cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels into an integrated process, where each change in one component resonates in the other two.

Cascading effects reflect the spread of influences in the system. Cognitive cascades begin with transformations in the sphere of thinking and turn into behavioral changes; emotional cascades manifest themselves as emotional contagion that forms a collective atmosphere or changes a personal state; behavioral cascades trigger a domino effect when individual actions generate long-term changes in an individual or group value system. The combination of circular and cascading mechanisms creates a holistic contour of self-regulation, development, and stability, which guarantees the living dynamics of the system without losing its core integration.

Thus, a holistic model of the Value Intelligence system can be considered as a multidimensional psychological and pedagogical construct, in the center of which is the core and the Self as an integrated coordinating axis of equilibrium, which acts as a system-forming center that sets the direction, stability, and internal hierarchy of the entire model. The core contains basic values, meta-values, identity, and mission, which act as deep landmarks, due to which all cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes receive semantic certainty.

This core not only ensures the stability and integrity of the personality (Kohut, 1971, 1977), but also performs the function of the internal “pulse” of the system, constantly coordinating the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. Due to this, the model acquires dynamism and at the same time preserves internal order.

The cognitive component integrates with the core through conceptualization, rationalization, and systematization, transforming fundamental orientations into schemas, categories, and scenarios that make values recognizable and applicable. The emotional component interacts with the core through emotional coloring, experiences of significance, and motivation, which gives values personal strength and emotional support, and becomes an internal source of inspiration or tension. The behavioral component is connected with the core through implementation, expression, and social demonstration, which allows values to materialize in actions, regulate decisions, and shape lifestyles. In the opposite direction, the core determines cognitive filters, emotional modulation, and behavioral standards, creating conditions for internal coherence and consistency. Thus, the core not only ensures the organization and stability of the system, but also acts as a point of its development, since it maintains balance through homeostatic and compensatory mechanisms, and ensures dynamic evolution through integration and transformation processes.

The cognitive component gives values structure, logic, and conceptual form, the emotional one fills them with vital energy, experiences of significance, and affective coloring, and the behavioral one makes them visible through specific actions and social interaction. All three dimensions are in interdependent horizontal connections, where the cognitive one influences the emotional one through assessment and comprehension, the emotional one forms cognitive selectivity and memory, and the behavioral one as a practical plane reflects and specifies both of them. Vertically, the core provides reflexivity and adaptability, which guarantee the system’s ability to self-knowledge, critical reassessment, and adaptation to environmental changes.

The model functions according to the principle of circular and cascading relationships: changes in one dimension inevitably spread to others, and self-regulatory mechanisms maintain balance and at the same time allow development. Thus, Value Intelligence appears as a single integrated system, where the value core acts as the center of the semantic identity of an individual, and cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes are the means of its reflection and implementation. From a pedagogical point of view, such a model explains how the formation and education of values can be carried out not only through the transfer of knowledge, but also through the development of emotional sensitivity and organization of activities that reflect value orientations.

It is worth noting that the presented model of Value Intelligence has deep conceptual resonances with the theory of transactional analysis (E. Berne, T. Harris, M. James) (Berne, 1961; Harris, 1969; James & Jongeward 1971), in particular in aspects of educational psychology and pedagogical interaction. Both paradigms are based on the humanistic-existential understanding of a person as an active subject, capable of self-reflection, self-regulation, and conscious construction of relationships with the social environment. Within the framework of transactional analysis, the educational process is considered as a system of socio-psychological transactions that occur between three states of the Ego – “Parent”, “Adult”, and “Child”, which structurally reflect the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the personality. Similarly, the model of Value Intelligence identifies three basic components – cognitive, emotional, and behavioral – that are in constant interaction around the value core as an integration center.

This correlation allows considering the VI model as an axiologically in-depth version of the transactional approach, in which the mechanisms of internal and interpersonal transactions acquire a value-oriented dimension. From the standpoint of pedagogical psychology, this means that each transaction in the educational process – verbal, emotional, or behavioral – can be interpreted as an act of value interaction aimed at harmonizing the meanings, norms, and moral positions of the participants in the educational space. Thus, the Value Intelligence model opens up the possibility of rethinking educational communication as a space of “value transactions”, within which the development of the conscious Self, the formation of ethical competence, and the formation of moral autonomy of the subject of education are carried out.

From the methodological point of view, the integration of Value Intelligence and transactional analysis in the educational context contributes to the transition from instructional-directive pedagogy to dialogical, reflexive-semantic, and axiologically oriented pedagogy. It creates conditions for the formation of meta-competences in students, in particular, ethical sensitivity, empathy, cognitive flexibility, and the ability to constructive self-regulation in communication. The use of such a framework in pedagogical practice ensures the development of the so-called “value-based transactional environment”, in which educational interaction takes on the character of a partnership, and a teacher acts not as a carrier of authoritarian knowledge, but as a facilitator of the value formation of an individual.

## Conclusions

Thus, the proposed model not only integrates contemporary psychological and pedagogical understandings of the individual’s value domain but also opens

new perspectives for its application in educational processes. It enables the interpretation of value education not as a separate disciplinary task but as a systemic process in which knowledge, experience, and action are interconnected and interdependent, while the central value core ensures their harmonization and development. Within the framework of the modern educational paradigm, the Value Intelligence (VI) model can be regarded as a methodological and conceptual extension of transactional analysis – its value-integrative and axiologically regulated interpretation. This approach not only broadens the psychological understanding of interpersonal transactions but also elevates them to the level of value-meaning pedagogy, in which learning becomes a process of developing a holistic, self-reflective, morally mature, and ethically autonomous personality.

The results of the theoretical and methodological analysis allow for the conceptualization of Value Intelligence (VI) as an integrative system of self-regulation that unites cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes within the individual's axiological space. Value Intelligence is defined as a cognitive-axiological capacity that ensures the awareness, hierarchy, integration, and realization of personal and universal values through the processes of thinking, emotional experiencing, and ethical decision-making. It functions as a dynamic mechanism of moral autonomy and ethical reflection that fosters humanistically oriented behavior.

Problematization is identified as the central factor driving the development of the VI system, acting as an external stimulus for internal transformation. Environmental pressures – social, cultural, and technological – activate reflection, re-evaluation of meaning, and self-regulatory mechanisms within the VI structure. As a result, the transition from reactive adaptation to conscious self-transformation takes place, turning challenges into resources for growth and achieving a new level of integration and axiological maturity.

The VI model is constructed according to the principles of holism, hierarchy, emergence, reflexive-adaptive regulation, interdisciplinary integration, and axiological orientation. Its central element – the axis of Self – serves as a coordinating structure that integrates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes, ensuring internal coherence of the personality. This axis represents the coordinate center of moral stability, maintaining a balance among cognition, emotion, and action, and enabling ethical consistency and value-based behavior.

The proposed model represents an open, dynamic, and emergent system that evolves through interaction with its environment and transforms external influences into internal developmental resources. Its tripartite structure – cognitive, emotional, and behavioral – forms the foundation of the holistic functioning of VI and determines its levels of maturity.

The practical significance of the model lies in its potential use for empirical assessment of VI, development of diagnostic tools, and implementation of value-oriented educational programs aimed at fostering reflection, moral auton-

omy, empathy, and responsible decision-making/choice. In this context, value-oriented education is considered as an environment for cultivating humanistic competence, where knowledge is integrated with personal meaning and learning is combined with the development of ethical thinking, self-awareness, and inner maturity. It facilitates a shift from informative to transformative learning, where values become the foundation of educational interaction, professional culture, and civic responsibility.

Future research perspectives include developing validated diagnostic instruments for assessing levels of Value Intelligence, studying its interrelations with cognitive, emotional, and social intelligence, and implementing the model in psychological and pedagogical counseling, adult education, and leadership training. A particularly relevant research direction involves empirical verification of the model's predictive capacity – its potential to forecast patterns of moral choice, behavioral stability, and axiological integration of an individual within complex sociocultural contexts.

Consequently, the Value Intelligence model holds the potential to serve as a theoretical and applied foundation for the development of a new humanistic paradigm in psychology, pedagogy, and education, aimed at fostering mature, responsible, and axiologically integrated individuals.

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## Konceptualizacja modelu inteligencji wartości w ramach kompleksowej ramy naukowo-innowacyjnej: podstawy teoretyczne i zasady modelowania

### Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia teoretyczne i metodologiczne uzasadnienie oraz konceptualizację modelu inteligencji wartości (VI) jako złożonego zjawiska psychopedagogicznego integrującego poznawcze, emocjonalne i behawioralne mechanizmy samoregulacji w ramach systemu współrzędnych opartego na wartościach. Model został opracowany w ramach kompleksowych ram naukowych i innowacyjnych, łączących zasady organizacji systemu, hierarchii, emergentności, regulacji refleksyjno-adaptacyjnej, integracji interdyscyplinarnej i orientacji aksjologicznej.

Stwierdzono, że inteligencja wartości funkcjonuje jako otwarty, dynamiczny i emergentny system zdolny do przekształcania wyzwań środowiskowych w zasoby służące wzrostowi i dojrzałości. W tym celu wykorzystano metodę modelowania oraz teoretyczne metody empiryczne.

Ustalono, że proponowany model służy jako konstrukcja teoretyczna i prognostyczna definiująca strukturalną i funkcjonalną organizację inteligencji wartości, jej kluczowe elementy, zmienne i poziomy rozwoju. Stanowi on podstawę do dalszej empirycznej walidacji, tworzenia narzędzi diagnostycznych do oceny VI oraz projektowania programów edukacyjnych zorientowanych na wartości, mających na celu wspieranie dojrzałości moralnej i kompetencji humanistycznych u poszczególnych osób.

**Słowa kluczowe:** integracja aksjologiczna, inteligencja wartości, model, podejście humanistyczne, samoregulacja.



**RESEARCH REPORTS – ON THE BORDER**  
**RAPORTY Z BADAŃ – NA POGRANICZU DZIEDZIN**



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## Happiness and hope in the consciousness of the young generation – analysis of perception and experience

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### Abstract

The article presents the opinions of pedagogy students about hope, symbols of happiness and personal values. It includes a theoretical part that describes the characteristics of the generation of people born after 1995 and outlines the concepts of hope and happiness. The empirical part describes the results of surveys diagnosing the level of basic hope and the symbols and values identified by young people with full and lasting satisfaction with life. The study used the BHI-12 Basic Hope Questionnaire and the Personal Values List.

The results allow us to conclude that the level of basic hope among the respondents remains at a good level. This makes it easier for them to find a way to respond to stress and trauma, shapes the speed and constructiveness of adaptation to a new social environment, and gives a greater chance for the effectiveness of educational and possible therapeutic interactions. Respondents indicate symbols of happiness and create a list of values whose achievement predicts life satisfaction.

**Keywords:** young generation, hope, happiness, personal values, diagnostic test

### Introduction

Hope and the pursuit of happiness have accompanied humanity since the dawn of time, giving rise to numerous theories, concepts, and definitions re-

garding the perception and understanding of these two notions. Hope helps individuals strive to fulfill their aspirations and life plans, which appears to be essential for human existence. A lack of hope can lead to despair and, consequently, to making decisions that may result in irreversible life situations. Hope enables people to endure the most challenging moments and periods of their lives.

Happiness, on the other hand, is defined in two ways: as “a feeling of great satisfaction and joy, as well as the things that cause it” (Doroszewski, 2024) and as “a fortunate coincidence of circumstances, success in various endeavors and life situations” (Ibid.). Happiness is linked to a person's emotional state and life circumstances, leading to the conclusion that “there are as many concepts of happiness as there are people striving for it” (Pepliński, 2011, p. 664).

From antiquity to the present day, the concepts of hope and happiness have been the subject of extensive philosophical inquiry and reflection, with numerous seminars and conferences dedicated to their significance and role in human life. These terms have also become firmly embedded in the language of medicine, psychology, psychotherapy, sociology, pedagogy, and law (de Tchorzewski, 2018, p. 33).

This article examines hope and happiness from the perspective of students in pedagogy and special pedagogy programs. The discussion is divided into the following areas:

- The modern young generation,
- The categories of hope and happiness,
- The foundations of personal research,
- Discussion and conclusions.

## **The modern young generation**

Today's youth—referred to as Generation Z—differ from previous generations in their aspirations, motivational factors, and methods of communication. Scientific literature offers numerous definitions of the concept of a generation. A particularly relevant definition for this study is that of Hartmut Giese, that describes a generation as a collective of individuals of similar age, belonging to a specific cultural sphere, and displaying similarities in attitudes, motivations, dispositions, and value systems within a given historical and social context (1996, p. 11). Importantly, simply being born in a particular time period does not automatically make one a representative of that generation. Instead, what matters is that the formative years of personality development are marked by similar social events, transformations, or technological advancements.

The technological and social changes that have occurred in the second and early third decades of the 21st century have led to young people being colloqui-

ally labeled as: Generation M (Multitasking), Generation C (Connected Generation), the Net Generation (constantly connected), or the Snowflake Generation (Anasiewicz, 2023, p. 507). Most of these terms originate not from academia but from popular culture, such as the term “snowflakes,” which was used in a dialogue in David Fincher's film *Fight Club* (Anasiewicz, 2023, p. 508). In popular perception, this generation is characterized by constant smartphone use, immersion in the virtual world, a preference for screen-based entertainment, and difficulties in forming lasting and real-life relationships, including in the workplace (Gajda, 2017, p. 161).

However, recent studies on the situation of young people in Poland challenge these stereotypes (Szafraniec, 2011; Boni, 2021; CBOS, 2021). Research indicates that Generation Z is a values-driven generation, willing to make sacrifices for higher causes, creative, and eager to change the world. It is a shrinking group due to demographic factors. They achieve financial independence later in life but enter the workforce (typically in temporary jobs) earlier. They seek a balance between work and personal life, believing that flexibility enables them to pursue their passions and interests, contributing to their well-being. Young people engage in various activities to help others, which provides them with inner satisfaction and enhances their sense of self-worth and image (Orlik, 2023, p. 73). Generation Z places great importance on mental health and overall well-being. They are aware of the potential negative effects of work-related stress and burnout. Consequently, they prioritize self-care, setting boundaries between work and personal life, and engaging in self-reflection (Majdan, 2022). Environmental issues are also a major concern for Generation Z, as they worry about climate change (Ibid.). Additionally, they are a globally-minded generation, determined not to repeat their parents' mistakes, with ambitious plans and a broad vision for the future.

The dynamic and value-driven nature of this young generation provides an ideal backdrop for discussing fundamental values—hope and happiness.

## Hope and happiness in human life

### The Category of Hope

Across various fields of study, hope is defined in different ways. Similarly, its significance in human life is perceived ambiguously. Research presents diverse evaluations of this concept, ranging from attributing a salvific meaning to hope—both literally and metaphorically—to considering it as destructive and harmful to individuals (Frąckowiak, 2007).

In human sciences, several approaches to understanding hope can be found. In philosophy, hope was initially regarded as an emotion related to good—an

uncertain good, as it does not yet exist, belongs to the future, but remains achievable. Human actions can facilitate the attainment of this good, though they do not guarantee control over it (Murawska, 2011, p. 55). Psychologists also widely classify hope as an emotion. Czesław Nosal considers it a dominant positive emotion associated with a high subjective probability of certain events occurring. This emotional-intellectual state opens the door to transgressive behaviors (Nosal, 1986, p. 22-23). In other perspectives, hope is linked to attitude. Kazimierz Popielski treats hope as an attitude toward life, expressing a positive orientation toward existence. It directly serves human existence, motivating individuals to act and serving as a means of countering doubt, resignation, withdrawal from life, and passive waiting for favorable circumstances (Popielarski, 1994, p. 102). Similarly, Erich Fromm defines hope as an attitude, although he sees a close connection between hope and emotional experiences. He argues that hope differs from emotional experiences in that it is not directed toward another person. Rather, it is an internal experience, with relationships to others being secondary (Fromm, 2017, p. 29). Psychologists who adhere to the cognitive concept of human nature emphasize the cognitive aspect of hope. They consider it a cognitive structure that includes emotions, affiliative judgments, temporal orientation, motives, and causal factors. While all these elements form a psychological whole, cognition plays the dominant role within it (Kozielecki, 2006, p. 37-38).

To explain the concept of hope, Erik Erikson moves away from the terms "attitude" and "emotion" and introduces the notion of "sense," which encompasses both superficial and profound matters and is situated within both consciousness and the unconscious (Erikson, 2004, p. 52). According to Erikson's theory (1997, 2002), hope is embedded in the overall process of identity formation and represents a fundamental belief about two general and interconnected properties of the world:

- The world is orderly and meaningful.
- The world is generally benevolent toward people.

For research purposes, the term *basic hope* was adopted from Erikson, as he defines it as:

- One of the seven fundamental ego strengths (virtues), alongside faith, love, wisdom, justice, moderation, and courage.
- The term *basic* distinguishes this concept from its colloquial meaning, as well as from the commonly used psychological notion of hope as "a feeling that things will turn out well" (Trzebiński, Zięba, 2003, p. 4).

The level of basic hope is an essential personality trait that enables individuals to respond constructively to two types of situations:

- Novelty, where basic hope increases readiness to take on new challenges and build a new order.

- The breakdown of an existing order, where it helps individuals, in the face of irreversible loss, to choose new life alternatives.

Basic hope is a relatively stable personality structure. Its foundations are likely formed during early childhood development, but it can change over the course of a person's life. As a personality competence, it influences behavior in response to important life situations while also evolving in response to events that reshape an individual's perception of the world (Trzebiński, Zięba, 2003, p. 4).

### The Category of Happiness

A common saying in everyday life expresses the desire to be "healthy, beautiful, wise, and wealthy," reflecting the popular aspiration for happiness. The sense of happiness is undoubtedly a key component of the quality of life for the younger generation. Quality of life, in turn, is perceived in two ways: as a certain standard of living for individuals and groups, and as personal perceptions and/or feelings regarding one's own condition, living conditions, relationships with others, and various other factors that determine satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life (Suchodolska, 2017, p. 47).

The concept of happiness has a broad semantic field. For example, the Latin *fortuna* means "objectively understood happiness," *beatitudo* refers to "spiritual happiness, the highest good," the Greek *eusto* means "well-being," *euthymia* translates to "good fortune," and *ataraxia* signifies "peace of mind." In German, *Glück* refers to "happiness as a state of mind," while *Glückseligkeit* means "bliss," and *Glücksfall* denotes "a stroke of luck" (Kanasz, 2015, p. 18). These examples illustrate that happiness is intertwined with the ethical and social dimensions of human life, as well as specific attitudes and emotions (Kaczor, 2014, p. 31).

From a philosophical perspective, happiness relates to human existence and is "someone's for someone else, always" (Głombik, 1982, p. 11). It is, therefore, as complex and varied as human nature itself. Władysław Tatarkiewicz presents four interpretations of happiness (2015). The first is the objective or "life-oriented" perspective, which defines happiness as "a favorable arrangement of events, good fortune, and lucky chances." The second is the subjective perspective, representing a psychological dimension, where happiness is "a particularly joyful and profound experience" for an individual, regardless of external factors. The third approach, eudaimonia, equates happiness with access to as many goods as possible, as they are seen as the key determinants of happiness. The fourth approach defines happiness as life satisfaction (Tatarkiewicz, 2015, p. 11-21).

- Tadeusz Czeżowski identifies three approaches to the perception of happiness: optimistic, pessimistic, and contemplative (Czeżowski, 1989, p. 195-197; Torczyńska, 2013, p. 97-100). The optimistic approach assumes that specific goods exist, the pursuit of which brings happiness (*substantive ap-*

*proach*), or that happiness comes from striving for what is good, guided by a sense of duty (*formalistic approach*).

- The pessimistic approach argues that happiness is unattainable due to the impermanence of worldly goods and the instability of evaluations (*nihilistic approach*). Another variation assumes that the uncertainty of judgments and statements leads to disappointment rather than happiness (*skeptical approach*) (Czeżowski, 1989, p. 195-196).
  - The contemplative approach suggests that while minor goods contribute to a state of happiness, true happiness comes from viewing life holistically and accepting one's fate through reflection, which serves as both the path and the goal of achieving happiness (Ibidem, p. 196).
1. Psychological perspectives on happiness an intriguing psychological concept of happiness was developed by Jerzy Czapiński and Guillem G. Peeters. They called it the Onion Theory of Happiness (Czapiński, Peeters, 1990). According to the authors, happiness has a layered structure. The key condition for maintaining a lasting, positive attitude toward life is the integrity of the deepest layer. This inner layer is believed to be internally, and even genetically, determined. It shapes a person's positive outlook on life. In this model, happiness consists of three layers. The deepest and most stable layer, which is the will to live—relatively unaffected by external events.
  2. The middle layer, representing life satisfaction, which reflects an emotional sense of well-being.
  3. The outermost layer, which is highly sensitive to external conditions, includes partial satisfaction from different aspects of life, such as work, family, leisure, education, living conditions, financial status, country and region of residence, and socio-cultural environment (Czapiński, 1994, p. 25; Czapiński & Panek, 2015, p. 222-225).

Based on this theory, it can be observed that positive experiences and associated memories contribute to an increase in the feeling of happiness and life satisfaction. Thus, in psychology, happiness is closely linked to quality of life and the exploration of both positive and negative sources of life experiences (Suchodolska, 2017, p. 74).

Scientific research on happiness is conducted in three directions, with reference to: behavioral systems, mediating mechanisms and personality traits. First one, behavioral systems, which analyze response patterns aimed at achieving a goal or fulfilling a function, ultimately leading to satisfaction. Second one, mediating mechanisms, referring to internal psychological processes that help individuals fulfill various tasks and functions, thus generating a sense of satisfaction. Third one, personality traits, understood as qualities and skills that are independent of internal psychological functions. These traits can be consciously developed to achieve happiness (Lewis & Havland-Jones, 2005, p. 833). By analyz-

ing the mechanisms behind happiness, researchers can distinguish between the causes and reasons for human happiness.

The List of Personal Values (LWO) developed by Zygfryd Juczyński was used to study the understanding of happiness among students of pedagogy. This tool consists of several dozen socially significant values that form the foundation of human principles and norms of conduct. Personal values are acquired through internalization (Parsons, 1969; Juczyński, 2012, p. 123). Since normative values are linked to attitudes, the study began with the selection of symbols of happiness, which hold a normative character. Individuals adopt specific attitudes toward these symbols and implement them in their lives through behaviors and actions. As young people gradually integrate into the cultural world, they choose specific values, internalize them as their own, refine them, and pass them on (Juczyński, p. 123).

This study aimed to: determine the level of basic hope among students and identify the symbols of happiness and fundamental values chosen by representatives of the young generation.

## **Methodological assumptions of the study**

The study had a diagnostic character and employed the diagnostic survey method along with the questionnaire technique. Two research tools were used: the Basic Hope Inventory (BHI-12), developed by Jerzy Trzebiński and Mariusz Zięba (2003), and the List of Personal Values (LWO), created by Zygfryd Juczyński (2012).

The study was conducted among 74 pedagogy students, specializing in early childhood and preschool education, care and educational pedagogy with pedagogical therapy, and special pedagogy (education and rehabilitation of individuals with intellectual disabilities). The participants were aged 20 to 25 and studied at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Silesia in Katowice. The sample selection was non-random and purposive, including individuals who met the criterion outlined in the research question. Such a selection does not allow for generalizations to the entire population (Rubacha, 2016, p. 124). The aim of the study was to determine the level of basic hope and to explore the significance of hope as a concept in the actions of Generation Z. To achieve this goal, the following research questions were formulated:

- What is the level of basic hope among pedagogy students?
- What role does hope play in the actions of the younger generation, as exemplified by pedagogy students?
- What symbols of happiness do young people choose?
- What significance do participants attribute to different values?

In line with research methodology principles, no research hypotheses were formulated. In diagnostic studies, formulating hypotheses could exert an undesirable influence on the final results (Rubacha, 2016, p. 99).

The study was conducted in groups between May and June 2023. The questionnaires were distributed to participants in paper form.

To verify the empirical data, a triangulation strategy was applied (Urbaniak-Zajac, 2018, p. 121-138). The students' responses were subjected to quantitative and then qualitative analysis. A detailed description of the analyses is provided in the next subsection.

Research Results

Basic Hope Inventory (BHI-12)

The BHI-12 is a self-report tool consisting of 12 statements to which respondents express their agreement or disagreement using a five-point scale, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Responses are recorded by circling the corresponding numbers (1 to 5).

Three items (1, 4, 7) serve as buffer questions and are not included in the final score calculation. The remaining nine items are scored on a scale from 1 to 5, with reverse scoring applied to items 3, 5, 9, 10, and 12 (i.e., 1=5, 2=4, 4=2, 5=1).

The final score is the sum of the points, representing an overall indicator of basic hope levels. The possible score range for an individual is 9 to 45 points. The results obtained are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1  
*Responses Collected Using the Basic Hope Inventory (BHI-12)*

No.	Statement / Total Responses	1	2	3	4	5
2.	The world is just, and everyone will eventually get what they deserve.	7	15	25	24	3
3.	There is no such thing as objective good and evil.	1	17	25	26	5
5.	The reality around us is inexplicable and unpredictable.	0	7	8	46	13
6.	The world is fundamentally good, even if we are suffering.	3	16	20	28	7
8.	There will always be people who will help us in difficult times.	0	5	5	44	20
9.	The events that happen to us are random, and we are at the mercy of fate.	5	31	30	8	1
10.	Fate is unfavorable to me.	8	26	32	7	1
11.	The world is fundamentally meaningful, even if we sometimes feel lost.	0	5	13	42	14
12.	“Every cloud has a silver lining” vs. “Things always go from bad to worse.”	32	30	10	1	1

Legend: 1 – Strongly Disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Neutral, 4 – Agree, 5 – Strongly Agree

Source: Own research.

The results summarized in Table 1 show an even distribution of responses. Quite a large group of respondents (depending on the question, from 10% to 43%) gave the given statements a middle value (digit 3) – neither I agree nor disagree, which was not taken into account in the overall score. Most students avoided extreme responses: I strongly disagree (number 1) and I strongly agree (number 5). The statements with which more than half of the respondents agreed were: there will always be people who will help us in difficult times, and the world is fundamentally meaningful, even if we sometimes feel lost. More than 25% of students rather agreed that: the world is just, and everyone will eventually get what they deserve, and that the world is fundamentally good, even if we are suffering. 80% of respondents in relation to the statements – every cloud has a silver lining vs. things always go from bad to worse – chose the first of them. About 30% of respondents rather disagreed with the statement: the events that happen to us are random, and we are at the mercy of fate.

The collected answers were converted into points, and the obtained raw score was presented in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Scores Obtained by Respondents in the BHI*

Statement No.	Total Score	Mean Score
2.	148	3,0
3.	130	2,7
5.	119	1,8
6.	182	3,4
8.	286	4,1
9.	166	3,8
10.	159	3,8
11.	326	5,3
12.	283	4,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1799</b>	<b>32.3</b>

Source: Own research.

When interpreting the results, the following categorization was used: 1 – 4 sten – low results, 5 – 6 sten – average results, 7 – 10 sten – high results (Brzeziński, 2006, pp. 541-542). For the obtained raw score of 32.3, the Polish norms of the BHI-12 questionnaire constitute the 7th standard. Therefore, it can be concluded that students present an average level of basic hope. This may predict that the respondents:

- know quite well how people react to stress and trauma,
- the speed and constructiveness of their adaptation to the new social environment is at an average level,

- their chances for the effectiveness of educational interventions and psychotherapy are good (Trzebiński, Zięba, 2003, p. 22).

### Results obtained based on the List of Personal Values (LWO)

The Personal Values List consists of two parts. The first one contains a description of 9 symbols of happiness that express various forms of actualization of human values. The second part presents 10 categories of personal values, including health identified with physical and mental fitness. The aim of the study was to assess the importance assigned to various values, including health. Achieving values that are important to oneself is identified with full, lasting and justified satisfaction with life (Juczyński, 2012, p. 125). The results obtained are summarized in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3  
*Symbols of Happiness – Distribution of Rankings*

Symbols of Happiness	Ranking (number of selections, N=74)					
		5	4	3	2	1 no choice
Large circle of friends	$\Sigma$	7	11	7	3	2 44
	%	9,5	15	9,5	4	3 59
Successful family life	$\Sigma$	25	17	5	6	5 16
	%	34	23	6,8	8	6,8 21,4
Doing a favorite job/profession	$\Sigma$	6	7	14	15	16 16
	%	8	9,5	19	20,3	21,6 21,6
Success in studies/work	$\Sigma$	5	4	5	7	6 47
	%	6,8	5,4	6,8	9,5	8 63,5
Good health	$\Sigma$	21	17	10	6	6 14
	%	28,5	23	13,5	8	8 19
Being needed by others	$\Sigma$	5	9	13	12	4 31
	%	6,8	12	17,5	16,3	5,4 42
Good material conditions	$\Sigma$	3	7	13	10	10 31
	%	4	9,5	17,5	13,5	13,5 42
Life full of adventures and travel	$\Sigma$	1	1	7	11	19 35
	%	1,4	1,4	9,5	14,7	26 47
Fame/popularity	$\Sigma$	0	0	0	0	0 74
	%	0	0	0	0	0 100%

Legend: 5 – Most important; 4, 3, 2 – Less important; 1 – Least important; Not Selected – No importance given.

Source: Own research.

The results from Table 3 indicate that the most valued symbols of happiness among respondents were:

- Successful family life (34% ranked it as most important, 23% ranked it second).
- Good health (28.5% ranked it as most important, 23% ranked it second).

Other frequently chosen symbols of happiness included: being needed by others, having a large circle of friends, good material conditions a life full of adventures and travel

The least valued symbols were fame and popularity, as none of the respondents selected them as important. Similarly, success in studies or work was ranked low, with 63.5% of respondents not selecting it as a symbol of happiness.

Table 4  
*Important Life Values – Distribution of Rankings*

Values	Ranking (number of selections, N=74)					
		5	4	3	2	1 no choice
Love, friendship	Σ	39	20	2	6	7 0
	%	52,5	27	3	8	9,5 0
Good health, physical and mental fitness	Σ	18	17	3	9	5 22
	%	24,4	23	4	12	6,8 29,8
Sense of humor, wit	Σ	2	8	5	5	5 49
	%	3	10,6	6,8	6,8	6,8 66
Intelligence, sharp mind	Σ	3	5	14	10	6 36
	%	4	6,8	19	13,5	8 48,7
Knowledge, wisdom	Σ	1	2	13	8	6 44
	%	1,4	3	17,6	11	8 59
Joy, satisfaction	Σ	5	8	17	11	8 25
	%	6,8	11	23	15	11 33,2
Courage, determination	Σ	2	4	7	5	12 44
	%	3	6	9,5	6,8	16,2 58,5
Kindness, gentleness	Σ	2	7	6	10	10 39
	%	3	9,5	8	13,5	13,5 52,5
Good looks, appearance	Σ	0	0	1	3	7 63
	%	0	0	1,4	4	9,4 85,2
Wealth, financial success	Σ	0	1	1	6	3 63
	%	0	1,4	1,4	8	4 85,2

Legend: 5 – Most important; 4, 3, 2 – Less important; 1 – Least important; Not Selected – No importance given.

Source: Own research.

Based on the results (Table 4), it can be stated that the value most appreciated by all surveyed students was love and friendship (rank 5 – 52.5% and rank 4 – 27% of the results). The second recognized value was good health understood as physical and mental fitness (rank 5 – 24.4% and rank 4 – 23% functional). However, with regard to this value, there was a group of respondents who did not include it in their ranking. – it constitutes 29.8% of the population. Less frequently chosen values were: joy and satisfaction, intelligence and sharpness of mind, kindness and gentleness, knowledge and wisdom. The least valued, but also indicated, were good looks and appearance as well as wealth and financial success (14.8% of choices in the given rank scale).

The obtained results indicate a relationship between the selected symbols of happiness and the resulting list of personal values. The most important symbols of happiness for young people are a successful family life and good health, which are related to values such as love, friendship and good health understood as physical and mental fitness. The list is supplemented by further values: joy and satisfaction, intelligence, kindness, knowledge and wisdom. The surveyed students see life satisfaction in achieving these values.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that despite various social challenges that have affected young people in recent years—challenges so severe that this generation was sometimes referred to as the “lost generation” (especially in the context of education)—they continue to build their future on values, finding hope and symbols of happiness in life. The key conclusions drawn from the research are:

- in the surveyed students the level of basic hope (7 sten) remains at a good level,
- Pedagogy students exhibit a moderate level of basic hope, which aids them in coping with stress and trauma, adapting to new social environments, and enhancing their educational and therapeutic effectiveness.
- Pedagogy students have a positive attitude towards important life situations, which results from their positive belief in their own abilities to achieve set goals and achieve success, a positive self-image, and the ability to act effectively based on the plan they have,
- The most valued symbols of happiness are: a successful family life and good health, slightly less frequently chosen are: being needed by others, a large circle of friends, good financial conditions and a life full of adventures,
- This is a generation whose list of personal values consists of: love and friendship, good health, joy and contentment, intelligence and sharpness of mind, kindness and gentleness, knowledge and wisdom.

The obtained results prove the validity of the assumptions presented in the theoretical part of the article on Generation Z. Thus, they refute the stereotypical perception of Generation Z portrayed in the mass media. They confirm that it is a generation living in a world of values, consciously shaping its personality, with room for hope and the search for happiness within its structure.

Referring to the assumptions of transactional analysis (Berne, 1987), it can be stated that the attitudes exhibited by the surveyed students indicate a dominance of the Adult and Spontaneous Child ego states, which is manifested in a responsible, realistic approach to life, while simultaneously being open to emotions, relationships, and spontaneity. Maintaining a balance between these states fosters the development of hope and a sense of meaning and also allows for the constructive building of interpersonal relationships in future pedagogical work. In this context, it can be considered that Generation Z, despite numerous challenges, enters adulthood with the potential to create "healthy transactions" based on authenticity, mutual respect, and responsibility, which represents an important asset both personally and professionally.

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## Szczęście i nadzieja w świadomości młodego pokolenia – analiza percepcji i doświadczeń

### Streszczenie

Artykuł prezentuje opinie studentów pedagogiki na temat nadziei, symboli szczęścia i wartości osobistych. Obejmuje część teoretyczną, w której opisano cechy generacji urodzonych po roku 1995 oraz zarysowano pojęcia nadziei i szczęścia. W części empirycznej opisano wyniki badań sondażowych diagnozujących poziom nadziei podstawowej oraz symbole i wartości utożsamiane przez młodych z pełnym i trwałym zadowoleniem z życia. W badaniu posłużono się kwestionariuszem Nadziei Podstawowej BHI-12 oraz Listą Wartości Osobistych.

Wyniki pozwalają stwierdzić, że u badanych poziom nadziei podstawowej utrzymuje się na dobrym poziomie. Ułatwia im to znajdowanie sposobu reagowania na stres i traumę, kształtuje szybkość i konstruktywność adaptacji do nowego środowiska społecznego, daje większe szanse na skuteczność oddziaływań edukacyjnych i ewentualnych terapeutycznych. Badani wskazują symbole szczęścia oraz tworzą listę wartości, których osiągnięcie prognozuje satysfakcję z życia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młode pokolenie, nadzieja, szczęście, wartości osobiste, badanie diagnostyczne.



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## The intricacies of academic personal mastery and systems thinking in the reflections of university staff involved in teaching

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the results of research on the reflections of academic teachers and administrative staff involved in teaching on their experiences of participating in an employee competence development project. The research was conducted based on Peter Senge's theoretical approach. Selected assumptions of his philosophy of organisational change and the model of a learning organisation formed the basis for distinguishing research categories. The analysis and interpretation of the research material obtained from 14 semi-open-ended in-depth individual interviews and their contexts led to the following conclusions: programmes that provide space for in-depth reflection on individual and collective professional functioning were perceived as contributing to increased motivation for improving professional skills, strengthening the sense of identity of organisation members and the willingness to engage in university-wide goals.

**Keywords:** learning organisation, academic teaching, personal mastery, systems thinking

### Introduction

The article presents how it is possible to effectively implement the mechanisms of a learning organisation in the field of teaching at a university – in

an environment of employees involved in academic teaching – and to achieve organisational learning goals related to improving the skills of individual members of the organisation, increasing their proactivity and openness to change, and ensuring the coherence of individual and institutional goals. For the purposes of this article, the definition of a learning organisation, in particular that of Peter Senge (Senge, 2012; Senge et al., 2013), and the assumptions of an implementation project aimed at developing professional competences are presented. The aim of the presented research project was to find out whether the implementation of the Peer Learning and Peer Tutoring programmes (original professional competence development programmes dedicated to employees involved in academic teaching and implemented in the university environment of the respondents) in a team/ pair in the area of teaching would influence declarations regarding improvement changes (personal mastery) and the perception of oneself as a member of the institution (systems thinking). The analysis and qualitative interpretation of the participants' statements and their contexts revealed the dimensions of the implementation of the attributes of a learning organisation, including establishing and nurturing relationships between employees, cooperation, exchange of experiences and peer evaluation, a sense of belonging to the academic community, decisions to introduce improving changes in methods of working with students and attitudes towards other employees, declarations of increased well-being in the workplace and involvement in university life.

## **Academic educators as a learning community**

Contemporary academic teaching faces, on the one hand, changes in higher education under the influence of new challenges related to the need to adapt educational offerings to the dynamically changing requirements of the labour market (cf. Jedlińska, 2021), and, on the other hand, the need for continuous transformation of teaching methods resulting from rapid changes in the identity of generational communities (cf. Igoa-Iraola et al., 2023). Both those directly involved in the educational processes at higher education institutions and those who manage and administer academic teaching are exposed to situations in which the existing methods of operation prove insufficient to meet the expectations of high-quality education. This situation is not helped by the atomisation of academic life and the resulting sense of loneliness among staff (cf. Ortega-Jiménez et al., 2021).

In 2022, as a result of a grassroots employee initiative, a unit responsible for supporting academic teaching was established within the framework of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education's programme 'Teaching Excellence at Uni-

versities' (measure 3.4. Management in higher education institutions). One of its objectives was the implementation of a project based on the assumptions of the learning organisation model (cf. Fullan, 2007), in particular on the mechanisms of functioning indicated by Senge.

The idea of a learning organisation and organisational learning is the result of the adaptation in organisational management sciences of the so-called systemic approach, which views the world as dynamically interdependent activities. (cf. Mirvis, 1996). The traditional management system adopted a mechanistic model of work, in which the criteria for organisational success and the objectives of employee activities are set top-down by management, and the role of the employee – motivated by competition and 'management by fear' (Senge, 2012, p. 12) is to perform the maximum number of tasks assigned to them.

The pressure resulting from global competition, the flattening of organisational structures and rapid communication transfer have increased the importance of organisational learning. Responding to this need, among others, researchers from the Institute of Social Research and the Tavistock Institute applied a systemic approach to the study of organisations (cf. Emery & Trist, 1965; Miller & Rice, 1967). As a result of the popularisation of this approach, the mechanistic model gave way to viewing organisations as organisms whose components engage in dialogue, inquiry, joint definition of situations and testing of possible solutions in order to enable learning, improvement of organisation members and the development of effective ways of operating (cf. Argyris & Schon, 1995). In line with this perspective, Senge defines a learning organisation as a place 'where people are constantly discovering how they create their reality and how they can change it' (Senge, 2012, p. 29).

In Senge's proposal, the full learning potential of an organisation can be realised on the assumption that teams, rather than individuals, are the basic units of learning. For this reason, the project in which the respondents participated involved the creation of teams of several academic teachers and administrative staff involved in academic teaching, which operated within the framework of development programmes based on mechanisms for activating team learning: Peer Learning and Peer Tutoring. According to Senge, team learning should cover five so-called disciplines – areas that constitute collective intelligence and at the same time have a fundamental impact on the effectiveness of the organisation and the development of three key team learning skills: inspiring aspirations, conducting insightful conversations and understanding complexity. This gives employee activities a teleological and eudaimonistic aspect (cf. Senge, 2012, pp. 19-21). The disciplines identified by Senge and included in the project activities are: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking.

In the processes implemented as part of the project, participants, in various ways, using coaching tools that open them up to self-analysis (cf. Szewczak et

al., 2020) in confrontation with the ways of thinking of other team members, in relation to various aspects of their work, had space to reflect on hidden personal mental models and a shared vision during friendly, non-judgmental dialogue. Thanks to the exchange of reflections and sharing of experiences, insight into the patterns of interaction occurring in teams, there was space for team learning.

The attributes of a learning community, i.e. personal mastery and systems thinking – categories that form the foundation of Senge's model – only had a chance to fully reveal themselves after six months of workshop activities and became key to the content presented in the article. Senge defines personal mastery as a type of proficiency gained through 'deepening one's vision of life, focusing energy, practising patience, and perceiving reality objectively.' (Senge, 2012, p. 23; cf. Senge et al., 2013, pp. 231-278). These are formal professional skills and moral dispositions that form the basis for effectively setting personal development goals and thus fulfilling life aspirations in integration with professional goals. The discipline of systems thinking is related to acquiring the ability to understand an organisation in a holistic way, taking into account its individual elements, including the individual situation of the employee, and identifying important connections between them. According to Senge, the existence of systems thinking is essential for organisational success and the uninterrupted further development of organisational learning (Senge, 2012, p. 23; Senge et al., 2013, pp. 111-228).

## **Research methodology and procedure**

### **Research objectives**

The aim of the original Peer Learning and Peer Tutoring programme at the university was to initiate change at the individual level in the professional practice of the project beneficiaries. The analysis and interpretation of the statements of the study participants and their contexts, carried out as part of the research presented here, aimed to:

- reveal whether, in the opinion of the study participants – project beneficiaries – the selected attributes of the learning community became their real experience individually and collectively, and
- in accordance with the adopted theoretical perspective, whether, in the light of the participants' statements, they could be the cause of changes in the employee-organisational system relationship, as well as
- to understand the ways in which the study participants/project beneficiaries conceptualise these changes in order to find out whether universal experiences have emerged, as well as to identify individual ways of perceiving the changes.

## Research sample

Fourteen people employed full-time at the university covered by the study participated in the study. The participants were recruited from among those who, in response to an email inviting them to participate in the study, voluntarily signed up to participate and completed the employee competence development programme – Peer Learning or Peer Tutoring. The volunteers were familiarised with the objectives and conditions of the study and gave their informed consent to participate.

The sample selection was purposeful and stratified. This means that participants representing various characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study were deliberately selected from among the beneficiaries of the programme, such as type of position (teaching or administrative), length of service (short 0-10, medium 10-15, long . 15), affiliation to different organisational units (anonymised), gender (proportional to the gender structure of employees in the study population) and age (specified by a range for anonymisation purposes). The aim of this selection was to ensure the widest possible diversity of individual perspectives and to check whether, despite these differences, it would be possible to identify common, universal experiences.

Table 1  
*Demographic data of study participants*

Pseudonym	Type of position	Length of service	Organisational unit	Gender	Age
1	Teaching	medium	Institute X	Female	40 – 45
2	Administrative	medium	Biblioteka	Female	45 – 50
3	Teaching	long	Institute Y	Female	50 --55
4	Teaching	long	Institute Z	Male	35 – 40
5	Teaching	medium	Institute Z	Male	40 – 45
6	Teaching	long	Institute V	Female	50 – 55
7	Teaching	short	Institute Z	Female	50 – 55
8	Administrative	long	Education Planning Office	Female	40 – 45
9	Administrative	short	Dean's Office	Female	50 – 55
10	Administrative	long	Dean's Office	Female	35 – 40
11	Teaching	long	Institute Y	Female	45 – 50
12	Administrative	long	Education Centre	Female	40 – 45
13	Teaching	long	Institute X	Female	40 – 45
14	Teaching	short	Institute X	Female	30 – 35

Source: own research

## **Research procedure**

The study was conducted using the individual semi-structured in-depth interview technique (cf. Ruslin et al., 2022; Magadi & Berler, 2020). The interviews took place at the university between 3 and 6 months after the end of the project. The interview scenario was developed in advance based on the theoretical assumptions of the project. All interviews were recorded on a voice recorder and then transcribed in full. The transcripts were anonymised and the data was coded to ensure confidentiality.

## **Analysis of research material**

The data analysis was based on classical content analysis (cf. Kubinowski, 2011). The entire content of 14 interviews was analysed. A deductive-inductive approach was used, whereby the initial analytical categories were derived from previously accepted theoretical assumptions (cf. Gibbs, 2011) – in this case, from Peter Senge's concept – and then enriched and modified based on empirical data, in accordance with what appeared in the participants' statements. In the first phase of coding, a code grid based on areas related to personal mastery and systems thinking was used. In the area related to personal mastery, statements were identified that referred to: deepening one's own reflectiveness in the sphere of professional functioning; gaining distance from previous beliefs about oneself as an employee or about colleagues or institutions; giving new meaning to one's own professional activities; new personal development goals; greater personal integrity in the professional sphere; improving one's professional competences. In the area of systemic thinking, statements were selected relating to: a systemic perspective in thinking about oneself as an employee and the institution; awareness of one's own impact on the overall functioning of the institution; a greater sense of agency in improving the institution as a whole; awareness of complex systemic interdependencies within the institution – and hence the interdependencies between colleagues. In the course of further analysis, new codes were added – especially where significant themes emerged that were not included in the original structure. This made it possible to maintain a balance between theory-based analysis and openness to the participants' voices. The presentation of the results used quotations illustrating representative or contrasting statements by participants, embedded in a broader semantic analysis.

## **Results**

This section of the article presents the results of content analysis based on transcripts of individual interviews. The main thematic categories that were

identified in the course of deductive-inductive coding are presented, taking into account both the theoretical areas defined by Peter Senge's concept (personal mastery, systems thinking) and the content that appeared spontaneously in the participants' statements. Each category was illustrated with quotations from the statements of the respondents. The analysis covered not only individual statements, but also the contexts in which they appeared, which allowed conclusions to be drawn about ways of conceptualising changes in one's own professional functioning, including personal mastery and systems thinking.

## **Personal mastery**

The statements of the study participants indicate a growing willingness to critically reflect on their own professional practice. This is particularly evident in relation to their relationships with students and the way they conduct their classes. As part of the development process, respondents confronted their existing strategies with the perspectives of others or with new experiences, which led them to question their existing beliefs and seek new solutions. Personal mastery, as defined by Peter Senge, assumes a willingness to continuously learn, develop and deepen self-awareness – and these attitudes were observed in the narratives of the respondents.

One of the participants admits outright that participating in the training process triggered a sense of uncertainty in her, which prompted her to rethink her own patterns of behaviour:

It really made me think and feel uncertain. Because is what I have believed so far definitely good and only good, or can it be assessed so unequivocally? This feeling of ambiguity, of uncertainty. (3)

This statement illustrates a moment of critical reflection on one's own behaviour and questioning of previously accepted assumptions.

Compare this with the statement of another participant in the study:

For me, it made me more open to change, (...) to expanding the teaching arsenal of what one does. Our situation is specific because we have a narrow category of subjects that we deal with, but this does not rule out our activity, because I believe that (...) I am also able to work effectively with students in other fields, using my subject knowledge. (11)

shows that there is now an openness to exploring new ways and areas of teaching activity, and that confidence in one's own abilities and, hence, opportunities for development in the field of teaching has increased.

For other participants, participation in the project gave rise to reflection on their personal difficulties in effectively educating students and an awareness that these difficulties stem from the generational characteristics of contempo-

rary students. As a result, they recognised the need to change their own attitudes and revise their existing teaching methods to take into account the specific needs of new generations. In their opinion, therefore, this change should not concern the attitudes of students, but the methods used by teachers. One of these individuals even considered the specific nature of how contemporary young people function to be an area of their own ignorance:

I changed what I do (...) in relation to what I did last year with students (...) because students are different every year, and I even feel that I am already a different generation. I can see that they grew up in a different reality, and I don't really understand it. Certain things need to be solved in such a way that I adapt more to them. (13)

This statement points to a solution shared by many respondents in the context of difficult issues concerning the effectiveness of teaching methods, which was considered to be greater openness to following students' expectations. It can be assumed that the students' voice was thus recognised as a possible inspiration for teaching.

In a similar context, another participant, also critically reflecting on their previous teaching methods and declaring an awareness of the need for change in their attitude as a teacher, noticed, thanks to discussions with other people in the project, the prevalence of one of the typical behaviours of contemporary students:

(...) it is very difficult to conduct classes in a good way that would interest the other side and draw them out of their comfort zone, i.e. their phones. And I also confirmed that I am not the only one who has this problem nowadays. And most likely, I now have to change something in myself, not continue teaching as I have done so far (...) so that they lift their heads up and listen to something else. (14)

Community discussions about teaching thus provided an opportunity to confront the experiences of other teachers, which, as this quote shows, had a motivating effect on teachers' attitudes and their decisions to implement new solutions. In this case, it was assumed that this could be achieved by finding forms of teaching that were attractive to students.

In many interviews, there were statements about giving new meaning to one's professional activities thanks to participation in the project, in particular the modern, activating teaching methods used in it. The participants expressed, above all, a change in their own understanding of the role of the student, and hence also of the teacher, in the teaching process. In the case of students, they pointed to the emergence of openness to giving them more space to actively co-create the teaching process and express themselves. In the case of teachers, they pointed to a change in teaching style from controlling and authoritative to more involved in building a deeper, less formal relationship with students and appreciating their active contribution to the development of their fellow participants:

For years, I was used to a teaching model in which feedback, controlling the student and their progress were important (...) and now I've changed a bit (...) and I think that the feedback that the participants give each other can be just as valuable, that it can be (...) even more important than what the teacher says. (6)

I now see more clearly that I have to make an effort to reach the students. Because until now, when difficulties arose, I would try to deal with them by saying that it's difficult, I have to teach these classes, you have an obligation to attend them, and that's that. (...) However, my mission will change here, as I will want to reach them and have real contact with them, even if only for a moment. (5)

It is also worth noting here that in the first statement, the participant reports an increase in confidence in engaging peer learning methods among participants in teaching activities, which means a shift towards perceiving the student as a person who is jointly responsible and personally involved in the education process. The second participant, on the other hand, points to the emergence of motivation for greater involvement on his part – the teacher's part – which is to result in a real understanding between him and his students.

Most respondents expressed a clear link between participation in project activities and the emergence or planning of new personal teaching development goals. These new goals were most often associated with increasing their own awareness of students' needs or moving away from various forms of teaching effectiveness control in favour of student self-control:

In general, it is a transition from a controlling teacher who accounts for every little activity of the student ... to a more spontaneous management of the process with the justification that it is equally valuable (...) that students themselves, if the process is properly managed. (6)

(...) I am more motivated to prepare better for classes, it motivates me more to try to be more effective. In my case, when I got tired, I became less attentive during classes. I already know that I have to stay attentive. (...) and I hope that this will help me next year. (5)

These examples also illustrate the fact that participation in the project has stimulated proactivity among teachers and led to the discovery of new values that can enhance the effectiveness of the teaching process, whether through more flexible, open to creative student participation in classes, or paying more attention to one's own condition and minimising its possible negative impact on maintaining teacher alertness.

Numerous reflections by participants concerned the teaching innovations they initiated after participating in the project, recognising them as beneficial for improving the quality of their teaching:

Stimulating reflection – the questions that were asked, the methods that were demonstrated, they stimulated reflection. This is something that requires you to stop in your tracks and be provoked. So there were stimuli here that provoked thinking. (...) I try to maintain this reflection in my teaching classes. (3)

I try to use the techniques that were presented there. There are times during the academic year when stress-relieving techniques come in handy. (14)

Although the respondents pointed to various inspirations, the context of their statements allows us to identify certain universals: the respondents emphasised that their first-hand experience of the effectiveness of the techniques demonstrated in the project was the motivation for adapting them in their own teaching.

The analyses presented above mainly concern the group of teachers. This does not mean that the respondents, representatives of the administration department related to teaching, did not reveal experiences related to deepening their own reflectiveness, increasing awareness of the need and desire for improvements in their own professional practice, or declarations of such changes. However, it can be said that teachers more often related their experiences to working with students, while in the group of administrative staff this occurred only occasionally. An interesting and unexpected result from the perspective of the original theoretical assumptions of the study was the reflections shared by both professional groups on various aspects of employee co-functioning. Thus, when reflecting on their own professional situation, it turned out that regardless of their length of service and position, many of the respondents stated that joint project activities allowed them to get rid of the feeling of anonymity of themselves and others. For example, the participants stated:

This person is more human, they are not some Ms Master's, Ms Doctor, Ms Something, but an ordinary person, with their own thoughts, feelings and emotions, who is sometimes tired. I have a better understanding of this. (2)

I never thought so deeply about the relationships between different people, those we know and those we don't know, and about their emotional and private sphere in general, so personally about emotions and things that happen behind the facade of our professional attitude at work. I started to think that it is important to take care of what is behind that façade. (1)

These statements show that the project made it possible to gain greater awareness of the multidimensionality of colleagues, allowed for the experience of the significant value of a holistic view of these people, and also broke down a kind of 'rigid' perception of people in their professional roles. Other participants came to similar conclusions and also appreciated the importance of getting to know their colleagues better, which the project made possible:

I think it could be a nice, close-knit group of scientists if we integrated more, which was evident in some classes (...) where we have the opportunity to get to know each other and our interests, because suddenly during the training (...) Wow! You do that? We don't know what people do, we just don't know each other. (11)

Many people ceased to be anonymous. To my surprise, I even became closer to people from my institute, because we used to pass each other by, and working together in a training course, you know, completely changes relationships. (13)

This points to the personal benefits that resulted from the change in the quality of relationships: a broader potential was seen in integrative activities, e.g. the opportunity to learn about the competences of colleagues, which can become an opportunity for self-improvement. A new quality was discovered in old relationships, resulting from breaking anonymity in favour of deeper relationships.

Other respondents explicitly revealed the emergence of a new and, from their perspective, beneficial standard of employee coexistence:

The whole course gave me the feeling (...) that I am a member of a larger community, because I simply got to know these people and we say hello to each other in the corridor, sometimes we talk. I think that if I needed to talk about what was bothering me, if there was time for it, I'm sure there would be someone willing to listen and offer support (...).(13)

A different view of an administrative or teaching staff member. A more sympathetic approach, I suppose. When you get to know someone better, you also see them differently. Both from the administration and from the teaching staff. (8)

These statements indicate that, in the respondents' opinion, this new standard is a direct result of their participation in the project and has brought specific personal benefits: gaining a sense of being part of a real community that is open to each other and willing to help when needed, and hence the emergence of the courage to seek support if necessary, or the observation of a new interpersonal attitude and the activation of greater reserves of kindness towards others.

In a similar context, participants declared that they had begun to reflect on their own interpersonal behaviour and intended to change it to be more sensitive to the needs of others:

I will try to look at the needs of someone other than myself (...) these meetings (...) allowed me to take a step back, look at myself and say: wait, there are different people, everyone perceives what you say differently, so give them a chance to understand what you want in the way you want. (1)

It is worth mentioning here that the project activities were carried out in such a way that each participant had the opportunity to speak, listen carefully, express doubts, etc. It can therefore be concluded that it was thanks to their personal experience of the diversity of human points of view that the participants were motivated to continue this attitude in their everyday lives.

The participants' statements also revealed their belief that the well-being resulting from having and maintaining relationships with others translated into their professional competences: it created an opportunity to draw inspiration from the experience of others, as well as to share their own expertise, and brought a sense of security, increased self-confidence and a willingness to act:

For me, it was a discovery that when (...) we talked about teaching, there were a lot of people interested and a lot of people who thought similarly to me (...) I noticed that there

are many people who want to talk about it, share these experiences in a way that suits me, i.e. non-judgmental and cooperative. (3)

We saw each other in a different light, I personally felt more settled (...) the fact that we went through several training sessions made it feel more like my institution. (14)

The above opinions illustrate how participants gained a new perspective on themselves and others in the workplace, fostering genuine cooperation in a spirit of camaraderie, support and values derived from a community of people who actually know each other and therefore trust each other.

## Systems thinking

In Peter Senge's concept, the discipline of systems thinking means the ability to understand an organisation in a holistic and sensitive way, taking into account its constituent elements, e.g. the individual situation of an employee, as well as the important relationships between them. As part of the development process, respondents shared the secrets of their own work with others, sought out what they had in common and what made them different, and reflected on their personal involvement in the university's mission, which was shared by all employees. The narratives of the study participants revealed that, thanks to their participation in the project, they gained a broader awareness of their role in the overall functioning of the university and became more sensitive to the complexity of the processes taking place there and their own role and that of their colleagues. In particular, it turned out that both teaching administration staff and teachers declared that they had a greater sense of influence on the overall university system and greater motivation to work for the organisation.

Some of the respondents' statements indicate that they have acquired a systems perspective in thinking about themselves and others as creating a shared work environment. One of the respondents declared that participation in the project opened her up to the aspect of interpersonal relationships in the work environment:

In our project, it was like opening a door so that people would dare to share their inner experiences related to emotions, home and everything else, not just work, and I feel that, first of all, it brings people closer and shows them that others also have different and similar problems, and I started to think more (...) in terms of emotions, relationships and looking deeper, beyond what constitutes the performance of a task, more towards the emotional, human, humanistic aspect. (1)

This statement shows that the project activities were a turning point for the participants in their approach to themselves and their colleagues. They allowed them to meet outside the purely task-oriented system and the associated narrowing of access to other people, and gave them a chance to see others and

show themselves in a full, human dimension, including emotionality, personality and the private sphere. What is more, it is mentioned that this has an impact on their personal attitude towards their colleagues in the future.

The importance of sharing one's personal perception of one's work in a collaborative environment was also echoed by another participant, who recognised the role of community dialogue in gaining a deeper understanding of one's own and others' professional situations, which are often fraught with various difficulties resulting from the shortcomings of the work system and thus causing dissatisfaction:

I began to see my colleagues (...) as people who share similar experiences to mine related to the profession and also certain frustrations associated with it, such as having to work at weekends (...) However, I realised that I am not the only one struggling with these difficulties, but that I am part of a larger community of people with similar experiences. (3)

This narrative illustrates the perception of one's own work in terms of an experience shared with other people who are part of the same institutional system and therefore share both its upsides and downsides. It can therefore be concluded that seeing oneself in a network of systems relationships – although in difficult situations this does not completely change the status quo – removes the stigma of uniqueness from one's own situation and thus has the potential to minimise the emotional costs.

The systems thinking present in the respondents' statements includes statements about the participants acquiring a sense of agency, influence and significance within the university and outside the work environment as a result of their participation in the project. The university system is beginning to be perceived as susceptible to change on the part of employees, and the employee himself as a creative and active element of it. For example, one respondent states:

It is a living organism, it evolves, it changes, we can shape it, and how we want, i.e. we must also want to change it, and if we want to, we can also modify it more to our needs, because every such organisation is a system. And every system is rigid, it's like a robot, something soulless. But no system is such that it cannot be changed... after all, we can also have ideas from the bottom up and improve the quality of our work, our presence here. (2)

This narrative highlights a change in the perception of the university structure from a purely mechanical and therefore unresponsive to individual initiatives to a dynamic and empowered vision, where the contribution and needs of each person have a chance to be taken into account. It is worth mentioning here that the project itself was the result of a grassroots employee initiative, which was a precedent in this environment within the framework of university-wide projects. Its success and the broad, voluntary participation of 143 people certainly highlighted new opportunities for co-shaping the work environment.

The importance of empowering the university system by supporting the development needs of employees is also reinforced by this statement:

I have a huge dilemma with the fact that (the university – change for anonymisation) ... has this social mission towards the environment, has a mission of scientific development, has a teaching mission, and we are so focused on fulfilling our various tasks, but what I missed a little was this concern for the lecturers, for ourselves. And for me, the fact that we had the opportunity to work together, to participate in activities, was such a moment for me that I thought to myself, it's a pity that it's now, at this stage of my work here, and not twenty years earlier. (14)

On the one hand, this voice represents the emergence of critical reflection on employee well-being in a standard university system and the related value dilemmas. On the other hand, it points to the emergence, as a result of participation in the project, of a way to meet the needs of employees by providing them with real opportunities for personal development. Importantly, this support – genuinely focused on building a community in the full sense of the word, as it is filled with activities that allow the richness of human complexity and its creative, synergistic result to emerge – allows for greater consistency between oneself and the literal mission of the university. The value of empowering the relationships that make up the university system also emerges in the following statement:

A sense of integration, a sense of being part of a group, a sense that I am not anonymous, that I am not just a cog in this whole organisation, but that I can go and talk to another person, whether about science or the proverbial weather, I have someone with whom I feel comfortable, for example. (11)

This narrative also shows a moment of change in the participant's vision of the organisation, in particular changing her perception of herself as part of the system from seeing herself as limited to performing tasks assigned by those with the relevant competences to a fully personal image of herself. It can be assumed that this is a transition from the position of 'me for the system' to 'the system for me and with me', in which the employee has the opportunity and the right to draw on the resources they need as a human being.

What connects the statements of the programme participants is the emergence of a real experience of affinity at the level of understanding the meaning and goals of their work, especially among those who were beneficiaries of the project. This affinity was associated with similar attitudes towards teaching-related work, primarily a sense of its importance for academic activities as a whole and a desire to develop in this area. One of the respondents stated that:

It was a revelation to me that we are similar in that (university – change to anonymise) attracts like-minded people. And that was cool, I really liked that in our meetings, we all care and, in fact, we are here for a reason and we see a deeper meaning in why we are here. Not only does it give us money, but also something like a meaning in life. (1)

This statement illustrates the moment of discovering the meaningful dimension of one's own work and that of colleagues, which changes the image of the system from a formally viewed institution to a place where people actually fulfil their calling. In yet another voice, there is once again a reflection on the standard coexistence of employees, related to its task-oriented and often highly formalised nature, mutual unfamiliarity, and the discovery during the project that the university system is made up of people who share common values:

I met people who, first of all, revealed themselves to be teachers and were also able to open up to this teaching space. (...) People drew attention to something that, as a matter of course, is pushed aside due to general requirements. And here was a group of people who said – teaching is important. (5)

This narrative also shows that the existence of the university system in the form enabled by the project fills an important niche in the functioning of the university as a working environment. It complemented the formal systemic conditions with areas of activity that are important to employees and also require care.

Many participants expressed confidence about their increased personal involvement in the area of shared spaces or, more broadly, university life in general, which, according to Senge, is a sign of acquiring the discipline of systems thinking. This can be seen, for example, in the following narrative:

However, if someone is less oriented towards this mission, it may be difficult for them to accept various difficulties here, they may not be so involved, but it requires 100% commitment to create something not only for themselves, but also for the development of the institution, their workplace. (1)

This statement demonstrates an understanding of the relationship between the various elements of the university system, in particular the activities of the employee and the mission of the university, and an increased awareness of the complexity of these relationships. It exemplifies the recognition of the link between identification with the mission and the level of commitment to work. It is worth recalling here that the project created a space for discussion about the university's mission, personal visions of its greater embodiment in university reality, and its modification. It can reasonably be assumed that these activities became the basis for the reflection also visible in the following narrative, where the respondent noted that she had become more willing to take action at the university:

Now that I know that a number of people are working in this direction, it is easier and more willing for me to do something, to propose something, to participate in something. For example, when there was a proposal for a group photo, I felt like going down there, whereas before I would not have gone. (...) If something interesting happened that I could get involved in, I would be more likely to get involved than before. (2)

This voice expresses a feeling shared by other participants in the study, namely that joint employee activities, which in the form of a project proved to be effective and of high value to the beneficiaries, make more sense. The experience of this value has instilled a belief in the need to co-create various works and a desire to make one's own creative contribution to them.

Another aspect of employee agency was highlighted by the respondent in the following statement:

I felt so 'off the hook' (...) because I'm working at least two additional jobs. However, the fact that (the university – change for anonymity) was interested in my development, made such an offer, thought it would be worthwhile to take care of the teaching side, I thought to myself that... this is a bit of employee care. I somehow sensed it – okay, you're giving me an offer, I can take advantage of it, and now I can be more grateful and committed – such a small thing, and yet he did so much! (11)

This illustrates both the perception of one's own working condition in the context of their current functioning at the university, diagnosing a low level of identification with it, and the change in attitude towards the workplace, influenced by project activities. Once again, the issue of the importance of moving away from viewing the employee as a performer of tasks and towards viewing them as an integral part of the university system, worthy of investment in its development, resonated here. Moreover, it also demonstrates the connection between the level of genuine employee engagement and the subjective treatment of employees in systemic solutions.

In light of Senge's views, an indispensable element that determines employees' acquisition of systems thinking skills is a shared vision, meaning that the employee team must develop a vision and directions for the work environment that are acceptable to all and relevant to individual initiatives. Project activities created space for numerous discussions on this topic within both employee groups. They led – in line with the interpretation proposed above – both to a deeper identification with the university's mission and, interestingly and unexpectedly from the perspective of the initial research assumptions, to various critical reflections on it, resulting from the decision to change one's own employee attitudes influenced by participation in the project, for example:

I think that in our mission – from the perspective of these training experiences – (...) there is too much emphasis on molding people, shaping them, molding them, and there is too little room for the student themselves... in this mission, there is a provision that we are to mold enlightened and so on, these professionals. So we will mold these people, we will put them into some kind of mold, and we will squeeze them into these shapes. (6)

This statement represents a focus on critical reflection on systems conditions, in this case related to the perception of the mission, the formulation of which is beginning to be perceived as inadequate to the actual goals of educating young generations requiring solutions tailored to their specific needs.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This article demonstrates that participation in a professional competence development project led study participants to embody Peter Senge's fundamental attributes of a learning community: personal mastery and systems thinking, as well as skill development, initiative, and openness to change, and a sense of coherence between individual actions and the institution's mission. Analysis and interpretation of the statements of beneficiaries of Peer Learning and Peer Tutoring programs and their contexts revealed multiple dimensions of the implementation of these attributes. The research results led to the following conclusions:

- shared responsibility of the university and genuine support for employee development contributes both to professional development and to greater employee identification and engagement in professional activities;
- everyday academic life does not foster genuine understanding of colleagues, including their professional potential. However, experiences that create opportunities to gain a holistic picture of others increase the sense of security, belonging, initiative, and willingness to collaborate;
- in standard academic settings, there is little room for reflective reference to one's own professional practice, especially with the opportunity to confront the experiences of others. Creating conditions for non-judgmental discussion and shared reflection on this area allows for a deeper understanding of the causes of experienced difficulties, acceptance of their inevitable nature due to the perception that such experiences are shared by others, and, ultimately, making improvements inspired by good and proven practices;
- academic teaching, although it forms the foundation of university functioning in an environment of growing academic competition, is often an area that receives little systemic support, leaving practitioners involved in teaching to fend for themselves. However, its support, by providing opportunities for competence development, contributes to the improvement of employees' professional skills;
- long periods of service contribute to the routine nature of professional activities and a reduced sensitivity to changing needs of their recipients. Community reflection on these needs and first-person experience of the effectiveness of teaching methods that address these needs encourages a change in attitudes and builds motivation for new teaching activities;
- functioning as a “performer of tasks resulting from the system” can lead to employee demotivation, frustration, and a sense of loneliness. When the system treats employees subjectively by meeting their real needs and providing them with the space to co-create solutions, it increases their openness to being an active part of the system and leads to an increased sense of agency and self-efficacy.

In light of the above conclusions and research results, it can be reasonably argued that participation in development programs is of high and significant value to university employees, providing space for in-depth reflection on individual and collective professional functioning and providing new knowledge and competencies that allow for more effective coping with the challenges of contemporary teaching. Cyclical initiation of similar events has the potential to strengthen the academic community, which will build better solutions with a sense of collegial support and identification with the organization as a creative community.

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## **Meandry akademickiego mistrzostwa osobistego i myślenia systemowego w refleksji pracowników uniwersytetu związanych z dydaktyką**

### **Streszczenie**

Celem artykułu jest prezentacja wyników badań nad refleksjami nauczycieli akademickich oraz pracowników administracji związanych z dydaktyką wokół ich doświadczeń z udziału w projekcie rozwoju kompetencji pracowniczych. Badania zostały przeprowadzone w oparciu o podejście teoretyczne Petera Senge’a. Wybrane założenia jego filozofii zmiany organizacyjnej i model organizacji uczącej się stanowił podstawę dla wyróżnienia kategorii badawczych. Analiza i interpretacja uzyskanego materiału badawczego pochodzącego z 14 wywiadów indywidualnych, pogłębionych o strukturze półotwartej i ich kontekstów doprowadziła do następujących wniosków: programy, które dają przestrzeń na pogłębioną refleksję nad indywidualnym i zbiorowym funkcjonowaniem zawodowym, postrzegane były jako przyczyniające się do wzrostu motywacji do doskonalących zmian w umiejętnościach profesjonalnych, wzmacniające poczucie tożsamości członków organizacji oraz chęć zaangażowania w cele ogólnouczelniane.

**Słowa kluczowe:** organizacja ucząca się, dydaktyka akademicka, myślenie systemowe, mistrzostwo osobiste.



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## Peer Play in Transformation: From Playground “Tag” to Internet “Challenge”

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### Abstract

This article presents an analysis of the specific nature of internet challenges (known as “challenges”) popular among children and adolescents, viewed in the context of traditional peer play. These activities are treated as a new element of contemporary children’s culture and are thus perceived as a consequence of the transformation of peer play. The research problems focused on identifying the characteristics of traditional peer play present in internet challenges, and the new elements introduced by digital play compared to playground games. Using netnography as the data collection method, internet challenges published on the popular youth application TikTok were identified and observed. Thematic analysis allowed for the extraction of elements of continuity preserved in the “challenges,” such as: collectivity and cooperation, fun and laughter, ritual and symbolism, competition and test of strength, and creativity and creation. Among the distinguishing features of internet play, the following were noted: digital perpetuation and visibility, public and global dimension, radicalisation of forms and content, performativity, and the logic of platforms.

**Keywords:** peer play, internet challenges, transformation of play, children’s culture, digital childhood

### Introduction – Peer Play as a “Living” Cultural Practice

Play is an activity that is intrinsic to human life. It constitutes a characteristic feature of the human species and is not limited to the activities of individuals or

groups. It is thus constitutive of all forms of human culture (Karpatschhof, 2013). It is most fully realised during childhood. Like childhood itself, it is dynamic, as it strictly corresponds to the historical time in which it operates, is socially responsive, and results from the child's activity. As Jolanta Zwiernik writes, play thus constitutes an essential medium mediating between the child's inner world – including their knowledge, emotions, fears, and areas of particular interest – and the external reality in which the child functions as an active participant and a keen observer. The external world simultaneously becomes a source of inspiration and an object of symbolic processing within collective play practices (2009, 122). Play, being a form of interaction between the child and the environment, can therefore be interpreted in the spirit of Transactional Analysis – as a process of exchanging meanings, emotions, and experiences between participants in the children's world, where the child not only reacts to external stimuli but also co-creates them.

Despite the numerous scholarly works created so far dedicated to the specificity of play, it constantly transcends subsequent definitional frameworks. According to Johan Huizinga, the difficulty in subjecting it to logical interpretation stems from the very essence of play, which serves nothing so much as giving pleasure (Huizinga, 1987). Nevertheless, contemporary discourses attempt to capture the specificity of play to deepen studies on the child and childhood. Thus, play is emphasised as a specific kind of cultural practice filling the child's daily life (Zwiernik, 2009), in which children realise themselves as active social actors (Markowska-Manista, 2022, p. 57). In contrast to play directed by adults, during peer play, children independently create and modify its course, making it an important field for learning autonomy and responsibility. Play is thus – alongside components such as children's language, rituals, superstitions, and children's material creations – an essential element of children's culture (Corsaro, 2009; Nowicka, 2014; Dziekońska, 2020a). It is not merely a reflection of adult culture – although it draws from it and influences it – but constitutes an original, autonomous activity in which children actively create their own meanings and norms (Corsaro & Everitt, 2023).

In the traditional understanding, play often has a symbolic-ritualistic nature and is rooted in the relationship with the environment, relying on movement (e.g., popular games such as “tag,” “hide-and-seek,” or imitative games). In the era of the technological revolution and “networked playgrounds,” physical activity during play assumes a digital dimension (Dziekońska, 2020b). Equally important is the identity aspect of play, which, more than any other activity, creates an opportunity to discover social preferences within oneself and experience oneself as an individual within a group (Waloszek, 2009, p. 337). This occurs through the joint negotiation of roles, rules, and principles, engaging in cooperation, competition, conflict resolution, or shaping social norms. Unlike other ac-

tivities characteristic of childhood, play, as a “living” cultural practice, does not submit to criteria and rules imposed from the adult world. On the contrary, it is distinguished by authenticity, freedom from rules, and reliance on imagination (Markowska-Manista, 2022, p. 51). Perhaps this is why it is so often treated in common discourse as “doing nothing,” its significance diminished compared to activities such as school learning or organised classes, and its developmental and cultural value for childhood is trivialised (Waloszek, 2009, p. 331).

What particularly distinguishes peer play is its dynamism and absorbency. As a tool for children's expression, play is not static or uniform; rather, it evolves with the advancing social, technological, and cultural changes that build the children's shared social world (Kalliala, 2005). The play created by children today is different from that undertaken by adults during their childhood, because play always reflects the individual's experiences. We thus observe that this activity is transforming, and the boundaries between what is physical and digital are blurring. Consequently, it is natural that the term play is currently used in a broader sense, encompassing both traditional movement games realised in physical spaces, such as playgrounds, pitches, or parks, and children's activities in the digital environment (Dziekońska, 2023).

### **“Internet Challenge” – A New Face of Peer Play**

Contemporary children and adolescents are immersed in the digital world and increasingly meet their emotional and social needs within it. Consequently, they seek opportunities online for play, joint activity, self-expression, and gaining recognition, thereby creating a new, previously unknown face of children's culture (Dziekońska, 2020a). One format that appears to be an element of this today is the so-called internet challenge (pol. *wyzwania internetowe*, commonly referred to as “challenges”). These are highly popular among children and teenagers, in turn arousing interest – and often concern – among childhood researchers.

The essence of an internet challenge is to perform a specific task, record it, and publish it on social media with an appropriate “hashtag,” and then encourage others to repeat the activity. The popularity of a given “challenge” depends on how many users undertake it and the scale of its spread across the network (Hilton et al., 2021). Some published challenges are harmless, amusing forms of entertainment, such as tasks involving styling oneself as famous people, popular dance routines garnering millions of views, or challenges with a social and charitable dimension (Ministerstwo Cyfryzacji, 2023). It is worth noting that the first challenges that appeared online in 2014 had this nature. They involved pouring ice-cold water over oneself to raise awareness of the disease ALS – amyotrophic

lateral sclerosis (Fazio et al., 2023). The Ice Bucket Challenge served as an impetus for the creation of new forms of play, which, over time, began to take on an increasingly spectacular, risky, or borderline nature. Particularly dangerous challenges appeared online, involving: experimenting with various substances – e.g., nutmeg, cinnamon, Benadryl, deodorant, laundry pods – and observing the body's reaction; rubbing the body with an eraser, causing a burn; self-asphyxiation; or self-immolation (Astorri et al., 2022; Dacka, 2024). Recently, a challenge involving placing dangerous objects, including metal items, inside sweets and handing them out to children during Halloween also sparked considerable global controversy (BezpieczneDziecko.org., 2024).

For many children and adolescents, participating in internet challenges is a way to gain recognition within the peer group, achieve popularity, but also to provide entertainment, experience emotions, and transgress everyday limitations. For adults, this is often merely a waste of children's free time, a source of anxiety about safety, and the result of the internet's negative impact on the functioning of the younger generation. However, observing the popularity of internet challenges among children and adolescents suggests that they have, to some extent, become an "extension" of pre-digital era games, in which participants sometimes engaged in equally risky behaviours, testing the limits of their own capabilities, as well as the boundaries set by adults. Peer jokes, tricks, borderline behaviours, rituals, sayings, or rhymes filled with sexual content and common names for human excrement or body parts constitute a distinctive feature of children's culture. I thus view children's involvement in this type of activity as an important educational aspect, requiring both an understanding of the essence of the challenges, a comprehension of children's motivations, and a reflection on the adult attitude towards the transformation in the digital landscape of childhood. Mariatta Kalliala, in her book *Play culture in a changing world*, encourages adults to try to understand the authenticity and variability of play, and to appreciate its value in human life (2005). It seems that the analysis of the transformation of play provides an opportunity to not only better understand the current cultural practices undertaken by children but also to grasp the processes of re-defining childhood and the child-world relationship.

## Research Methodology

The subject of the research described in this article is internet challenges (the so-called "challenges") popular among children and adolescents. I treat these activities as a new element of contemporary children's culture and, therefore, perceive them as a consequence of the transformation of peer play. The starting point is the assumption that, despite the change of medium – from the

physical space of the playground to the digital space of social platforms – play remains an important tool for building identity, group belonging, and testing social boundaries and norms by children and adolescents.

The aim of the research is thus to analyse the specific nature of internet challenges popular among children and adolescents in the context of traditional peer play undertaken in the offline environment. From the perspective of Transactional Analysis, it is assumed that every activity of children on the internet is a socio-symbolic transaction, in which there is an exchange of messages, emotions, and roles between the participants in the play, as well as between children and the digital environment, which co-determines the manner of their action and self-experience.

The research problems focused on the following questions:

1. Which characteristics of traditional peer play are present in internet challenges?
2. What new elements do digital challenges introduce compared to playground games?

The research was conducted using a qualitative strategy, which allowed access to the research material, its saturation, and then the analysis that identified the key features of the internet challenges popular among children. To gather the research material, I applied netnography (Kozinets, 2015), which involved the observation and identification of internet challenges popular among children and adolescents. Data collection was carried out in the spring of 2025 on TikTok, one of the most popular mobile applications among children and adolescents in recent times (Bigaj et al., 2025). The material gathering process involved entering keywords into the application's search engine, such as: "challenge," "kids challenge," "challenge viral tiktok," and others. This allowed access to the main data in the form of short videos presenting internet challenges involving children. Ancillary data such as the number of comments published under the videos, as well as "hashtags," the number of likes, and the number of views, were also monitored and mainly served to select the videos for further analysis. All data was public, meaning every logged-in application user had access to it. This allowed for ethical monitoring of the content.

Videos were selected based on several criteria:

- Age of challenge participants (the dominant age group was children and adolescents);
- Popularity of challenges (number of views/likes);
- Thematic focus of challenges (videos of a playful, social, or risky nature created by children);
- Publication date of challenges (current videos, published after 2020).

Data was collected until saturation was reached – a situation where subsequent identified challenges were repetitive and no longer introduced new information

concerning the phenomena studied. The final set of research material included 76 videos, of which 31 were dance-related (e.g., choreographic routines set to popular music tracks); 19 showed situations where a more or less demanding action had to be performed (e.g., bottle-flipping games, stick jumping, pouring water with eyes closed); 18 concerned humorous and situational challenges (e.g., “try not to laugh” games, tortilla slap challenge); and 8 remaining videos had artistic features related to drawing, putting on make-up, or hairstyling.

I subjected all videos to a thematic analysis, proceeding according to the following stages (Braun & Clarke, 2022):

1. Data Coding: Identifying patterns, motifs, and recurring themes in the challenges.
2. Categorisation and Theme Definition: Grouping the codes into main thematic categories.
3. Final Report Preparation: Comparing the identified themes with the main characteristics of traditional peer play described in the theoretical part of the article.

## Research Findings and Discussion

During the monitoring of internet challenges involving children and adolescents, the initially striking observation is the extremely high popularity of this type of activity among the younger generation. This is evident from both the number of published videos and the number of comments and likes left by observers (often reaching several hundred thousand, or even several million likes).

Dance challenges were the most popular, providing examples of play based on rhythm, movement, and collective action. In these types of videos, children presented choreographic routines, often performed in pairs or groups (individual performances were rarer), which reinforced the element of community and the sense of co-creation and doing something together. The choreographies most often referred to popular trends, which seems to confirm the strong influence of the logic of platforms on the course of play.

The next category, skill-based challenges, exhibited characteristics of competition. Participants attempted to complete a specific task requiring concentration, dexterity, or courage – such as maintaining balance on a spinning playground wheel, or jumping over a stick according to the answers given to questions asked by the person leading the game. In many videos, children treated failures during the task with humour. I did not observe frustration or anger due to the difficulty of completing the task, which allows these challenges to be interpreted as a test of strength and simultaneously a playful way of testing limitations.

The third group of challenges, those of a humorous and situational nature, revealed a particular role for laughter and absurdity. Participants in these videos often used props (e.g., water, a bottle, a tortilla), referencing the tradition of children's pranks and jokes. Situational humour, based on exaggeration and unexpected effects, served the function of integrating the group and reducing tension.

The last identified category of videos – artistic challenges (drawing, make-up, or hairstyling) – showed challenges as a form of expression and self-affirmation. In these, children showcased their manual, aesthetic, and creative skills, utilising the visual effects and musical backgrounds available in the TikTok application. These realisations particularly suggest that play in the digital environment also becomes a space for identity creation and self-presentation, where the child simultaneously acts as a creator and recipient.

In the subsequent analysis, I focused on identifying the elements of continuity connecting traditional forms of peer play with challenges popular in the digital space, and the new features of internet challenges largely resulting from the digital context.

## **Characteristics of Traditional Peer Play Present in Internet Challenges**

In seeking the answer to the first research question, I identified five main thematic categories that link traditional forms of play with internet challenges: collectivity and cooperation; ritual and symbolism; competition and test of strength; creativity and creation; and laughter and entertainment.

### **Collectivity and Cooperation**

Peer play has always served a communal function, enabling children and adolescents to engage in group activities and do something together. Communality of action is inherent in the period of childhood (Appelt, 2005, pp. 284–285). In the digital space, this function is taken over by internet challenges, where participants act collaboratively – they perform a task together: dancing to popular music tracks, presenting movement routines, or conducting a “friendship test” (answering questions to check how well they know their friends). These types of interactions are particularly important in the process of building social bonds and shaping group identity. It is worth adding, however, that communality in the digital age is not only physical or emotional in nature. Children engage in joint activities also to gain popularity online. Collective actions that promote increased reach include inviting other users and co-creating content to reach an unknown part of the community, publishing common “hashtags,” mutually sharing their videos, or commenting on them.

### **Ritual and Symbolism**

Traditional peer play, such as “hide-and-seek” or “tag,” exhibited a ritualistic nature and required participants to adhere to specific rules and take on defined roles. Games permeated with magical practices, superstitions, and various beliefs have long been an element of children's folklore (Simonides, 1976, p. 192). Similar features can be observed in internet challenges, which are also based on repeatable patterns and refer to the children's symbolic world. Challenges such as “The Floor is Lava” are based on a shared cultural code and require participants to adopt certain game assumptions that are understood and respected by the entire group. In internet challenges, symbolism is also manifested in attributing fabulous or magical characteristics to certain objects and places, e.g., the floor in the aforementioned game is perceived as a kind of abyss that signifies defeat for the participants.

### **Competition and Test of Strength**

In both traditional games and digital challenges, competition and rivalry hold an important place. Tug-of-war, jumping over obstacles, or running races from the past now have their counterparts in the form of “challenges” that test children's physical fitness, reflexes, or psychological resilience. An example is the challenge of jumping over a stick or rope placed on the floor depending on the answer to a closed “yes/no” question (one side means “yes,” the other side means “no”), without making a mistake and jumping to the wrong side. Examples of internet challenges based on a test of strength also include games such as “Try Not to Laugh,” where participants are tasked with maintaining a straight face for as long as possible while another person tries to make them laugh, or the “Bottle Flip Challenge,” which involves tossing a bottle of drink so that it lands upright. Otherwise, the person who failed must perform a penalty task.

### **Creativity and Creation**

Peer play is a space for creativity. Children create their own worlds built from specific rules, beliefs, ways of thinking (symbolic creations), as well as play objects (material creations) (Corsaro, 2009, p. 301 et seq.). In the digital version, children's creativity is visible, for example, in drawing challenges (children draw an eye, for instance, in an artistic way), hairdressing challenges (children create attractive hairstyles and present them in a video), or invented choreographies for popular songs. Despite the digital medium, participants continue to express themselves through creative actions, often combining manual, visual, and performative skills. Performing their own identities – through movement, gesture, styling, and even music selection – becomes an essential element of digital challenges. Children not only show what they

can do but also who they are or who they would like to be. This is a form of self-expression that combines play with the need for self-affirmation in the eyes of peers and the broader internet audience.

### **Joy and Humour as a Form of Joint Play**

In both traditional and digital forms of play, laughter and entertainment play a crucial role. In traditional children's folklore, scatological and macabre anecdotes, as well as various parodies mocking almost everything and everyone, were very popular (Simonides, 1976, p. 97 et seq.). The situation is no different today. Children undertake challenges not only to test themselves but above all to have fun and laugh. Challenges involving hitting each other in the face with tortillas or pouring water over oneself refer to situational humour and absurdity, being a contemporary form of old-fashioned pranks and playground jokes. Laughter here serves the function of group integration, tension reduction, and the strengthening of peer relationships.

### **New Elements of Internet Challenges**

Contemporary internet challenges connect with traditional peer play in terms of collectivity, ritual, competition, and humour, among others. Simultaneously, the specific nature of the digital space in which children operate contributes to changes in the forms of children's activity. The new elements that can thus be observed in contemporary peer play on the internet include: digital perpetuation and social visibility, public and global dimension, radicalisation of forms and content, performativity, and the logic of platforms.

#### **Digital Perpetuation and Social Visibility**

In contrast to the ephemeral nature of traditional playground games, internet challenges are documented and disseminated online. Videos published on the TikTok application, on one hand, create an archive of children's activity, but they also become subjects of evaluation. Consequently, contemporary internet challenges aim not only to provide entertainment but also to gain online recognition. Social visibility is provided by the "likes" left under published videos, comments, and shares to a wider audience. In the case of some videos, these reach as many as a million likes. An example is the – seemingly simple – challenge of passing the whole body through rolled-up towels held in the hands of two girls, such that both people freely hold their towel at the end and are not constrained by the other person (the video gained 1.2 million likes and 8,737 comments).

It can therefore be assumed that the digital perpetuation of children's activity online determines the specificity of the play. Firstly, it introduces elements of self-presentation and public performance, which were previously limited to a peer group of a few people, but now cross local boundaries (internet challenges are often observed by thousands of users, both known and unknown). Secondly, the recording of internet challenges ensures that they permanently leave their trace in the internet space, in contrast to the fleeting nature of play-ground games.

### **Public and Global Dimension**

Traditional games were primarily local in nature. Children's games echoed the sounds of the village playground or the hubbub of city streets and estates where children played (Cieślowski, 1986, pp. 46–47). Internet challenges, on the other hand, are a form of global play. Children from various countries can perform the same tasks and use the same sounds and “hashtags.” An example is the globally popular “24 Hours Challenge,” which involves performing one activity for 24 hours or staying in one place for a day. Among the collected videos, there were many examples where children undertook this challenge, such as spending 24 hours in one room with siblings and only eating yellow-coloured food during that time, or reading books together with a friend for a full day. The unification of play thus carries new social consequences. On one hand, it allows for a sense of belonging to a global peer community and the blurring of inequalities between children. On the other hand, it can generate pressure to compare oneself with other online participants, and also lead to the erasure of local features of play that made it a repository of cultural knowledge about a given community.

### **Radicalisation of Forms and Content**

Digital challenges – although often playful – appear to be more radical than their analogue forms. Examples of extreme challenge forms, such as those involving the consumption of dangerous substances or testing pain, indicate a shift in safety boundaries. Radicalisation is also manifested in the shifting boundaries of decency and aesthetics – participants in “challenges” often use shocking, obscene, or socially transgressive language to attract attention. An example is a challenge where the penalty for failing to complete a task is scratching one's intimate areas. The participants in the video do this without any embarrassment, despite it being recorded and publicly shared with a wide audience. Increasingly common are challenges that violate private space (e.g., recording unaware people) or are physically invasive (e.g., slapping a co-participant in the face with a tortilla). This phenomenon is intensified by the fact that platform users learn algorithmic effectiveness, based on the dependency: the greater the

surprise, controversy, or “shock effect,” the greater the chance for “viral success.” Radicalisation, therefore, concerns not only the content but also the strategies of children's actions in the digital space, who – it seems – treat play as a form of social experimentation with the limits of permissibility.

### **Challenges of a Performative Nature**

Internet challenges are inherently spectacular. Their goal is not just internal group entertainment but also visual attractiveness for a wide audience. They thus introduce the element of performativity. This manifests itself in children not only participating in the play but also enacting certain roles, preparing enactments, and employing directorial techniques. An example is challenges involving the joint performance of a dance by a group of peers, which must have been previously rehearsed. This is a form of activity close to a performance, requiring planning and conscious image management. Simple, quite intuitive video editing tools available in the TikTok application facilitate this. They enable even the youngest users to create visually appealing content that can further attract attention and encourage participation in challenges.

### **The Logic of Platforms**

Contemporary forms of children's play in the digital space are strongly shaped by the operating mechanisms of social platforms, such as TikTok. The logic of platforms includes algorithmic content amplification, an orientation towards visibility and popularity, and a continuous need for timeliness and reactivity. Internet challenges are often constructed with the aim of capturing audience attention and fitting into current trends. An example is the challenge involving pouring water into a cup while blindfolded, which, despite its simplicity, ensures high viewership due to its reactivity and potential for rapid duplication. Children learn not only how to play but also how to “perform” themselves in a way that increases their visibility in the digital space. Play ceases to be spontaneous interaction and becomes a strategy for digital self-presentation and a struggle for attention. Such conditioning can cause tension and thus a change in the function of play: shifting from a space of relaxation and imagination towards an activity subordinated to the rules of a digital game for reach. In this sense, the logic of platforms can influence not only the form of the challenges but also how children perceive themselves and their place in the peer community. The analysed phenomenon can also be interpreted as a network of transactions between the child, peers, and technology, in which each of these elements influences the others. The child, by using the logic of platforms, simultaneously co-creates it – they assimilate norms while also generating new ways of communication and expression.

## Conclusions and Summary

The changes observed within contemporary childhood affect almost all areas of modern children's lives. They are visible in the areas of establishing and maintaining relationships, communication, learning, and understanding the surrounding world. They also concern the fundamental category of childhood, which is play. Despite the transformations in childhood, play appears to remain the foundation of the initial period of human life. Children's immersion in the online world does not diminish the role of play in their lives; it only influences its specificity.

The results of the conducted research suggest that children invariably demonstrate a need to be together and do things jointly, they want to play and laugh, even in ways that adults might not understand, they want to test their own capabilities and the limits of the surrounding world, and to act in a creative and inventive manner. However, it is important to emphasise that children, as representatives of the digital generation who have functioned in a continuously internet-connected world since birth, are also active transformers of play. By participating in digital culture, they adapt play to the logic of internet platforms in order to become creators online, gain popularity, and achieve recognition in the eyes of others. They, therefore, often radicalise their activity online, succumb to trends, and frequently become participants in a digitally perpetuated spectacle.

From a Transactional Analysis perspective, these transformations show play as a process of mutual learning and interaction between children and the digital world – the child here is not merely a recipient but an active participant in an exchange where new meanings, norms, and forms of expression are created.

The analysis indicates that contemporary internet challenges constitute a space for learning social roles, where children negotiate their position in the group, test the boundaries of acceptance, and learn to respond to evaluation. In the context of Transactional Analysis, play online can be considered an emotional transaction in which children exchange emotions, recognition, and visibility over the internet. This aspect – which seems to be rarely observed in the discourse on threats – allows “challenges” to be viewed not only as risky behaviours but also as a form of symbolic communication and expression. These conclusions can serve as a starting point for designing educational actions focused not on prohibitions, but on developing children's reflective participation in digital culture and strengthening their competencies regarding safe media use.

In conclusion, it is worthwhile to reflect on the consequences of the changes in the area of play to present a fuller spectrum of the phenomenon and to deepen the understanding of how the transformation of peer play might affect the functioning of children and adolescents. In the final section,

I have therefore attempted to map the potential problematic areas, as well as the possible developmental benefits, resulting from children's participation in internet challenges.

Among the concerning consequences that warrant attention are:

- Risky Behaviours – Challenges can lead to physical injuries (e.g., jumps, choking) or psychological threats (anxiety, humiliation).
- Peer Pressure – Fear of rejection or of being “out of trend” can compel children to participate in activities against their own will.
- Inappropriate Content – Digital platforms do not always filter content – children may encounter vulgarity, erotica, or violence.
- Excessive Need for Recognition – Children learn that the value of their activity depends on likes, reach, and visibility – which can lead to dependence on approval.
- Loss of Privacy – Public sharing of everyday life content (home, school) increases the risk of abuse and exposes them to the judgment of strangers.

However, children's participation in digital activities can also bring positive consequences:

- Challenges as an Element of Children's Culture – Internet challenges have become a permanent element of contemporary children's culture. They are the way the young generation participates in the social world, comments on reality, and builds its own rituals and norms.
- Strengthening Social Bonds – Joint challenges build a sense of community, equality, and participation – even remotely.
- Development of Creativity – Creating challenges, choreographies, or narratives is an exercise in imagination, planning, and creative expression.
- Learning Responsibility – The awareness that content remains online “forever” encourages reflection on what and how is published.
- Digital Self-Awareness – By observing the reactions of others and analysing the consequences of actions, children can learn to predict the consequences of their own decisions.

The conducted analysis allows for a better understanding of how children use social media to maintain play practices, and how play in the digital environment becomes a form of social communication in which contemporary children create their own children's culture. Simultaneously, the categories identified and the suggested consequences are merely a voice in the discussion aimed at deepening the understanding of internet challenges not only as a new phenomenon but also as a continuation of old forms of play in a new environment. Expanding the research to include new areas (exploring other internet spaces – not just the TikTok application – where children undertake internet challenges) or employing different research methods that allow for listening to the voices of children and adolescents themselves (incorporating focus group or individual in-

interviews with children) might provide an opportunity to deepen the analysis and offer new interpretations. Nevertheless, it seems important to make efforts to understand contemporary forms of peer play to provide educators and parents with tools for a conscious approach to children's digital activity and engagement in the process of digital education, and for formulating effective educational strategies.

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## **Zabawa rówieśnicza w transformacji: od podwórkowego „berka” do internetowego „challenge’u”**

### **Streszczenie**

W artykule przedstawiono analizę specyfiki wyzwań internetowych (tzw. „challenge’y”) popularnych wśród dzieci i młodzieży w kontekście tradycyjnych zabaw rówieśniczych. Aktywności te

traktuje się jako nowy element współczesnej kultury dziecięcej i tym samym postrzega jako następstwo transformacji zabawy rówieśniczej. Problemy badawcze skoncentrowano na określeniu cech tradycyjnych zabaw rówieśniczych obecnych w wyzwaniach internetowych oraz nowych elementów wprowadzanych przez zabawy cyfrowe w porównaniu do zabaw podwórkowych. Posługując się netnografią jako metodą gromadzenia danych, dokonano identyfikacji i obserwacji wyzwań internetowych publikowanych w popularnej wśród dzieci i młodzieży aplikacji TikTok. Analiza tematyczna pozwoliła wyłonić elementy ciągłości zachowane w „challenge’ach”, takie jak: kolektywność i współpraca, rozrywka i śmiech, rytualność i symboliczność, rywalizacja i próba sił oraz twórczość i kreacja. Wśród cech wyróżniających zabawy internetowe dostrzeżono: cyfrowe uwiecznienie i widoczność, wymiar publiczny i globalny, radykalizacja form i treści, performatywność oraz logikę platform.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zabawa rówieśnicza, wyzwania internetowe, transformacja zabawy, kultura dziecięca, dzieciństwo cyfrowe.

**REVIEWS**

RECENZJE



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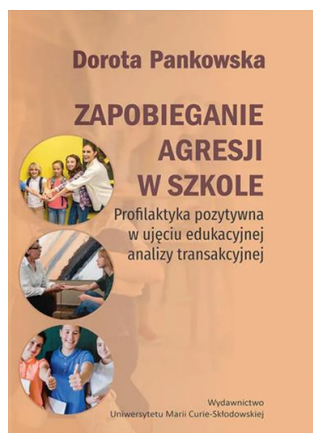
**Book Review: Dorota Pankowska (2024).  
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Contemporary schooling is a mirror of the current social moment, operating at the intersection of complex educational, technological, and societal challenges. In this context, not only is the pedagogue's knowledge crucial, but also the availability of effective preventive tools. Dorota Pankowska's book, *'Preventing Aggression in Schools: Positive Prevention in the Context of Educational Transactional Analysis'*, appears to be an adequate response and a valuable resource for addressing the escalating phenomenon of aggression in educational settings. The escalating media reports concerning alarming events within the school environment only serve to confirm the timeliness and utility of this monograph.



In her monograph, Professor Dorota Pankowska frames the narrative within the current of positive prevention, focusing primarily on strengthening psychological resources and cultivating a supportive, developmental environment for young people. The author explores the subject of aggression prevention using the framework of Educational Transactional Analysis (TA). This combination—integrating TA with the concept of positive prevention and the school context—constitutes a novel and coherent approach that allows for an integrated perspective on student personality development, social relations, and the school itself as a resource-based prophylactic environment.

The monograph is structured logically, comprising an introduction, five well-thought-out chapters, and concluding reflections. The sequence of content is deliberate and consistent. The reader is first acquainted with the concept of aggression before being gradually immersed in the individual components of Transactional Analysis, such as Ego States, Life Positions, communication patterns, passivity, Life Scripts, and time structuring. The introduced concepts are in constant dialogue, forming a cohesive whole. Issues are analysed in profound depth, frequently broadened by thematically related aspects, enabling the reader to adopt a multi-faceted, almost holistic perspective on the subject matter.

The function of Chapter One is to introduce the reader to the problem of aggression. The author provides a meticulous presentation of its theoretical and empirical aspects, drawing upon both psychological and pedagogical perspectives. Readers gain knowledge concerning the types, sources, and developmental specificity of aggression. The author raises the important issue of understanding aggression; in common parlance, it is often associated with overt aggressive acts, which may actually be a culmination point. When considering prevention, a deep comprehension of the underlying mechanisms is key, prompting action *before* aggressive acts manifest. Furthermore, the author extends the description beyond the school environment, outlining the familial context as well.

Chapter Two is the most extensive in the publication, arguably forming the core of the book. Its subsections address the educational potential and risks concentrated within individual Ego States. The opening subsection describes the structural and functional model of Ego States, upon which the author explains how each state can either favour the development or inhibition of aggression. The subsection on the Assertive Adult delineates characteristics that underpin an assertive posture—presented as a vital alternative to both aggression and passivity. The following subsections focus on developing empathy through the Nurturing Parent and the resources of the Normative Parent in the formation of a value system. The author highlights the role of anti-values and stereotypes as potential threats. The section on the Natural Child focuses on the need to support natural emotions, as misunderstanding or suppressing them can form the foundation for frustration and aggression. Reflections on the creative or destruc-

tive nature of adaptation are made in the context of the Adapted Child, strongly emphasising the role of socialisation and the development of social competence. Finally, the subsection on the Integrating Adult describes the path towards authentic maturity by reinforcing positive personality aspects. The actions described centre on shaping a subject-oriented and responsible attitude, which is crucial for the development of autonomy and aggression prevention. The descriptive style encourages auto-reflection among educational professionals without becoming overly didactic.

Chapter Three details the creation of positive relationships within the school environment. The author analyses the way relationships and interactions are established based on the Life Positions of the educational process participants. These deeply rooted beliefs determine both aggressive and positive (pro-social) behaviours, forming the foundation of attitudes adopted by both students and teachers towards themselves and others. The presentation of the “I’m OK – You’re OK” position as an attitude requiring conscious cultivation is particularly salient. This chapter also incorporates an analysis of communication from the TA perspective, describing how unconscious psychological games and transactions can heighten tension. As an alternative to harmful communication patterns, the author explains the use of transparent communication forms and positive strokes to strengthen relationships and support the development of student agency. Chapter Three thus underscores the role of communication clarity and relational authenticity as a form of aggression prophylaxis.

Chapter Four addresses the intrapsychic sphere in the context of coping with problems and difficult situations. Here, aggression is framed as a response to a lack of resources for constructive action. The author refers to the concept of passivity as an unconstructive coping mechanism, noting that it facilitates the emergence of various forms of aggression. Pankowska details the mechanism of devaluation, which helps to understand passivity not merely as inertia, but as a psychological process of avoiding responsibility. She further discusses the four categories of passivity (doing nothing, over-adaptation, agitation, and incapacity) and analyses them within the school reality. The chapter then examines the concept of Life Scripts—unconscious plans that influence the interpretation and experience of reality and can severely limit personal autonomy. The author illustrates how these elements affect human functioning and how they can foster aggressive behaviours. The latter part of the chapter focuses on prophylactic and intervention activities aimed at developing constructive coping skills.

Chapter Five addresses the organisational culture of the school and how it can be interpreted and supported from the perspective of Transactional Analysis. Professor Pankowska meticulously defines organisational culture, relating it to the school context, and then focuses on the possibilities for diagnosing and improving the school environment using TA concepts. She describes the Ego

States and Life Positions in the perspective of organisational life, referencing, for example, Charles Handy's typology of organisational culture. Tools for assessing the institution's strengths and weaknesses are also presented. Finally, the concept of time structuring is introduced; through a broad description, the author focuses on the potential of different structuring forms to generate aggressive behaviours.

This publication not only presents the issue of aggression comprehensively but also encourages teachers toward creative thinking, reflection on their own practice, and transcending fundamental educational requirements. Furthermore, the book contains practical guidance, including interventions tailored to specific situations and needs. The author engages in dialogue with numerous studies and presents methodological materials that can serve as the basis for lessons or other educational activities.

In my assessment, the monograph is also an intriguing resource for discerning parents, who can not only expand their knowledge of aggression but also gain new ideas for managing it within the family environment. It illustrates the development of aggressive behaviours from the earliest years, where such behaviours are often downplayed or even accepted by the immediate surroundings. While the thematic focus is on school aggression, the author presents the phenomenon in a complex manner, encompassing developmental and social contexts.

Professor Dorota Pankowska concludes the publication with a critical reflection on systemic actions concerning aggression. One can only hope that this book will encourage creative foundational work, fostering unconventionality, courage, and a hopeful outlook for change.