

**PODSTAWY EDUKACJI**

**TOM 17**

*EDUCATION FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION*

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**FUNDAMENTALS OF EDUCATION**

**VOL. 17**

*EDUCATION FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION*

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# PODSTAWY EDUKACJI

**TOM 17**

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**red. COSMINA SIMONA LUNGOCI**

we współpracy z Redaktor Naczelną

**MAŁGORZATĄ PIASECKĄ**

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**ed. COSMINA SIMONA LUNGOCI**

with collaboration Editor in Chief

**MAŁGORZATA PIASECKA**



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42-200 Częstochowa, al. Armii Krajowej 36A  
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Cosmina Simona LUNGOCI

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6823-4351>

West University of Timisoara, Department of Educational Sciences, Romania

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**Contact:** [cosmina.lungoci@e-uvt.ro](mailto:cosmina.lungoci@e-uvt.ro)**How to cite [jak cytować]:** Lungoci C.S. (2024). Foreword of the Editor: Fundamentals of Education. *Education for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Podstawy Edukacji. Education for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, 16, 9–11.*

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## Foreword of the Editor: Fundamentals of Education. Education for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are fundamentally essential concepts for education. According to the UNESCO *Salamanca Statement* (1994), which begins with a commitment to Education for All, it is imperative to recognise the necessity and urgency of providing education for all children, young people and adults ‘within the regular education system’. The Framework For Action says, ‘Inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and the enjoyment and exercise of human rights.’ In education, this is reflected in the ‘genuine equalisation of opportunity.’ 21 years later, the *Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action. Education 2030* (UNESCO, 2015) emphasises inclusion and equity as foundations for quality education. It promotes addressing all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, as well as disparities and inequalities in access, participation, and learning processes and outcomes. In this regard, education professionals should give due importance to promoting effective strategies, approaches, and programs to support the implementation of DEI education. (Corsino, Fuller, 2021; Ainscow, 2016) However, many questions remain unanswered about the best psycho-pedagogical and other interventions to reinforce DEI education.

Recent research (Marchall, 2022) emphasises the role of mentoring in promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in education and research because this practice brings together mentors and mentees who collaborate to achieve this

goal through creativity, authenticity, and networking. The success of mentoring derives from active and respectful listening and the willingness to learn and accept opportunities for personal growth. Also, there is increasing awareness that diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and backgrounds yields stronger teams and more effective results. (Jones et al., 2023)

However, efforts to promote DEI education systems should be based on analysing particular contexts. In this regard, Ainscow (2020) provides a research-based framework that can be used to carry out such contextual analyses and concludes by arguing that an emphasis on inclusion and equity can potentially improve the quality of education for all young people within a national education system.

The concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion are fundamental and more recently heavily discussed within research, and the larger society, so educating for DEI in research and academic institutions should be a priority. (Corsino, Fuller, 2021, Ainscow, 2020) Further, as we continue to explore, test, and implement these approaches, strategies, and programs, other questions remain regarding the best assessments to determine their impact: How and If progress has been made in Diversity, Equity, Inclusion within the field of education? What response education provides to all the changes in contemporary society while trying to ensure equal opportunities for all?

The Fundamentals of Education is an annual, reviewed scientific journal organised around a current topic. It has been published by Jan Dlugosz University in Czestochowa since 2008. It provides a high-standard platform for researchers and experts to share and discuss their ideas on a given theme of the year, which this time is, as written above, education for diversity, equity, and inclusion mainly from the academic, scholarly perspective, but also from an integrated, multidisciplinary perspective.

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# **STUDIES AND DISSERTATIONS**



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Ałła WASYLUK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6542-5649>

Vinnitsia Mikhailo Kociubynsky National Pedagogical University, Ukraine

Marcin BIAŁAS

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0160-1839>

Jędrzej Śniadecki Academy of Physical Education and Sports in Gdańsk, Poland

---

**Contact:** allawasyluk@gmail.com; bialasmarcin@o2.pl

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# Organizing Differentiated Teaching in the Conditions of Inclusive Education

## Abstract

The article attempts to define the essence of inclusive teaching and indicate the need to implement it in schools to respond to the need to build an open society. The article outlines a historical sketch of the assumptions of inclusive teaching, which became one of the foundations of its crystallization. It identifies the problem of differentiated teaching in an inclusive classroom, where the emphasis should be on creating an appropriate educational environment, organizing the teaching process, and modifying programs to achieve educational success for children with various special educational needs. The attempt to define the essence of student assessment in the adopted concept of differentiated teaching also seems necessary, as it gives teachers personalized information about their students' educational progress. Enables ongoing changes in their teaching strategies to stimulate students' independence when acquiring knowledge, skills and competencies.

**Keywords:** inclusion, educational needs, stimulating independence

## Introduction

The urgent need to reform modern schools confronts them with two main tasks. One of them is to assist students in understanding the increasingly com-

plex realities of unstable life, the so-called new "principles of social, economic and cultural order". In this regard, schools must undertake upbringing and educational activities that will support students' mental – immanent change, updated to the ideals and goals prevailing in the world. It is the responsibility of a modern school to educate a new person who will be a wise and responsible citizen, leading his life (private and professional) according to his desires, expectations, and opportunities and thoroughly enjoying his rights. He wants to live in an open world devoid of borders and any restrictions that could constitute the basis for his possible exclusion (Szymański, 2012).

However, the second important task that a modern school should focus on is to educate a person who will be compassionate, sensitive and capable of acting in solidarity with others. Open to man's otherness, his uniqueness, treating these qualities as valuable and distinguishing him. It is the responsibility of modern education to develop a system that helps overcome social and educational exclusion, increasing educational opportunities for all students by providing them with conditions for developing their potential. They must be equipped with the knowledge, skills, and social competencies necessary to create an inclusive society here, now, and in the future (Bąbka).

It seems that fulfilling these tasks will be possible only by changing the way of seeing the modern school and its mission related to the need to make fundamental changes related to changing the way of seeing teaching subjects (students), changing the approach to programs, methods and teaching style, as well as changing the quality of work of teachers – entities of partnership relations with students (Mielczarek). In this sense, inclusive education implemented in mass (general) schools responds to the need for these changes. It creates conditions for learning (personalized educational requirements, individualization of teaching methods, a fair grading system that takes into account the student's work contribution and involvement, subjective, partnership-based treatment of the subjects of their educational and upbringing activities by teachers) that provide every student – as a full participant in the education process. They will enable full personal development and inclusion in social life to the best of their abilities, being an educational system focused on expanding access to education, promoting full participation in the education system and the possibility of realizing the potential of all students in particular, those with special educational needs (Miłkowska).

## **A student with special educational needs – as a subject of inclusive education**

In this context, the concept of "*special educational needs*" (SEN) was first used by the British philosopher and educator Mary Warnock in a report on the



state of education in Great Britain "*Special Educational Needs*" (1978), in which she proposed a shift to a more functional language of social understanding of needs students who have been diagnosed with symptoms that make it difficult or impossible to function in terms of motor, sensory, cognitive, communication, mental or emotional-social aspects. It is worth noting that "*special educational needs*" refers to children and young people from the age of three and up to completion of education. However, in the case of children up to three years of age, they are referred to as "*special developmental needs*".

The 1990s were crucial for changes in the education of students with SEN, during which international solutions were adopted aimed at social integration in education. In particular, in 1994, the World Conference entitled *Education of People with Special Needs* (Spain, Salamanca) presented the socio-social concept of inclusion. Conference participants (representatives of 92 countries, without the participation of the Polish organization) agreed based on the statement that the proposed changes should concern a comprehensive educational policy dedicated to all students without exception, not only those with SEN. They agreed on the issue of equal opportunities for access to various forms of education, as well as high-quality educational offers addressed to everyone and taking into account students' unique talents (and not only their weaknesses). The "*Framework for Action*" program adopted at the conference emphasized that public schools should admit all children despite physical, intellectual, emotional, linguistic and other deficits. For this reason, inclusive education has been included on the list of priorities of the European Union's educational policy and justified by the issuance of many key normative documents specifying the directions of its development at every stage of education.

At this point, it must be emphasized that inclusive education is not a new concept, as the presented content might suggest. It is not an experiment whose consequences may be dangerous to some extent. The idea of inclusive education, although not expressis verbis, was born many years ago in the minds of world-famous educators. For example, R. Steiner (1861–1925), M. Montessori (1870–1952), and J. Korczak (1877–1942), who in their scientific achievements emphasized not only the need to develop the development drive of every student – without exception but also the need for dedicated assistance to each student in achieving their full potential in all areas of life. They pointed out the possibilities of implementation through the organization of the educational environment and the use of appropriate and diverse educational methods and techniques while emphasizing the significant role of teachers – "environment creators" – people who extract resources from their students.

Moreover, the need to develop students' independent thinking is satisfied by them acquiring (discovering) knowledge in action or the need to shape students in an expansive, comprehensive environment (class peers, et cetera).

Therefore, inclusive education has not been discovered in recent years. It appears as an evolutionary package of views that have crystallized over the years into its current form, developed and verified in direct action – in work with students (Mittler, 2000).

Unfortunately, in 1994, the Polish government did not respond to the appeal made by the UN education agency calling on the international community to support the creation of the concept of schools with inclusive teaching, combined with the need to introduce practical and strategic changes in this area, as a result of the *World Conference on Education for Persons with Special Needs* mentioned above. The concept related to the need to reform Polish schools implementing the ideas of inclusive education during the period of systemic transformation in Poland was wholly underestimated and omitted. Upon Poland's accession to the structures of the European Union (2004) and under pressure to introduce reforms in the education system, the Polish government was obliged to introduce the concept of inclusive education according to which Polish schools should be organized. For over 20 years, there have been tentative attempts in this area. Conferences are organized, discussion panels are created, and scientific research is conducted, such as *Analysis of school practice and characteristics of a school effectively implementing inclusive education in practice* (Gajdzica Z., Skotnicka B., Pawlik S., Bełza-Gajdzica M., Trojanowska M., Prysak D., Mrózek S. (2021), et cetera, which, in addition to good practices, indicate the shortcomings and limitations that hinder the reform of education in this area, which include, for example, lack of education of teachers, lack of support from specialists (psychologists, pedagogues, speech therapists, therapists, and others), poor technical equipment of the school (lack of specialist workshops, e.g. for sensory integration, lack of teaching aids), lack of practical cooperation with parents, et cetera. (see also) *Statistical report Inclusive Education in Poland* (2021) by Maciej Mroczek commissioned by the Centre for Education Development and the Ministry of Education and Science.

It seems that the common denominator of the sluggishness that delays the implementation of the need to introduce inclusive education in Polish schools is the failure to adopt state budget priorities that should include funds to finance the improvement of educational services necessary to enable the inclusion of all children, regardless of their differences or difficulties, in the mainstream of an open society.

It is a well-known fact that creating schools with inclusive education is a costly concept. However, at this point, we cannot forget about the "profits" that inclusive education brings. The "profitability" of this project translates not only into immeasurable effects contributing to the creation of an open society. It also has a strictly financial dimension. The logic of this thesis goes as follows: inclusive education contributes to a significant extent to improving the quality

of education, which translates into acquiring knowledge, skills and social competencies that positively contribute to improving the quality of life of every person, without exception (the Ministry of National Education has committed to making a comprehensive change in the field of inclusive education, giving 2026 as a binding date).

## **Theoretical principles of inclusive education (teaching and learning)**

Hence, inclusion in education is seen as helping in the holistic development of each student. According to the assumptions of inclusive pedagogy, no restrictions may disqualify a student in the education and upbringing process, mainly a student at risk of exclusion and marginalization. In this sense, inclusion has become a paradigm of "non-segregated" education, particularly emphasizing the student's subjectivity (following the ideas of personalistic pedagogy from which it draws), his right to self-fulfilment and autonomy in developing his or her potential (Leszczyński, 2021).

That is why positive psychology plays a vital role in implementing the assumptions of inclusive education, emphasizing the human potential and ability to act, not only on deficiencies and limitations. In his studies, Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) drew attention to the need to create an education system that organically combines teaching children with special needs with teaching children with typical development. The scientist emphasized: *"Despite all its advantages, a school for children with special needs has the main drawback: it confines its pupil to a narrow circle of the school complex. At the same time, creating a detached and closed world in which everything is adapted to the child's defects. It focuses his attention on a bodily defect and does not introduce him to an open society. It develops skills that ultimately lead to even more excellent isolation. These mistakes hinder the child's educational process and hamper his development potential."* (Воспитание, 1981, p. 21). According to L. Vygotsky, the main task of raising a child with developmental disorders is to include him in social life and compensate for his disorders. His developmental disorders are related to both biological factors that negatively affect his development and social barriers that strengthen them, becoming the reason for his exclusion.

Therefore, inclusive education has been the subject of heated discussions in contemporary pedagogy in recent years, primarily due to research on the search for the optimal teaching model for children with SEN. For example, Ukrainian scientists and their foreign colleagues have developed theoretical and methodological principles for developing inclusion in education. In particular, an essential scientific achievement in this respect has been the research on the philoso-

phy of inclusive education and the methodology of its modelling (W. Kremiń, A. Kołupajewa, T. Sak, N. Sofij, N. Semago, M. Semenowycz, M. Białas et al.); conceptual approach and implementation of inclusive education (W. Bondar, L. Budiak, L. Danylenko, N. Kolomiński, A. Kołupajewa, P. Prydatczenko, Yu. Rybaczuk, N. Slobodianiuk, A. Wasyluk, H. Kit et al.). In their studies, scientists draw attention to important aspects of the organization of teaching students with SEN in public schools, including general education, correction development and compensatory adaptation (L. Sawczuk, A. Szewcow et al.); differentiated teaching in an inclusive classroom (O. Taranchenko, Yu. Najda, et cetera); psychological and pedagogical assistance and support for students with SEN (S. Myronowa, T. Zubareva, S. Kondratieva, L. Oltaszewska); individual assessment of educational achievements of students with SEN (T. Sak et al.).

Designing strategies and tactics for teaching students with diverse special educational needs has been a significant problem for many years. According to Alla Kolupaeva and Ludmiła Sawchuk, inclusive education involves creating an educational environment in a mass primary school that would meet the needs and capabilities of each child, regardless of the peculiarities of his or her psycho-physical development. It is intended to be a flexible teaching system based on an individual teaching plan with medical, social, and psychological-pedagogical support. It provides students with SEN with conditions not only for teacher-led work but also for education through independent action and experience. Hence, teachers and teaching assistants should create a diverse and balanced learning environment where teacher intervention in students' structured learning activities is undertaken when needed. In this respect, actions taken by teaching staff should be limited to providing students with space for learning using self-regulation and self-determination when organizing thought processes and using strategies conducive to learning in individual conditions and working in pairs and teams (Колупаева, 2010).

When analyzing the possibility of promoting quality in inclusive teaching, several key factors should be emphasized (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2009):

- *Including students in the education system applies to a broader group than only those with recognized special educational needs.* This process should include all students at risk of exclusion through loss of access to educational services and, consequently, loss of opportunities related to school education.
- *All students must be actively involved in the teaching process,* which must be understandable to them. Promoting positive attitudes among the people involved in the education process is also essential. The attitude of parents and teachers towards the education of students who have a wide range of needs is determined mainly by their personal experiences. Considering this fact,

appropriate solutions and strategies should be introduced to develop appropriate attitudes among these people. Effective strategies include ensuring that teachers are appropriately trained so that they are ready to take responsibility for their students, regardless of their individual needs, and supporting the involvement of students and their parents when making decisions regarding the educational process.

It is also worth noting that the priority here is developing students' ability to acquire new skills (and not just mastering a specific section of subject knowledge) and developing a personalized approach to the learning process, according to which each student (supported by teachers and family) sets specific educational goals for himself, creates an appropriate list of them, reviews them regularly and, with the help of others, develops an individual learning course.

- *Development of an Individual Teaching Plan* that will guarantee students the maximum amount of independence, ensuring students' involvement in expanding their own educational goals, as well as a specific type of approach to the teaching process aimed at meeting the various needs of all students (without unnecessary categorization), is in line with the principles of inclusive education.
- *Teaching is based on cooperation with others.* The teacher develops a team system of activities involving students, their parents, other teachers, supporting staff, and appropriate team members of specialists from various fields. In particular, students can help each other in multiple ways by flexibly and well-thought-out, dividing them into proper "intrinsically differentiated" groups. Also, an individualized approach to the needs of each student during the lesson takes into account the diversity of their needs. This approach involves setting appropriately structured goals, using alternative learning paths, maintaining the flexibility of the teaching process and allowing for various variants of dividing students into groups.
- *Effective teaching methods* based on the appropriate selection of goals, considering alternative learning paths, flexible teaching techniques, and a transparent system of providing students with feedback.
- *An assessment system that supports learning* does not stigmatize students or result in negative consequences for students. Assessment should take a holistic perspective in measuring student progress; this perspective considers content mastery and the learning process's behavioural, social and emotional aspects and clearly defines its following stages.

Moreover, according to U. Bronfenbrenner (1979), the microsystem is fundamental for the development of every person, and the primary role is played by the family, peer group, and school class. The first school experiences should shape the area of self-awareness, self-regulation, and students' motivation for activities undertaken in the learning process and in planning their educational

career. Hence, K. Reich, in his monograph *"Inklusive Didaktik. Bausteine für eine inklusive Schule"* (Eng. *Inclusive teaching. Components of an inclusive school*), lists ten (10) elements that constitute the foundation of the microsystem for the proper functioning of an inclusive school. Especially:

1. Teachers working in well-cooperating teams, presenting an attitude of openness towards diversity;
2. The school guarantees equal educational opportunities, regardless of students' origin, gender or learning difficulties, and cooperates with the students' family home;
3. Curricula will enable each student to develop competencies and achieve individual achievements, taking into account their educational interests and cognitive abilities;
4. Full-day care at school, ensuring healthy nutrition, exercise and rest for students, enabling constructive learning in an inspiring environment;
5. Creating a friendly learning environment by defining the goals that the student is to achieve, providing feedback helpful in planning further learning, and effectively managing lesson time;
6. Supporting students with SEN, assuming that all students need individual support;
7. Differentiated assessment, combining teaching with formative assessment, supporting student development, taking into account elements of self-assessment;
8. Properly planned school architecture, free of barriers, with meeting places for students, quiet study corners and consultation rooms;
9. A school open to the outside world, cooperating with the district, for which students are involved;
10. Support from experts, use of external evaluation, attitude towards change and continuous development.

The point is that an inclusive school cares about the effectiveness of organizational and teaching processes, the student with the quality of his relationships and bonds with peers, and his well-being. The fundamental dimension of this institution should be perception, which is broadly understood perception and feelings related to its social and educational climate. Such a school is the most effective tool that guarantees solidarity, cooperation, mutual respect and understanding between children with SEN and their non-disabled peers. Interpersonal relationships are the basis for developing a person's personality and how he thinks, acts, and perceives himself and the world.

Overall, research evidence has shown that inclusive education improves the learning outcomes of students with SEN; provides role models in the form of peers appropriate to their age category; provides learning opportunities in a realistic/natural environment; helps develop communication, social and academic

skills; ensures equal access to education; allows one to increase self-esteem; expands the possibilities of making new friends.

Each classroom in which children with SEN learn is, in its essence, a great challenge, mobilizing the school and teachers to make pedagogical programs and technologies more flexible, stimulating the development of teachers' competencies and promoting an atmosphere that will allow for a better response to the needs of all children. Such a climate would encourage teachers to view students with learning difficulties not as a problem but as a stimulus through which they can improve and develop their teaching methods.

It should be noted that implementing inclusion in Ukrainian primary schools revealed the need to ease the cooperation of educators working in inclusive classes (teacher, teaching assistant, correctional educator, special education teacher and other professionals). Firstly, this applies to teachers and teaching assistants who provide socio-pedagogical support to students with SEN and carry out educational, upbringing, and social-adaptive activities. Appropriate ones need special training and a willingness to cooperate among themselves and with other specialists to provide high-quality educational services (provided in the education system). An essential condition is experience in working with children with special educational needs, including in an inclusive educational environment.

## **Differentiated instruction: Justifying the approach**

The tendency to move from a segregation model towards an integration and inclusive model takes on the character of differentiated education. First, it is worth noting that in inclusive pedagogy, differentiated teaching is treated as a conceptual approach based on the specific organization of the educational process. Differentiated learning is a flexible opportunity to adapt teaching to the abilities and level of each student.

The concept of education, in this case, is oriented towards the needs of children. It assumes the organization of classes in such a way that the learning process takes place through modelling, guidance, intensive practical learning and the teacher's provision of conditions for planned and effective action, assistance with a gradual decrease in its intensity (to stimulate the development of students' independence). This concept is also significantly influenced by L. Vygotsky's theory, in which the leading role is assigned to the social component of teaching. In this sense, the teacher's tasks should be limited to creating sufficient motivating situations conducive to solving students' problems (educational, personality, psychological, et cetera) (Калініченко, 2013).

Research by scientists J. Renzulli, J. Leppien, T. Hayes, S. Kaplan et al. has proven that using a child-centred approach is highly effective in working with

students who differ from the conventional "norm" and is one of the critical factors in increasing their educational success. Appropriately differentiated teaching, in this case, involves creating an educational environment and organizing the learning process to ensure that children with different educational needs successfully acquire knowledge, skills and competencies. Additional (individualized) learning support is also crucial in this process, and it is possible through modelling teaching strategies and their personalized modification and adaptation, which teachers should use in their educational activities. Personalized modification transforms the nature of the presented educational material by changing its content or the conceptual complexity of a given teaching task. For example, they shorten the learning materials, modify the curriculum or goals and tasks acceptable for a specific child, correct tasks, and determine the content to be mastered. In contrast, personalized adaptation changes the nature of the educational material presented without changing its content or the conceptual complexity of a given task. In particular, the following types of adaptations can be used:

- adaptation of the environment (increasing the lighting intensity in classrooms where children with visual impairments stay; reducing the noise level in the classroom where a child with hearing impairment studies, equipping him with a hearing aid; creating a separate block of rooms in the school for primary school students );
- adaptation of teaching approaches (using tasks of varying degrees of complexity, extending the time for completion, changing the pace of classes, alternating types of activities);
- adaptation of materials (adaptation of textbooks, combination of texts and graphics, pictograms, visual and other materials, use of printed texts with different font sizes, hint cards, et cetera).

Undoubtedly, preparing alternative materials is an additional burden for the teacher. However, the positive effects of this approach will be felt not only by children with special educational needs. All students in the classroom will benefit from diversifying the presentation of educational materials.

Educational programs in general schools are becoming more and more accessible to children with SEN through modifications. At the same time, it involves various forms of organizing the educational process and helps teachers take into account differences between students, in particular:

- various interests (based on the child's inclinations, interests and desire to master a specific topic or develop practical skills);
- their level of preparation (due to adapting the pace of learning and the level of difficulty of educational materials);
- individual learning styles (by organizing many different types of activities so that students have the opportunity to receive and absorb knowledge in different ways) (Таранченко, Найда, 2012).



Therefore, the following approaches to differentiating teaching in an inclusive classroom are distinguished:

1. Adaptation of the content, process and result of educational activities;
2. Modification of requirements to the degree of completion of tasks by students during the lesson (adjusting the number of tasks to be completed in a given time, varying the degree of difficulty of tasks, reducing the scope of texts to be read or the material to be mastered);
3. Using specific forms, methods and tools for organizing classes and isolating factors ensuring differentiated teaching, namely: focusing on the main concepts, ideas and skills in each school subject; taking into account individual differences of students; combining teaching and assessment, et cetera.

Differentiated teaching can, therefore, be talked about as an approach that demonstrates the teacher's acceptance of the diversity of the student body (different levels of students' primary and current knowledge, their preparation, educational interests and individual learning styles); the teacher's ability to organize the process of educating students with different learning abilities in the same classroom; encouraging students to achieve higher academic results (providing support and assistance where necessary). Teachers using differentiated teaching in their practice act as their coaches or mentors. Therefore, they transfer some responsibility for their learning to students, which the children can accept and gradually help expand.

There are several misconceptions about differentiated instruction. The most common ones are as follows:

- students will not be well prepared for the final assessment (testing, examination);
- due to the differentiation of teaching, the teacher causes an uneven load on individual students;
- students will not be able to compete in real life;
- there is only one way to differentiate teaching.

It should be emphasized, however, that differentiated teaching does not involve implementing a strictly defined methodological procedure. However, it is a way that allows a departure from the usual routine practice, giving the teacher many opportunities to experiment with the material to obtain students' best possible educational achievements. Therefore, the teacher's task is to develop his or her way of differentiated teaching, considering the individual teaching style, the goals of the core curriculum, and the school's capabilities and resources.

As a pedagogical approach, differentiated learning can become an efficient basis for organizing lessons because it is based on a thorough theoretical and empirical base and considers the importance of the socio-cultural dimension in teaching.

Considerable attention should be paid to the mobile grouping of children, which stimulates the development of positive communication skills. Differentiated teaching allows the organization of individual- and teamwork on authentic tasks. It is also essential for teachers to understand that when deciding to teach "weak students", they have to work with them more and explain more in more detail than is usually the case when working frontally with the whole class.

## **Differentiation of content, process, and product (final results)**

When planning differentiated instruction, consider:

- content (what students should learn and how they will receive information);
- process (types of educational activities carried out by students in order to understand and master the content);
- products (something that allows students to consolidate, apply, deepen and improve acquired knowledge, skills, habits (projects, specific activities and their results, et cetera);
- educational environment (how work is done in the lesson, what is the atmosphere).

Let us consider separate aspects of differentiated instruction.

Access to teaching materials through their content is essential for students with SEN. Content accessibility is considered an essential element of differentiation. Diversification at the content level considers goals, tasks, and expected results planned to be achieved (educational, developmental, social). The balance between goals and tasks determines the level of content differentiation. Access to content is considered as a critical requirement. Changes can often be observed in how students access information (concepts, generalizations, attitudes, skills, actions, et cetera). Tasks are often arranged as a sequence of steps of increasing complexity, resulting in a continuum of tasks designed to develop specific skills. For students at different levels, the task menu is varied to facilitate the transition from one stage of learning to another.

Teaching is aimed at using concepts. Concepts should be broad in scope to be understood and applied. Teachers should focus on the concepts and skills their students are mastering. The teaching content is to contain analogous concepts for all students. However, their complexity level (volume, breadth, degree of generalization, et cetera) must be differentiated depending on different children's capabilities.

It is worth mentioning here that it is worth providing students with as many different examples as possible to master the educational material comprehensively. While keeping the primary content unchanged, the teacher can change the degree of complexity of the educational material (by specifying or general-

izing, simplifying or complicating). For students with physical or cognitive disabilities, various examples are significant for understanding the material being taught. Numerous examples may also benefit other students who will receive different approaches to the presented educational material.

Today, a wide range of tools for presenting digital educational content allows teachers to manipulate size, colour contrast, and other characteristics to create examples on numerous media in various formats. It is important to avoid focusing students' attention on long-winded facts and details but instead focus on working with generalized concepts. In this way, teachers isolate the most essential content components.

As students learn new content, they should engage in social interactions and begin to collaborate. Teachers can initially discuss the main ideas of the content with the whole class, and then students can work in small groups or pairs. Creating groups should be a dynamic process, changing depending on the content, type of activity and assessment results. For practical work in the classroom, teachers should approach the organization and selection of teaching methods reliably.

When looking for the best work methods, it is worth the teacher's scepticism towards any assurances about the universality of a given method. He should then ask himself the following questions: Who will benefit from a particular helpful method? What lesson goals can it be used to achieve? Does it promote a given group of students' learning efficiency and mastery of a specific part of the material? Therefore, he should consider working methods to select them adequately for the lesson, as well as for the needs of students and his personality (Szczepkowska, 2020).

It is important to emphasize that a personalized learning environment meets the needs related to individual differences and can also place demands on each student that slightly exceed what he or she believes he or she can do or achieve.

In this respect, appropriate (differentiated) assessment of students is also essential. In inclusive teaching, the teacher should ensure flexible methods of assessing students. It may be either a formal or informal assessment. It is essential to include an initial measurement of the difficulties faced by a student with SEN, his or her contribution to work and the increase in knowledge, skills and competencies, indicating his or her developmental progress in the scope of the material learned. Differential assessment gives teachers personalized information about a student's educational progress (or lack thereof), which gives them feedback on the effectiveness of their work. It is also crucial that continuous assessment is conducted. It collects information about students, their knowledge, skills, strengths, and weaknesses. Thanks to this data, teachers can adapt educational processes to the needs of their students instead of expecting them to accept ineffective methods of transmitting knowledge. The most significant advantage of differentiated assessment (as diagnosis) is the ability to pro-

vide feedback to students. In this method, such comments are detailed and personalized, considering their predispositions and needs. It is a more effective, more friendly way of motivating students to continue learning because it focuses on their achievements (and not knowledge gaps) while monitoring the specific stage of acquired knowledge, skills and competencies achieved by a given student, with an indication of the next ones (Szczepkowska, 2020).

In differentiated learning, students are active researchers. Each task given to students should be interesting, exciting and accessible for conscious assimilation of the material and development of appropriate skills and abilities. At the same time, the child should feel that a given task is a challenge. Tasks should be differentiated so that different students can demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Some students may have difficulty writing long texts or speaking in front of the class. However, they could successfully present their knowledge differently, e.g. by preparing a presentation or speaking in a small group. Various opportunities must be available to (as far as possible) a wider group of students and not just to a selected few.

In the learning process, teachers and students collaborate and constantly use assessment and its results to work together further. Teachers learn a lot about their students when assessments occur frequently and in different ways. Teachers can also observe and test changes in students' thinking to establish connections between prior knowledge and what has been recently learned. Learning also improves when students are encouraged to think about their learning, review their learning experiences, and apply what they have learned in everyday practice.

We will distinguish functions for checking and assessing students' educational achievements, including:

- *diagnostic* (involves determining the level of achievement of a student (class, group), determining readiness to learn new material, which will enable the teacher to use diverse material and teaching resources to complete tasks; prevent possible complications);
- *educational* (involves improving the learning of new material, its acquisition, reproduction, application, explanation and deepening of knowledge, its systematization, and improvement of skills and habits);
- *diagnostic and corrective* (involves finding out the causes of difficulties occurring in a specific student during learning, adapting corrections in the activities of the student and teacher aimed at meeting the students' needs);
- *stimulating and motivational* (aimed at developing the desire to improve one's results, shaping positive motivation to learn through a sense of competence, seeing the connection between activities and achievements, interest in the subject, positive emotions related to learning, perceiving the classroom environment as conducive to learning);

- *developmental and educational* (involves developing the ability to work independently and focused, promotes the development of diligence, perseverance, activity, mutual help and other personality traits).

In an inclusive class, it is beneficial to introduce a portfolio that the student will select independently. It will enable the teacher to solve some essential corrective tasks. Working on a portfolio will help maximize each child's opportunities. From the beginning of learning, the child will be provided with the basis for self-reflection on educational activities, i.e., responsibility and independence in learning and participation in the qualitative assessment of the results of one's learning. The child will develop the ability to analyze his interests, inclinations, and needs and correlate them with available opportunities.

Considering the low ability of a child with SEN to adequately assess his or her physical condition and intellectual capabilities, as well as significantly higher or lower self-esteem than the norm, this factor favours the development of positive personality traits. Researchers have proven that the independent selection of materials for a portfolio creates a situation of success that increases self-esteem and faith in one's abilities; it also develops cognitive interests and readiness to acquire knowledge independently.

Well, teachers who practice differentiated teaching can organize various educational activities to understand better and acquire knowledge; create unique conditions for children to receive new information; interpret students' characteristics and determine their learning needs and interests; and assess students' level of preparation through various measures. First of all, teachers should change the methods of checking students' skills and knowledge and propose alternatives in choosing the product of the activity or the form and way of presenting the results by students. It is essential that teachers constantly improve their pedagogical tools and that students acceptably implement the curriculum (in an atmosphere of support and encouragement to achieve better results).

Implementing a differentiated approach to teaching focused on the needs of students is extremely promising. After all, not all students have the same level of education, which is why inclusive pedagogy is constantly looking for the optimal model of tools that will allow as many students as possible to achieve high results.

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## **Organizacja zróżnicowanego nauczania w warunkach edukacji inkluzyjnej**

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł jest próbą zdefiniowania istoty nauczania inkluzyjnego oraz wskazania konieczności jego implementowania do szkół jako odpowiedzi na potrzebę budowania społeczeństwa otwartego. W artykule zarysowano szkic historyczny założeń nauczania inkluzyjnego, które stały się jednym z fundamentów jego skryształowania. Określono w nim problem zróżnicowanego nauczania w klasie inkluzyjnej, gdzie nacisk położony jest na znaczenie tworzenia odpowiedniego środowiska edukacyjnego, organizacji procesu nauczania, modyfikacji programów w celu osiągnięcia sukcesu edukacyjnego przez dzieci z różnymi specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi. Nie bez znaczenia wydaje się także podjęta próba określenia istoty oceniania uczniów w przyjętej koncepcji nauczania zróżnicowanego, dającej nauczycielom spersonalizowaną informację o postępach edukacyjnych swoich uczniów i umożliwiającą bieżącą zmianę strategii ich nauczania w celu większego stymulowania samodzielności uczniów podczas zdobywania wiedzy, umiejętności i kompetencji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** inkluzja, potrzeby edukacyjne, stymulowanie samodzielności.





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Halina Monika WRÓBLEWSKA

University of Białystok, Poland

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1985-3877>

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**Contact:** h.wroblewska@uwb.edu.pl

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## Integration of Environmental Potentials for Promoting a Positive Model of Education Open to Diversity. The Context of Academic Tutoring

### Abstract

The issue addressed in this paper concerns integrating the school's and academic environments' potential in favour of a positive education model open to diversity and its promotion through the animation of joint activities. The context is tutoring as a qualitative change and a personalised form of education. The tutoring programme "Student as Researcher, Scientist, and Discoverer" aims to strengthen cooperation between higher education institutions and secondary schools by enabling students to conduct scientific research under the supervision of a tutor – a research and teaching staff member. The synergy of the mutual potential of the secondary school and university educational environments fits into education management, supporting students' individual development, creating conditions for developing interests, talents, and passions, and promoting their achievements. The implemented project fits into the perspective of Education of Tomorrow – seen as a multifaceted, innovative, and prospective process.

**Keywords:** integration, potential, positive model of education, diversity, tutoring.

### Introduction

The text was developed in response to an invitation to discuss education for diversity, equality, and integration (Ainscow, 2016, 2020; Corsino, Fuller, 2021)

from an academic, scientific, but also integrated, multidisciplinary perspective. The issue addressed concerns the integration of the school and academic environments in favour of a positive<sup>1</sup> education model open to diversity, which promotes individual potential, abilities, and creative human resources. The issue fits into the perspective of Education of Tomorrow – seen as a multifaceted, innovative, and prospective process. The context is tutoring as a qualitative change and a personalised form of education. It constitutes an in-depth form of individualised educational work based on the tutor-pupil relationship, which has gained

a permanent place in the universities of Western Europe and the USA (Ragonis, Hazzan, 2009, pp. 67–82). The tutoring method can respond to the paradigmatic change "from teaching to learning" (Barr, Tagg, 1995). Studies show that mentoring is essential in promoting diversity, equality, and integration, as this practice connects mentors and mentees who collaborate to achieve this goal through creativity, authenticity, and networking. Mentoring success results from active and respectful listening and willingness to learn and accept personal development possibilities. (Marshall, A. 2022). Diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and environments ensures stronger teams and more effective outcomes (Ainscow, Miles, 2011). The basis of the discussion is the author's personal experience as a research and teaching staff member at the university in the tutoring programme "Student as Researcher, Scientist, and Discoverer," which was implemented in cooperation with the secondary school environment. The tutoring program aims to strengthen cooperation between the university and upper-secondary schools, students with specified passions, interests, and scientific talents by enabling them to conduct scientific research under the supervision of a tutor – a research and teaching staff member of UwB. The implemented project fits into the area of education open to diversity and its promotion through the animation of actions to synergistically utilise the mutual potential of the academic and educational environments. Cooperation concerns: (1) creating environments that facilitate the learning process and gaining new experience spaces, (2) managing education supporting individual student development, (3) creating conditions for the development of talents, interests, and passions, and (4) promoting student achievements. Learning in cooperation constitutes

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<sup>1</sup> Caprara, G.V. (2009). Positive orientation: Turning potentials into optimal functioning. *The Bulletin of the European Health Psychologist*, 11(3), 46–58, Ryan, R.M., Deci, E.L. (2000b). On happiness and human potentials: A review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 52, 141–166; Seligman, M., Csikszentmihalyi M. (2000). Positive Psychology. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5–14.

an educational strategy used to promote diversity. The added value of the project is its innovativeness.

## **Tutoring as a Qualitative Change in Education. Diversity as Potential Management**

Diversity is addressed from an educational perspective and in management sciences as a foundation for building organisational potential and managing human capital (Jastrzębska, 2016; Szaban, 2003). Social diversity in education is considered in terms of culture, worldview, age, ethnic differences, and gender. The idea of tutoring represents a form of personalised and individualised education (Brzezińska, 2009, 2012; Dziedziczak-Foltyn, 2020a; Karpińska-Musiał, 2016, 2018; Kaczorowska, 2007). In higher education, tutoring, coaching, and mentoring reflect the need to institutionalise methods and professionalise competencies (Dziedziczak-Foltyn, 2020b). Personalised education responds to the changing perception of the teacher's role and the educational process, moving away from the "teaching" paradigm toward a "learning" paradigm (Barr, Tagg, 1995). In the context of career planning and supporting and developing future competencies, tutoring as a form of education fits into the assumptions of Education 4.0 (Wach, Furmańczyk, 2024). It represents a qualitative change in education due to its focus on possibilities, successes, and students' strengths (Czekierda, 2009). Tutoring is a method of individual care based on the master-student relationship, which, through an integral view of human development, seeks to develop its potential (Czekierda, 2015) fully. From tutors, there is a demand for the ability to design a scientific-developmental environment for their tutees to develop their strengths and talents. The practice connects tutors and mentees who collaborate to achieve this goal through creativity, authenticity, and networking. The success of tutoring comes from a willingness to learn and accept development opportunities, both personal and social, and to realise what is most important in education – meeting people on the path of development (Kaczmarek, 2013). Tutoring also requires continuous improvement and self-education of tutors by analysing their work methods, achieving results, and eliminating mistakes and failures (Arends, 1994, p. 56). A fundamental condition for a practical and ethical tutoring relationship is – according to the self-determination theory by Richard Ryan and Edward L. Deci – that it allows both the tutor and their students to satisfy all three basic psychological needs: (1) the need to maintain positive relationships with others, (2) the need for autonomy, and (3) the need for competence (Ryan, Deci, 2000, 2008). Considering these aspects in action can contribute to more effective and ethical use of tutoring in educational practice (Brzezińska, 2013, p. 13).

## **Main Assumptions of the Tutoring Programme "Student as Researcher, Scientist and Discoverer"**

As part of the tutoring program "Student as Researcher, Scientist, and Discoverer" the University of Białystok offers: 1) tutor supervision by a research and teaching staff member whose research interests align with those of the student; 2) implementation by the student of their own research or scientific project under the supervision of a tutor; 3) participation in tutorials during which the student and the tutor will formulate, discuss, solve research problems, present progress in their work, formulate new problems, and set further research and development goals; 4) the opportunity to participate in instructional classes in a selected subject taught by the tutor under regulations in force at the faculties; 5) free access to the faculty's infrastructure (e.g., rooms, laboratory, equipment under the rules in force at the faculty) under the supervision of a tutor and the collections of the University Library necessary for the realisation of the student's research project; 6) support in disseminating and popularising the results of the student's research work through journals, seminars, conferences, exhibitions organised by UwB; 7) support in planning an individual path of scientific development.

In terms of the tutor's responsibilities: 1) supporting the development of knowledge, skills, and individual interests of the student; 2) setting goals together with the student, consistent with their interests and predispositions; 3) establishing an individual research programme and a schedule of tutor meetings with the student; 4) supporting the student in planning and implementing their ideas and research or scientific projects; 5) monitoring the student's work and progress. Graduates of the tutoring program undertaking studies at the University of Białystok have the right to 1) continue their research from the first year of studies under the supervision of a tutor; 2) carry out scientific and research projects with scientists from the faculty (from the first year of studies); 3) apply for an individual study programme under the rules defined in the UwB Study Regulations.

## **Previous Outcomes of the Tutoring Programme "Student as Researcher, Scientist, and Discoverer"**

In the first pilot programme, "Student as Researcher, Scientist, and Discoverer", at the University of Białystok, 21 students from the Podlaskie Voivodeship participated. They were supported by 16 tutors – staff members from seven different UwB faculties: the Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Physics, the Faculty of

Education Sciences, the Faculty of Philology, the Institute of Sociology, and the Faculty of Biology. The outcome of the pilot tutoring programme “Student as Researcher, Scientist, and Discoverer” implemented at the University of Białystok was 21 scientific and artistic projects. In June 2023, the young researchers and their tutors summarised the results of several months of collaboration during the First Tutoring Forum. Its primary purpose was for students to present the results of their completed research work independently. Their research topics were highly diverse, covering issues in the social sciences, humanities, and math-natural sciences. In the second edition of the Tutoring Programme “Student as Researcher, Scientist, and Discoverer” at the University of Białystok, aimed at talented upper-secondary school students and science enthusiasts, eight faculties, 17 scientists were involved, and more than 30 topics were offered for selection. Recruitment started in November 2023, and work in the programme began in December 2023. Students met with their tutors for half a year during the tutoring to implement the selected research projects. The students presented the results of their work during the university’s Second Tutoring Forum in June 2024.

The tutoring programme helps co-create (create) an environment conducive to learning and gaining new experience spaces in a higher education setting. The synergy of the mutual potential of the secondary school and university educational environments fits into education management, supporting students’ individual development and creating conditions for developing talents, interests, and passions. It contributes to promoting student achievements and, as a result, to planning and choosing further educational and vocational paths for the students.

### **Academic Tutoring as a Space for Supporting Learning. Education Open to Diversity**

The work of tutoring provides the opportunity to expand acquired knowledge and discover new areas. The synergy of the mutual potential of the academic and school environments creates a creative environment, which stimulates the development of a creative attitude and activates creative abilities. A creative attitude manifests in recognising problems requiring solutions, positively relating to them, and the readiness and ability to solve them. It fosters a climate for creativity (Craft, 2001; Kettler, 2017; Herbert, 2010; Hanson, 2021). Managing education that supports individual student development involves going beyond learning and constructing knowledge at school (how to act competently) – to create conditions for understanding and describing a person functioning in the modern world and coping with its complex problems. The matter

involves identifying the potential, intellectual resources, emotional strength, values, strong points, and positive dispositions of students (positive diagnosis) (Richards, 2007): maximising potential, motivating development, and engagement. The engaged life – is one of the components of well-being (Seligman, 2005, 2011). Creating conditions for developing talents, interests, and passions involves creating educational opportunities to recognise one's potential and develop cognitive, emotional, skills, and personality strengths (Caprara, 2009).

In the pilot edition of the tutoring programme, the proposed author's topic concerned the issue (*Non*)ordinary Minds. *The Role of Talent and Passion in the Biographical Experiences of Outstanding Creators*. A female student in the second year of general secondary school showed interest in this research area. The jointly developed research project concerned two problem areas:

(1) The Life and Works of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) – poet, playwright, and actor – from the perspective of the concept of an integrated personality: *IVDICIO PYLIUM, GENIO SOCRATEM, ARTE MARONEM*, (Pylos in judgments, Socrates in genius, Maro in art) and (2) Between the Struggle of Existence and the Passion for Development. The Role of an Integrated Personality (the concept of Kazimierz Dąbrowski) – in the context of analysing the biographical experiences of an outstanding creator (W. Shakespeare). The essence of the project was the combination of different approaches, which are mutually conditioning and complementing each other, creating a new, scientifically justified quality – INTEGRATION IN SCIENCE.

In the second edition of the tutoring programme, the research project topic was: *Life Goals and Plans of Youth Concerning Their Future in the Perspective of the Global World*. Tutor supervision was provided to three female students in the second year of secondary school who were interested in the submitted topic and were willing to collaborate on a joint project. It concerned two problem areas: (1) Future Competencies and Skills Expected in 2030<sup>2</sup> and (2) Archipelago of Youth. Typology of Attitudes and Lifestyles of the Young Generation. HOW TO PLAN THE FUTURE TO FULFIL ONE'S DREAMS?

The knowledge society era is becoming increasingly complex and requires new competencies. Therefore, equipping individuals with appropriate competencies, also known as 21st-century or future competencies (European Commission, 2007)<sup>3</sup>, is crucial. They are also defined as STEAM competencies 4 C competencies (*communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity*).

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <https://content.mycareersfuture.gov.sg/6-future-skills-that-will-change-our-lives-by-2030/>

<sup>3</sup> Komisja Europejska, *Kompetencje kluczowe w uczeniu się przez całe życie – Europejskie ramy odniesienia*, Wspólnota Europejskie (European Commission, Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework, European Communities), Belgia 2007; retrieved from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32006H0962&from=LT/>

The youth's concepts about their life concern primarily the following areas: education, profession, work and family life. The creation of a concept by young people about their own lives is related to developing the so-called future orientation during adolescence (Nurmi, 1991). It enables them to define themselves in the future, create goals and life plans, and prefer certain future lifestyles. It also enables young people to create a general concept about their lives. A growing young person, creating their system of life projects in the context of culturally and socially defined tasks creates their subjectivity. Creating a concept by young people about their own lives is a process of self-creation. Self-creation is a person's co-creation of their life path and personality (Czerwińska-Jasiewicz, 2005).

The implementation of the tutoring programme allowed the exploration of students' diversity of interests and passions. The tutoring process required didactic, communication, and organisational skills in planning and conducting tutorials, i.e., individual sessions and meetings. The goal was to encourage students to independently explore scientific research, deepen acquired knowledge, and open up to seeking new areas in research project design. The tutoring process requires motivation for developing various scientific topics. Adjusting to the mentee's needs and different developmental possibilities is necessary. Tutoring fosters building a reflective attitude and self-awareness. It is essential to motivate students to perform tasks, as well as the personal motivation of the tutor and the extent of their involvement in the tutoring process. The tutor's role is essentially that of a supporting teacher (master) who advises, inspires, motivates, and encourages thinking. From a broader perspective, this approach to developmental work with another person assists in self-development in a space open to diversity.

## **Summary**

Education is synonymous with change, both regarding the need to adapt to a changing world and seek alternative, qualitatively new forms of education. The School and academic environment fulfils the mission of education, which creates conditions conducive to human development, enabling it to meet the complex challenges of the modern world. Introducing tutoring into the educational process is both a possibility and a challenge. It represents a cognitive and organisational effort and the necessity for commitment and responsibility. The tutoring programme "Student as Researcher, Scientist, and Discoverer" fits into the area of education management, which creates conditions for the development of talents, interests, and passions – implemented in the conditions of higher education. Human abilities are becoming a rare resource not only in education but also economically (Wróblewska, 2015, 2018a, 2018b). It is an essential perspec-

tive on new challenges in the Education of Tomorrow. It is favoured by the idea of a new look at the nature of abilities and talents (Runco, 2005, 2006; Sternberg, 1996, 1999, 2028). The author's experiences from the projects implemented so far in the area of diagnosing and stimulating the development of abilities and talents in the educational process<sup>4</sup> indicate the possibilities of creating many educational opportunities to creatively find new, valuable, and original solutions to problems through independent, critical thinking, and collaboration.

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<sup>4</sup> Active participation in the work of the Team for the identification and care of talented students within the project *Białystok Talents of the 21st Century (2014–2017)* (4 editions) funded by the Mayor of Białystok in cooperation with the Center for Continuing Education (CKU), University of Białystok (UwB), Białystok University of Technology (PB), Medical University (UM) and Białystok Science and Technology Park. Member of the team implementing project tasks: *Start-Up Academy*, under the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development, Priority Axis III Higher Education for the Economy and Development, Action 3.1 Competences in Higher Education (2018–2020) (2 editions). Organisation and implementation of the II Educational Module: *My Own Start-Up – From Idea to Implementation* developing universal competencies and skills in creativity and innovation. Organisation and implementation of the IV Educational Module: *About Supporting the Talents and Abilities of Children* – classes for parents, developing educational and social competencies.



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## **Integracja potencjału środowisk na rzecz promowania pozytywnego modelu edukacji otwartej na różnorodność. Kontekst tutoringów akademickich**

### **Streszczenie**

Problematyka opracowania dotyczy zagadnienia integracji potencjału środowiska szkolnego i akademickiego na rzecz pozytywnego modelu edukacji otwartej na różnorodność i jej promowanie poprzez animowanie wspólnych działań. Kontekstem jest tutoring jako zmiana jakościowa i forma spersonalizowana w edukacji. Celem programu tutorskiego „Uczeń jako badacz, naukowiec i odkrywca” jest wzmacnianie współpracy uczelni wyższej ze szkołami ponadpodstawowymi poprzez umożliwienie uczniom prowadzenia badań naukowych pod opieką tutora – pracownika badawczo-dydaktycznego. Synergia wzajemnego potencjału środowiska edukacyjnego szkoły średniej i uczelni wpisuje się w obszar zarządzania edukacją wspierającą rozwój indywidualny uczniów, tworząc warunki dla rozwoju zainteresowań, uzdolnień i pasji, promując ich osiągnięcia. Realizowany projekt wpisuje się w perspektywę Edukacji Jutra – widzianej jako proces wielostronny, innowacyjny i perspektywiczny.

**Słowa kluczowe:** integracja, potencjał, pozytywny model edukacji, różnorodność, tutoring.



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Kinga LISOWSKA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8404-4363>

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland

**Contact:** [kinga.lisowska@uwm.edu.pl](mailto:kinga.lisowska@uwm.edu.pl)**How to cite [jak cytować]:** Lisowska, K. (2024). "A Home-School for Everyone". Transcultural Identity in Education as a Chance for Formation of School Transcultural Communities. *Podstawy Edukacji. Education for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, 17, 45–55.

## “A Home-School for Everyone”. Transcultural Identity in Education as a Chance for Formation of School Transcultural Communities

### Abstract

Europe and the world have recently changed their political, economic and socio-cultural face. Migration movements caused by many factors, like SARS-CoV-2 or Russia's attack on Ukraine, have destabilized the system of social structures in the macro and micro space, including groups and various communities. At the same time, progressive digitalization has led to an easy and rapid blurring of the boundaries between the cultures represented in the home and school environments of children and young people.

From the perspective of these changes, on the one hand, the threat of marginalization of students identifying with different cultures has increased, and the use of stereotypes that have prevailed so far causes exclusion due to ethnic, national or religious diversity. On the other hand, the way has opened up for the formation of societies, including transcultural groups and communities, which makes it possible to come to terms with the dynamics of cultures and construct new transcultural structures devoid of antagonisms.

The presented article attempts theoretical considerations on the essence of shaping transcultural identity among children and young people, introduced at school through education for acculturation, and leading to the creation of a transcultural school community open, ensuring safety for all differences and focused on creating new connections. In these considerations, transcultural identity was considered an "opportunity" for the school's new tasks to ensure the functioning of students in a culturally diverse, open, non-marginalizing school transcultural community.

**Keywords:** transcultural education, identity, transcultural identity, transculturalism.

## Introduction

The article focuses on theoretical considerations concerning the issue of shaping transcultural identity among students (children and youth), which is an opportunity to enable the building of transcultural school communities through education for acculturation. Thus, it creates a "home" – a school for everyone, regardless of the cultural structure represented. A "home" in which antagonists cease to play a role and new spaces and networks of cultural connections are created.

It attempts to look at educational activities differently from the perspective of dynamically changing cultural structures. The world has undergone social, political and economic transformations in recent years. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has changed the functioning of individual countries and nations in them, Russia's attack on Ukraine, and multiple migration crises. Currently, representatives of different – other nations function side by side, use similar products in everyday life and receive the same stimuli from the media, newspapers, professional environments and peer groups. Regardless of their roots, they receive information about the same ways of behaving and express the need to be part of new transcultural groups and societies.

In the era of digitization and the Internet, the existing boundaries of cultural identities resulting from cultural affiliation are also disappearing. Today's world is fluid and may seem unstable to an "uninformed" individual. The task of the school should be to ensure that students who identify with different native cultural structures are educated with a sense of security and openness to multiple influences depending on the time, place and context in which they occurred. Transculturalism provides tools to create and increase students' ability to combine and include different cultural approaches that become part of a new educational model where cultural differences are valued and accepted rather than considered a point of separation (Casinader, Walsh, 2015).

In the article, the problem of transcultural perception of the world from the educational perspective will be outlined in three thematic areas: acculturation as a term in the social sciences; education for acculturation as a way to create transcultural school communities – the formation of individual and collective identities; the transcultural Identity of the pupil as a determinant of the functioning of school transcultural communities open to all strategies of action of individuals and the communities they represent, i.e. transcultural identity as a "cure" for marginalization due to differences in the ways of solving problems and interpreting life experiences.

On the other hand, transcultural societies, including groups and communities of educational institutions, shape their structure by connecting through transitions (or transversions) between codes, elements and values of different cultures. They are focused on dynamics, changeability and openness, and the

cultures that exist in them take the shape of a puzzle (Welsch, 1999). As a result of the interaction between coexisting representatives of cultures, new shapes, forms, styles, beliefs, and customs are revealed that were previously not taken into account, and in which there are no generally known ways of marginalization due to cultural dissimilarity (Augustyniak, 2023).

## **Transculturalism in the perspective of social sciences**

The sources of acculturation should be sought as early as the 16th century, and the theoretical foundations in the first half of the 20th century. Since the 1990s, there has been an increased appreciation for transculturalism and its approach, mobilizing changes in the psycho-socio-cultural spheres, cultural diffusion, and hybridization (Nikitorowicz, Guziuk-Tkacz, 2021).

The development of this concept in the humanities and social sciences was made by Wolfgang Welsch (1999), who pointed to the essence of the interpenetration of contemporary cultures, styles and values of life, the image of which is not separated and is characterized by heterogeneity and mixing. On the macro- and microsocial level, there is an interaction between at least two cultural poles. Cultures take the shape of puzzles by creating so-called transversions (puzzling forms of cultures). This phenomenon covers an increasing number of populations and areas and thus creates "configurations of connections" – cultures have lost their homogeneity and distinctiveness (Welsch, 1999).

Transculturality is also defined by Jerzy Nikitorowicz (2021) and Marta Guziuk-Tkacz (2021) as "the spatial being "beyond" the border(s) of specific cultures and cultural mixing, which results in the formation of new cultural structures and formations, built from heterogeneous networks, containing components common to other transcultural networks and differentiating elements" (Nikitorowicz, Guziuk-Tkacz, 2021, p. 28). In this way, acculturation leads to the emergence of new cultural qualities characterized by a hybrid structure, taking into account the constant crossing of cultural boundaries.

In the school space, acculturation is designed to enable children and young people to enter into "transversions" – to be ready to move between many frames of meaning. Students should strive for the human-culture relationship and adopt an active attitude to shape their cultural identity. Self-liberation occurs during contact with art, language, religion, and science; the individual gives meaning to cultural artefacts (Misiejuk, 2015). The building of a collective mentality begins, which we discover thanks to evaluation. Elements of culture with an assigned cultural value are transformed into specific symbols of social groups. They become part of the reference for moral evaluation of all human behaviour (Linton, 2000).

The development of acculturation in the education process depends on the establishment of personal relationships between individuals and cultural artefacts, which are divided into physical (material culture) and linguistic (language, myths, legends of a given community, expressing its views and history) as well as behavioural (rituals, customs and patterns of behaviour). Children and adolescents coming into contact with the world of artefacts should consciously read and then process the data encoded in the behaviours and things that surround them. By reconstructing their emotional value, they can then notice that the artefacts determine the relation of the thing to the specificity of this thing. It, in turn, determines the will to assimilate and maintain the elements of culture that characterize a given area and do not define a specific generation. Transculturalism allows for cultural identity formation, characterized by the individual's adaptation of artefacts to his activities and the needs of civilization. A person with this type of structure makes it available in his biography, which proves his high cultural awareness. Therefore, a student experiencing transculturality in the education process goes through a path in which he or she considers it appropriate to combine inherited culture with the one experienced, acquired, sought and constructed. However, it must receive a signal, a chance to develop in a multicultural social reality. Otherwise, cultural identity in the concept of transculturalism will not be initiated in any way (Misiejuk, 2015).

Acculturation and its contemporary approach can be an alternative to perceiving human nature as an unchangeable, eternal, homogeneous and autonomous being. Therefore, it is essential to provide knowledge and open the perspective of thinking in a hybrid-transcultural approach. In order to bring about a change in the education process, it is necessary to properly construct questions and pose challenges, perceiving cultural heritage from the perspective of connecting multicultural communities in micro and macro terms with "genius loci".

## **Education for acculturation as a way to create school transcultural communities**

Dynamically progressing changes in the political, economic and socio-cultural reality assign new tasks to schools to create the cultural identity of children and young people. In macro and micro terms, the world becomes a place of meetings and coexistence of culturally and ethnically heterogeneous identities. The student becomes part of a globalized reality in which education should be an element of more broadly organized identity formation processes in which the contingency and changeability of cultural networks play a role.

A determinant of modern education is following the ability of students to adapt creatively, guaranteeing the ability to create themselves and to maintain



the core of identity despite changing living conditions (Wróblewska, 2011). Children and young people must learn to function in the so-called triad: inherited identity co-occurring with the Identity of roles and challenges and the Identity felt and realized (Nikitorowicz, 1995). Then, the educational process simultaneously deepens students' sense of autonomy, develops openness to other cultures, and draws on their values. On the other hand, education is freed from the marginalization of different individuals in terms of experience and ways of solving problems. It enables creative adaptation to any environment in which a person finds himself.

A school in which individuals representing different cultural spaces meet more and more often must take into account universal values and cultural and religious pluralism in its educational activities. The process of education in a culturally changing school, considering the creation of communities with diverse reference cultures subject to hybridization, is an opportunity to form an open student – able to find himself in the dynamism of the outside world. A student who emphasizes his or her traditions but assimilates the experiences of colleagues representing different structures, at last, receives the necessary elements to shape his or her transcultural identity and is no longer subject to marginalization and stereotypical treatment of "strangers – others".

Transcultural education is a response to cultural, social, economic and political changes taking place in the international arena. In the transcultural approach, the student is considered the subject of pedagogical influences. At the same time, he has "transversal reason, which is a separate cognitive competence" (Nikitorowicz, Guziuk-Tkacz, 2021, p. 29). Only thanks to the assimilation of multifaceted rationality can modern man acquire an awareness capable of coping with instability.

The school can shape an individual, characterized by an internal pluralism of personality, and reveal a specific lifestyle. The phenomenon of such a student will be the ability to accept and see many variants of himself. To start an internal discussion in the face of discovering one's abilities, and at the same time to accept the idea of cognition concerning others and oneself. The school must go beyond ossified cultural structures – and open up to a different approach to constructing identity perspectives of the individual's growth in various reference groups.

A student ready to give up certain cultural elements of his or her choice can function on the cultural borderline. Therefore, he is ready to move into the world of new spaces, where, using the "storehouse" of value, he reaches for what gives him a hybrid view of reality. In transcultural education, the individual creates his or her identity, in which he or she considers the simultaneous experience of "being at home" and "strangeness". It assumes that it functions in a multicultural reality, so one of its tasks is to confront representatives of other cultures, especially the ways of behaviour they represent. The pillars of a student's identity depend on the way and ability to evaluate themselves and con-

structive criticism concerning multidimensional groups and people, as well as the associated conditions, situations and stereotypes.

An individual can – should – construct multiple identity variants, consisting of scattered "puzzles" – cultural proposals he encounters. Thanks to the possibility of transcultural identity creation in the school space, the student does not experience a "shock" and, from an early age, becomes ready for a dynamic transition between the cultures of reference without marginalizing any of them. Depending on the moment of his life, difficulties, desires and aspirations, man needs to be in different cultures and draw on the elements and experiences they express. This skill will stabilize and protect them from exclusion – for themselves and others standing between cultures.

In order to see the possibilities of different cultural spaces, an individual must acquire autonomy that will allow him to make choices and distance himself from social antagonisms. It must allow itself to leave what in the native culture does not deserve recognition and assimilate elements from other groups, which it defines as valuable.

Children and adolescents, seeing an opportunity for cultural hybridization, can adapt, maintain life balance, develop and meet their own needs regardless of where they function. The guarantee of creating the identity of children and young people in transcultural societies is the ability to critically evaluate and understand one's actions and accept the diversity of experiences and related values flowing from various social groups, not marginalizing otherness but respecting otherness.

In transcultural education, individuals who can cooperate, engage in dialogue and negotiate in a changeable, socially and identity-diverse reality are formed to be with others, to treat them equally and to recognize their differences.

Children and young people must understand that in the 21st century, they cannot be prisoners of inherited culture. The guarantee of their identity success is "between" and "beyond" a given perspective of reference, but with a holistic view of their needs and possibilities. The meeting of what is native with what is different but has developmental forms, new cultural spaces from elements revolving around the core of identity. Through transcultural education, the student can enter this "space" and reach for what he or she considers right for the development of his or her person (Nikitorowicz, Guziuk-Tkacz, 2021, p. 30).

## **Transcultural identity of students as a determinant of the functioning of hybrid – open–school transcultural communities**

The transcultural identity of individuals is shaped based on a transnational territory, and belonging to it does not require their physical presence. The pen-

etration of cultures into an increasing number of groups and communities and the areas they inhabit leads to the creation of "macro-complexes". From the perspective of creating cultural identity, the individual has a sense of contingency and dynamism of cultural networks that affect the situations and problems functioning in his or her life. It is also in constant contact with others, i.e., a constantly developing hybrid. Such multiple cultural connections provide a better perspective on the cultural formation of man.

On the other hand, identity formation is directed towards integrating various components characterized by multiple cultural origins (Welsch, 1999). Man must accept the transcultural community, enabling him to follow a cultural route – the search for authenticity through reconstructing the past and the dynamic and fluid blurring of boundaries between cultures. Only then does he acquire the ability to experience manifested as a "feedback loop" (Kamińska, 2009).

Children and young people who create a multidimensional cultural identity during education are subject to constant change, acceptance, and rejection of given values and ways of behaving and solving problems. At the same time, they remain aware of their identity in each new space in which they find themselves.

Transcultural identity is created in micro and macro societies and depends on the values and experiences of the communities that make up these spaces. Its acquisition occurs through basic family structures, the education system, and the socio-cultural, economic, and political world surrounding the individual. In order for children and young people to be able to shape their own cultural identity and settle in a specific reference group, and at the same time open up to other cultural groups, children and young people must receive correct patterns of movement in the course of education among multicultural, regional, national and international society, as well as among peer groups and communities of care and educational institutions.

Only openness to the dynamics of a world composed of overlapping cultural structures will provide students with an understanding of the otherness and differentiation of values subject to history and tradition, specific interpersonal relations and the system of power, or socio-economic conditions. It will enable the building of a self-image based on satisfaction, a sense of fulfilled duty, and the ability to adapt to constantly developing new values – emerging transcultural societies.

An increase in cultural mixing, and thus the individual's contact with many markers and codes different from the family environment, can destabilize the individual. Understanding the existence of values and the possibility of implying what is different- alien- into one's identity space is the way to understand oneself. At the same time, openness to preserving fundamental values that do not change in multicultural structures means acquiring the ability to combine the experiences of multiple generations. It is conducive to forming transcultural

communities based on the hybrid experiences of individuals in communities created in care and educational institutions.

On the one hand, transcultural identity should open children and young people to new and unknown spaces and, on the other hand, indicate markers of fundamental values, without which it would not be possible to find oneself in cultural hybridization. The latter, universal, unchangeable, permanent, timeless and universal human, include peace, the right to life, freedom, tolerance, truth, faith, love and justice (Kowolik, Pośpiech, 2009).

The destabilization of social structures forces the school to perform new tasks in creating the identity of students. The need for a different view on education is evident among representatives of local communities, but also among parents, who receive messages from children about their "surprise" at the cultural diversity of other/new participants in social life. There is a phenomenon of identification in micro-social spaces of representatives of other nationalities, Poles returning after economic emigration, and followers of various religions (Lisowska, Leszczyńska-Rejchert, 2023). Shaping transcultural identity among students is a way to eliminate the sense of instability and create one's close world – a community of peer and school groups open to multiple perceptions of reality – communities that are part of regional, national and international reality. It is a pursuit of the understanding that society on a micro and macro scale is built by different cultural groups (characterized by different reference cultures), which need to be constituted. By becoming transcultural societies, these groups prevent exclusion due to the diversity of values and traditions rooted in native reference cultures. They also open up to learning how to solve problems and make choices by individuals and communities that are not yet known to them/new.

Understanding the transcultural construction of individual and collective identity will allow students to preserve the historical values of a given space and actively respect and accept experiences from other cultural structures that determine the current reality of the school community. Education should consider the dynamics of the world, in which isolated patriotic values become an artefact, closing children and young people into a group of national identification. The school should show that patriotism is an approach that opens up to multicultural thinking about oneself and the space in which the individual lives and a firm negation of the rejection of other ways of solving solutions resulting from cultural diversity.

## **Conclusions of Theoretical Considerations**

The formation of the transcultural identity of students, leading to the building of school transcultural communities, should be based on the following goals:

- 1) Creating students' autonomy and subjectivity as a way to be open and get rid of cultural stereotypes leading to the marginalization of culturally different individuals and groups;
- 2) forming children and young people characterized by transversal reason, which will enable the active building of transcultural school communities;
- 3) creating open-minded individuals capable of creating hybrid individual identities; ready for transitions – transversions between cultures and for adopting completely new solutions;
- 4) introducing pupils to the world of cultural networks in which they take action to coexist, coexist and intermingle experiences and values accumulated by different cultural groups with which they coexist at school;
- 5) providing knowledge about regional cultural resources and intercultural complexities that are stages of education for acculturation;
- 6) constituting a sense of the contingency of the individual in a world in which native cultures discover the meaning, feel (perceive) in the course of growth and education, and finally choose because of the experiences and values adopted in the school environment.

In this way, transcultural identity in education should lead to integrating individuals identifying with different cultures and a sense of security and understanding of students representing multiple experiences and values. Transcultural Identity developed through education for acculturation enables the creation of hybrid spaces where all representatives of cultures, people with different views, and different (socially acceptable) ways of solving problems will find a place. It is also an opportunity to help students find balance and understand and support individuals in need who are marginalized because of their cultural, ethnic, and religious differences or represented values (different from standard models, but worth getting to know and noticing). Finally, there is the possibility of rejecting stereotypes while entering into openness for cultural instability.

Transcultural identity formed during education is a way to build modern societies, including groups and communities, in which the ability to connect and make cultural transitions is essential. It is an opportunity to consciously come into contact with other lifestyles, learn about discrepancies, and permeate. As a result of establishing relationships across borders and cultures, new – previously unknown forms – hybrids – styles – beliefs are created, and customs and ways of solving problems are created. Thus, transcultural communities are formed, including school transcultural communities, in which, while maintaining equality, interaction with strangeness is built and maintained.

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## **„Dom – szkoła dla wszystkich”. Tożsamość transkulturowa w edukacji szansą na kształtowanie szkolnych społeczności transkulturowych**

### **Streszczenie**

W ostatnich latach Europa i świat zmieniły swoje oblicze polityczne, ekonomiczne i społeczno-kulturowe. Ruchy migracyjne spowodowane wieloma czynnikami, m.in. SARS COV-2 czy atakiem Rosji na Ukrainę, zdestabilizowały system struktur społeczeństw w przestrzeni makro i mikro, w tym grup i różnych społeczności. Jednocześnie postępująca cyfryzacja doprowadziła do łatwego

i szybkiego zacierania granic pomiędzy kulturami reprezentowanymi w środowisku domowym i szkolnym dzieci oraz młodzieży.

W perspektywie tych przemian z jednej strony wzrosło zagrożenie marginalizacją uczniów identyfikujących się z różnymi kulturami, wykorzystywaniem do tej pory panujących stereotypów powodujących wykluczenie ze względu na odmienną etniczną, narodową, religijną. Z drugiej strony otworzyła się droga do formowania społeczeństw, w tym grup i społeczności transkulturowych, umożliwiających pogodzenie się z dynamicznością kultur oraz konstruowanie nowych struktur transkulturowych pozbawionych wszelkich antagonizmów.

Prezentowany artykuł jest próbą rozważań teoretycznych nad istotą kształtowania wśród dzieci i młodzieży tożsamości transkulturowej, wprowadzanej w szkole za pośrednictwem edukacji na rzecz transkulturowości, a prowadzącej do tworzenia szkolnej społeczności transkulturowej – otwartej, zapewniającej bezpieczeństwo wszelkim odmiennościom i nastawionej na tworzenie nowych powiązań. W rozważaniach tych tożsamość transkulturowa została uznana za „szansę” na nowe zadania szkoły ukierunkowane na zapewnienie funkcjonowania uczniom w różnorodnej kulturowo, otwartej, niemarginalizującej szkolnej społeczności transkulturowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja na rzecz transkulturowości, tożsamość, tożsamość transkulturowa, transkulturowość.





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Aleksander CYWIŃSKI

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3945-9607>

University of Szczecin, Poland

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**Contact:** [aleksander.cywinski@usz.edu.pl](mailto:aleksander.cywinski@usz.edu.pl)**How to cite [jak cytować]:** Cywiński, A. (2024). What Kind of Education in Times of Climate Migration? *Podstawy Edukacji. Education for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, 17, 57–68.

# What Kind of Education in Times of Climate Migration?

## Abstract

The climate and environment emergency caused by human-generated greenhouse gas emissions presents significant global challenges, including rising temperatures, extreme weather conditions, and sea level rise. These effects impact agriculture, water resources, human health, and biodiversity, while also exacerbating socio-economic vulnerabilities. Climate migration, driven by these environmental changes, will reshape societies and challenge access to education for displaced populations. In response, education systems must adapt, promoting environmental justice, inclusivity, and resilience, while equipping future generations with the skills needed for a sustainable future.

**Keywords:** climate and environment emergency, climate migrants, education, justice.

## 1. Introduction – A climate and environment emergency

If you turn on the news on TV or radio, check online services, or traditionally open a printed newspaper, there is a good chance you'll come across information about droughts and wildfires (Russia, Canada, Australia) or extreme weather events, such as heavy rainfall causing floods (Central Europe, Pakistan, Afghanistan) or hurricanes (USA). Climate emergency caused by human-generated greenhouse gas emissions presents significant global challenges (Francis, 2015; Stanisoara, 2014; Shivanna, 2022; Thunberg, 2023). The impacts include

higher temperatures, extreme weather conditions, and rising sea levels, which affect agriculture, water resources, and human health (Levy & Patz, 2015; Campbell et al., 2007). Climate emergency also endangers biodiversity and the stability of ecosystems (Shivanna, 2022). Psychologically, the crisis leads to eco-emotions such as anxiety and grief (Kegyes, 2023). Research indicates that while young people recognize the severity of the climate crisis, many feel pessimistic about its resolution (Cywiński, 2023).

Despite growing awareness, profound changes in political and economic systems are urgently required to effectively confront the climate emergency (Gills & Morgan, 2020). Recent studies underscore the growing acknowledgment of climate change as an urgent issue, with many governments and organizations declaring climate emergencies (Dillon, 2019; Cretney & Nissen, 2022). According to EU terminology, we are operating in a climate and environment emergency (European Parliament resolution of 28 November 2019 on the climate and environment emergency, 2019). In accordance with the content of the Paris Agreement, the signatories committed to efforts to: „Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change”<sup>1</sup>. It’s worth fighting for: the increase in the number of heatwave days will lead to a rise in heat-related morbidity and mortality, especially among the elderly, children, and in regions with weak healthcare infrastructure and limited adaptive capacity (Liu et al., 2017).

International efforts to limit global warming, current projections indicate that temperatures may rise beyond the targeted levels (Shivanna, 2022). Tackling climate emergency demands urgent actions like reducing emissions, expanding forested areas, and possibly considering geoengineering as a last resort (Gabric, 2023). The humanities play a vital role in exploring the social and cultural effects of climate crisis (Leggewie & Welzer, 2010; Pathania & Bala, 2024). Implementing an emergency approach at the local level poses challenges and may reinforce existing political structures (Nissen & Cretney, 2021). Addressing this crisis demands a connection between health, social, and climate justice, alongside transformative activism (Bellizzi, Lane, Elhakim, Nabeth, 2020; Rouf & Wainwright, 2020).

In conclusion, we are in a very difficult situation. This Synthesis Report (SYR) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicates: „Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming, with global surface temperature reaching 1.1°C above

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<sup>1</sup> Importantly, the agreement reached was the result of a broad consensus among political leaders: [https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris\\_nov\\_2015/application/pdf/paris\\_agreement\\_english\\_.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english_.pdf)

1850–1900 in 2011–2020. Global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to increase, with unequal historical and ongoing contributions arising from unsustainable energy use, land use and land-use change, lifestyles and patterns of consumption and production across regions, between and within countries, and among individuals (high confidence)<sup>2</sup>. The climate and environment emergency, driven by human-generated greenhouse gas emissions, has led to rising global temperatures, extreme weather events, and threats to biodiversity, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations and low-income countries. Urgent actions, including emission reductions and systemic political and economic changes, are necessary to confront these challenges, with many governments and organizations already recognizing the severity of the crisis.

## **2. Human rights and climate and environment emergency**

As mentioned in the introduction, the situation is difficult. This also affects the observance of human rights. Before we move on to this topic, a fundamental assumption must be made, namely, Rebecca Bratspies notes: „The idea that there is a set of inalienable, universal rights to which all are entitled simply by virtue of being human stands out as perhaps the most significant achievement of twentieth-century international jurisprudence” (Bratspies, 2015, p. 39), which in short means: all people have subjectivity, we are the heirs of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948.

Rebecca Bratspies climate crisis is causing widespread environmental degradation, which in turn is threatening the realization of internationally recognized human rights, including the right to life, health, culture, food, and self-determination. Environmental harm disproportionately affects the poorest and most vulnerable populations, making it a social justice issue. The poorest will suffer first and most from the consequences of climate change, but ultimately, all people will be affected. Current international environmental laws are inadequate in addressing transboundary environmental harms. They are often aspirational and lack enforceable obligations. A human rights approach could fill these gaps by imposing more concrete obligations on states. The connection between human rights and climate change is increasingly seen as crucial, with numerous scholars pointing to the significant effects climate change has on fundamental rights (Bratspies, 2015). John K. Knox (2017), focusing on the issue of biodiversity, points out that is crucial for the enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water, and culture. The destruction of biodiversity endangers these rights and exacerbates human suffering, especially

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to emphasize the significance of the IPCC as the most reliable and competent source regarding the issue of the climate crisis: <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>.

among vulnerable populations. In the same spirit expresses Barry S. Levy and Jonathan A. Patz: consequences disproportionately affect vulnerable groups and low-income countries, raising concerns about human rights and social justice (Levy & Patz, 2015). Adelman (2014) explores the legitimacy of using human rights frameworks to address climate challenges, calling for the recognition of ecocide as a criminal offense. Savaresi and Setzer (2022) highlight the importance of rights-based litigation in addressing climate emergencies, while Knox (2009) advocates for applying human rights law to address global environmental damage.

The Declaration on Human Rights and Climate Change, introduced by scholars from the Global Network for the Study of Human Rights and the Environment (GNHRE), aims to address climate injustices and human hierarchies inherent in the climate crisis. It emphasizes the intrinsic connection between human rights and environmental integrity, advocating for accountability from states, corporations, and individuals responsible for climate-related harms. The Declaration promotes a rights-based approach that integrates Western and non-Western epistemologies, focusing on the protection of human and non-human entities, with particular attention to vulnerable populations such as indigenous peoples, women, and future generations (Davies et al., 2017).

### 3. Climate migrants

Estimates of the number of climate migrants by 2050 vary greatly, ranging from 25 million to over 1 billion people (Bassetti, 2019). Several hundred million people will have to relocate due to rising sea levels (Geisler & Currens, 2017). It is predicted in “World Migration Report 2024” of International Organization for Migration (IOM), that by 2050, 216 million people will be internal migrants within their own countries due to climate-related reasons (McAuliffe, M. & L.A. Oucho, 2024, p. 7). One of the main conclusions of this publication is that climate crisis interacts with food insecurity and socio-economic vulnerabilities, leading to migration. But what is more shocking, Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) predicts that around 1.2 billion people could be displaced by 2050 from this reasons. The Institute indicates that the countries facing the most ecological threats include Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Chad, India, and Pakistan, and Regions most at risk: Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. More than 1 billion people live in countries that lack sufficient resources to cope with future ecological shocks<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Moreover, by 2040, over 5.4 billion people will live in countries experiencing high or extreme water stress, and by 2050, the number of people at risk of food insecurity could rise to 3.5 billion: <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Ecological-Threat-Register-Press-Release-27.08-FINAL.pdf>

However, an equally alarming statement comes from Gaia Vince, which indicates that many areas in the Global South will become uninhabitable, leading to both internal and cross-continental mass migrations. She notes that the middle of the 21st century, even 3.5 billion people will live in areas that become too hot or humid to survive. Tropical countries such as Bangladesh, Sudan, and India will be the most affected. She states firmly that we will need to organize migration on an unprecedented scale to help people move to regions with more bearable climate conditions, such as northern Europe, Canada, Siberia, and the Arctic. Vince suggests that migration will not only change geography but also how we perceive each other. We will have to abandon national and ethnic divisions in favor of a global identity, which will be essential for survival in the new climate order (Vince, 2023).

Considering the above, in terms of Climate, Environmental, and Social Justice, it must be stated that we will likely face the deprivation of this good (justice) and witness violent and brutal transformations unless we restructure our world in the socio-political dimension.

#### **4. Climate migrants and their access to education**

The data presented so far aimed to show the nature and scale of the problem. At this point, I would like to pose the following research question: What kind of education in times of climate migration?"

According to Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child: "States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity"<sup>4</sup>.

Now, the global refugee crisis has significantly affected access to education, particularly for displaced children and youth. While primary education garners more attention, refugees face substantial challenges in accessing secondary and higher education (Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Anselme & Hands, 2010). Migrant education encounters many challenges, such as access barriers, interruptions in schooling, and lower academic performance compared to native peers (Entorf, 2015). In South Africa, refugee children encounter obstacles in both enrolling in and continuing their education (Meda, Sookrajh, Maharaj, 2012). Similarly, Sudanese refugees in Egypt struggle with legal and financial barriers to education (Moro, 2002). Despite these difficulties, education is essential for safeguarding refugee children and instilling hope for their future (Crisp, Talbot, Cipollone, 2001). Technological innovations like mobile phones and online platforms pre-

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<sup>4</sup> The significance of the convention lies in the fact that it has been ratified by a record number of countries: <https://www.unicef.org/media/52626/file>

sent promising ways to broaden educational opportunities for refugees (Moser-Mercer, Hayba, Goldsmith, 2018). Addressing these issues requires increased funding, policy reforms, and creative strategies to ensure refugees have access to quality education at all levels (Dryden-Peterson, 2010; Anselme & Hands, 2010; Moser-Mercer et al., 2018).

The educational consequences of child migration are multidimensional: migrant children often show lower academic performance compared to their peers from the majority population, which may indicate a correlation between educational outcomes and socio-economic status. They also tend to attend lower-performing schools or are overrepresented in vocational schools, which can limit their future educational and career opportunities (Brind, Harper, Moore, 2008). Despite numerous efforts, the education of migrant and climate refugee children faces persistent, often insurmountable challenges, including legal, financial, and systemic barriers. Even with technological advancements and policy reforms, the complexity of ensuring continuous, equitable access to education for displaced populations remains a largely unresolved issue.

## 5. Summary – possible future scenarios

The Salamanca Statement emphasizing the importance of creating educational systems that are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the diverse needs of all students<sup>5</sup>. And the report “Education for all 2000–2015: Achievements and challenges” indicates that if countries fail to take measures to integrate migrant children, they risk facing further marginalization<sup>6</sup>, what should be analyzed in relation to the second Millennium Development Goal: achieving universal primary education<sup>7</sup>. According to the report “The climate crisis is a child rights crisis” education is identified as a key factor in mitigating and adapting to climate risks. The report calls for climate-resilient education systems that not only teach children about climate science but also equip them with green skills for the future economy<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> However, this act, despite being 30 years old, remains relevant to this day: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000098427>

<sup>6</sup> The report identifies employment as a reason for remaining outside the education system: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232205>

<sup>7</sup> A total of eight goals were identified: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, to achieve universal primary education, to promote gender equality and empower women, to reduce child mortality, to improve maternal health, to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, to ensure environmental sustainability, and to develop a global partnership for development: [https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015\\_MDG\\_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Investment in sustainable education is seen as crucial for empowering children to participate in climate resilience efforts: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED614506.pdf>

In response to the question posed above: "What kind of education in times of climate migration?" we have two scenarios to consider: a) unifying, b) diversifying.

In answering this question, we must consider the data presented above: we are facing an unprecedented challenge to which the entire human race must respond. Most likely, in a relatively short time, the socio-political order of the world will change. Mass migrations will affect all dimensions of functioning for nation-states. All of them. This is the subject of Gaia Vince's book "Nomad Century: How Climate Migration Will Reshape Our World" (2023). Ensuring universal education for children, as highlighted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, should be a key concern, as mentioned by Pope Francis in his encyclical "Laudato Si'" (2015). This reflects the perspective of viewing the Earth as a common home. As for the content of education itself, considering the situation humanity finds itself in, we should place particular emphasis on the statement in "Article 29. 1. (e) The development of respect for the natural environment" from the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In the case of the predicted migration northward, including into Poland, I advocate for a single form of education for everyone, rejecting a model where local children receive one type of education and climate migrants another. This should be an education that prepares humanity for the reverse process, namely the re-settlement of areas that were abandoned due to climate reasons.

If the education of the near and distant future is to simultaneously serve diversity, equity, and inclusion, then its (education's) main component, due to the importance of the issue, should be justice, as a universally shared value, almost embedded in our DNA, but currently, in the context of climate, essentially dormant. Sunita Narain points out : "The fact is that we have lost precious time in finding 'smart' ways to do as little as possible to reduce greenhouse emissions, and it is time to take decisive and bold steps. We need to build policies knowing that we live in an interdependent world where cooperation that is driven by fairness and justice is critical" (Thunberg, 2023, p. 439). Naomi Klein, writing about a just climate transition, through which it will be possible to build a fair society, she advocates five principles that should be adopted: a) energy democracy – shifting from centralized, corporate-controlled fossil fuel systems to decentralized, community-controlled renewable energy sources, b) front lines first: the communities most affected by climate crisis should build new green infrastructure and rehabilitate lands, c) care work is climate work – care work (such as teaching, caregiving, and healthcare) as critical to a low-carbon economy. These jobs should be valued and supported in a just transition, d) no worker left behind – workers in carbon-intensive industries are supported with retraining and guaranteed incomes, so they are not left behind as the economy shifts away from fossil fuels, f) polluter pays – those who have profited the most

from pollution, particularly fossil fuel corporations and wealthy individuals, should bear the financial burden of the transition to a green economy (Thunberg, 2023, p. 546–553). Klein concludes: “it offers integrated and intersecting solutions grounded in a clear and compelling vision of our future – one that is ecologically safe, economically fair and socially just” (Thunberg, 2023, p. 552–553), Hilda Flavia Nakabuye: “There cannot be sustainability without equity, and there cannot be equity without sustainability. Climate justice must manifest everywhere, for everyone” (Thunberg, 2023, p. 557), and Mitzi Jonelle Tan: “Together, we fight for land into a greener society and for a world with a united community full of love and cooperation. This is what we mean when we talk about equity. Equity is justice. Equity is liberation. Equity is what we need, so there is no choice but to fight back” (Thunberg, 2023, p. 561). It is an articulated program for future education, a set of goals that it should serve. It is the opening of education to environmental justice, meaning equal access to a clean environment, and multispecies justice – concerning the relationship between nature and humans, as well as spatial justice, which relates to urban space management and the democratic decision-making process in this area (Celermajer et al., 2021; Costanza-Chock, 2020; Fainstein, 2009; Fainstein, 2010; Harvey, 2009; Schlosberg, 2007; Schlosberg & Collins, 2014; Soja, 2009; Soja, 2010).

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## Jaki rodzaj edukacji w czasach migracji klimatycznej?

### Streszczenie

Kryzys klimatyczny i środowiskowy, spowodowany emisją gazów cieplarnianych wytwarzanych przez człowieka, stawia przed światem poważne wyzwania, takie jak wzrost temperatur, ekstremalne zjawiska pogodowe oraz podnoszenie się poziomu mórz. Te zmiany wpływają na rolnictwo, zasoby wodne, zdrowie ludzi oraz bioróżnorodność, jednocześnie pogłębiając nierówności społeczno-ekonomiczne. Migracja klimatyczna wywołana tymi zmianami środowiskowymi przekształci społeczeństwa i stworzy nowe wyzwania związane z dostępem do edukacji dla przemieszczonych społeczności. W odpowiedzi, systemy edukacyjne muszą się dostosować, promując sprawiedliwość środowiskową, inkluzywność i odporność, jednocześnie wyposażając przyszłe pokolenia w umiejętności potrzebne do zrównoważonej przyszłości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kryzys klimatyczny i środowiskowy, migranci klimatyczni, edukacja, sprawiedliwość.

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Izabella KUCHARCZYK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1054-9825>

Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw, Poland

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# Diversity in Educational Approaches: Mentoring as a Tool to Support Students Diagnosed with Dyslexia and at Risk of Social Maladjustment

## Abstract

The modern education system faces the challenge of meeting the needs of students with dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment. Such students often encounter learning difficulties, which can lead to reduced self-esteem, withdrawal from school life, and problems with social adaptation. Mentoring, based on individual relationships, represents a promising support tool, helping to overcome educational barriers, develop social skills, and better understand emotions. This article highlights the importance of mentoring as a form of support for students with dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment. Mentoring helps build positive self-esteem, develop interpersonal skills, and cope with emotional challenges, which is crucial for young people at risk of social exclusion. Examples of programs demonstrate the positive impact of mentoring on educational outcomes, social integration, and the reduction of emotional problems. Research confirms that long-term mentoring relationships bring lasting benefits, such as increased motivation, higher self-esteem, and better social functioning.

**Keywords:** mentoring, student with dyslexia, student at risk of social maladjustment, educational support, emotional support.

## Introduction

The contemporary education system is confronted with the challenge of addressing the diverse needs of students, particularly those grappling with a dual

diagnosis of specific learning difficulties and the risk of social maladjustment. Students diagnosed with dyslexia often face significant barriers in the educational process, which can lead to diminished self-esteem, withdrawal from school life, and, consequently, challenges with social adaptation. The coexistence of dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment presents a particularly complex challenge for teachers and specialists, necessitating a tailored and multifaceted approach.

One promising tool for supporting students in such circumstances is mentoring. In the academic literature, mentoring is defined as a relationship between a more experienced individual (mentor) and a student (mentee), in which the mentor serves as a guide, advisor, and provider of emotional support<sup>1</sup>. Such relationships can play a pivotal role in assisting students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment in overcoming educational barriers, developing social skills, and gaining insight into their emotional states. Mentoring enables an individualised approach to a student's needs, fostering academic achievement and emotional and social development—crucial elements for students at risk of social maladjustment. Mentoring also encompasses advisory support, academic performance monitoring, and assistance with planning and achieving success (Karwala, 2007, cited in Butarewicz, Potoniec, 2013).

Mentoring can take various forms depending on the context, location, and individuals involved (Aspfors, Fransson, 2015). Mentoring should not be conflated with coaching or consulting as an effective method for fostering personal and professional development, as these are based on entirely different principles. Coaching focuses on the individual's resources and skills, aiding them in discovering knowledge through questioning. At the same time, mentoring completely depends on the mentor's expertise and experience, with the mentor guiding the mentee's development. Mentoring can take various forms: formal or informal, personal or organisational, regular or sporadic, conscious or unconscious, and individual or group-based. Additionally, it is worth highlighting the practice of remote mentoring, known as e-mentoring and peer mentoring (Hnat, 2023).

This article aims to elucidate the role of mentoring as a tool for supporting students with both a diagnosis of dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment. It will present the findings of research demonstrating how mentoring impacts educational progress, motivation, and the development of social skills in these students. Furthermore, the article addresses the practical aspects of implementing mentoring programs in schools, emphasising the importance of selecting suitable mentors and tailoring programs to meet the diverse educational needs of students.

Evaluating the effectiveness of mentoring in working with students diagnosed with both dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment will allow for rec-

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.promentor.pl/czym-jest-mentoring>.

ommendations for further research as well as guidance for educational practitioners. Given the growing demand for personalised teaching methods, particularly in the context of students with diverse educational needs, the topics discussed in this article are gaining importance and constitute a vital element in the ongoing discourse concerning the future of education.

## **Dyslexia and the Risk of Social Maladjustment: A Dual Challenge**

Although the relationship between specific learning difficulties in reading and writing and emotional and social disorders remains a subject of discussion, dyslexia and the risk of social maladjustment undoubtedly affect the emotional and social functioning of those who experience them (e.g., Svetaz, Ireland, Blum, 2000; Humphrey, Mullins, 2002; Kavale, Mostert, 2004; Wiener, Tardif, 2004; Maag, Reid, 2006; Eissa, 2010; Peleg, 2011; Gallegos, Langley, Villegas, 2012).

Specific learning difficulties often co-occur with behavioural problems. Students affected by these difficulties typically require educational, social, emotional, and behavioural interventions.

Educational challenges and difficulties related to cognitive abilities, particularly those involving auditory and visual processing and language skills, can significantly and negatively impact students' emotional well-being. These issues often lead to school dropout, mental health disorders, and prolonged high levels of stress. Numerous studies indicate that students with learning difficulties frequently face social problems, behavioural disorders, and struggle with anxiety or depression. Repeated academic failures further deplete their resources. Research shows that multiple experiences of poor school performance may contribute to the development of emotional difficulties. Attribution theories suggest that students with learning difficulties are more likely than their peers to develop negative thinking patterns, where success results from external, variable factors. At the same time, failure is attributed to internal causes. As a result, individuals with these learning difficulties may exhibit more emotional symptoms than their peers without such challenges (Firth, Frydenberg, Steeg, Bond, 2013; Piedra-Martínez, Soriano-Ferrer, Arteaga, 2017; Livingston, Siegel, Ribary, 2018; Sainio, Eklund, Ahonen, Kiuru, 2019).

Many researchers point out that learning difficulties during schooling can lead to emotional, social, and behavioural problems. Frequently, students facing these difficulties experience both externalising disorders, such as hyperactivity, oppositional defiant behaviours, and conduct issues, as well as internalising disorders, including anxiety and depression (Martínez, Semrud-Clikeman, 2004; Carroll, Iles, 2006; Knivsberg, Andreassen, 2008; Huc-Chabrolle, Barthez, Tripi,

Barthelemy, Bonnet-Brihault, 2010; Mammarella et al., 2014; Boyes, Leitao, Claessen, Badcock, Nayton, 2016; Cristofani et al., 2023).

Students diagnosed with specific learning difficulties exhibit higher levels of internalising symptoms, such as separation anxiety, generalised anxiety, and social anxiety, compared to their peers without such difficulties. Moreover, students with dyslexia are more likely to display somatic and depressive symptoms. Regarding externalising disorders, oppositional defiant behaviours and conduct issues are commonly observed among students with specific learning difficulties. The most frequently co-occurring disorder, however, is ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), diagnosed in 25% to 45% of students with specific learning difficulties (Willcutt et al., 2013; Horbach, Mayer, Scharke, Heim, Günther, 2020; Fabiano et al., 2021).

Exciting results are provided by Eric G. Willcutt and Bruce F. Pennington (2000) studies. They argue that students with specific learning difficulties are more often diagnosed with conduct disorders and ADHD compared to other categories of developmental disorders. Additionally, there is a higher likelihood that they will meet the diagnostic criteria for oppositional defiant disorder and ADHD, resulting in a dual diagnosis. Meanwhile, Linda Visser and her team (2020) emphasise that students with specific learning difficulties more frequently exhibit mental health problems compared to children without such difficulties. In a study involving over 3,000 children aged 9-10, the rates of co-occurring disorders were as follows: 21% of those with specific learning difficulties were diagnosed with anxiety disorders, 28% with depression, 28% with ADHD, and 22% with conduct disorders.

Although studies on the behaviours of adolescents with learning difficulties are relatively rare, there is evidence suggesting that as these students age, they continue to be more vulnerable to experiencing loneliness, stress, and anxiety (Lackaye, Margalit, 2006; Feurer, Andrews, 2009; Wilson, Armstrong, Furrie, Walcot, 2009). Additionally, these individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of aggression, tendencies toward delinquency, and a greater inclination to engage in risky behaviours (McNamara, Vervaeke, Willoughby, 2008).

Rebellious and aggressive behaviours may be secondary responses to difficult situations, serving as a means of coping with them (Dahle, Knivsberg, Andreassen, 2011; Selenius, Hellström, Belfrage, 2011; Pierce, Wechsler-Zimring, Noam, Wolf, Tami Katzir, 2013). Such behaviours can also result from difficulties in phonological processing, where challenges in understanding sounds may contribute to aggression. Students with dyslexia may also avoid new challenges due to limitations in short-term auditory memory and information processing, leading to adverse reactions in unfamiliar and demanding situations (Li, Chen, 2017; Yasir et al., 2023).



Research on students with learning difficulties and social maladjustment has repeatedly shown that, in addition to typical school problems, these students face numerous challenges in the socio-emotional sphere. These include peer rejection, feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, higher levels of depression and anxiety, as well as more significant behavioural difficulties and a tendency to withdraw compared to children without learning difficulties (Weiner, Schneider, 2002; Dyson, 2003; Al-Yagon, 2007; Estell et al., 2008; Algozzine, Wang, Violette, 2011).

## **The Role of Mentoring in Supporting Students with Dyslexia and the Risk of Social Maladjustment**

For students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment, an individualised approach is crucial for providing adequate support. Each student has different needs, so mentors must use strategies tailored to their mentees' specific difficulties and strengths. In the context of dyslexia, this may include developing compensatory techniques, such as multimedia tools or alternative learning methods that support the learning process. Meanwhile, students at risk of social maladjustment may require more support in areas such as interpersonal relationships and emotional management. An individualised approach allows the mentor to understand the student's specific challenges better, leading to more effective support and improved outcomes in both academic and social life.

## **Emotional Support and Building Self-Esteem**

Mentoring is vital in building the self-esteem of students with dyslexia and those at risk of social adjustment difficulties. These students often struggle with low self-esteem, stemming from their educational challenges and a lack of acceptance from peers. Through regular meetings with a mentor, they receive emotional support, helping them rebuild confidence in their abilities. This process involves empathy and understanding and reinforces positive changes, even small ones, which motivates further development. When students feel supported, their engagement in learning increases and their social relationships improve, directly impacting their overall emotional well-being and academic success.

Research indicates that students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment often struggle with emotional difficulties, such as low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, or anxiety. Additionally, they may have difficulties identifying and understanding emotional signals, which negatively affects their interpersonal relationships. Socially, they may exhibit passive behaviours, fear of interactions, difficulty building and maintaining relationships, and actions that

conflict with social norms, often due to a lack of practical conflict resolution skills (Backer, Neuhauser, 2003; McNulty, 2003; Carroll, Ilnes, 2006; Mugnaini, Lassi, La Malfa, Albertini, 2009; Terras, Thomson, Minnis, 2009; Eissa, 2010; Gallegos, Langley, Villegas, 2012; Haft, Chen, Leblanc, Tencza, Hoeft, 2019; Giovagnoli et al., 2020). According to Ann-Mari Knivsberg and Anne Brit Andreassen (2008), students with dyslexia may experience adaptive and emotional difficulties exacerbated by attention, memory, language, and social problems.

Due to frequent academic failures, students with dyslexia and social adjustment problems may have lower self-esteem. As a result, they find it harder to cope with stressful situations compared to their peers who do not experience such difficulties (Amahazion, 2021).

Aggressive or socially unacceptable behaviours that may occur in adolescents with dyslexia have roots in various factors. These include social and emotional pressure, excessive expectations, difficulties understanding their emotions, and frustration from frequent experiences of failure. Collaboration with a mentor helps alleviate these challenges by offering emotional support and tools for managing emotions (Vaughn, Bos, Schumm, 2006; Krasowicz-Kupis, 2008; Gallegos, Langley, Villegas, 2012).

## **The Role of Mentoring in Developing Social Skills**

Mentoring is a valuable tool for supporting students' social skills development. Students can enhance their communication abilities, learn to collaborate and build relationships through regular interaction with a mentor. In turn, it may assist them in functioning more effectively within peer groups and mitigate the risk of social maladjustment.

Cultivating social skills in students with dyslexia and social maladjustment is critical in fostering their development in educational and interpersonal contexts. Dyslexia is one of the most common specific learning disorders, and social maladjustment, which manifests as difficulties in adapting to social norms and expectations, can lead to isolation, challenges in building relationships, and diminished self-esteem. Consequently, interventions aimed at enhancing social competencies are paramount in enabling these students to function more effectively within the school environment and society.

Dyslexia impacts language skills, exacerbating academic challenges. Students with dyslexia may encounter difficulties in reading, writing, processing information, and organising their thoughts, affecting their social interactions. Numerous studies indicate that students with dyslexia are more likely than their peers to experience lower self-esteem, which in turn may lead to social withdrawal, fear of exposure in school settings, and difficulties in establishing and

maintaining relationships. A noteworthy study concerning emotional self-awareness and assessing one's social competencies in adolescents was conducted by Izabella Kucharczyk and Agnieszka Dłużniewska (2017). The authors compared the levels of both variables in groups of individuals with and without dyslexia. The findings revealed that adolescents with dyslexia demonstrated more significant difficulties in analysing their emotions, verbalising their feelings, and being aware of physiological responses in emotionally challenging situations compared to those without dyslexia. The study further indicated that students with dyslexia rated their social competencies lower in such areas as initiating contact, supporting others, expressing emotions in social interactions, assertive behaviour, and developing social skills than their peers without dyslexia. Given that social competencies play a pivotal role in effective societal functioning, the lower levels of these skills among students with dyslexia underscore the need for supportive interventions, such as training programs focused on emotional and social development.

Significant research on improving social skills among students with dyslexia was presented by Haniye M. Esmmaeelbeygi and her team (2020). The authors propose that interventions aimed at increasing mindfulness and enhancing the ability to express one's needs can positively impact the development of social competencies in this group of students. Of particular interest is the fact that the intervention incorporates elements of meditation, which aids in improving relaxation and concentration, thereby fostering the development of social skills.

Conversely, social maladjustment is characterised by difficulties adhering to social norms, impulsivity, challenges in emotional regulation, and frequent conflicts with others. Students experiencing social maladjustment struggle with relationships with both peers and teachers, frequently exhibiting oppositional or defiant behaviour, which further exacerbates their social isolation (Chow, Wehby, 2018).

## **Examples of Best Practices**

In practice, mentoring can take various forms, ranging from regular individual meetings to group programs, where students can work together to develop their skills under an experienced mentor's guidance. In some schools, programs that combine mentoring with other forms of support, such as pedagogical therapy or psychological counselling, allow for a comprehensive approach to student's problems.

In recent years, programs supporting students with specific learning difficulties have shifted their focus not only on academic achievements and adaptation to the school environment but also on their overall well-being, especially in emotional and social development (Cavioni, Grazzani, Ornaghi, 2017).

One auspicious form of mentoring is peer tutoring, which involves collaboration between students of similar age but varying skill levels. Research by Barwasser, Urton, and Grünke (2021) has demonstrated that peer tutoring can effectively support students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment. Peer support facilitates more efficient learning, fosters the development of bonds, and strengthens the sense of belonging within the peer group. A similar view is shared by Stephanie Haft and her team (2019), who argue that mentoring programs with well-prepared teachers and students help mitigate the socio-emotional difficulties of students with specific learning difficulties and ADHD.

One example of a successful mentoring program is the Youth Mentoring Program (YMP). This mentoring program focuses on supporting students with various difficulties, including dyslexia and adaptive challenges. The program includes individual meetings between mentors and students, as well as support in the development of social and emotional skills. YMP aims to improve students' self-esteem, support them in building relationships with their peers, and motivate them to achieve better academic results<sup>2</sup>.

Another program is the DoCS Mentorship Program (DMP). This program is aimed directly at students, combining educational support with social-emotional development. As part of the program, mentors—often adults who have experienced similar challenges—help students manage school-related problems and develop the skills necessary for success in both academic and personal life<sup>3</sup>.

A further example of a mentoring program is "Kinship of Greater Minneapolis", which supports children and adolescents aged 5–15 with a parent or parents serving a prison sentence. "Kinship" focuses on providing support through individual mentoring, typically lasting around three years. During the program, the mentor builds a strong, trusting relationship with the mentee, meeting weekly. Shared activities like doing homework or going for walks help provide the child with a sense of stability and security, with the mentor becoming a reliable support point in the young person's life. The "Kinship of Greater Minneapolis" program is a model example of a mentoring initiative<sup>4</sup>.

An example of effective practices in supporting students with learning difficulties is peer mentoring. Peer groups act as a natural source of support, enhancing the sense of belonging and acceptance among students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment. Positive relationships with peers increase motivation for learning while reducing the stress associated with the educational challenges these students face. Being part of the school community fosters greater empathy, understanding, and motivation to engage.

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <https://youthmp.org>

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from: <https://docs.rutgers.edu/mentoring>

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/41-1624831>

Support for students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment can take various forms, such as assistance with learning, sharing notes, or explaining the content presented in class. Collaboration with peers facilitates the development of socio-emotional competencies, positively influencing their self-esteem and reducing the risk of social exclusion. Positive attitudes from peers, such as a willingness to help and understanding, can minimise problematic situations and strengthen the community.

It is also important to note that the role of peers in the support process goes beyond direct assistance. Peer mentoring plays a crucial role in fostering a positive school climate that encourages the acceptance of diversity in students' abilities and needs.

Mentoring programs are an effective support tool for students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment. Through an individualised approach and a long-term mentor-student relationship, these programs can significantly enhance academic outcomes and foster the development of social and emotional competencies, thereby improving students' overall quality of life. Further research into the effectiveness of different forms of mentoring could assist in optimising these programs and better tailoring them to the specific needs of students.

## **Conclusions**

Mentoring is an effective tool for supporting students with dyslexia and those at risk of social maladjustment. Through an individualised approach, emotional support, and the development of social skills, mentoring can significantly improve educational outcomes and the quality of life for these students. In light of modern education's increasing challenges, it is worth considering the introduction of mentoring as a permanent support measure in schools, particularly for students with special educational needs.

The complexity of the issues faced by students diagnosed with dyslexia and at risk of social maladjustment requires a multifaceted and individualised approach. Mentoring has proven to be an effective means of supporting these students' educational, social, and emotional development. A consistent, trust-based relationship with a mentor allows students to overcome educational barriers, build positive self-esteem and improve their interpersonal skills.

Mentoring programs demonstrate that individual support has a lasting positive impact on both academic performance and the social functioning of students. Particularly valuable are peer mentoring programs, which foster bonds between students and enhance their motivation and sense of belonging within a group.

Mentoring also helps to mitigate the effects of emotional difficulties, such as anxiety, depression, or low self-esteem, which often accompany students with dyslexia and social maladjustment. Programs incorporating elements of mindfulness training and emotional regulation techniques, such as meditation-based interventions, have also yielded positive results.

In summary, the effectiveness of mentoring programs in working with students with complex educational and social needs confirms their value as a support tool. With the growing demand for individualised learning processes, implementing such programs is essential to modern education. Further research into different forms of mentoring can assist in better adapting these programs to the needs of students and ensuring their comprehensive development.

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## Różnorodność w podejściu edukacyjnym: mentoring jako narzędzie wspierające uczniów z diagnozą dysleksji i zagrożenia niedostosowaniem społecznym

### Streszczenie

Współczesny system edukacyjny staje przed wyzwaniem sprostania potrzebom uczniów z dysleksją i ryzykiem niedostosowania społecznego. Tacy uczniowie często napotykają na trudności w nauce, co prowadzi do obniżonej samooceny, wycofania z życia szkolnego i problemów z adaptacją społeczną. Mentoring, oparty na indywidualnych relacjach, stanowi obiecujące narzędzie wsparcia, pomagając w przezwyciężaniu barier edukacyjnych, rozwoju kompetencji społecznych i lepszym zrozumieniu emocji. Celem artykułu jest ukazanie znaczenia mentoringu jako formy wsparcia dla uczniów z dysleksją i ryzykiem zagrożenia niedostosowaniem społecznym. Mentoring wspomaga budowanie pozytywnej samooceny, rozwój umiejętności interpersonalnych oraz radzenie sobie z wyzwaniami emocjonalnymi, co jest kluczowe dla młodzieży zagrożonej społecznym wykluczeniem. Przykłady programów wskazują na pozytywny wpływ mentoringu na wyniki edukacyjne, integrację społeczną i redukcję problemów emocjonalnych. Badania potwierdzają, że długotrwałe relacje mentoringowe przynoszą trwałe korzyści, takie jak lepsza motywacja, wyższa samoocena i lepsze funkcjonowanie społeczne.

**Słowa kluczowe:** mentoring, uczeń z dysleksją, uczeń z ryzyka zagrożenia niedostosowania społecznego, wsparcie edukacyjne, wsparcie emocjonalne.



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Magdalena WÓJCIK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2836-8742>

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland

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**Contact:** magdalena.wojcik@mail.umcs.pl

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## Activating Methods for Developing Students' Critical Competencies in Inclusive Education

### Abstract

All students need key competencies and essential skills for self-fulfilment, personal development, employability, social inclusion, and active citizenship.

The development of critical competencies, their importance and ensuring education and learning focused on their implementation should be implemented by establishing good practices in terms of better support for educational staff, updating the assessment of methods and tools, and introducing new and innovative forms of teaching and learning.

Therefore, activating methods is the guiding principle of the teaching-learning program for students with and without disabilities.

The methods used should take into account the individual needs and capabilities of students, which in the case of an often very diverse inclusive class may prove to be a big challenge, especially since, in addition to adapting educational requirements, the teacher must constantly take into account the degree, scope and possibilities of implementing key competencies.

**Keywords:** key competencies, inclusive education, activating methods.

### Introduction

Everyone has the right to high-quality, inclusive education, training and life-long learning that develops critical competencies and essential skills. All stu-

dents need key competencies and basic skills for self-fulfilment, personal development, employability, social inclusion, and active citizenship.

Therefore, new requirements are dictated for revolutionary changes in education and competencies that must be taught to meet the requirements of the modern labour market, which is beginning to function in a digital environment. Today's education system is trying to transform into an ecosystem in which its elements must connect and interact with each other and respond flexibly to the needs of society (Rasskazova et al., 2020).

Competence refers to the complex combination of knowledge, skills, understanding, values, attitudes and desires that lead to effective, embodied human action in the world in a specific domain. Achievement at work, in personal relationships or civil society is not based simply on the accumulation of second-hand knowledge stored as data but on the combination of this knowledge with skills, values, attitudes, desires and motivation and its application to specific human settings in a specific point in the trajectory in time. Competence implies a sense of agency, action and values (Crick, 2008; Tiana et al., 2011).

Key competencies as a phenomenon and the need to consider activating teaching methods constitute a link between family education, upbringing and education in the school environment and the social impact on human development (Szókö, Benková, 2022).

## Theoretical and Legal Context of Key Competencies

In 2006, the European Parliament and the Council adopted a Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. They defined each European citizen's competencies for personal fulfilment and development, employment, social inclusion and active citizenship.

This document defines vital competencies as "a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the situation" (OJ of the European Union of 30/12/2006 L 394/13)<sup>1</sup>.

Key competencies are developed from a lifelong learning perspective, from early childhood to adulthood, through formal, non-formal and informal learning in all contexts, including family, school, workplace, neighbourhood and other communities (OJ of the European Union C 189/7).

Eight key competencies have been established:

- literacy competencies – understood as the ability to identify, understand, express, create and interpret concepts, feelings, facts and opinions in speech

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: Recommendation of the European Parliament and the Council of 18 December 2006 on Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning. Official Journal of the European Union. (2006/962/EC). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2006:394:0010:0018:en:PDF>.

- and writing, using images, sounds and digital materials in all fields and contexts;
- multilingual competencies, defining the ability to use different languages correctly and effectively to communicate, and their scope of skills essentially coincides with the ability to understand and create information;
  - mathematical competencies and competencies in science, technology and engineering, relating to the ability to develop and use mathematical thinking and perception to solve problems in everyday situations, the ability and willingness to explain the natural world using existing knowledge and methods, including observations and experiments, in order to formulate questions and drawing evidence-based conclusions and applying that knowledge and methods in response to perceived human needs or requirements. Competences in science, technology and engineering include understanding changes caused by human activities and understanding one's responsibility as a citizen;
  - digital competence, including the confident, critical and responsible use and interest in digital technologies for learning, work and participation in society;
  - personal, social and learning-to-learn competencies, i.e. the ability to self-reflect, manage time and information effectively, work constructively with others, remain resilient and manage one's learning and career;
  - citizenship competencies, understood as the ability to act as responsible citizens and participate fully in civic and social life, based on an understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global events and sustainable development;
  - entrepreneurship competencies, defined as the ability to use opportunities and ideas and transform them into value for other people;
  - cultural awareness and expression competencies, including understanding and respecting how ideas and meanings are creatively expressed and communicated in different cultures through different types of art and other cultural forms (OJ of the European Union C 189/9-11)<sup>2</sup>.

Competency needs are not static; they change throughout life and generations. It is, therefore, crucial that all young people and adults have the opportunity to acquire the required competencies in initial education and training, higher education, adult learning or various forms of informal learning.

The development of critical competencies, their validity and the provision of education and learning oriented towards their implementation should be imple-

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<sup>2</sup> Zalecenia Rady w sprawie kompetencji kluczowych w procesie uczenia się przez całe życie (2018/C 189/01). Retrieved from: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)&from=en](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01)&from=en).

mented by establishing good practices in terms of better supporting educational staff in carrying out their tasks and improving education, as well as updating the assessment of methods and tools and introducing new and innovative forms teaching and learning (Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 25)<sup>3</sup>.

The Council's guidelines clearly emphasize that the role of education systems, and more specifically teachers, is to develop students' key competencies, understood as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that go beyond the concept of focusing on knowledge alone, so that as adults they can function freely in the surrounding and constantly changing reality (Furgoł<sup>4</sup>, n.d., Kucharczyk, Wójcik, 2024).

The common feature of these views is the postulate of moving away from the traditional education model based on transferring knowledge (teaching) towards a model based on creating a space for independent learning. A good school is based on the student's search for sources of knowledge and develops skills to effectively fulfil many life roles (Skałbania, 2020).

The fundamental competencies approach, mainly focusing on cross-curricular key competencies, requires that the school-level curriculum is not designed as a collection of different (separate) subjects but creates links between subject areas. It also requires closer cooperation among teaching staff (Gordon et al., 2009).

Implementing a new curriculum requires school leadership to create a supportive framework aligned with the curriculum vision that helps teachers understand the curriculum and its positive impact on student learning. Implementing change also requires a simultaneous, coordinated transformation of many aspects, including practice, thinking, systems, behaviours and beliefs throughout the school. This iterative process often leads to the development of professional learning opportunities to increase teachers' knowledge of how competencies can be used in specific areas of the curriculum and how to engage students in crucial competencies (Hamilton et al., 2013).

The core curriculum of general education is one of Poland's most important foundations for school work and teacher work. Analyzing its provisions, a direct reference to understanding the sense and importance of individual vital competencies and the possibilities of shaping them at a given educational stage is no-

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<sup>3</sup> Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. OJ C 417, 15.12.2015, p. 25. Retrieved from: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215(02)).

<sup>4</sup> Furgoł, S. (n.d.). Wzorcowe materiały dydaktyczne w zakresie: kompetencje kluczowe. Część III: Poziom – szkoła podstawowa i szkoła ponadpodstawowa. Retrieved from: [https://www.wcdn.wroc.pl/dsc/wzorcowe\\_materiały\\_SP\\_i\\_LO/DSC\\_kompetencje\\_kluczowe\\_ponadpodstawowa.pdf](https://www.wcdn.wroc.pl/dsc/wzorcowe_materiały_SP_i_LO/DSC_kompetencje_kluczowe_ponadpodstawowa.pdf).



ticeable. Regulation of the Minister of National Education of February 14, 2017, on the core curriculum for preschool education and the core curriculum for general education for primary schools, including students with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities, general education for first-cycle vocational schools, general education for particular school preparing for work and general education for post-secondary school specifies that the most important skills developed as part of general education in primary school are:

- efficient communication in Polish and modern foreign languages;
- efficient use of mathematics tools in everyday life, as well as developing mathematical thinking;
- searching, organizing, critically analyzing and using information from various sources;
- creative problem-solving in various fields with conscious use of methods and tools derived from computer science, including programming;
- problem-solving, also using mediation techniques;
- teamwork and social activity;
- active participation in the school's cultural life, the local community and the country.

The task of teachers is to create such a learning environment that key competencies can be developed appropriately for students' developmental ages. It serves, among others, developing teaching programs that emphasize the organization of the teaching process in such a way that it serves the development of these competencies, using, among others, appropriate teaching methods and work techniques. It should also be remembered that diversifying students' functioning should consider their individual development and educational needs, difficulties, barriers, and challenging behaviours. Looking at the group as a whole, taking into account the individual predispositions and challenges of students with and without disabilities, combined with the extensive knowledge of teachers, will allow for the appropriate selection of work methods and thus create an optimal environment for developing the potential of each student.

## **Activating methods in inclusive education**

In many cases, the traditional approach seems to bring good results. However, no one disputes the fact that the development of active skills requires the use of active learning methods. The entire school community needs a solid understanding of key competencies. Within this framework, different teaching methods and styles can produce good results because they are based on joint responsibility for the education of teachers and students (with a transition from teaching to learning), the organization of the school promoting strong connec-

tions between subjects and the introduction of various forms instead of rigid class and subject structures. Many innovative projects are based on developing key competencies, even if this was not the declared goal. In this sense, adopting the Recommendation can be considered an incentive for innovation in school practice or at least for reflection and critical evaluation of the teaching methods and means used (Gordon et al., 2009).

Activating methods are "a group of teaching methods that enable the release of multilateral activity of students in the teaching process, at the same time promoting the transition to an increasingly higher level of activity" (Marszałek, 2004, p. 210).

It means that the use of activating methods increases the activity of students' motivation, promotes students' autonomy and creativity, and causes a transition from traditional to innovative teaching (Micieta et al., 2020).

According to Jeziorska (1996, p. 91), activating teaching, also called exploratory, problem-based and research teaching, involves specific actions by the student. Therefore, the teacher directs, stimulates and supports students in their development.

Based on the division distinguished by Krzyżewska (1998), activating teaching methods are:

1. Integrating methods that relax and unwind, putting in a good mood and friendly atmosphere. They ensure safety in the group, guarantee a sense of identity, teach effective communication, help sort out problems, and teach creative thinking and cooperation.
2. Methods of creating and defining concepts – teach how to analyze, define, negotiate and adopt different positions.
3. Hierarchization methods – teach how to analyze, classify and order in superiority-inferiority relationships.
4. Methods of creative problem solving – teach children to discuss, think critically and creatively, combine knowledge with experience and solve problems.
5. Methods of working in cooperation – teach cooperation and acceptance of individual differences, efficient communication and negotiation, and working in and with a group. In such conditions, there is no competition but mutual help, and everyone has a chance to speak, argue and discuss.
6. Diagnostic methods consist of collecting information about the course and results of a specific state of affairs by inferring, checking, assessing and explaining the causes.
7. Discussion methods – teach how to discuss and listen to others, as well as negotiate and adopt different points of view.
8. Methods that develop creative thinking, teach to think creatively and discover students' predispositions and abilities.

9. Group decision-making methods include effective participation in discussions, responsibility for one's and the group's decisions, and teaching decision-making based on known facts.
10. Planning methods – allow one to fantasize and dream and plan and make one's dreams come true.
11. Educational games – teach to follow established rules, allow the students to feel the joy of winning, and develop the ability to lose.
12. Accelerated learning methods allow quick, stress-free, lasting knowledge acquisition.
13. Evaluation methods – allow one to assess oneself and others and teach him or her to accept criticism and praise.

In teaching using activating methods, the teacher becomes more of a sage, mentor and trainer than a provider of information and knowledge that the student can acquire, among others, from the textbook. The teacher accompanies students in exploring the world, inspiring and provoking thinking (Drzewiecki, 2014).

Therefore, activating methods is the guiding principle of the teaching-learning program (Szcotka, Szewczuk, 2019).

Although this topic is crucial from the point of view of learning and upbringing in inclusive education, the research conducted so far mainly focuses only on single types of activating methods or analyses only the general application of innovative methods in education (Dunlosky et al., 201; Safapour et al., 2019; Micieta et al., 2020). Moreover, the literature on the subject is also poor in research on the group of non-disabled students and their disabled peers, so there is no possibility to refer to the universality of the application of methods activating students among students with special educational needs and their possible modification forms.

Hooijdonk, Mainhard, Kroesbergen, and Tartwijk (2020) in their study, designed creative problem-solving tasks for primary education that represent this complete CPS model and investigated whether compelling fact and problem retrieval were positively related to the creativity of the ideas found. Furthermore, they also investigated whether finding solutions is feasible for these young students and how they select the most creative ideas. Bayesian analyses indicated a positive relationship between fact and problem retrieval, as well as the number of ideas generated and the originality of these ideas. Furthermore, problem retrieval seemed to be positively related to the completeness of ideas, whereas fact retrieval was not. They also found that primary school students could identify their most creative ideas. Students did not seem to underestimate certain aspects of creativity when using solution-finding. The results indicate that, in order to achieve more original solutions, teachers could embed fact and problem retrieval in their CPS teaching practices. The results also indicate that primary school students can recognize creativity.

In contrast, the purpose of Maker et al.'s (2023) study of creative problem-solving characteristics in young children was to determine whether the percentage of creative behaviours declined, remained the same, or increased as children entered school and moved into first grade and describe differences and similarities across three age groups and ten assessment domains. Using a play-based assessment with developmentally appropriate, flexible materials and activities that were engaging for young children, trained observers conducted assessments, took photographs and videos, observed problem-solving behaviours, entered behaviours into a database, compared children's performance with others in the talent groups, and made decisions about children's strengths in ten ability domains. In the talent domains, of the 29 behaviours included, the percentage of 18 creative problem-solving behaviours increased over the three years; nine behaviours declined at age 5. They increased at age 6, and 4 behaviours declined from age 5 to 6. The patterns varied across the talent domains. The researchers concluded that age-related development, teaching methods, culture, and other factors interact in the development of creative problem-solving. Teaching methods that enhance creativity can positively affect children's creative problem-solving development.

A longitudinal study by Baines, Blatchford and Chowne (2007) examined the effectiveness of the SPRinG program, which was developed in collaboration between researchers and teachers and aimed to provide teachers with strategies for increasing student group work in an "authentic" classroom setting. The evaluation study compared students in SPRinG classes trained in group work skills with those who did not achieve similar academic results. The experimental and control groups comprised 560 and 1027 students (8–10 years old). The study found that SPRinG students made more remarkable progress in their academic achievement than the control group.

Many studies have investigated the benefits of implementing gamification methods, showing that students are more engaged and motivated during classes.

In addition to the competition and scoring games that further engage students, player interactions positively affect students' social skills. Games should be designed to increase interaction and active participation to achieve optimal results rather than simply providing entertainment. Teachers should consider using gaming to engage students in their studies and to experience things instead of just memorizing things, but as these studies have shown, further research into the combination of engagement and specific content is needed (Burguillo, 2010; Son et al., 2011; Berkling, Thomas, 2013; Ptak et al., 2016; Perttula, Tuomi, 2017). Also, games used in education are useful for learning mathematics (Baldeon et al., 2015), vocabulary, and motivation to learn (Walsh, 2014).

It should be emphasized, however, that the available materials and analyses do not refer specifically, or only to a small extent, to the effectiveness of meth-

ods activating students in developing specific competencies per the assumptions of lifelong learning.

## **Key competencies in inclusive education and possibilities of their implementation using activating methods**

As the Council Recommendation makes clear, everyone has the right to good quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and cope effectively with changes in the labour market. Everyone has the right to timely and tailored support to improve their prospects for employment or self-employment. It includes the right to receive support in finding a job, training and changing professional qualifications (OJ of the European Union C 243/10)<sup>5</sup>.

There is a close connection between the skills developed as a part of general education in primary school and the key competencies strongly emphasized in the European guidelines.

Analyzing in detail the guidelines of the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of February 14, 2017, on the core curriculum for preschool education and the core curriculum for general education for primary schools, including for students with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities, and general education for stage I vocational schools, general education for a particular school preparing for work and general education for a post-secondary school (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356) and the resulting recommendations, many activating methods adequate in a given competence area can be indicated, which may have a positive impact on the development of individual key competences, thus facilitating the teaching and educational work of primary school teachers and allowing more significant and more committed participation of students in this process, both non-disabled students and those with special developmental and educational needs.

The project method, strongly emphasized in the above regulations, can effectively acquire the necessary competencies. It also helps develop students' entrepreneurship and creativity and enables the use of innovative programs and organizational or methodological solutions in the education process. The project method assumes significant participant independence and responsibility, creating conditions for students to manage the learning process individually. It supports the integration of the class team, in which students, thanks to group work, learn problem-solving, active listening, effective communication, and

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<sup>5</sup> Council Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02). Retrieved from: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(02))

strengthen their self-esteem. The project method introduces students to planning and organizing work and self-assessment. Students should receive assistance from a teacher/guardian when working on projects. Teachers using the project method can individualize work techniques by differentiating the requirements (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356, p. 14). However, this is not the only form of activating students, so it is vital to indicate specific possibilities of using several effective activating methods for non-disabled children and their disabled peers.

For students with disabilities, teaching is adapted to their psychophysical capabilities and learning pace. The choice of forms of individualization of teaching should result from recognizing the potential of each student. If a teacher allows a student to achieve success to the best of his or her abilities, then he or she has a chance for general and educational development. Therefore, the teacher should select tasks in such a way that, on the one hand, they do not exceed the student's capabilities (prevent success) and, on the other hand, they do not reduce the motivation to cope with challenges (Journal of Laws of 2017, item 356, p. 13)<sup>6</sup>.

A detailed analysis of publications on activating education methods (Kujawiński, 1990, Radecki, 1992; Krzyżewska, 1998; Rau, Ziętkiewicz, 2000; Taraszkiewicz, 2000; Karbowniczek, 2016, Marek, 2017; Stańdo, Spławska-Murmyło, 2017, Gadamska, 2018; Lipowska-Kuźba, Dłutowska-Osik, 2019; Danielewicz, 2020, Kubik, 2020) and their practical application (Senderowska, 2001; Ordon, 2015; Furmaniak, Olkowska, 2017; Szczotka, Szewczuk, 2019; Kubik, 2020; Micieta et al., 2020) allowed for the identification of helpful methods which, with appropriate modification and adaptation to the individual needs and capabilities of students in a given class, will enable more effective implementation of EU guidelines and the development of key competencies with the most significant possible involvement of all students in inclusive education.

Activating methods that will help students implement these competencies include:

#### 1. Literacy competencies and multilingual competencies

- mental map – helps to learn new grammatical rules, repeat knowledge or systematize issues from literature;
- meta-plan – it encourages critical analysis of facts and formulation of judgments and opinions;
- decision tree – it serves to make the right choice and make a decision with full awareness of its consequences and worth using when analyzing texts, literature, school readings or grammatical rules of statements;

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<sup>6</sup> Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej (2017) w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły podstawowej, w tym dla uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu umiarkowanym lub znacznym, kształcenia ogólnego dla branżowej szkoły I stopnia, kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły specjalnej przysposabiającej do pracy oraz kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły policealnej. Retrieved from: <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu20170000356>

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- 5-step reading – a method of searching, organizing and using information from various sources, encourages systematic reading exercises, gives students a positive attitude towards reading, it is also helpful for individual work at home;
  - Point discussion is an alternative to traditional questioning. It simultaneously allows the collection of broader material regarding the student's progress in learning and the development of his attitudes and personal culture. It accustoms students to communicate in a substantive, open and cultural manner;
  - 6 thinking hats – develops the ability to communicate in various situations, present one's position, and take into account other people's views;
  - didactic games – teach to follow established rules, give the opportunity to feel the joy of winning and develop the ability to accept a loss, increase the attractiveness of classes;
  - brainstorming – to gather many competing or complementary hypotheses for solving the problem to which a given methodological unit or its fragment is devoted;
  - snowball – a helpful method when creating definitions, gives each student a chance to formulate their thoughts on a given topic, acquire new experiences and communicate skills;
  - unfinished sentence technique – develops the ability to express oneself independently and matchmaking;
  - “mug” plot – inspires the student to creative work, which takes place as a result of providing only a specific general plan (characters, plot, place of action);
  - portfolio – a method of collecting materials on a topic selected by students or given by the teacher into folders.
2. Mathematical competencies and competencies in science, technology and engineering
- memory hooks – a method that uses natural abilities to create mental images of various states of affairs. It is imagination training, a technique for better-remembering numbers, quantities, and relationships, and building association systems;
  - brainstorming – which, in this case, can be used to invent new solutions, methods of calculation, and explanations of phenomena;
  - wastebasket and suitcase – help to analyze both natural and technological issues, searching for the most appropriate solutions and eliminating unnecessary ones;
  - guide text method – the problem is presented as a structure with insufficient data that the student must complete through exploration;

- decision tree – can help to analyze mathematical, natural and technical issues actively;
  - memory hooks – in this case, they may help remember dates, time relations, the order of occurring phenomena or the multiplication table;
  - didactic games based on dominoes help to consolidate all dependencies and sequences of phenomena and events, and various lotteries, guessing games, tests, and association games can be used to consolidate the acquired knowledge;
  - case study – involves analyzing specific events and relationships, making it easier to understand all phenomena similar to the analyzed one, developing skills such as critical analysis of information, presentation of own opinions, teamwork;
  - jigsaw – is an example of collaborative learning. It is universal and can be used on various objects. It is used when students have to learn a certain amount of material that can be divided into coherent fragments.
3. Digital competencies
- “for and against” debate is a method of analyzing an issue from different points of view.
  - elements of drama – role-playing;
  - chain association method and fish skeleton method – these methods will find applications in analyzing threatening phenomena and essential factors affecting the effectiveness of operations in cyberspace;
  - applications and programs that enable the identification, filtering and organize knowledge, such as WebQuest, ChatGPT;
  - Gamification methods, e.g. Kahoot, learning apps, or work based on programs/applications, e.g. Padlet, Canva, Glogster, and Google Drive.
4. Personal, social and learning to learn competences
- desert island – a method of practical team cooperation and group work, building interpersonal bonds, and making individual and group decisions;
  - “for and against” debate, decision tree, six thinking hats, drama elements, memory hooks, spider’s web and debate – in this case, all of these methods will help to find alternative solutions in terms of personal challenges, e.g. related to learning methods, or social challenges resulting from, for example, the diversity of the internal group;
  - Portfolio method enables planning, organizing, and evaluating learning.
5. Citizenship and entrepreneurship competences
- debate “for and against” or discussion, priority pyramid, brainstorming, six thinking hats, didactic games, decision tree, fish skeleton, case study, educational project method, WebQuest method;



- SWOT technique – involves a team analysis and assessment of a specific problem or event. It is beneficial in making certain decisions. It requires approaching the problem critically and creatively. It involves students contrasting characteristics and views. Thanks to this technique, the student can distinguish positive and negative behaviours and perceive threats.
6. Cultural awareness and expression competence
- elements of drama – role-playing, “mug” plot, portfolio, discussions, group work, six thinking hats, didactic games – simulations, unfinished sentences technique, mental map, project method;
  - school lessons should be supplemented with participation in concerts, plays and music broadcasts; lessons in concert halls, music schools, museums, and galleries; co-creating concerts, presentations, and music events; organizing, promoting and participating in “children to children” concerts; participation in interdisciplinary class and school projects;
  - meetings with artists; learning and co-creating local musical folklore; exploring monuments; participating in reviews, festivals and music competitions;
  - creating class and school work or participating in art competitions.

## Summary

Teachers working in classes with non-disabled and disabled children should remember that their teaching and educational work should be carefully thought out and planned and how important it is to select more exciting tasks and activities that take into account the child’s interests and abilities (Lipowska-Kuźba, Dłutowska-Osik, 2019).

Despite knowledge about the typology of activating methods, teachers may have difficulty selecting appropriate techniques to meet student’s individual needs and abilities in a diverse, inclusive group. The need to adapt or modify methods and effectively implement them in the course of classes are difficulties that may stand in the way of implementing the assumptions of the core curriculum.

Another significant difficulty may be the appropriate construction of activating influences to implement the critical competencies discussed in the article so that younger students can actively develop these competencies and skills at the early school education stage.

Using activating teaching and learning methods in the classroom helps the students and makes the teacher’s work easier. However, this often requires many preliminary actions and increased work. A teacher who decides to work using nontraditional methods must:

- prepare materials in advance,
- arrange the study space (properly arrange chairs, benches, prepare materials, et cetera.),
- overcome his/her uncertainty before experimenting with the lesson,
- improve methodological and didactic skills and – although it is not easy in the initial phase and requires additional work – it is a temporary burden that will pay off in the future on many levels (Brudnik et al., 2011, p. 4).

In the era of emphasizing the importance of individual autonomy in striving for self-rehabilitation and self-education, such a specific separation of methods and indication of their application is a signpost for further searches and new solutions.

The whole-school approach to achieving successful key competence learning needs the proper preparation of teachers to provide "learning to learn" opportunities within the subject instruction, introduce meta-cognitive skills through textbook exercises, and develop integrated teamwork and peer learning (Gordon, 2009).

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## Netography

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## Metody aktywizujące w kształtowaniu kompetencji kluczowych uczniów w edukacji włączającej

### Streszczenie

Kompetencje kluczowe są potrzebne wszystkim do samorealizacji i rozwoju osobistego, uzyskania szans na zatrudnienie, włączenia społecznego i aktywnego obywatelstwa.

Rozwój kompetencji kluczowych, ich zasadność oraz świadczenie kształcenia i uczenia się zorientowanego na ich wdrożenie powinny być realizowane poprzez ustanowienie dobrych praktyk w zakresie lepszego wspierania kadry edukacyjnej, a także aktualizacji oceny metod i narzędzi oraz wprowadzanie nowych i innowacyjnych form nauczania i uczenia się.

Zadaniem nauczycieli edukacji włączającej jest stworzenie takiego środowiska uczenia się, aby kompetencje kluczowe mogły być rozwijane odpowiednio do wieku rozwojowego uczniów. Stosowanie metod aktywizujących jest zatem naczelną zasadą programu nauczania-uczenia się uczniów z niepełnosprawnościami i pełnosprawnych.

Stosowane metody powinny uwzględniać indywidualne potrzeby i możliwości uczniów, co w przypadku często bardzo zróżnicowanej klasy włączającej może okazać się dużym wyzwaniem, zwłaszcza że poza dostosowywaniem wymagań edukacyjnych, nauczyciel musi stale uwzględniać stopień, zakres i możliwości wdrożenia kompetencji kluczowych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kompetencje kluczowe, edukacja włączająca, metody aktywizujące.



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Beata ŁUKASIK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4432-6729>

Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa, Poland

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## Emotional Dysregulation of Children and Adolescents as a Cause of Exclusion from the School Environment – Possibilities for Counteracting the Phenomenon

### Abstract

Emotional dysregulation, which refers to difficulties in managing, controlling and adequately expressing emotions, is a phenomenon more and more frequently diagnosed among young people disrupting their functioning in many areas, including: interpersonal relationships, everyday activities, but above all education, threatening the phenomenon of exclusion from the school community. However, to prevent this from happening and to ensure that pupils with difficulties in controlling their emotions have equal opportunities for development, appropriate school measures are needed to safeguard their special needs. Some of the possible intervention strategies of the school aimed at creating an optimal environment for the development of a pupil with emotional dysregulation and enabling them to participate fully in the life of the school, but also outside its space have been presented in this article. Among the forms of psychological and pedagogical support dedicated to pupils with emotional dysregulation, the following were mentioned: social skills training, mindfulness, the use of elements of cognitive behavioural therapy and dialectical behavioural therapy, peer mediation and peer tutoring, work on the pupil's positive self-esteem, as well as establishing cooperation with the child's family and involving it in the intervention process. As part of the postulates and indications for practice, attention was drawn to the need for appropriate education of teachers and psychologists, with particular emphasis on preparing staff in the area of early diagnosis of emotional disorders, which in turn is a key issue for effective intervention and minimising the threat of educational exclusion of the pupil.

**Keywords:** emotional dysregulation, social exclusion, intervention strategies.

The phenomenon of emotional dysregulation is being more often diagnosed among children and adolescents and is beginning to pose a serious challenge to nowadays education. Difficulties in managing emotions effectively have a significant impact on the functioning of young people in various spheres of life, including school environment. School, being one of the environments fundamental to social and emotional development, can both support a pupil who is unable to manage his or her emotions and, unfortunately, exacerbate the problem by contributing to exclusion meaning the pupil's isolation from peers and full participation in school life.

The aim of this publication is to outline what the phenomenon of emotional dysregulation is and to point to possible interventions, mainly by the school, aimed at counteracting the exclusion from the school community of pupils struggling to manage their emotions.

## **Social exclusion**

Social exclusion is an extremely complex issue. It is a multi-faceted structure and can occur at many levels (Giddens, 2005), causing divergent interpretations. Although identifying a universal way of understanding exclusion is a challenge beyond the scope of these considerations, it can be assumed that social exclusion means "voluntary isolation or, more often, isolation forced by external conditions" (poverty, unemployment, different skin colour, religious beliefs, disability, environmentally unacceptable behaviour, etc.) (Jarosz 2008, p. 10). One aspect of social exclusion is educational exclusion. Children exposed to exclusion due to their own dysfunctions are characterised by certain problems that contribute to the escalation of the phenomenon, but are also its cause. It seems necessary to point out here, for example: deprivation of needs (which results in their satisfaction in an unacceptable manner), learning difficulties, disorders in emotional and social functioning. The cause of the latter is very often emotional dysregulation. The phenomenon of exclusion at school can take the form of more or less overt segregation of pupils (Lewandowska-Kidoń, Witek, 2012). Adolescent exclusion is characterised by a lack of bonds with peers, rejection by the class team, abnormal relationships with adults, lack of success in the learning process, lack of motivation to learn and make efforts, interests and passions in life, a sense of loneliness or lack of support from positive personal role models (Miłkowska, 2005; Lewandowska-Kidoń, Witek, 2012). There are various consequences of peer rejection: "from feelings of isolation, loneliness and depression to engaging in antisocial behaviour" (Musialska, 2011, p. 75), including risky behaviour, conduct disorders, oppositional defiance, violence, school failure or



dropping out of school. Pupils experiencing such problems require assistance to enable them to fulfil their developmental tasks and their own life chances.

Having the subject of the considerations in mind, the purpose of this paper is to identify the possibilities of counteracting the phenomenon of social and educational exclusion by means of activities (mainly school) in providing psychological and pedagogical assistance to pupils at risk of exclusion. However, prior to their presentation, it is worth considering what the phenomenon of emotional dysregulation is.

### **Emotional dysregulation – definition, causes, consequences**

The process of emotion regulation is a multifaceted phenomenon. When disturbed, it plays a fundamental role in the development of psychopathology (Kaufman, Xia, Fosco, Yaptangco, Skidmore, & Crowell, 2016). It can be defined as the ability to identify, understand and accept emotions, but also (depending on the context) to flexibly manage emotional control (Kaufman et al., 2016). Meanwhile, emotional dysregulation is “the difficulty or inability to experience, process and manage emotions effectively” (Leahy, Tirch, Napolitano, 2014, p.23). It can mean both “overly intense emotional reactions and difficulty modulating or suppressing emotions” (Linehan, 2016 p.32), often leading to impulsive, aggressive or withdrawn behaviour. Marsha Linehan (2016) distinguishes three components of emotion dysregulation: increased emotional sensitivity (i.e., a low threshold of sensitivity to emotional stimuli); increased emotional reactivity (a rapid increase in emotional intensity in response to specific stimuli); and a slow return to an initial emotional state, all of which become problem in controlling impulsive behaviour and the expression of negative emotions, while also contributing to significant difficulties in interpersonal relationships.

The causes of emotional dysregulation are complex and multifactorial (Linehan, 2016). They include both biological aspects, such as abnormal functioning of the nervous system, and environmental factors, such as: stress, violence, instability in the family environment and inadequate patterns of emotion management in the child’s environment. Such experiences can lead to abnormal development of the systems responsible for emotion regulation, which in turn results in difficulties in managing emotions. Emotional dysregulation can also result from the neurochemical system disturbance, particularly in the functioning of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine and norepinephrine (Butcher, Hooley, Mineka, 2020).

Emotional dysregulation gives rise to negative consequences in the area of interpersonal bonds, affecting other aspects of an individual’s life as well. In the context of mental health, individuals with emotional dysregulation are more

likely to develop mental disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders (Menin, Heimberg, Turk, Fresco. 2002), personality disorders and eating or substance abuse disorders (Fairburn, Cooper, Shafran 2003). In some circumstances, they can also become a source of conflict with the law, particularly when emotional disturbances become the cause of aggressive or impulsive behaviour.

During childhood and adolescence, emotion dysregulation is often associated with learning problems. It has a significant impact on the that a pupil functions in the school environment, often being the cause of exclusion. Before this happens, however, the child's difficulties may be observed, such as problems concentrating attention, difficult relationships with peers and teachers, "difficult" behaviour (aggression, rebelliousness, etc.) (Bloomquist, 2011), which can ultimately lead to stigmatisation and exclusion.

Reduced ability to concentrate attention and assimilate educational material is one of the problems faced by pupils experiencing concomitant emotion dysregulation. Excessive or inappropriate emotional reactions interfere with the ability to focus attention, leading to difficulties in performing tasks that require prolonged concentration (Mathews, MacLeod, 2005). Intense emotions such as anxiety, anger or sadness become a cause of cognitive overload, which in turn can result in task avoidance, reduced school performance, consequently leading to a decrease in the pupil's motivation to continue education.

As already mentioned, emotional dysregulation can also lead to difficulties in interpersonal relationships, whether with peers, teachers, parents, other adults. It is often associated with behavioural disorders, which seem incomprehensible and disempowering to those around them. Behavioural disorder is a category of psychiatric disorders that encompasses "an established and recurring pattern of behaviour manifested by violations of the rights of others or of social norms and rules applicable to a particular age group" (DSM-5 Diagnostic Criteria for Mental Disorders, 2018, p. 574). Children with dysregulation often react with excessive and inadequate anger or aggression to situations that others find neutral or of little emotional challenge, so they are often perceived as unpredictable and peers avoid contact with them fearing their inadequate reactions. This usually leads to escalating conflicts. Long-term problems in peer relationships lead to lower self-esteem and feelings of loneliness, isolation, and avoidance of social interaction, which exacerbates emotional problems and sustains the vicious cycle of peer exclusion (Cole, Hall, Hajal, 2008). Like peers, teachers or other adults may perceive children who do not manage their emotions properly as "problematic". Educators who are not adequately trained in recognising and dealing with emotional dysregulation see pupil's behaviour as a lack of discipline or so-called "bad parenting". As a result, they may respond to these behaviours in ways that exacerbate the problem, such as through fre-

quent comments, punishment or exclusion from class, which in turn exacerbates the pupil's aggression or withdrawal. The lack of understanding and support from the teachers perpetuates the emotional problems of these pupils, while the educators themselves may feel helpless, leading to their frustration and further exacerbating the conflicts, and ultimately isolating the child. For a pupil who struggles with emotional dysregulation such isolation means a loss of access to positive behavioural patterns and social support, which are crucial for proper development.

### **Intervention strategies – psychological-educational assistance**

In order to effectively counteract the exclusion of emotionally dysregulated pupils, it is necessary to implement comprehensive intervention strategies in schools in the form of psychological and educational support. One form of such assistance is access to a school psychologist, whose tasks should include helping to develop social and emotional skills, organising mindfulness training or introducing elements of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), which have been shown to improve the wellbeing of people with emotional dysregulation (Hofmann, Hayes, 2020; Barlow et al, 2020; Beck, 2005; Kendall, 2006).

The development of emotional skills, which includes the ability to recognise, understand, express and regulate emotions, is essential for effective functioning in everyday life (including education). Despite the ambiguity of definition, social, or social and emotional skills are equated with the widely accepted, conflict-free functioning of the individual, which seems to be an extremely important finding in the context of emotional dysregulation and its consequences. Research in this area is particularly abundant with regard to the relationship with expressions of aggression and violence (Frey et al., 2005). Low levels of social competence can manifest themselves in aggressive behaviour and have also been linked to peer rejection (Volling, Mackinnon-Lewis, Rabiner, Baradaran, 1993). A child's aggressiveness (as an expression of difficulty managing their own emotions) increases the risk of rejection by the peer group and may perpetuate tendencies towards asocial behaviour (Urban, 2012). The most recognised social competence training programme, Aggression Replacement Training (ART) (Goldstein, Glick, 1994), has seen numerous implications in many countries, including its application in Poland (Morawski, 2005; Pawliczuk, Łobodda, Nowińska, 2015; Czarnecka-Dziulak, Drapała, Ostaszewski, Więcek-Durańska, Wójcik, 2015). It is worth mentioning that this programme is based on the assumptions of social learning theory and the cognitive-behavioural stream, considered to be one of the most effective in working on emotional dysregulation. According to cognitive behavioural therapy, thoughts, emotions and behaviour have impact on one

another, so that by changing one of these elements we can influence the others. It mainly focuses on changing distorted thinking (e.g. challenging and reformulating catastrophic thoughts), modifying maladaptive behaviour and developing more constructive ways of coping ( Dziektarz , Wojcik, 2022; Beck, 2005; Kendall, 2006).

Similarly to CBT (cognitive behavioural therapy), dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT) (which includes elements of CBT) should be used in difficulties with emotion management, which focuses on developing emotion regulation skills (which helps to reduce the intensity of psychological symptoms) and identifying and modifying maladaptive behavioural patterns that contribute to difficulties in interpersonal relationships with both peers and adults (Linehan, 2016; Neacsiu, Bohus, Linehan, 2020).

A response to the need for schools to provide appropriate interventions to help children and young people cope more effectively with emotional dysregulation is mindfulness training. The first formalised mindfulness-based programme to support work with stress was MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) by Jon Kabat – Zinn (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Mindfulness means the full acceptance of awareness of the current experience. Mindfulness is also referred to as “acceptance without valuing”, observation or orientation to the present moment (Germer, 2015, p. 34). This practice allows one to deepen self-awareness and learn more about one’s own emotions, thoughts and reactions to difficult experiences. In addition to their impact on the emotional realm, formal mindfulness training practices focus on exercising multiple qualities of attention, improving cognitive and metacognitive functions. Their use can improve the efficiency of the learning process, affect overall school functioning in terms of increasing knowledge, competence, thus contributing to improved school grades. According to clinical research, mindfulness trainings also promote improved interpersonal relationships (Craswell, 2017). A decrease in impulsive and aggressive behaviour and an increase in optimism allow for improved integration and group cooperation and a reduction in conflict. This results in the accumulation of positive experiences in the area of social relationships and perceiving them as more pleasant and desirable (Brown, Creswell, Ryan, 2015). In addition to the school psychologist, mindfulness practice can also be introduced by teachers and parents in family homes. Although for many, mindfulness may seem a bit complicated, one does not have to be a professional trainer to practise mindfulness (at school or at home), as a few activities can be incorporated into subject lessons or parenting lessons and implemented consistently throughout the school year. The first steps are simple techniques such as concentrated breathing, awareness of the child’s body or attentive observation of the surrounding world. The decision to introduce mindfulness into daily rituals can be the start of an extraordinary journey to achieve control over one’s own emotions. Mindfulness training is not psychotherapy, however, as confirmed by sci-

entific research in psychology and neuroscience, it is an excellent complement to work on mental health and improving mental resilience (Żejmo, 2022).

An effective tool, or type of intervention to help reduce social isolation of emotionally dysregulated pupils, is peer group support. In recent years, there has been increasing interest in mediation, including peer mediation, although it still seems to be underestimated in Polish schools. They have the advantage that they are conducted by another child, i.e. a person who knows and understands the needs and problems of their peers very well due to their own membership in the group of pupils (Raszewska-Skałeczka, 2013). They also allow children to resolve conflict situations without the involvement of adults. Peer mediation programmes teach young people how to resolve conflicts in a constructive and supportive way (Duda, 2019). Pupils with emotional dysregulation, who are more likely to have conflicts with their peers, can benefit from this type of support, which helps them to establish and maintain good relationships. Their participation in mediation proceedings has a number of positive effects in different spheres of their lives. It provides an opportunity to talk about their experiences, feelings, and facilitates the discharge and expression of emotions, which is particularly important in emotional dysregulation. It is also an opportunity to understand the other person and the motives behind their actions. Peer mediation is listed as an evidence-based method by the *National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders*. This means that it is a method the effects of which have been demonstrated in scientific studies and recommended for use in educational settings (Wong et al., 2015). Research findings indicate an increase in the level of empathy and competence in recognising other people's feelings in adolescents who have received peer mediation training and gained knowledge about the specifics of this procedure, the methods and techniques used (Sahin, Serin, Serin, 2011).

Having in mind the fact of including peers in the assistance directed to pupils with emotion dysregulation, it is worth noting peer tutoring, which can, in addition to its scientific (academic) character, developing specific areas of knowledge and skills, take the form of developmental tutoring, referring mainly to humanistic skills and knowledge, social and organisational and communication skills (Brzezińska, Rycielska, 2009; Budzyński, 2009). Researchers and advocates of tutoring (e.g. Slavin, 2013; Topping, 2005) cite numerous studies confirming that the use of peer tutoring has benefits for both the cognitive development of participants and social and emotional development, including, among others, the development of empathy, the strengthening of bonds between pupils, increased self-esteem.

Whether it is peer mediation, peer tutoring or other forms of peer support, it is important to emphasise their importance in increasing the awareness of mental health of children and adolescents, their understanding of what their peers are fac-

ing and their willingness to support them. Raising awareness of mental health among peers leads to a more inclusive and supportive school environment.

Having in mind the possible negative events that a pupil with emotional dysregulation may have experienced, such as educational failure, criticism from peers or educators as well as parents, it is important to take care of the pupil's self-esteem and motivation. Despite the fact that the topic of self-esteem is so popular among theorists and empiricists, the term "self-esteem" has not yet been clearly defined. Despite the diversity of its approaches, it is quite often emphasised that self-esteem is a set of opinions and judgements relating to one's own person, e.g. "intelligence, physical attractiveness, sense of humour, interpersonal competence" (Strelau, 2003, p.579). In other words it is a way of perceiving oneself, it can be a positive or negative attitude towards the Self (Schaffer, 2018; Brown, 1998; Rosenberg, 1965).

Children with low self-esteem often perceive their failures as the result of a lack of ability rather than difficulties beyond their direct control, and they most often locate the source of failure within themselves, attributing it to internal, fixed and global factors (e.g. low intelligence), and successes to external factors, e.g. luck. This perception leads to avoidance of difficult tasks and reduces motivation to undertake further activities, which are often restricted due to an inadequate fear of failure (Crocker, Luthanen, Cooper, Bouvrette, 2003). Underrated self-esteem can contribute to the phenomenon of the self-fulfilling prophecy, in which pupils begin to behave in ways that are consistent with their negative expectations of their own abilities (Wood, Heimpel, Manwell, Whittington, 2009). If pupils believe that they are unable to succeed, their behaviours, such as task avoidance, lack of effort or withdrawal, may actually contribute to failure. This in turn reinforces their negative self-esteem and leads to further exclusion from the educational process.

Low self-esteem not only affects educational achievement, but also interpersonal relationships. Pupils with low self-esteem may avoid interacting with their peers out of a sense of being inferior or not fitting into the group (Schaffer, 2018). Thus, one of the most important aspects of intervention is to support the development of positive self-esteem in pupils. The school psychologist, teacher and parent can support the child by offering constructive feedback (Hattie and Timperley, 2007), recognition for effort and celebration of small successes. It is important that pupils develop a sense of self-worth based on their achievements and not just on school assessments. What is more, there is a need for teachers, educators and school psychologists to use a range of exercises and trainings to raise pupils' self-esteem to a higher level, including play therapy, interpersonal training, psychodrama, music and bibliotherapy, and relaxation exercises (Wosik-Kawala, 2007). An important part of self-esteem-building methods is training in verbalising what children like about themselves and consider to be

their strengths (it is important that they also gather this kind of information from others during the exercises). Improving positive thinking about oneself is supported by completing unfinished sentences (e.g. "I am cool, because.....", "I am valuable, because.....") (Chomczyńska-Miliszkievicz, Pankowska, 1998, p.53). Building self-esteem is also fostered by working on the "inner monologue". It develops the ability to notice and transform sentences that lower self-esteem. The self-confidence-draining thoughts include: negative sentences about oneself ("I am clumsy"), catastrophising sentences ("Today they will laugh at me") and self-punishing sentences ("As usual, I have made a fool of myself"). It is necessary to replace these sentences with self-esteem-building forms, such as: "Well, I don't always show off my dexterity", "I often think like that and then it turns out that nobody laughed at me", "I was surprised that I didn't know how to behave" (Chomczyńska-Miliszkievicz, Pankowska 1998, p.53).

Moreover, it is worth noting that when working with a pupil with emotional dysregulation, it will be valuable for the teacher to take care to individualise teaching, both in compulsory and additional educational classes. This means adapting the ways, methods and means of teaching and enforcing knowledge to the capabilities and needs of the child with emotional dysregulation. The extent of the adaptation may include, among other things: rules for the presentation of knowledge (e.g. avoiding forum questioning); dividing tasks into stages; setting "partial" deadlines, etc. Pupils who receive tailored support are more likely to be able to manage their emotions better and reduce the risk of exclusion.

In relation to intervention strategies, the pupil's family and the need to provide them with appropriate support cannot be forgotten either. The involvement of the family in the intervention process is fundamental for the educational success of the child. School-family partnership programmes, which should include regular meetings, parental support and parental education (e.g. parent club, parental support groups), can significantly contribute to the improvement of the child's functioning in the school space. This type of support offered to the family is aimed at strengthening parental competences, improving the relationship between parent and child, supporting the child's development through joint activities between the school and the family home. However, these forms may not be sufficient, therefore it seems that close cooperation between the school and entities of the local environment providing assistance to the child and family is needed, consisting, among other things, in joint problem solving, sharing of knowledge and experience, and implementation of the developed solutions (Lewandowska-Kidoń, 2017).

It is worth emphasising that the intervention strategies outlined in these considerations, such as emotional skills development programmes, mindfulness training, peer group support, work on pupil self-esteem, mental health education, etc., are intended to help pupils to better manage their emotions and can

be implemented both in the classroom and as additional forms of psychological support. Individual and group therapy can be particularly relevant. In the context of emotional dysregulation, individual therapy allows for the creation of a safe space where the patient/pupil can freely explore their emotions and thoughts and the therapist has the opportunity to tailor interventions to individual needs, while group therapy offers the unique benefits that come from interacting with others with similar emotional problems.

## **Postulates**

A child's emotional dysregulation and often associated behavioural disorders can lead to exclusion, posing a serious challenge to the educational system and society. The consequences of exclusion are far-reaching, affecting the educational, social and psychological development of the pupil. In order to effectively counteract these problems, it is necessary to implement integrated intervention strategies. However, in order to create proper psychological and pedagogical care and to be able to counteract the consequences of the emotional dysregulation experienced by adolescents, special attention must be placed on qualifications of teachers, not only their further education, postgraduate studies, courses, etc., but, above all, the attention must be placed on preparing educators reliably already at the stage of academic training and to equip them with tools and strategies that will enable them to effectively manage problematic behaviour in the classroom. A particularly important task is to prepare teachers in the area of early diagnosis of emotional disorders, which in turn is a key issue for effective intervention. Early recognition of emotional problems allows for quicker implementation of appropriate measures and reduces the risk of the disorder worsening and having a negative impact on the child's development.

It is very important to prepare both educators and school psychologists in de-escalation techniques, developing communication skills and working with pupils with special needs, as well as developing empathetic and supportive attitudes among peers, which can significantly improve school functioning, foster a supportive learning environment and reduce the risk of exclusion. It is also worth noting that it is essential to train professionals in peer collaboration, which can provide comprehensive support to pupils with emotional problems. Training should include information on available resources, procedures for referring pupils to specialist and strategies for working together to develop a plan to support the pupil.

Having in mind counteracting the effects of a pupil's emotional dysregulation, the involvement of the child's family in the process cannot be forgotten, thus creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. In ad-



dition, working with pupils' families and providing support at home can significantly improve the effectiveness of school-based interventions. Involving the family in the intervention process, through education about emotional disorders and active participation in therapeutic programmes, furthermore allows for the creation of a synergistic relationship that is supportive of the child's struggle with an internal, often incomprehensible and difficult world of emotions. It facilitates knowledge of this world and control of the experiences connected with this world, while at the same time providing an opportunity to realise the ideas of diversity, equality and inclusion in education.

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## **Dysregulacja emocjonalna dzieci i młodzieży przyczyną wykluczenia ze środowiska szkolnego – możliwości przeciwdziałania zjawisku**

### **Streszczenie**

Dysregulacja emocjonalna odnosząca się do trudności w zarządzaniu, kontrolowaniu i adekwatnym wyrażaniu emocji jest zjawiskiem coraz częściej diagnozowanym wśród młodych osób i zaburzającym ich funkcjonowanie w wielu obszarach, m. in.: w relacjach interpersonalnych, codziennych czynnościach, ale przede wszystkim w sferze edukacyjnej, grożąc zjawiskiem wykluczenia ze społeczności szkolnej. Aby jednak do niego nie doszło, i by uczniowie borykający się z trudnościami kontrolowania własnych emocji mieli równe szanse rozwoju, potrzebne są odpowiednie działania szkoły, zmierzające do zabezpieczenia ich specjalnych potrzeb. W niniejszej publikacji zostały określone niektóre z możliwych strategii interwencyjnych szkoły zmierzających do stworzenia optymalnego środowiska dla rozwoju ucznia z dysregulacją emocjonalną i umożliwienia mu pełnego uczestnictwa w życiu szkoły, ale i poza jej przestrzenią. Wśród form pomocy psychologiczno-pedagogicznej dedykowanych uczniom z dysregulacją emocjonalną przywołane zostały m.in.: treningi umiejętności społecznych, mindfulness, stosowanie elementów terapii poznawczo-behawioralnej i dialektyczno-behawioralnej, mediacje rówieśnicze i tutoring rówieśniczy, praca nad pozytywną samooceną ucznia, a także nawiązanie współpracy z rodziną dziecka i zaangażowanie jej w proces interwencyjny. W ramach postulatów i wskazań dla praktyki zwrócono uwagę na konieczność odpowiedniego kształcenia nauczycieli i psychologów, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem przygotowania kadr w obszarze wczesnej diagnozy zaburzeń emocjonalnych, co z kolei jest kluczową kwestią dla podjęcia skutecznej interwencji i minimalizowania zagrożenia, jakim jest edukacyjne wykluczenie ucznia.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dysregulacja emocjonalna, wykluczenie społeczne, strategie interwencyjne.





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Kalina KUKIEŁKO

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4256-8871>

University of Szczecin, Poland

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**Contact:** kalina.kukielko@usz.edu.pl

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## Adaptive Fashion. Clothing as a Tool for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities

### Abstract

Based on subject literature and examples drawn from design practice, the article aims to introduce the concept of adaptive fashion, almost absent from Polish popular science discourse and tailoring practice. By analyzing its potential in the context of inclusion, the article demonstrates that adaptive fashion can play a crucial role in integrating people with disabilities, offering them the opportunity for fuller participation in social life. According to WHO data, over a billion people worldwide live with various forms of disability; however, the standard fashion market primarily focuses on the needs of “typical” body types, marginalizing individuals with specific requirements. The lack of tailored clothing can lead to social exclusion and reduced self-esteem, which limits active participation in social and professional life. Adaptive fashion addresses these challenges by providing functional, aesthetically pleasing, and comfortable clothing while allowing users to dress independently (fastening/unfastening, putting on/taking off).

**Keywords:** adaptive fashion, inclusive fashion, inclusion, people with disabilities.

### Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, over one billion people, or approximately 16% of the population, have some form of disability—whether permanent or temporary (WHO, 2023). Clothing is one of the most fundamental

ways of expressing one's individuality and sense of belonging to a group (Simmel, 1980). The typical customer of fashion brands is a representative of the 'standard population,' with a classic body shape (slim, hourglass for women and inverted triangle for men) and a maximum clothing size of 42 or 44 (J.H. Lee, E. Lee, C.H. Lee, J. Huh, J. Kim, 2024). The juxtaposition of these seemingly unrelated facts highlights the existence of a marginalized group of customers in the fashion market—namely, people with various types of disabilities. Although the clothing industry often prides itself on innovation and creating new trends, it still rarely considers the needs of customers whose conventional clothing cannot meet them. (Bhandari, 2023). People whose body shapes do not fit within the 'standards' set by the fashion industry are often forced to choose clothing primarily based on functionality rather than aesthetics. Instead of following fashion trends or personal style, they prioritize comfort and ease of putting on and removing the clothes. As a result, these individuals often forgo wearing the most fashionable or attractive garments in favour of those that meet their specific needs. This issue is significant for many reasons. Firstly, the lack of appropriate clothing can significantly limit the social participation of those affected. The negative consequences may manifest in reduced involvement in community life, a sense of exclusion, and a decrease in self-confidence and self-esteem, leading to a withdrawal from active participation in significant professional and social events—especially when adhering to a specific dress code is required. (Jun, 2024).

On the other hand, an increasingly important aspect of contemporary discourse on inclusivity, equality, and the needs of all members of society is the focus on designing environments, public spaces, and everyday objects to make them accessible to as many people as possible. It also applies to the fashion industry, as reflected in the segment of adaptive fashion, also known as inclusive fashion. This area focuses on designing and creating clothing tailored to the needs of individuals with various types of disabilities. Adaptive fashion aims to provide functional, aesthetic, and comfortable clothing that considers users' requirements and allows them to use it quickly and, most importantly, independently (June 2024).

This article presents the concept of adaptive fashion based on literature and examples drawn from design practice. This topic is almost absent in Polish popular science discourse and local tailoring practice. However, it is worth recognizing, if only due to its potential for addressing the needs and inclusion of people with disabilities.

## **Disability and Fashion**

Although the first attempts at designing in the spirit of adaptive fashion can be traced back to the mid-20th century, it was still virtually absent from the



commercial fashion sector at the beginning of the current century. Adaptive clothing refers to modified or specially designed garments to meet the specific needs of individuals with various types of disabilities or limitations. This type of clothing has been on the market for decades, yet its design is often based on the medical model of disability. This model assumes that disability is an issue whose effects should be minimized as much as possible to enable individuals to participate more fully in society (Twardowski, 2018). In practice, this means that designers working with individuals with disabilities focus more on adapting their functioning to the demands of the surrounding world rather than adapting the environment, including clothing, to their individual and specific needs. (Rana, McBee-Black, Swazan, 2024). For a long time, clothing designed for individuals with disabilities was primarily focused on rehabilitative functions rather than the wearer's appearance. The design and sewing process concentrated mainly on practical aspects of the garments, such as form, functionality, and comfort, often neglecting aesthetics. The main goal was to facilitate daily tasks related to clothing use, such as putting on and taking off, fastening and unfastening, adjusting to body shape, freedom of movement, and selecting appropriate fabrics. Functional and efficiency aspects were prioritized, emphasizing the needs of caregivers who assist with dressing (McBee-Black, 2022). Individuals with mobility limitations, such as those using wheelchairs, blind people, people who are deaf or hard of hearing, or those on the autism spectrum, have had limited options for clothing that meets both their physical and aesthetic needs. This approach limits the potential of adaptive fashion as a functional tool to express the user's personality and identity. True inclusion, meanwhile, should involve creating practical and aesthetically pleasing clothing, allowing individuals with disabilities to fully participate in social life without sacrificing the expression of their individuality and style. Since the mid-1990s, the medical model has increasingly been replaced by the social model of disability, which points out that disability itself is not the 'problem' or 'barrier,' but rather the environment and surroundings that create barriers for individuals with disabilities. Although the process of moving away from the medical model of disability towards the social model is progressing too slowly, there is a growing awareness that removing external barriers—both in physical spaces and in the sector of products and services—creates a supportive and inclusive environment (Cywiński, 2023).

As social media developed and more people openly discussed their experiences with disability in the context of dressing, the need for commercially produced, functional, and fashionable clothing became increasingly apparent. Initially, these were small, specialized brands that created custom clothing or produced limited runs. Today, adaptive fashion is in a phase of rapid development but faces several challenges that require innovative solutions. One of the main issues is ensuring that clothing is affordable for a broad audience. High produc-

tion costs, related to the need for customization and specialized materials, make it generally more expensive than standard clothing. As a result, many individuals with disabilities still have limited access to such products.

## Runway of Dreams and Tommy Hilfiger

A turning point for adaptive fashion in the mainstream fashion industry was the collaboration between the Runway of Dreams Foundation<sup>1</sup> and the Tommy Hilfiger marked brand. In 2016, Mindy Scheier, founder and president of the foundation and the mother of a boy with muscular dystrophy, partnered with this iconic clothing giant, resulting in the first widely available line of adaptive clothing for children—Tommy Adaptive<sup>2</sup>.

The media recognized the launch of this collection as a groundbreaking event that drew the fashion industry's and its customers' attention to the need for adaptive clothing. The collection includes garments with simpler fastenings tailored to the needs of wheelchair users, those with prosthetics, and individuals with sensory sensitivities. The design process was based on in-depth research and consultations with individuals with disabilities, which allowed for developing solutions that genuinely improve their quality of life. Scheier focused her work on this group of customers due to her personal experiences. As the mother of a child for whom dressing independently is very challenging, she encountered difficulties finding stylish and functional clothing for him. She realized that this issue affects not only her son but also many other individuals with disabilities around the world. Leading clothing brands have long ignored the needs of this community, excluding it from their product offerings. Scheier also observed this exclusion in the United States, where individuals with disabilities represent the most significant minority, yet their needs remained unmet for a long time.

To fully understand clients' challenges with various limitations and types of disabilities, Scheier used her fashion design experience to conduct comprehensive research. Her goal was to identify specific issues related to clothing and dressing and persuade the fashion industry to make changes to address this critical, often overlooked group's needs. In her research, Scheier focused on indi-

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<sup>1</sup> The goal of the Runway of Dreams Foundation is to support the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the fashion and beauty industries by promoting social awareness and encouraging positive change. The foundation's initiatives not only emphasize the value of diversity but also actively challenge existing stereotypes. It pays particular attention to the need for creating products and collections characterized by adaptive and universal design, which allows individuals with disabilities to participate more fully in social and cultural life. <https://www.runwayofdreams.org/> [access: 14.09.2024].

<sup>2</sup> The Polish page for the Tommy Adaptive line: <https://pl.tommy.com/tommy-adaptive> [access: 14.09.2024].

viduals with various disabilities—physical, cognitive, neurological, visual, and auditory. After conducting her research, she realized that most individuals with disabilities, regardless of the type, face similar difficulties in finding suitable clothing and in the dressing process. These challenges included physical and functional aspects of clothing, leading to daily discomfort and frustration. Based on her research findings, Scheier developed three critical innovations in adaptive clothing design to increase the ability to dress independently. These innovations include magnetic closures that eliminate the need for traditional buttons and zippers; adjustable pant legs, sleeves, and waistbands for a perfect fit; and the introduction of additional entry points, such as openings on the sides and back, which significantly enhance the ability to put on and take off clothing independently. Thanks to these innovations, Scheier not only made life easier for many individuals with disabilities but also initiated an essential shift in the perception of fashion as a field that should be accessible and inclusive for everyone, regardless of physical or cognitive limitations (McBee-Black, 2022).

Tommy Hilfiger has continually introduced innovations in its production processes to design and manufacture adaptive clothing. Following the success of the children's line, the offering has also been expanded to include adult models. With the growing social awareness of the need to include individuals with disabilities, other mainstream brands such as Target, Nike, and Zappos have recognized the potential of such initiatives and introduced their adaptive clothing collections. As a result, the adaptive clothing market has become one of the fastest-growing segments in the fashion industry. Although still considered relatively new, it demonstrates tremendous growth potential. Estimates suggest that by 2026, its value could reach around \$400 billion, highlighting the significant impact of adaptive fashion on the entire industry's future (McKinney, Eike, 2023).

## **Adaptive Fashion**

Creating adaptive clothing is thus a global trend in fashion that includes a previously marginalized community. The global fashion market is increasingly recognizing the need to address the everyday challenges faced by individuals with disabilities concerning clothing and to design and produce garments that facilitate independent dressing and undressing while ensuring comfort throughout the day. Clothing should, therefore, be designed to meet the individualized and personalized needs of individuals with disabilities. It should handle varying perspiration levels and be antibacterial, odourless, and resistant to high and low temperatures. Safety is also considered a key aspect in designing such clothing, especially for individuals who use wheelchairs. However, clothing should also support the user on a broader level than merely providing comfort and ease.

Addressing the need for a sense of attractiveness, self-expression, belonging, and social integration is equally important. Therefore, adaptive clothing should be designed to resemble other fashionable garments widely available in stores (McBee-Black, 2022).

Designing clothing for individuals with disabilities requires specialized skills and knowledge. There is a wide range of disabilities, and designers must understand how each affects their clients' clothing needs. It includes, for example, atypical body shapes or the need to remain seated. Cognitive disabilities, in turn, require understanding sensory issues related to materials, seams, or labels. Designing clothing for individuals with disabilities requires specialized skills and knowledge. There is a wide range of disabilities, and designers must understand how each affects their clients' clothing needs. It includes, for example, atypical body shapes or the need to remain seated. Cognitive disabilities, in turn, require understanding sensory issues related to materials, seams, or labels (McKinney, Eike, 2023). One concept explaining why individuals with disabilities are marginalized in mainstream fashion is the suggestion that designers still do not fully understand their needs and expectations. As a result, they often ignore or fail to appreciate the potential for adapting specific designs to meet these requirements.

Furthermore, due to a lack of knowledge about the specific needs of 'non-standard' bodies, they create clothing that can be uncomfortable or difficult to wear (e.g., due to too-short zippers, small buttons, or bulky seams) (Lamb, 2001). It is, therefore, a complex process that depends on three key factors: the designer's approach, the product's purpose, and the end user. Paradoxically, the latter is often overlooked, which can lead to a mismatch between clothing and the actual needs of individuals with disabilities. It highlights that inclusive design requires more than just the intention to create clothing for people with various limitations. This process must include the active involvement of individuals with disabilities, who can provide valuable insights into their actual needs and challenges. In this way, design can become more informed and effective, addressing the real needs of users and creating clothing that genuinely enhances their comfort and functionality in everyday life (June 2024).

One solution to this problem could be incorporating diversity into the educational process for future designers. Design students should be encouraged to develop inclusive ideas that address various body types and consider how different individuals might perceive their clothing designs. It can help them create apparel that is more inclusive and accessible to a broader audience (J. H. Lee, E. Lee, C. H. Lee, J. Huh, J. Kim, 2024). There is a growing demand for fashion design curricula and courses more inclusive of traditionally marginalized groups. Particularly important are those that teach students how to handle the complexities of designing clothing for individuals with disabilities and address needs related to ageing. Several leading academic institutions have significantly changed

their programs in response to this need. For example, New York's Parsons School of Design offers a course in collaboration with the non-profit organization Open Style Lab, which focuses on the needs of individuals with disabilities<sup>3</sup>. An increasing number of people are also questioning existing norms in fashion, leading to a growing interest in addressing the needs of marginalized groups. Diversity, inclusivity, and equality are becoming more frequently discussed in everyday conversations, making it essential to include individuals with disabilities (June 2024).

Different types of disabilities come with different clothing needs, so they should always be approached individually, with empathy and sensitivity. Depending on the user's preferences, clothing can conceal or highlight a disability, supporting the process of self-acceptance and social acceptance. Properly designed and constructed clothing can significantly reduce dependency on others, minimize the risk of pressure sores in bedridden patients, and prevent back and shoulder injuries and skin irritations. Adaptive clothing design employs a range of unique solutions to enhance the wearer's comfort, safety, and independence. These include, among others: (1) Replacing buttons with zippers, Velcro, or magnetic buttons—traditional buttons can pose challenges for individuals with limited manual dexterity. Therefore, adaptive clothing often incorporates modern solutions such as long zippers, Velcro, or magnetic buttons. These innovative fastenings are easier to handle, providing users with greater independence and comfort during daily dressing and undressing; (2) A central back opening to facilitate dressing—specially designed openings in the central back area aim to make the dressing process easier. These openings allow for easier putting on and removing clothing, especially for individuals using wheelchairs or those with limited upper-body mobility. This solution eliminates the need for excessive fabric stretching, significantly improving the comfort and functionality of the clothing; (3) Flat seams to prevent pressure sores and skin irritations—flat seams are used in adaptive clothing to minimize the risk of irritation and abrasions. These seams are gentler on the skin and do not cause discomfort, which is especially important for individuals with sensitive skin or when traditional seams are bothersome or painful for the user; (4) Extended back length to accommodate seated wheelchair users—adaptive clothing often features an extended length at the back. This design prevents the fabric from riding up and exposing the back, significantly improving comfort and aesthetics, as well as providing additional protection and warmth during daily use; (5) Elastic waistband for added comfort and security—elastic inserts in the waistband provide not only a perfect fit but also additional comfort and security. This detail is crucial as it allows for a customized fit to the user's individual needs and facilitates ease of putting on and taking off the clothing; (6) Special seams, fabrics, and fastenings—adaptive

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<sup>3</sup> <https://parsons.edu/openstylelab/course-description/> [access: 14.09.2024].

clothing features carefully selected materials and innovative design solutions, such as these unique elements. These thoughtful details not only enhance the aesthetics of the clothing but also ensure high functionality and comfort. As a result, this clothing supports individuals with various health needs, improving their independence and comfort in daily use (Bhandari, 2023).

Thanks to such innovations, adaptive clothing addresses specific needs, supports a sense of independence and enhances the everyday comfort of individuals with disabilities.

## **Conclusion**

The above considerations show that adaptive fashion extends beyond functionality, comfort, and aesthetics. Its significance in shaping perceptions of individuals with disabilities and promoting equality and integration is invaluable. Adaptive fashion meets aesthetic and practical needs and becomes crucial in building a more open and inclusive world.

One of the most important aspects of adaptive fashion is its ability to raise awareness about the lives of individuals with disabilities. Through its growing presence in fashion shows, advertising campaigns, and photo shoots featuring models with disabilities, adaptive fashion is gaining increasing recognition in the media and popular culture. These initiatives help to break down stereotypes and build a more diverse representation of society, leading to greater acceptance and understanding of people with disabilities. Instead of focusing on their limitations, adaptive fashion highlights the full participation of these individuals in social life, their interests, passions, and unique styles. Adaptive fashion thus becomes a tool for changing social narratives, showing that everyone has the right to self-expression and enjoy fashion, regardless of the shape and ability of their body. As more brands integrate inclusivity into their strategies, consumer awareness of the needs of individuals with disabilities is growing. Adaptive fashion serves an educational role, facilitating an understanding of accessibility and equality in fashion. Incorporating topics related to adaptive fashion into design school curricula will help educate future designers to be aware of the diverse needs of their clients and to create suitable clothing for them.

Adaptive fashion represents a significant step towards a more equitable and balanced world. With continuous innovations, increasing social awareness, and the engagement of the entire fashion industry, we can create a reality where everyone, regardless of their level of ability and specific needs, can feel beautiful, comfortable, and confident in their clothing. It is a vision that inspires and motivates action.

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## **Moda adaptacyjna. Odzież jako narzędzie inkluzji osób z niepełnosprawnościami**

### **Streszczenie**

Artykuł, oparty na literaturze przedmiotu i przykładach zaczerpniętych z praktyki projektowej, ma na celu przybliżenie – niemal nieobecnej w polskim dyskursie popularnonaukowym i powszechnej praktyce krawieckiej – idei mody adaptacyjnej. Analizując jej potencjał w kontekście inkluzji, pokazuje, że może ona odgrywać kluczową rolę w integracji osób z niepełnosprawnościami, dając im szansę na pełniejsze uczestnictwo w życiu społecznym. Według danych WHO, ponad miliard osób na świecie żyje z różnego rodzaju niepełnosprawnościami, a mimo to standardowy rynek mody koncentruje się głównie na potrzebach „typowych” sylwetek, marginalizując osoby o specyficznych wymaganiach. Brak dostosowanych ubrań może prowadzić do poczucia wykluczenia społecznego oraz obniżenia samooceny, co ogranicza aktywne uczestnictwo w życiu społecznym i zawodowym. Moda adaptacyjna odpowiada na te wyzwania, oferując ubrania, które są jednocześnie funkcjonalne, estetyczne i wygodne, a przy tym umożliwiają użytkownikom samodzielne ubieranie się (odpinanie/zapinanie, zdejmowanie/zakładanie).

**Słowa kluczowe:** moda adaptacyjna, moda inkluzyjna, inkluzja, osoby z niepełnosprawnościami.



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Amelia WALOTEK

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-0621-7179>

Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa, Poland

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**Contact:** a.walotek@ujd.edu.pl

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## ***My Very Special Book – Bibliotherapy Project that Involves Working with Children with Special Needs. Application Proposal***

### **Abstract**

The article's primary goal is to present the educational project *MyVery Special Book*, based on the bibliotherapy method, and illustrate the development of social competencies in students with special needs during revalidation classes based on this idea. The article discusses the process of creating a therapeutic story with sixth-grade students in an integrated school based on *My Very Special Book* project carried out as part of a grant from the "Nowa Era" Publishing House in the *Projektanci Edukacji* contest. The theoretical foundations, course, assumptions, and method of conducting revalidation classes are analysed, the aim of which is to improve emotional and social competencies. The project involved creating a therapeutic story with students about their difficulties and problems. The project recipients are the students with special needs, difficulties in social functioning, chronic diseases and low self-esteem.

**Keywords:** bibliotherapy, therapy, autism, project-based work.

### **Introduction**

The educational project entitled *My Very Special Book* was created by students of an integrated school (the sixth grade) and supervised by a therapist and

psychologist as part of their revalidation classes. In the article, I discuss the process of creating a therapeutic fairy tale with students, the goals of the project focusing on developing social competencies (cooperation, assertiveness, active listening, sharing experiences), practical aspects of using such a method of working with students with special educational needs, as well as the benefits of undertaking this type of initiatives for students. I have analysed the theoretical foundations of this approach, the goals and assumptions of the project, and the practical implications. In the article, we discuss how creating therapeutic fairy tales can influence the development of students, their relationships with peers, and their ability to talk about their experiences, emotions, and challenges in dealing with difficult situations.

*My Very Special Book* project allowed students to create stories about their experiences and needs. It is a form of therapeutic work that can be both a way of expressing emotions, an opportunity to share one's problems, and a tool for integration, development of social competencies and students' self-esteem. Appropriate books can modify the behaviour of students with emotional disorders and introduce positive changes in them (Shem, 2016). For students in integrated schools, creating therapeutic fairy tales is not only an exciting way to conduct therapeutic classes and build their motivation to participate but also a way to develop emotional competencies and build bonds in the peer group.

One of the minor difficulties of the children participating in the project was the feeling of rejection in the group. As a psychosocial phenomenon, this term was analysed in terms of its impact on an individual's emotional and psychosocial development in the relationship with the social group. Regardless of the form, the actions of peers aimed at rejecting it are perceived by a given individual very clearly. Peer rejection may take various forms: isolation and quick interruption of social contact with a specific student, aggressive behaviour, preventing activities, providing information, subordination, constant checking and supervision, up to unfair negation directed directly at the child and his/her activities, conveying lies and degrading opinions (Urban 2005).

Peer relationships are essential in child development (Domagała-Zyśk, 2012). Colleagues provide the student with a sense of social belonging and emotional support. Relationships with peers are a fundamental source of self-esteem. They allow a child to feel valued by those he considers necessary.

## **Revalidation classes**

Revalidation classes are additional classes not subject to assessment, and their progress is documented in a separate class log. The main goal of these classes is to support the child's development through specialised activities tailored

to a given person's needs. The term "revalidation" comes from the Latin words "re-" (again) and "validus" (strong), which reflects the essence of these activities – strengthening and improving abilities.

The purpose of revalidation classes is to increase the child's competencies on various levels to facilitate the process of socialisation and education and maximise the chances of independence. These activities should consider all the difficulties the child is struggling with while relying on his/her capabilities and strengths. Conducting these classes requires systematicity, consistency and cooperation with a team of therapists who strive to achieve goals related to education, upbringing, therapy and revalidation (Obuchowska, 2003).

As part of the revalidation process, certain basic principles are observed, including continuity of therapeutic activities; the principle of grading difficulty and correction of disorders; compensation for disorders by exercising more efficient functions in order to induce a compensatory mechanism; the principle of systematic actions; consolidating acquired knowledge and skills; cooperation with the family and the principle of attractiveness of exercises (Niepokólczycka-Gac, 2018).

Revalidation classes are adapted to the student's needs based on judgment or opinion. Their classes may include various therapies, such as speech therapy, psychological therapy, pedagogical therapy, sensory integration therapy, physiotherapy or corrective and compensatory therapy. The scope of activities during these classes is broad and considers various aspects of development, such as social, emotional, communicative, cognitive, motivational, motor and perceptual (Domagała-Zyśk et al., 2017).

Therapists conducting this type of class acquire qualifications during bachelor's, master's, postgraduate and specialised courses. The methods used during these classes should be attractive to the child and adapted to his or her age and abilities. Examples of methods include various types of activity programs, such as applied behaviour analysis, music therapy, occupational therapy, dog therapy, art therapy, bibliotherapy, and many others. These methods can be combined and modified to achieve therapeutic goals. Information and communication technologies are increasingly used in revalidation, such as specialised software on a tablet or therapeutic games (Niepokólczycka-Gac, 2018). These activities must integrate the child into his or her peer environment, which can be achieved by using tools popular among his or her peers.

## **Bibliotherapy**

The fairy tale is an irreplaceable tool for teachers working in preschool education (Domagała, 2022). A child acquires knowledge about the world through spontaneous and unconscious learning in new, diverse situations in the environ-

ment around him. Learning about social reality is a child's fundamental need, and information at the stage of its development is acquired through cognitive processes such as perceptions, impressions, speech, thinking, memory and attention. Fairy tales teach parents the art of storytelling while children develop listening skills (Kruszewska, 2017). A fairy tale can have various functions: translation, conveying values, education or calming. The potential of a fairy tale makes it a valuable educational tool, contributing to learning and supporting development. Bibliotherapy is a therapeutic form that allows one to discuss complex topics with a child, considering their developmental needs and enabling an open discussion. Due to the multitude of therapeutic texts, it is possible to adapt them to the child's individual needs and interests to make the therapeutic process as comfortable as possible. It is a form of therapy that allows one to metaphorically capture various problems while giving the freedom and safety to select the content so that it does not overload the patient.

Bibliotherapy is a tool for promoting children's psychological well-being (Lucas, Soares, 2013). This method can meet a wide variety of therapeutic goals that are defined according to the specific needs and problems of clients, for example, increasing the skills of introspection and self-assessment, better understanding the specific motivations for human behaviour, alleviating egocentrism by paying attention to the reactions of others (Abdulah, 2008).

The main goals of bibliotherapy are to support and strengthen the recipient through focused reading. A vital role in this process is played by an intermediary, such as a librarian, psychologist, or bibliotherapist who uses psychotherapy methods, focusing on selecting and using appropriate literature when working with the reader. Bibliotherapy includes reading texts and various methods and forms of working with them to support development and improve the quality of life (Matras-Mastelarz, 2016).

There are at least three areas in which the bibliotherapeutic process can develop. The first relates to the universal ground covering general concepts about interpersonal relationships common to all parents and children. The personal level concerns the participant's recalling his or her experiences in bibliotherapeutic activities and comparing them with other people's experiences, such as relationships between the child and friends or parents. The third area results from the context and is shaped by specific interpersonal relationships, for example, between the teacher and students in the classroom. It is worth emphasising that the interpenetration of these levels contributes to correctly understanding relationships with other people and explaining individual reactions to various life situations. That, in turn, promotes effective communication, distinguishing values, beauty, necessity and correctness from what is reprehensible, evil and harmful (Borecka, 2002).

Story therapy can be placed in the context of bibliotherapy and art therapy. This method strengthens self-confidence and changes one's attitude towards oneself and one's surroundings. Additionally, it helps develop memory and increase vocabulary. Fairy tale therapy is a form of changing behaviour through identification with the characters. According to her, each fairy tale has a didactic nature, and its structure is based on the juxtaposition of various characters, such as good versus evil, wealth versus poverty, wisdom versus stupidity, and justice versus injustice, which enables the assessment of both one's own and other people's behaviour. (Łaba, 2011).

Therapeutic fairy tales do not meet the definition of classic fairy tales because they are neither short nor written in verse and do not contain a moral (Krasoń, 2009). These are fantasy stories whose plot reflects intrapsychic experiences, such as fears, difficulties related to developing self-esteem and identity, internal conflicts, relationships with peers and significant others, and understanding and identifying emotions. Therapeutic fairy tales are created strictly to support development, only in a therapeutic context, distinguishing them from fairy tales and traditional fairy tales (Bautsz-Sontag, 2015).

Therapeutic fairy tales cover all areas of a child's functioning that may require therapeutic support, for example, the death of a loved one, chronic illness, difficulties in social functioning, behavioural difficulties, the situation of parents' divorce and the like. They are created to allow a conversation with the child about potentially tricky topics that challenge the child and the parent or teacher, not only in the therapeutic space but also at home or school. This activity is an easier and safer way to discover a specific part of one's personality because it is related to the characters presented in the text (Lutovac, Kaasila, 2020). Therapeutic fairy tales allow one to naturally start a conversation on complex topics and explain complicated psychological phenomena, processes and situations.

## **The current state of research on the issue of bibliotherapy**

Research has shown that fairy tales evoke positive emotions, and carefully selecting literature and spending time with parents (guardians) and teachers positively impact the child's development (Kruszewska, 2017). Research reports confirm the beneficial impact of fairy tales on the development of children (Basak, 2012). Storytelling therapy is also an effective method in educational work, which at the same time provides support in everyday challenges and offers a chance to solve difficulties in working with a child. It is a valuable tool that supports both teachers and parents.

According to a meta-analysis of articles on the effectiveness of bibliotherapy in the treatment of neurocognitive disorders (Wang, 2020), it was found, among

other things, that studies on children and adolescents showed a moderate effect of bibliotherapy on reducing depression (Yuan,2018). The study's results showed that the method of conducting bibliotherapy can significantly affect its effectiveness compared to control groups without intervention, and video bibliotherapy turned out to be more effective than Internet bibliotherapy.

In further research on the effects of bibliotherapy on caregiver self-efficacy, it was found that of all aspects of self-efficacy, bibliotherapy had a significant cumulative effect at a trim to a moderate level in improving the ability to cope with challenging behaviours (Steffen, Gant, 2016), and a small effect of online bibliotherapy after three months (Cristancho-Lacroix, 2015). The sample sizes of the intervention groups ranged from 10 to 28 people, which may explain the small effect size and lack of significance of the results. Other systematic analyses also found that psychosocial interventions were generally effective in increasing self-efficacy in dementia caregivers. However, remote interventions were less effective than face-to-face interventions (Tang, Chan, 2016).

## **Assumptions and description of the project**

The "*My Very Special Book*" project was one of the elements of revalidation classes for six students with special educational needs. Its main goal was to create a therapeutic story that cooperated with students with special educational needs. Its assumptions aimed to create a safe, creative space for students to express themselves and gain greater awareness and acceptance of themselves and others. At the same time, the project aimed to educate and raise awareness of the local community, which contributed to building a more inclusive educational environment. The next step after publishing a therapeutic fairy tale with a specific task provided the therapeutic tool for educators, who joined the last part of the project and conducted classes based on "*My Very Special Book*".

The project involved six sixth-grade students of an integrated school who, during revalidation classes, created content, illustrations and tasks for a therapeutic fairy tale, which was used during bibliotherapeutic workshops in grades 1-3 in special schools, hospital schools, and for children of a foundation dealing with children with diabetes. The project involved students with pervasive developmental disorders, motor aphasia and mild intellectual disability. It was financed by a grant from Nowa Era Publishing House during the Projektanci Edukacji contest.

The students participating in the project co-authored a therapeutic fairy tale that touched on the problems they reported that they experience every day. Thanks to this, it was possible to continuously react and talk about students' problems, developing communication skills and team cooperation. The project's

recipients also developed skills in graphomotor skills, imagination, the ability to plan tasks in time, share responsibilities, and assertiveness. All these competencies were developed in a practical aspect while creating a therapeutic fairy tale.

The essential assumption of the project was for the students to create a therapeutic fairy tale with the teacher's help, in which they jointly discussed topics related to their difficulties and challenges. The project supported the development of the imagination and creativity of students, who expressed their feelings and thoughts by creating their own stories. The project was based on a therapeutic approach that assumes that stories are tools for understanding and processing difficult experiences (Matras-Mastalerz, 2016). Joint creation and sharing of stories contribute to developing social competencies, such as working in a group, communicating needs, sharing responsibilities, talking about one's experiences, et cetera.

Creating a therapeutic book by a group of students with similar challenges and difficulties resulting from special educational needs facilitated the exchange of experiences and the creation of a specific network of support and exchange of resources between them. By creating a therapeutic fairy tale together, students and therapists created a tool that can be used to support both therapy and the educational process.

## Methods of project implementation

The project was divided into stages:

- a. Analysis of the therapeutic fairy tale's theme in a practical and theoretical context
- b. Creating characters in the text
- c. Shaping the plot
- d. Analysis of possible forms of therapeutic fairy tales and creation of concepts for tasks included in the book,
- e. Translating the therapeutic fairy tale into English
- f. Creating illustrations for a therapeutic fairy tale
- g. Creating tasks
- h. Distribution of books and conducting workshops

When creating the outline of a therapeutic fairy tale, it was crucial to determine the topic that meets the current needs of students. During revalidation classes, the topic of feeling different, rejection in the group, and low self-esteem emerged.

Creating a therapeutic fairy tale character, the central character of a therapeutic fairy tale, requires considering characteristic features related to the sense of rejection. This character has been personalised and adapted to the target

group to represent the experiences, emotions and challenges readers identify adequately.

By creating characters, the children analysed their problems and emotions related to them. Creating a character who, due to his differences, experiences rejection among his peer group allowed students to share their own experiences while describing social situations that the main character encountered. Animating the therapeutic fairy tale characters made it easier for them to talk about potentially complex topics, which also had a critical therapeutic value. The main character of the therapeutic fairy tale, Alex, had three horns, which clearly distinguished him from the group of unicorns. He also had difficulty responding to challenging behaviour from peers and often suffered from sensory overload. When creating characters, students talked much more willingly and openly about their experiences from everyday life, translating them into the fate of the fairy-tale character. At the same time, all classes took place in a group, and the children shared their observations, experiences, and strategies for dealing with difficult situations.

In shaping the plot of the therapeutic story, the focus was on elements related to confrontation with rejection, the process of accepting one's difference and the search for self-esteem. A vital aspect of the project was making decisions regarding the form of the therapeutic fairy tale, planning the layout and structure to create a coherent and logical whole, and determining the form of tasks for readers, et cetera. Working in a group, making decisions, establishing an action plan, and exerting a significant influence on each element of the therapeutic fairy tale contributed to increasing students' self-esteem, the sense of their subjective treatment, and the sense of agency and competence in-group cooperation. Each participant in the project impacted the final appearance of the therapeutic fairy tale, and the students took part in every element of its creation. Everyone decided, discussed, and created all the elements with the teacher.

The illustrations in the book played a crucial role in conveying emotions and visualising the plot while remaining relevant to the subject matter. The students created illustrations and discussed each element of the therapeutic fairy tale during group activities, discussing and arguing for their ideas.

The graphomotor tasks included in the book had to be consistent with the target group's subject matter and advancement level to enable readers to practice practical work on developing their skills. The students also determined their shape, form and thematic scope. During the discussion, they analysed what the tasks should look like and what form they should take, determining the final shape of each element.

The tasks attached to the therapeutic fairy tale were not only to consolidate knowledge about the therapeutic fairy tale and develop fine motor skills and creativity but also to enable potential readers to create a therapeutic fairy tale



together. Each illustration in the book requires completion and colouring so that the reader – informed about it at the beginning of the therapeutic fairy tale – can co-create it. Creating a therapeutic fairy tale is an essential therapeutic element, which is why it has also been preserved for its readers.

The project included activities that finished with conducting bibliotherapeutic workshops for children with difficulties in social functioning, in a complex health situation, and with special educational needs; the workshops were organised in groups: children with chronic illnesses participating in educational group activities organised at a hospital school, children with mild intellectual disabilities, children with diabetes. The workshops covered the topics of difference, acceptance, and understanding of oneself and others.

It also assumed publishing the therapeutic fairy tale in two forms – electronic (PDF) and traditional form- which required organising the publishing process and transforming the therapeutic fairy tale into appropriate formats. It becomes available to a larger group of recipients. Mariusz Rzepka also recorded an audiobook for the therapeutic fairy tale, which considers the needs of various recipients, regardless of their reading skills.

All the above aspects were crucial elements in creating a therapeutic fairy tale aimed at supporting and developing participants in coping with difficulties, understanding themselves and developing self-esteem. The project perfectly combined elements of psychology and pedagogy, using literature and art as practical tools for support and personal development.

## Summary

The project discussed in the article was intended to support the implementation of therapeutic goals consistent with the goals of revalidation classes, aimed at understanding oneself, one's own and other people's emotions, increasing self-confidence and self-awareness, which directly affects the sense of agency and developing soft skills in children with special needs. Educational. Students shared their thoughts and problems by working on the issue while creating a friendly, therapeutic environment in the support group. Taking the initiative in the form of a grant from Nowa Era Publishing House, "Projektanci Edukacji" also had a positive impact on their self-perception; as project participants, it gave them the feeling that they were the authors of a therapeutic fairy tale on which they had a joint influence. Moreover, working in a group strongly influenced their level of integration and understanding of the needs and difficulties of other project participants.

When creating a therapeutic fairy tale, focusing on the characters' symbolism, morality, and appearance is crucial. It helps children understand the mean-

ings, demonstrate the problems and use the available features (Shuba, 2023). These characters play a representative role, helping children identify with the story and better understand themselves and their surroundings. Moreover, work in the form of a therapeutic fairy tale, including illustrations, graphomotor tasks and content, is precisely adapted to the student's level of understanding, considering their special educational needs.

The project does not finish with the book publication but also provides for the organisation of bibliotherapeutic workshops based on the book created. The workshops complement the project's activities, offering participants active participation in the therapeutic and educational process. Publishing the therapeutic fairy tale in electronic and paper forms shows a diversified approach to the accessibility and preferences of participants and makes it more spreadable.

As a result, *My Very Special Book* provides children with a therapeutic tool. It creates an inclusive and informed learning environment, promoting understanding, acceptance and support for students with special educational needs. By co-creating a therapeutic fairy tale, students process their own experiences and educate the school community about special educational needs. The project fits into bibliotherapy, using stories to develop understanding, acceptance and the ability to cope with difficulties.

The development of the project's activities included organising a series of bibliotherapeutic workshops based on the created therapeutic fairy tale. The aim of the workshops was the active participation and support of participants in the therapeutic and teaching process. They read a book together, performed graphomotor tasks, and talked about self-esteem, students' strengths and barriers, and acceptance and cooperation in the group.

Critical aspects of the project include discussing topics related to rejection, otherness and self-esteem, creating a therapeutic fairy tale character consistent with the theme, shaping the plot and working on the therapeutic fairy tale form. As a result, the project provides participants with therapeutic tools and creates an inclusive educational environment, supporting the development and self-knowledge of children with intellectual disabilities and Asperger's syndrome.

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## **My Very Special Book – Projekt biblioterapeutyczny w pracy z dziećmi ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi. Propozycja aplikacyjna**

### **Streszczenie**

Głównym celem artykułu jest przedstawienie projektu edukacyjnego: *My Very Special Book* opartego na metodzie biblioterapii oraz zilustrowanie rozwoju kompetencji społecznych u uczniów ze specjalnymi potrzebami podczas zajęć rewalidacyjnych opartych na tym pomysł. W artykule omówiono proces tworzenia opowiadania terapeutycznego z uczniami klasy szóstej szkoły integracyjnej w oparciu o projekt *My Very Special Book* realizowany w ramach grantu Wydawnictwa „Nowa Era” w konkursie Projektanci Edukacji. Analizie poddano podstawy teoretyczne, przebieg, założenia i sposób prowadzenia zajęć rewalidacyjnych, których celem było podniesienie kompetencji emocjonalnych i społecznych. Projekt polegał na stworzeniu z uczniami opowieści terapeutycznej o ich aktualnych trudnościach i problemach. Odbiorcami projektu są uczniowie ze specjalnymi potrzebami, trudnościami w funkcjonowaniu społecznym, chorobami przewlekłymi i niską samooceną.

**Słowa kluczowe:** biblioterapia, terapia, autyzm, praca metodą projektu.

# **RESEARCH REPORTS**



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Izabela ZIĘBACZ

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4275-0550>

Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa, Poland

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# The Dynamism of Character as a Tool for Supporting Teachers in Diverse Educational Environments. The Application of Mazur's Theory in Inclusive Education

## Abstract

This publication discusses Marian Mazur's *Cybernetic Theory of Character* in the context of its application in inclusive education and managing diversity in school classrooms. Modern education faces challenges arising from the increasing diversity of students, which requires adapting teaching methods to meet the individual needs of students with varying predispositions and learning styles. Mazur's theory, based on the analysis of character dynamism, offers teachers a tool for better understanding the internal decision-making mechanisms of students, which can support more effective management of diverse groups. The paper also presents the results of empirical research conducted in a Youth Educational Center. These studies demonstrated that profiling the dynamism of character is more relevant than assigning a fixed character category in terms of adapting educational processes to the individual predispositions of students.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, diversity management, cybernetic of character, educational personalization.

## Introduction

Modern education faces unique challenges stemming from the increasing diversity among students. Social and technological changes, as well as globaliza-

tion, require teachers to adapt their instructional approaches in order to effectively work with students who have diverse needs, predispositions, and learning styles (Fullan, 2013; Clarke-Midura & Dede, 2014; Rose & Meyer, 2007; Hehir, 2005).

Adapting education to meet the diverse needs of students becomes even more important in the context of diversity, equity, and inclusion. According to the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), every student, regardless of the extent of their educational needs, should have access to high-quality education that supports their individual development by adapting the learning process to their abilities through the integration of diverse methods and tools. The Salamanca Statement emphasizes that mainstream schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, and promoting education that is accessible to all students, including those with special educational needs. Similarly, the Incheon Declaration stresses inclusivity and equity, placing responsibility on educational systems to eliminate all forms of exclusion and marginalization. However, as Ainscow (2020) notes, the effective implementation of inclusive education requires that teachers are equipped with appropriate didactic tools, enabling them not only to identify students' individual predispositions and needs but also to tailor the teaching process to this diversity. A key challenge remains the development of strategies that allow for the effective management of diversity in the classroom, and, consequently, the full integration of all students into the educational process (Sijuola & Davidova, 2022).

In this context, Marian Mazur's *Cybernetic Theory of Character (CTC)* offers teachers a practical tool that can help them better understand students' internal decision-making mechanisms and the dynamics of their character. Mazur's cybernetic approach, combining elements of psychology and systems theory, provides teachers with specific guidance on how to manage diverse groups of students by adapting teaching methods to their individual rigid intellectual and energetic properties (Wilsz & Bał, 2015; Wilsz, 2017). A key aspect of this theory is the modeling of character dynamics as a set of behavior patterns that individuals strive toward, as freely exhibiting these patterns gives them a sense of psychological comfort (referred to as the optimal state) and self-fulfillment.

The aim of this article is to present the *Cybernetic Theory of Character (CTC)* as a tool to support teachers in implementing educational processes in diverse educational environments. The text discusses how Mazur's theory can assist in developing inclusive teaching strategies, helping teachers better prepare to work with students of varying abilities and educational and social needs, thus more effectively fulfilling the goals of modern inclusive education.



## Literature review

Inclusivity and diversity are fundamental concepts in modern education that have gained prominence through international documents such as the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). This document emphasizes every child's right to participate in the educational system, regardless of abilities or needs, focusing on inclusive education aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for all students. The Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2016) represents another step toward eliminating exclusion and marginalization in education, highlighting the need for a commitment to promoting equality and integration within educational systems.

Ainscow and Booth (2006) point out that teaching strategies should not only support students with special needs but also foster empathy and build attitudes of acceptance toward diversity. In their meta-analysis, Kalambouka et al. (2007) demonstrated that in the majority of the studies analyzed, inclusive education had positive effects for both students with disabilities and their peers.

Undoubtedly, research on inclusive education confirms the benefits of inclusive practices. However, Parveen and Qounsar (2018) point out that while inclusive education holds great potential, it faces numerous challenges, such as the lack of adequately trained teachers, insufficient resources, and a lack of positive attitudes towards students with disabilities. The effective implementation of inclusive education requires educational systems to provide the necessary support and infrastructure, enabling students with diverse needs to fully participate in educational processes. As Parveen and Qounsar (2018) noted, the challenges related to inclusive education call for approaches that take into account the unique needs of each student.

Lewkowicz (2019), studying the role of inclusive education in preschools, highlighted the need for teacher training that equips educators to adapt teaching methods to the individual needs of students. Although his work primarily focused on early childhood education, its conclusions can be applied at higher levels of education, particularly in the context of differentiated instructional support. Freeman-Green et al. (2023) emphasize the crucial role of teachers in creating an environment that fosters equity and inclusion, while Lindsay (2007) demonstrated that students with disabilities in inclusive schools developed better social skills and achieved higher outcomes than those in special schools. Similar conclusions emerge from the research by Szumski, Smogorzewska, and Karwowski (2017), which shows that inclusive education in Polish integrative schools improves the outcomes of both students with disabilities and their peers.

Managing diversity thus becomes crucial for effective teaching. Tomlinson (2017) emphasizes that differentiated instruction in classrooms with varying abilities is essential to ensure all students have access to high-quality education.

Appropriate differentiation strategies, such as adjusting the pace of learning and instructional approaches, can help teachers better respond to the individual needs of students and support their development. Tomlinson argues that teachers must be prepared to flexibly apply a variety of methods to meet different learning styles and levels of student advancement (Tomlinson, 2017).

In the context of managing diversity, the *Cybernetic Theory of Character* (CTC) developed by Marian Mazur (1976) can serve as a valuable tool. This theory allows for a better understanding of the dynamism of students' character, which can help teachers adapt teaching methods to the individual needs of students. The application of Mazur's theory in inclusive education can support the development of personalized education tailored to the diverse abilities, requirements, and needs of students.

In summary, inclusive and interdisciplinary teaching approaches, supported by appropriate theories and strategies, are essential in achieving contemporary educational goals based on equity and inclusion.

## **Cybernetic Theory of Character. Basic assumptions**

Marian Mazur's Cybernetic Theory of Character (CTC) is a valuable approach to understanding human behavior through the application of cybernetics, the science of control and communication in biological and mechanical systems. Unlike traditional psychological approaches, which recognize the plasticity of character and its dependence on the environment, Mazur's cybernetic theory formally and mathematically presents character as a set of "rigid control properties" that are not susceptible to external influences unless they are destructive (Mazur, 1999). This means that individuals' behaviors are largely determined by internal autonomous processes (Pawlak, 2020).

This theory is based on the assumption that every person is an autonomous system with the ability to self-regulate. This means that individuals can make decisions independently of external influences, and their character plays a key role in this process (Mazur, 1999). The theory highlights three essential cybernetic mechanisms: feedback, homeostasis, and the dynamism of character:

- Feedback refers to the system's (the person's) ability to respond to stimuli from the environment in a way that is aligned with the internal mechanisms of character (Mazur, 1999).
- Homeostasis represents the ability to maintain internal balance despite changing external conditions (Wilsz, 2017).
- The dynamism of character, as Mazur notes, is one of the key mechanisms influencing how a person reacts to their environment, processes information, and adjusts their behaviors (Mazur, 1999).

The dynamism of character is one of the central aspects of Mazur's theory, describing how an individual processes energy within an autonomous system. Mazur identifies five classes of character dynamism that influence a person's behavior: exodynamism, exostatism, statism, endostatism, and endodynamism (Mazur, 1999). Each type is characterized by a different way of responding to external stimuli, which has a direct impact on the learning process. For example, exodynamics are characterized by high energy dispersion, tend to act spontaneously, and prefer creative, less structured approaches to learning. In contrast, statics, with near-zero dynamism, prefer more organized and predictable teaching methods, where emphasis is placed on systematicity and order (Mazur, 1999; Pawlak, 2020). Endodynamics, focusing on energy accumulation, tend to work independently and strive for power and influence, which may mean they prefer tasks that require planning and analysis.

Table 1  
*Character Classes in a Cybernetic Approach*

Character Classes	Description
Exodynamism (very distinct positive dynamism).	Exodynamics are students who enjoy being creative and spontaneous, often inventing their own imaginative worlds. They frequently change their minds, quickly forget unpleasant experiences, and act impulsively without much consideration of the consequences.
Exostatism (fairly pronounced positive dynamism)	Exostatics are students who enjoy life and like to stand out in a group, sometimes through interesting or unusual behavior. They respect rules, but may occasionally adjust them to suit their own needs. They enjoy attracting attention by presenting their ideas in a colorful and engaging way.
Statism (dynamism close to zero).	Statics are students who value order and rules, striving to act in accordance with established norms. They like when everything is well-organized and aim to be fair and consistent in their actions and opinions.
Endostatism (quite pronounced negative dynamism)	Endostatics prefer a calm and well-organized life, adapting rules to fit current needs. They avoid risk, are cautious in communication, and enjoy solving problems efficiently, excelling in negotiations and discussions.
Endodynamism (very distinct negative dynamism)	Endodynamics are students who strive for power and influence, often acting according to their own rules. They are highly focused on their goals, may be distrustful of others, and prefer to keep their feelings and plans to themselves, with their primary aim being to achieve success.

Source: Author's own elaboration upon: Mazur, 1999; Wilsz 2013, Pawlak, 2020, Ziebac 2023.

## The application of Mazur's theory in managing diversity and inclusive education

The theory developed by Marian Mazur can serve as an effective tool for personalized teaching, particularly in managing diversity. Biernacka, Obidziński,

and Zaborek (2023) examined character dynamism in a group of adults, highlighting correlations between dynamism and other psychological traits. Although this research did not directly focus on students, its findings may serve as a starting point for further studies on adapting Mazur's theory in education.

Pawlak (2020) highlights the role of Mazur's theory in optimizing decision-making processes, which can be particularly important in education. This theory allows for a better understanding of how character dynamism influences students' decision-making. Although Pawlak's article does not directly address school practice, his interpretation of Mazur's theory points to its broad applications in fields such as psychology, education, and management.

Lechowska and Lechowski (1987) conducted research at the Railway Technical School in Warsaw, which confirmed that adapting teaching methods to students' character dynamism can yield positive results. In this experiment, students whose diploma projects aligned with their dynamism achieved higher results and were more engaged in the learning process. While these findings are promising, it is important to note that the study focused on a specific group, which limits the generalizability of the results.

Paluch (1989) highlighted the application of Mazur's cybernetic theory in managing educational processes. In his research on character dynamism and its impact on student performance, he emphasized that understanding dynamism enables teachers to tailor teaching methods to the individual predispositions of students. Paluch argues that this approach can promote better classroom management and enhance the effectiveness of teaching.

The effective application of diverse didactic interventions within a single group of students, in accordance with the dynamism of their character, requires the use of experimental planning techniques that enable the adjustment of teaching methods to individual needs. By working within confidence intervals, a teacher can more confidently predict the effectiveness of various teaching methods for specific groups of students. For example, students who are exodynamists may prefer engaging in creative and spontaneous tasks, while statisticians may prefer a more organized and structured approach to learning.

In inclusive classrooms, where an additional supporting teacher is involved in the didactic process, it becomes possible to implement a more efficient variety of teaching methods. The supporting teacher can work individually with students who have special needs, which allows for the simultaneous application of different didactic approaches within one group. This makes it possible to better manage diversity and more effectively tailor teaching methods to the varied dynamism of students' character.

The application of Mazur's theory in education can enable better adaptation of teaching methods to the diverse needs of students. This theory offers tools that support teachers in managing diverse groups of students. As Wilsz (2017)

emphasizes, character dynamism influences how students absorb information and respond to educational stimuli, allowing teachers to gain a deeper understanding of individual student preferences and better tailor the teaching content to their needs.

Modern educational technologies, by supporting the process of personalized learning, enable the dynamic adaptation of teaching content to the specific characteristics of each student. Methodological tools based on cybernetics allow for more effective management of the educational process, especially when working with students with special educational needs (Ziebacz, 2023).

In conclusion, Mazur's theory, combined with modern technologies and adaptive tools, offers teachers unique opportunities to tailor teaching methods to the dynamics of students, while simultaneously supporting the process of inclusive and personalized education.

### **Empirical section. Psychocybernetic study of character dynamism**

The research on profiling character dynamism was conducted from March to June 2024 in one of the Youth Educational Centers in the Opole Voivodeship (Poland). A questionnaire with 35 manifestations of dynamism, based on M. Mazur's matrix, was used to diagnose five classes of character. It should be noted that the research questionnaire was designed with practical application in education in mind. The questionnaire is still in the testing phase and is ultimately intended to be adapted for use by teachers who do not have formal psychological training. The goal of this study is to develop a tool that is simple and intuitive enough for a teacher, based on observing student behavior and completed surveys, to identify the dynamism of the student's character without the need for advanced psychological knowledge. This tool is intended to support teachers in better tailoring teaching methods to the individual needs of students.

The study was anonymous, and the questionnaires from both the students and educators were coded. A total of 40 participants took part in the study, including 10 educators who assessed selected students. The analysis results allowed for the identification of differences in character types and their impact on relationships and educational processes.

Understanding character dynamics can enable more effective relationship-building and allow for the adjustment of educational processes to the individual predispositions of students. Each type of dynamism (exodynamism, exostatism, statism, endostatism, endodynamism) is characterized by specific traits that influence both personal and school life. As a result, adapting communication and teaching methods to these traits can lead to improved educational outcomes.

Table 2  
*Detailed manifestations of character dynamism (selected examples)*

	Type of dynamism	Exodynamism	Exostatism	Statism	Endostatism	Endodynamism
No.	character class	C	BC	B	AB	A
1	Life orientation (method of processing information and energy)	Dispersing information and energy, not accumulating anything	Prevalence of dispersing information and energy over accumulating them	Maintaining balance in all aspects of life, equilibrium in accumulating and dispersing information and Energy	Prevalence of accumulating information and energy over dispersing them	Accumulating information and energy (accumulates everything, disperses nothing)
2	Intensity of life	Vivacity, seeking pleasure in life regardless of the possible consequences of such an attitude	Variety, seeking pleasure in life, but not at any cost	Moderation (willing to endure moderate discomfort for pleasure)	Comfort (willing to face only minor discomfort for pleasure, likes to live comfortably)	Calmness (unwilling to endure any discomfort for pleasure, wants to live peacefully, safely)
3	Attitude towards rules	Capriciousness (lack of attachment to rules, does not bend one's actions to anyone's requirements)	Individualism (follows general rules but rejects those that do not suit them)	Principled (adhering to specific rules)	Flexibility (acknowledges general rules with deviations depending on needs)	Arbitrariness (creates rules for one's own benefit but does not adhere to them)
...	...	...	...	...	...	...
35	Winning people over	Personal charm (easily wins others over with personal charm)	Grace, likability (wins people over with grace, an impressive demeanor, witty speech, humor, and elegant dress)	Righteousness, proving correctness (wins people over through righteousness, by proving that his cause is just)	Efficiency, demonstrating usefulness (wins people over with efficiency, by persuading them to adopt his point of view as useful)	Power, providing benefits (does not persuade, but hints that fulfilling his wishes will benefit the other person)

Source: Author own's elaborations upon Mazur, 1999.

The research data was analyzed using information entropy according to C.F. Shannon. Information entropy, developed by Shannon, allows for treating a person as a source of information. In this context, entropy was applied to study the uncertainty/complexity of character traits, aiming for a better understanding and classification of various classes of character dynamism. Entropy is particularly useful in research on character dynamics because it accounts for the probability of different intensities of traits, helping to identify patterns and differences between them. In pedagogy, entropy opens new possibilities for understanding individual differences among students, allowing for the adaptation of teaching methods to their specific needs. Since entropy reflects the complexity and diversity of information, it is well-suited for assessing differences in students' characters. The formula used for calculating entropy was:

$$H = - \sum_{i=1}^n p_i \log(p_i)$$

where:

$P_i = \frac{p_i}{\Sigma}$  – the probability of the intensities of the detailed manifestations of the dynamism of the character of the researched resource.

The following charts depict the character dynamism profiles of selected students. The charts illustrate the probability of belonging to the five classes of dynamism: exodynamic, exostatic, static, endostatic, and endodynamic, and indicate entropy levels as a measure of variability and stability of behaviors within a given character class. Aggregated data for the selected 10 students is presented in Chart 1.

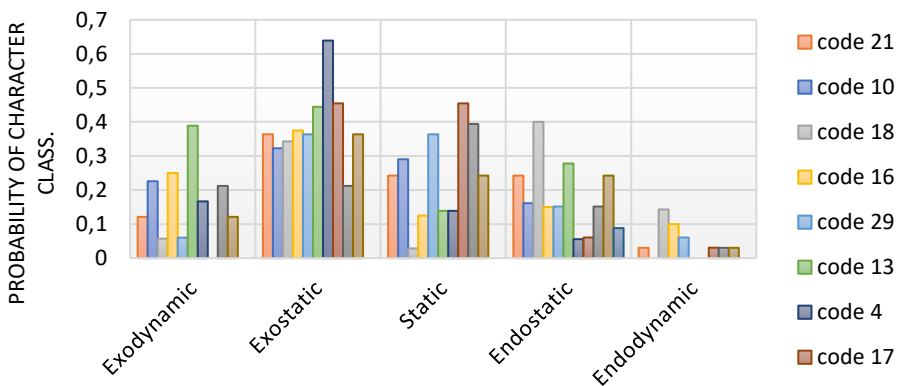
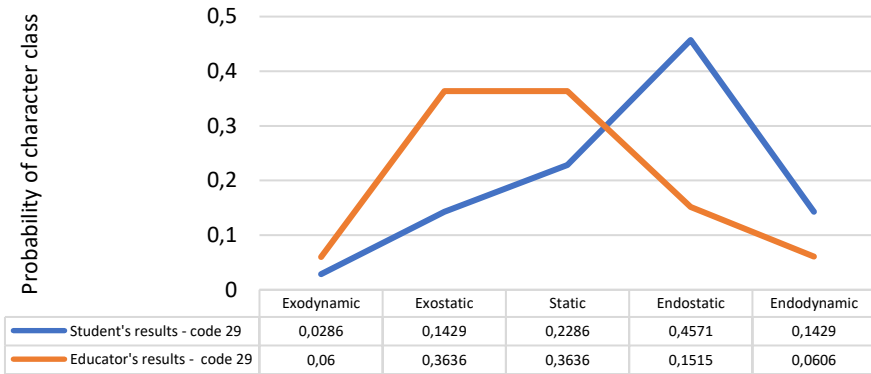


Chart 1  
Character dynamism profiles of selected students

Source: Author's own elaboration.

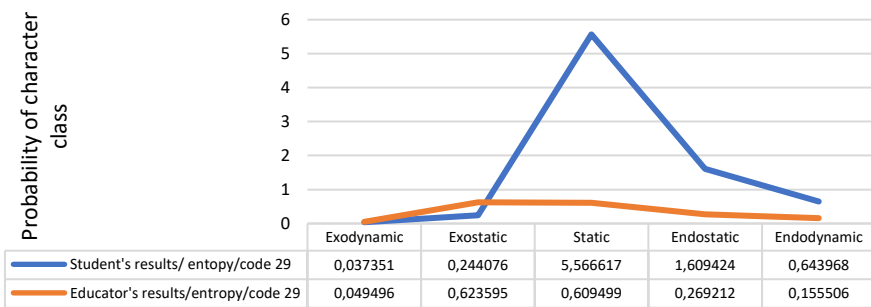
Chart 1 shows significant variation in character dynamism within the studied group of students, even though the sample presented in the chart includes only 10 individuals. Such diversity poses substantial challenges for the teacher, as it makes it impossible to apply uniform teaching methods to the entire group.

Chart 2 shows the probability of the student (code 29) belonging to different cybernetic character classes. The student’s profile indicates that the likelihood of belonging to various character types is not evenly distributed, which allows for several conclusions about their personality and potential behaviors.



*Chart 2*  
Character dynamism profile – student code: 29

Source: Author’s own elaboration.



*Chart 3*  
Chart of entropy – student code: 29

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

- Self-Assessment – The student (code 29) perceives themselves in a varied manner, assigning different probabilities to each character class. In the Exo-



dynamic category, the assigned probability is 2.86%, with an entropy of 0.037351, indicating very high predictability and low variability in behavior. For the Exostatic type, the probability is 14.29%, and the entropy is 0.244076, suggesting moderate stability and predictability of behaviors in this category. In the case of Static, with a probability of 22.86%, the entropy value is 5.566617, indicating very high variability and unpredictability of behaviors in this category. The Endostatic class, to which the student assigns the highest probability (45.71%), has an entropy of 1.609424, meaning moderate variability. However, with such a high probability, the student's behaviors may require flexibility in the educational approach. In the Endodynamic class, the assigned probability is 14.29%, with an entropy of 0.643968, indicating moderate variability, though the student's behaviors in this category are more stable than in the Static class.

- *Teacher's Assessment of Student (code 29)* – The teacher's assessment of the student with code 29 differs somewhat from the student's self-assessment. In the Exodynamic category, the teacher assigns a probability of 6%, with an entropy of 0.049496, indicating stability and predictability of behavior. For the Exostatic class, the teacher assigns a probability of 36.36%, with an entropy of 0.623595, suggesting moderate variability in this category. In the Static class, also with a probability of 36.36%, the entropy is 0.609499, indicating moderate predictability of behavior, though the teacher perceives the student as relatively stable in this category. In the Endostatic category, with a probability of 15.15%, the entropy is 0.269212, suggesting behavioral stability in this category. For the Endodynamic class, the teacher assigns a low probability of 6.06%, with an entropy of 0.155506, also indicating relative stability and predictability of behavior.
- *Guidance for the Teacher* – A comparison between the student's self-assessment and the teacher's assessment reveals significant differences in the perception of behavioral dynamics. Notably, the student perceives themselves as more variable in the Static category, where entropy in the self-assessment is much higher than in the teacher's evaluation. These differences may indicate a need for a more individualized approach to the student, particularly in terms of flexibility in responding to their dynamic behaviors. It would be valuable for the teacher to take into account the student's perception of their own behaviors as more complex and unstable, especially in the Static and Endostatic types, where entropy in the self-assessment suggests greater variability than in the teacher's evaluation. Adjusting the educational approach to these dynamic traits may help the student better understand and stabilize their behavior.

Other examples of student profiles, along with their analysis, are presented in Charts 4 and 5.

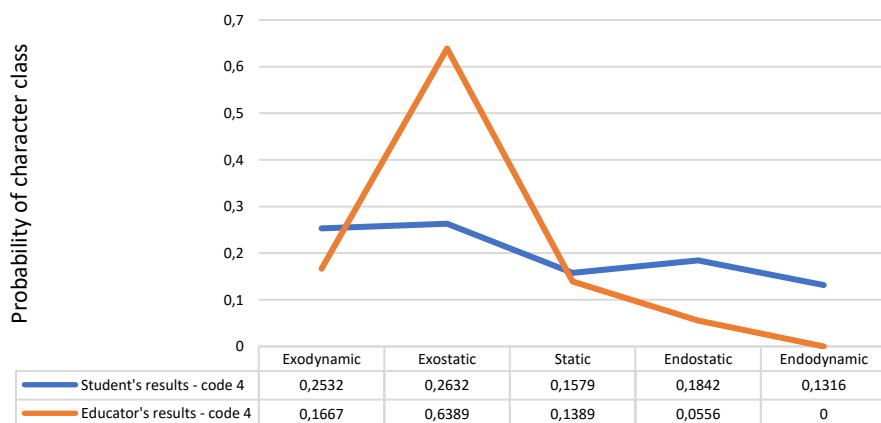


Chart 4

Character dynamism profile – student code: 4

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Table 3

Entropy distribution of results for teacher and student (self-assessment) with code 4

	Exodynamism	Exostatism	Statism	Endostatism	Endodynamism
Student's results	0,298808	0,549171	0,477138	0,662704	0,53664
Educator's results	0,12374	0,956179	0,277045	0,134606	0

Source: Author's own elaboration.

- Self-Assessment – Student 4 perceives themselves in a balanced way, assigning similar probabilities to class 1 (25.32%) and class 2 (26.32%). The entropy value in class 1 is 0.298808, indicating stability and predictability of behaviors in this area. The entropy in class 2 is 0.549171, suggesting moderate variability, but behaviors in this category remain fairly predictable. Class 4, with a probability of 18.42%, has a high entropy of 0.662704, indicating greater behavioral variability in this category, which may require a more flexible approach from the teacher.
- Teacher's Assessment – The teacher assigns the student the highest probability of belonging to class 2 (63.89%), with a very high entropy of 0.956179, indicating that the student's behavior in this category is perceived as highly variable. Additionally, for class 4, the probability is only 5.56%, and the entropy is 0.134606, suggesting that the teacher perceives the student's behavior in this category as stable.

- Guidance for the Teacher – The student perceives themselves as more dynamic than the teacher’s assessment suggests. The teacher should take note of the differences between the student’s self-assessment and their observations, adjusting their approach to help develop the student’s dynamic traits. It is worth leveraging the student’s tendency to engage in activities, while also providing support in stabilizing their behaviors in more complex situation.

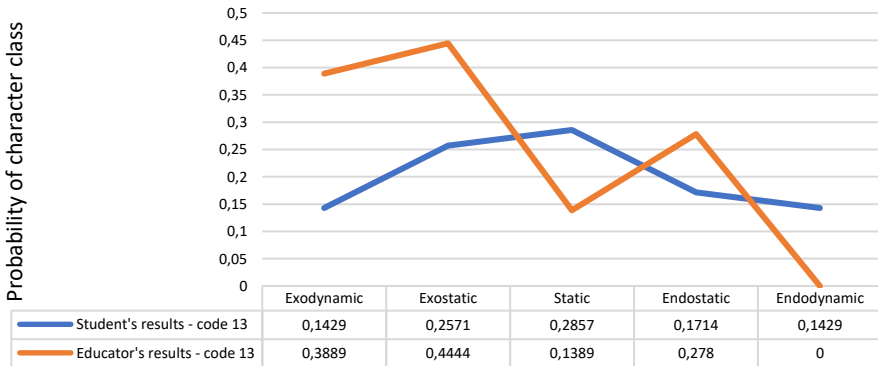


Chart 5  
Character dynamism profile – student code: 13

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Table 4  
Entropy distribution of results for teacher and student (self-assessment) with code 13

	Exodynamism	Exostatism	Statism	Endostatism	Endodynamism
Student’s results	0,149404	0,488152	0,715707	0,47336	0,53664
Educator’s results	0,346472	0,623595	0	3,36515	0,077753

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

- Student Self-Assessment (code 13) – The student with code 13 perceives themselves as most belonging to the Static class, with a probability of 28.57% and high entropy of 0.715707, suggesting significant variability in their behavior within this category. The Exostatic class also has a high probability (25.71%) and moderate entropy of 0.488152, indicating relatively stable behaviors in this category, though some differences may occur. For the Endostatic class, the probability is 17.14%, with entropy of 0.47336, suggesting moderate behavioral variability. In the Exodynamic and Endodynamic

categories, each with a probability of 14.29%, entropy is 0.149404 and 0.53664, respectively, indicating greater stability in the Exodynamic class and moderate variability in the Endodynamic class.

- Teacher's Assessment (code 13) – In the teacher's assessment, student 13 is perceived as more dynamic, with the highest probability assigned to the Exodynamic class (40%) and moderate entropy of 0.346472, suggesting that the student is active but relatively predictable. The Exostatic class is assigned a probability of 42.86% with entropy of 0.623595, indicating greater behavioral variability in this category than reflected in the student's self-assessment. For the Endostatic class, the probability is 14.29%, but with entropy as high as 3.36515, suggesting very high unpredictability in this category. The teacher perceives the student as stable in the Endodynamic category (2.06% probability, entropy 0.077753), while the Static class is not assigned (0% probability, 0 entropy).
- Guidance for the Teacher – The differences between the student's self-assessment and the teacher's evaluation, particularly in the Exodynamic and Static classes, indicate the need for a flexible approach. It is important to consider the student's behavioral variability and provide support in situations that require greater predictability. Additionally, efforts should be made to stabilize behaviors, especially in areas where entropy indicates high variability, such as the Endostatic category.

## Discussion

The analysis of the profiles of students 29, 4, and 13 revealed significant discrepancies between the students' self-assessments and the teachers' evaluations, particularly regarding the stability and variability of behaviors, which were measured using entropy indicators. These results show that students' self-assessments often do not fully reflect the teachers' perceptions, which may lead to inappropriate educational interventions if these differences are not taken into account. Entropy-based profiling provides a more detailed insight into the dynamics of behavior, allowing for more effective adaptation of teaching methods to the individual needs of students.

The research clearly shows that each student is characterized by a unique dynamism of character, which further complicates the teaching process in diverse educational environments, especially in the context of inclusive education. Teachers must not only deal with individual differences but also with inclusivity, which introduces additional challenges related to the diversity of educational and social needs of students. Therefore, it becomes essential to use tools that allow for precise examination of this diversity. With such tools, teachers can

more effectively adapt their teaching methods, leading to more efficient classroom management, regardless of the level of student diversity. Undoubtedly, the application of Mazur's theory in managing diversity in inclusive education holds great potential.

## **Conclusion**

Mazur's theory, based on entropy analysis and character profiling, offers teachers a tool for better diagnosing and understanding the complex traits of students. This can enable more effective management of diversity and inclusivity in education. Utilizing entropy and profiling the dynamics of students' behaviors can help adapt teaching methods to the individual needs of students, increasing the effectiveness of the educational process.

Although Mazur's theory is complex and requires specialized teacher training, it serves as a valuable tool for working in diverse classrooms. Its application in inclusive education can significantly contribute to a better understanding of students' individual needs and more effectively support their development. So far, this theory has not been widely used, mainly due to its formal-mathematical nature and the lack of available translations into English, which has limited its reach and availability in the international academic community. However, in recent years, there has been a growing number of interdisciplinary publications indicating increased interest in Mazur's theory. To fully harness its potential, further research involving larger groups of participants and diverse educational contexts is necessary to confirm the anticipated benefits of applying this theory. Experimental studies, in particular, would be helpful to broaden the scope of Mazur's theory to a wider population of students. It is also important to note that the sample size (40 participants) and the specific context (Youth Educational Center) may limit the generalizability of the results to other educational settings. In general, Mazur's method itself does not have direct limitations related to the age of students or the type of disorders, as the theory of character dynamism assumes that every individual possesses varied rigid character traits, regardless of specific conditions. For this reason, the theory can be applied to a broad population, including in inclusive education. However, to effectively adapt the tools for school practice, further research is needed, particularly regarding students with special educational needs. Diagnostic tools must be developed that can account for the actual capabilities of these students and adjust the teaching process to their specific needs. It is crucial to conduct research in diverse educational environments to verify how Mazur's theory works in practice with students with different types of disorders and across various age groups. Further large-scale studies, conducted in more diverse environments,

could provide more comprehensive evidence of the applicability of Mazur's theory in the context of modern inclusive education.

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## **Dynamizm charakteru jako narzędzie wspierające nauczycieli w zróżnicowanych środowiskach edukacyjnych. Zastosowanie teorii Mazura w edukacji inkluzywnej**

### **Streszczenie**

Niniejsza publikacja omawia teorię *Cybernetyka charakteru* Mariana Mazura w kontekście jej zastosowania w edukacji inkluzywnej oraz w zarządzaniu różnorodnością w klasach szkolnych. Współczesna edukacja stoi przed wyzwaniami wynikającymi z rosnącej różnorodności uczniów, co wymaga adaptacji metod nauczania do indywidualnych potrzeb uczniów o różnych predyspozycjach i stylach uczenia się. Teoria Mazura, oparta na analizie dynamizmu charakteru, oferuje nauczycielom narzędzie umożliwiające lepsze zrozumienie wewnętrznych mechanizmów decyzyjnych uczniów, co może wspomóc bardziej skuteczne zarządzanie zróżnicowanymi grupami. W pracy przedstawiono również wyniki badań empirycznych, przeprowadzonych w Młodzieżowym Ośrodku Wychowawczym. Badania te wykazały, że profilowanie dynamizmu charakteru jest bardziej zasadne niż nadawanie indywidualnej kategorii charakteru, w kontekście dostosowywania procesów dydaktycznych do indywidualnych predyspozycji uczniów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja włączająca, zarządzanie różnorodnością, cybernetyka charakteru, personalizacja edukacji.



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Andra-Maria JURCA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4220-4795>

West University of Timisoara, Department of Educational Sciences, Romania;  
Doctoral School of Psychology-Educational Sciences

Anca LUSTREA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1018-2966>

West University of Timisoara, Department of Educational Sciences, Romania;  
University Clinic for Therapies and Psycho-Pedagogic Counselling

Claudia-Vasilica BORCA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5368-355X>

West University of Timisoara, Department of Educational Sciences, Romania;  
University Clinic for Therapies and Psycho-Pedagogic Counselling

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**Contact:** andra.jurca@e-uvt.ro; anca.lustrea@e-uvt.ro; claudia.borca@e-uvt.ro

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## Perceptions of Educational Managers and Teachers on the Implementation of Inclusive Education in Romanian Schools

### Abstract

Inclusive Education (IE), thirty years after the Salamanca Declaration (1994), is still a challenge that requires evidence-based solutions. In Romania, Inclusive Education focuses mainly on integrating students with special educational needs (SEN) into mainstream schools. However, full inclusion has not yet been achieved. Teachers and educational managers are essential in successfully implementing IE in schools. The present study aims to investigate the factors that significantly predict differences between the perceptions of teachers and academic managers regarding IE implementation in Romanian schools. A quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional, comparative, and correlational design was used for research. One thousand thirty-five participants, includ-

ing 123 educational managers (inspectors and principals), responded to the Romanian culturally adapted 4th edition of the Index for Inclusion. The results showed that principals perceive schools as more inclusive than teachers. The factors that predict these differences are those related to policies, cultures and practices rather than age, seniority, gender, and environment. A distinct age-related factor concerning inclusive school policies was identified only in the case of younger principals.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, inclusive school, index for inclusion.

## Introduction

Inclusive Education (IE) is an increasingly widespread process that is continuously reconceptualized. It promotes respect for each person's right to education, regardless of individual characteristics (Hornandez-Torrano et al., 2020; Mendenhall et al., 2021). Therefore, even 30 years after the Salamanca Declaration (1994) was adopted, scientifically validated solutions are still to be explored. As a policy, IE represents a challenge to achieve in specific educational situations because solutions that fit all learners, regardless of their extraordinary support needs, are complicated and almost impossible to accommodate. It is necessary to consider the context and individual particularities, as the implementation of IE differs from one situation to another (Halinen & Järvinen, 2008).

In Booth and Ainscow's (2016) and the present study, IE understanding is holistic, emphasizing equality, increased participation, and reduced exclusion in educational settings for all students. At the school level, EI is perceived as the implementation of inclusive values, which propose an evaluation of school inclusion on three dimensions: cultures, policies, and practices. Inclusive culture refers to a school that nurtures belonging, diversity, and mutual respect among all its members. Inclusive policies involve developing and implementing strategies that support the participation and achievement of every student, ensuring that no one is excluded or marginalized. Inclusive practices are the strategies and teaching methods employed to accommodate students' varied learning needs, enabling all to access and engage with the curriculum effectively (Booth & Ainscow, 2016).

Research highlights the importance of conducting studies on this topic. It is essential to identify the factors related to the school context and how they can influence the successful implementation of IE (Aftab et al., 2024), but also to explore the perceptions of all relevant actors: teachers and educational managers (Loreman, 2014) regarding the implementation of IE in schools (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Van Mieghem et al., 2018; Sirem & Çatal, 2022). Educational policymakers decide the school's purpose, vision, and action framework, and principals and teachers translate this into practice while teachers actively implement IE in the school (Rouse, 2017).

Teachers have a crucial role in implementing inclusive policies in schools and classrooms (Chow et al., 2023) as they, through their specific actions, make

these wishes come true. Teachers are not the only ones who can contribute to this regard. School principals also have an essential role in the implementation of IE (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; AuCoin et al., 2020; Pedaste et al., 2021; Sirem & Çatal, 2022), to stimulate innovation and promote changes and improvements regarding inclusive practices (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Harris, 2012), but also the influence of cultures favourable to school inclusion (Hallinger, 2005; Habegger, 2008; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006, apud. Yan & Sin, 2015), supporting, guiding and monitoring teachers in this endeavour. The school principal especially has a role in managing the paradigm shift, being essential in optimizing the practice and culture of the school organization to facilitate the implementation of IE (Pedaste et al., 2021) as well as inclusive policy (Cherkowski & Ragoonaden, 2016; Mac Ruairc, 2013, apud. AuCoin et al., 2020). Effective school management drives consistent changes in the educational system (Day et al., 2009, apud. AuCoin et al., 2020) by providing a meso-level framework that ensures inclusive practices are a constant, high-quality reality at the classroom (micro) level, with the entire school acting cohesively in support of these values.

There is a relationship between the attitude of school principals and the commitment of teachers to implement IE (Al-Mahdy & Emam, 2017; O’Laughlin & Lindle, 2015; Sumbera et al., 2014; apud. Pedaste et al., 2021). Principals can contribute to developing learning communities in the school to facilitate teachers’ professional development in implementing IE (Fluijt et al., 2016; Luștrea & Crașovan, 2020). The professional development of teachers and principals is essential to facilitating a positive perception and attitude towards IE in school (Yan & Sin, 2015; Clipa et al., 2019). Although the role of the school principal in achieving IE has been demonstrated, not much attention has been paid to their perceptions, with the emphasis in research being placed mainly on the teachers’ attitudes (Kielblock, 2018).

In the teaching process in general, but especially in that of IE, one of the essential factors is considered by the teacher, the expectations being that the teachers’ attitudes, perceptions, professional training, and self-confidence are favorable to developing teaching environments that are effective and inclusive (Monsen et al., 2014; Ewing et al., 2018). Teachers are the ones who facilitate the development of students’ skills by applying, implementing, using, and combining various didactic strategies and approaches (Finkelstein et al., 2019). Principals can facilitate the support a teacher needs to ensure quality education in the classroom for all students. In other words, teacher and principal attitudes toward IE are considered essential predictors of IE implementation at the school level (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Kielblock, 2018). IE is determined both by the attitude of school principals (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Al-Mahdy & Emam, 2017; O’Laughlin & Lindle, 2015; Sumbera et al., 2014; apud. Pedaste et al., 2021, Jurca

& Sava, 2023), as well as that of teachers (Verza & Verza, 2011; Gherguț & Frumos, 2019; Jurca et al., 2023).

When measuring IE, attitudes, perceptions, and perspectives are often used interchangeably, which can cause terminological confusion. Although some studies equate perceptions and attitudes, the two concepts are not identical. Attitudes are defined as those beliefs, feelings, and predispositions of a person towards something or someone (Alkhateeb et al., 2016). On the other hand, teachers' perceptions can be defined as how they understand, interpret, and evaluate different aspects of the educational environment, including the level of inclusion in the school. Most studies have investigated teachers' attitudes towards IE, not their perceptions of implementing IE in school. This study will address the concept of perceptions, as we want to see how teachers and educational managers report on inclusion in the schools where they teach. Thus, we can have a reference point regarding the current situation of schools as perceived by two categories of the relevant actors.

The choice to focus on the perception of teachers and educational managers is justified by the small number of studies carried out so far in Romania on this topic. Most studies investigated the teachers' attitudes (Marin, 2016; Frumos, 2018; Clipa et al., 2019; Mâța & Clipa, 2020; Luștea, 2023; Jurca et al., 2023) and principals' attitudes (Jurca & Sava, 2023). To the best of our knowledge, only one study in Romania used the Index for Inclusion (Ifl), second edition (2002) (Adet, 2019). One study explored how leadership influences inclusive cultures (Ionescu & Vrășmaș, 2023), while another examined school management in Romania, focussing on visions, values, and community collaboration (Voinea & Turculeț, 2019).

To develop inclusive school environments in Romania, the Ifl can be considered a valid tool for achieving this goal. It is one of the most used tools internationally to assess school inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Velez-Calvo et al., 2018; Fernández-Archilla et al., 2020). Although this tool is used in several countries, the Ifl is used inconsistently in Romania. Although the Inclusion Index is recommended as an educational policy tool (Ministry of Education, 2020), it is used sporadically. It is not known enough to allow conclusive data on IE implementation in schools in Romania or to be used consistently in schools as a structured and systematic action benchmark.

## Methodology

Using an explanatory, correlational, and comparative non-experimental design, this study aimed to investigate the perceptions of the teaching staff (teachers and educational managers) regarding the implementation of IE in the schools

and identify the factors that predict significant differences between their perceptions.

**General research question:** What is the perception of the teaching staff (teachers and educational managers) regarding implementing inclusive education in Romania?

**Specific research questions:**

In the perception of educators (teachers and educational managers), what are the most strongly represented aspects of inclusion in Romanian schools?

In the perception of educators (teachers and educational managers), what are the less represented aspects of inclusion in Romanian schools?

**Specific research hypotheses:**

The following research hypotheses were formulated from the premise that educational managers have a decisive role in transforming and promoting inclusive schools (DeMatthews et al., 2020; Khaleel et al., 2021; Adams et al., 2023).

**H1:** There are significant differences regarding inclusive education implemented at the school level in the perception of teachers and educational managers (principals and inspectors) from the perspective of policies, cultures, and practices.

**H2:** There are differences between the factors that predict the different perceptions of teachers and educational managers (principals and inspectors) about school inclusion from the perspective of policies, cultures, and practices.

## Instrument

The Index for Inclusion (Ifl) (Booth & Ainscow, 2016) was used to assess the teachers' perceptions of IE implementation in Romanian schools.

The Ifl comprises 70 items on three general dimensions (culture, policies and practices) and two sub-dimensions. The dimension of creating inclusive school cultures includes sub-dimensions: Strengthening the community (e.g. item: Everyone (students, teachers, parents or community members) is welcome in my school.) and establishing inclusive values (e.g. item: School in which I practice develops shared, inclusive values). The Elaboration of inclusive policies dimension includes the sub-dimensions: School development for all (e.g. item: In the development process of the school where I teach, the school management, teachers, parents, students, and the community participate.) and Ensuring support for diversity (e.g., item: In the school where I teach, there is coordination/synchronization of all forms of support addressed to students). The development of inclusive practices includes developing a curriculum for all (e.g., item: In the school where I teach, children learn and apply knowledge about food production cycles, food consumption, and the importance of water) and organiza-

tion of learning (e.g., item: In the school where I teach, learning activities are planned to take into account the needs of each child.).

In Romania, Ifl is available in the second edition (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) and the last edition, the fourth (Booth & Ainscow, 2016). The only research identified in Romania that used the second edition of the Ifl and other tools calculated the Alpha Cronbach coefficient, resulting in a value above 0.70 (Adet, 2019). No other validity measures in the Romanian context for the Ifl were identified. Given this situation, the Ifl was adopted and validated on the Romanian population in the present study.

The Ifl direct and retrovert translation, expert consultation, and cognitive interviews were conducted. We performed an internal consistency test, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to analyze the data. The values of the Cronbach alpha coefficient exceeded the threshold of 0.9 for all three dimensions: policies, cultures, and practices, indicating outstanding reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

All statistical indices obtained from EFA and CFA were significant (SRMR=.035, RMSE=.064, IFI=.99, CFI=.99). The initial version of the Ifl includes 70 items. Still, after the cognitive interviews and statistical analysis, 64 items were considered for the Romanian version.

## Participants

A total of 1035 teachers from all counties in Romania who had different administrative positions and specializations and taught in pre-university education participated in this research. The study participants were represented by 941 (90.9) females and 94 (9.1%) males. The teaching staff participating in the study hold various positions, such as 18 (1.7%) inspectors, 105 (10.1%) directors, 474 (45.8%) teachers, 31 (3%) itinerant teachers, 48 (4, 6%) counsellor teachers, 212 (20.5%) primary education teachers and 147 (14.2%) preschool education teachers. Of teachers who teach in rural areas, 262 (25.3%) and 773 (74.7%) in urban areas also participated. The schooling cycle at which the teachers taught was from preschool 173 (16.7%), primary school 237 (22.9%), secondary school 331 (32%), and high school 188 (18.2%), but also taught in several cycles 106 (10.2%). Study participants ranged in age from 18-20 to over 60. Most participants, 550 (53.1%), are 40-49. As for seniority, most participants, 615 (59.4%), are over 20 years old.

Table 1  
*Descriptive summary of the sample*

Features	N	%	Features	N	%
<b>Gender</b>			<b>Age range</b>		
Female	941	90.9	18 – 20	4	0.4
Male	94	9.1	21 – 30	66	6.4
<b>School level</b>			31 – 39	135	13
Preschool	173	16.7	40 – 49	550	53.1
Primary school	237	22.9	50 – 59	250	24.2
Secondary school	331	32	peste 60	30	2.9
High school	188	18.2	<b>Teaching experience (in years)</b>		
More then one	106	10.2	0 – 3	59	5.7
<b>Teaching role</b>			3 – 5	27	2.6
School inspector	18	1.7	5 – 10	58	5.6
Principal	105	10.1	10 – 15	93	9
Teacher	474	45.8	15 – 20	183	17.7
Support teacher	31	3	peste 20	615	59.4
School counselor	48	4.6	<b>School environment</b>		
Teacher of primary education	212	20.5	Urban	773	74.7
Teacher for preschool education	147	14.2	Rural	262	25.3

## Data collection

The indicators in the IFl were translated; three translations were made from English to Romanian, and the reverse was made from Romanian to English to identify the most suitable version of the translation in Romanian. The experts' opinion was requested to establish the closest form of the items that would fit in the Romanian context to confirm the validity of the translated items' content. Also, to ensure the instrument's validity, a first qualitative pre-test was carried out, which consisted of 5 cognitive interviews with teachers from different schools. Changes were made to the items based on the qualitative interpretation of the cognitive interview. Also, the first quantitative pre-test was carried out, and data was collected through the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire was distributed through the county school inspectorates between May and June 2023. The participants were informed about the study's purpose and the data's confidentiality. Thus, completing the form, they agreed to participate in this study. The form consisted of two sections, one for demographic data collection and the other section containing the questionnaire items. The survey carried out was approved by the Scientific Council of University Research, with approval number 86978/20.11.2023.

## Data analysis

The Friedman test was used to identify if, from the teachers' perception, there are differences between the ranks of the analyzed items for each dimension. Data were subjected to statistical analysis to determine variations in perceptions of school inclusion among inspectors, principals, and teachers. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used for this purpose. In addition, to assess differences in factors predicting perceptions of school inclusion for inspectors, principals, and teachers, standard multiple regression analyses were conducted.

## Results

### Presentation of the results related to the first two research questions

The Friedman test was used for each dimension, which included cultures, policies, and inclusive school practices to answer the research questions. For all sizes, the test is statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ). This result shows substantial differences between the ranks of the analyzed items. The following results are presented in detail for each item by size (Table 2).

Table 2

*The results of the Friedman test for teachers' perceptions of the implementation of inclusive education in schools for the dimension of inclusive school cultures*

Creating inclusive cultures			
Building community	Mean Rank	Establishing inclusive values	Mean Rank
A.1.1. Everyone (students, teachers, parents or community members) is welcome in my school	7.39*	A.2.8. The school where I teach promotes non-violent interactions and dispute mediation.	6.08*
A.1.11. The school staff where I teach is interested in the school family relationship.	6.89*	A.2.2. The school where I teach encourages respect for all human rights.	6.07*
A.1.8. The school encourages acceptance of diversity (understanding the interaction between people worldwide).	6.73*	A.2.3. The school where I teach encourages respect for protecting Planet Earth.	5.96*
A.1.2. The staff of the school where I work is cooperative.	6.66*	A.2.10. The school where I teach contributes to children's and adults' physical and mental health (parents, teachers, auxiliary teaching staff, non-teaching staff).	5.69*



Table 2 (cont.)

Creating inclusive cultures			
Building community	Mean Rank	Establishing inclusive values	Mean Rank
A.1.6. The school staff where I teach and the authorities (other local institutions) work well together.	5.85*	A.2.9. The school where I teach encourages children and adults (teachers, parents, auxiliary teaching staff, and non-teaching staff) to accept themselves unconditionally.	5.65*
A.1.10. The school where I teach, and the local community develop each other.	5.7*	A.2.7. The school where I teach fights all forms of discrimination.	5.57*
A.1.4. The staff and children in my school respect each other.	5.68*	A.2.4. In the school where I teach, inclusion is seen as an opportunity to increase participation for all.	5.47*
A.1.7. The school where I teach is a model of democratic citizenship (a socially involved, informed citizen).	5.62*		
A.1.3. The children in my school help each other.	5.38*		
A.1.5. The school staff and parents/guardians of all students in the school where I teach collaborate.	5.09*		
A.1.9. The adults and children in the school where I teach are open and understanding gender diversity.	5*		

Note: \*  $p < .001$ .

The highest-ranked items show that teaching staff value openness to the community and the school-family relationship. However, collaboration between parents and school staff, as well as acceptance of gender diversity, are less emphasized. It suggests that while teachers are open to community involvement, they struggle with fostering diversity and deeper parent-school cooperation. Additionally, promoting non-violent interactions and respecting human rights are highly valued, but combating discrimination and viewing inclusion to increase participation are less prioritized. It reflects a focus on non-violence but not necessarily on embracing diversity.

The highest-ranked items in the dimension of inclusive policies emphasize supporting new students and accepting all children (Table 3). Lower-ranked items indicate less focus on preparing students for diverse future environments and sustainability efforts. Efforts are being made to reduce bullying and barriers to participation, but there is less emphasis on professional development for di-

versity and coordination of support services. It suggests a focus on immediate inclusion and student support but a gap in long-term preparation and environmental consciousness.

Table 3

*Results of the Friedman test for teachers' perception of the implementation of inclusive education in schools for the dimension of inclusive school policies*

Producing inclusive policies			
Developing the school for all	Mean Rank	Organizing support for diversity	Mean Rank
B.1.7. All new children are helped to settle into my school.	6.86*	B.2.7. Bullying is discouraged/minimized in my school.	4.34*
B.1.6. The school I teach accepts all the children in its locality.	6.84*	B.2.6. In the school where I teach, barriers to student participation in school and extracurricular/extracurricular activities are reduced.	4.05*
B.1.8. In the classroom, the teaching and learning groups are organized equitably to support the learning of all the children in the school where I teach.	6.43*	B.2.5. The internal regulations of the school where I teach explain the standard of behaviour expected of students at school (school rules) for learning and curriculum development.	4.25*
B.1.5. All new employees are helped to settle into the school where they teach.	6.23*	B.2.4. The school where I teach ensures that 'special educational needs' policies support inclusion.	4.13*
B.1.2. The school where I teach takes an inclusive approach to leadership through a leadership style that excludes discrimination, bias and favouritism based on colour, race and other characteristics and allows employees to feel valued for their contribution.	6.14*	B.2.3. The school where I teach supports continuity in the education of institutionalized children (in the child protection system)	3.97*
B.1.1. The school management, teachers, parents, students and the community participate in the development process of the school where I teach.	6.09*	B.2.2. The professional development activities of the school where I teach help staff to respond to diversity	3.59*
B.1.3. Appointments and promotions of teachers and students in the school where they teach are correct.	5.95*	B.2.1. In the school where I teach, there is coordination/synchronization of all support addressed to students.	3.67*

Table 3 (cont.)

Producing inclusive policies			
Developing the school for all	Mean Rank	Organizing support for diversity	Mean Rank
B.1.4. the teaching and non-teaching staff's expertise (strengths, skills, training programs completed, etc.) is known and used in my school.	5.91*		
B.1.10. The school where I teach is accessible in terms of physical space, and the buildings and grounds are designed to support the participation of all people.	5.86*		
B.1.9. Children are well prepared to adapt to different environments/contexts during and after their studies.	5.53*		
B.1.11. The school is reducing its carbon footprint (pollution level) and water consumption.	4.15*		

Table 4

*Results of the Friedman test for teachers' perception of the implementation of inclusive education in schools for the dimension of inclusive school practices*

Evolving inclusive practices			
Constructing curricula for all	Mean Rank	Orchestrating learning	Mean Rank
C.1.5. Children constantly learn about health and relationships in my school.	7.68	C.2.2. In the school where I teach, learning activities encourage the participation of all children.	7.94
C.1.6. In my school, children constantly learn about planet Earth, the solar system, and the universe.	7.67	C.2.12. In the school where I teach, extracurricular activities involve all the children.	7.78
C.1.9. In my school, children constantly learn about communication and communication technology.	7.31	C.2.8. In my school, behavioural discipline is based on mutual respect.	7.46
C.1.7. In the school where I teach, the children are constantly studying life on Earth	7.28	C.2.4. In the school where I teach, children are actively involved in their learning process.	7.28
C.1.1. In the school where I teach, children learn and apply knowledge about food production cycles, food consumption, and water's importance.	7.26	C.2.7. In the school where I teach, assessments encourage the achievement of all children	7.18

Table 4 (cont.)

Evolving inclusive practices			
Constructing curricula for all	Mean Rank	Orchestrating learning	Mean Rank
C.1.3. In my school, children constantly learn about housing and the environment.	6.86	C.2.3. In the school where I teach, children are encouraged to think critically and be confident in their opinions	7.17
C.1.10. In my school, children get involved and create literature, art and music.	6.64	C.2.13. In the school where I teach, the potential of local resources is known and exploited for the benefit of the school.	6.91
C.1.8. In my school, the children constantly investigate energy sources.	5.96	C.2.1. Learning activities are planned in the school where I teach, considering each child's needs.	6.85
C.1.11. In the school where I teach, children constantly learn about the labour market and connect it to developing their interests.	5.87	C.2.10. In the school where I teach, teaching staff develop shared resources to support learning.	6.74
C.1.2. In the school where I teach, children constantly study how to dress and what accessories to use.	5.18	C.2.6. In the school where I teach, the lessons develop an understanding of the similarities and differences between people.	6.74
C.1.12. In the school where I teach, children constantly learn about ethics, power, and government.	5.15	C.2.5. Children learn from each other in my school.	6.69
C.1.4. In the school where I teach, children ask themselves questions about how and why people move out of town and into the world.	5.14	C.2.9. In the school where I teach, the teaching staff plan, teach and analyze together.	6.52
		C.2.11. In the school where I teach, homework is set individually to contribute to each child's learning.	5.72

In the dimension of inclusive practices, the focus is on developing a curriculum for all students (Table 4). The top-ranked items show that teachers emphasize health, relationships, and environmental education. However, topics like ethics, power, and government receive less attention. For learning organizations, high-ranking items highlight the encouragement of student participation in both academic and extracurricular activities. Lower-ranked items indicate a lack of collaboration among teaching staff and the absence of individualized homework assignments, which suggests a commitment to broad educational themes but gaps in collaborative planning and personalized learning.

## Presentation of results verifying hypothesis 1 (H1)

To confirm if there are significant differences regarding inclusive education implemented at the school level, in the perception of teachers and educational managers, from the perspective of policies, cultures, and practices, one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) was used as a statistical technique (Table 5).

One-way ANOVA analysis of variance was used to verify the first research hypothesis.

The obtained data indicate that there are statistically significant differences for all measured dimensions, cultures [ $F(6,1028) = 6.44, p < .001$ ], with medium to high intensity ( $d=.71$ ), policies [ $F(6,1028) = 5.07, p < .001$ ], with high intensity ( $d=.85$ ), practices [ $F(6,1028) = 3.83, p < .001$ ], with medium to high intensity ( $d=.64$ ) and for the total score [ $F(6,1028) = 5.84, p < .001$ ], with high intensity ( $d=.81$ ). We can state that the first hypothesis is supported by the data obtained, respectively there are differences between teachers' perceptions regarding the inclusive education implemented at the school level, depending on the managerial level, on all dimensions.

The Games-Howel post hoc test was then applied to verify which groups differed significantly for each dimension. The following section will present the differences between each group by size.

For the culture dimension, the results demonstrate statistically significant differences between principals, middle and high school teachers, counsellors and itinerant professors. Thus, principals ( $M=4.6, p < .001$ ) consider more than secondary and high school teachers ( $M=4.29, p < .001$ ), counsellors ( $M=4.22, p < .05$ ) and itinerant professors ( $M=4.13, p < .05$ ) that there is an inclusive culture in the school. No differences were obtained between principals and teachers for primary and preschool education. Still, differences can be observed between middle and high school teachers and teachers for primary and preschool education. In this case, teachers for preschool education ( $M=4.53, p < .01$ ) believe more than teachers of primary education ( $M=4.48, p < .05$ ) and secondary and high school ( $M=4.29, p < .01$ ) that there is an inclusive culture in the school.

Significant differences were obtained between principals, counsellors, and secondary and high school education teachers for the political dimension. We can see that principals ( $M=4.6, p < .001$ ) believe more than middle and high school teachers ( $M=4.2, p < .001$ ) and counsellors ( $M=4.09, p < .01$ ) that there are inclusive policies in school.

For the practical dimension, differences can also be noted between the groups of principals, middle school and high school teachers and counsellors. Also, for this dimension, the category formed by directors ( $M=4.24, p < .001$ ) considers more than secondary and high school teachers ( $M=3.92, p < .001$ ) and counsellors ( $M=3.75, p < .05$ ) that the school has inclusive practices.

Table 5

*One-Way ANOVA results for teachers' perception of the implementation of inclusive education in schools, according to managerial level*

	Teaching role (N=1035)														F	d
	School Principals (n=105)		School Inspectors (n=18)		Teachers (n=474)		School counsellor (n=48)		Support teacher (n=31)		Teacher of primary education (n=212)		Teacher for preschool education (n=147)			
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Inclusive culture	4.6 ced	.43	4.12	.82	4.29 afg	.78	4.22 a	.68	4.13 a	.80	4.48 c	.61	4.53 c	.58	6.44*	.71
Inclusive practices	4.6 cd	.58	3.94	.86	4.2 a	.89	4.09 a	.83	4.25	.79	4.37	.77	4.37	.72	5.07*	.85
Inclusive policies	4.24 cd	.67	3.64	1.00	3.92 a	.98	3.75 a	.95	3.81	1.08	4.07	.93	4.16	.90	3.83*	.64
Inclusive School	4.48 cd	.44	3.9	.84	4.14 ag	.81	4.02 a	.76	4.07	.83	4.3	.68	4.35 c	.64	5.84*	.81

Note: \*  $p < .001$ . Differences regarding the teaching role: School Principals (a), School Inspectors (b), Teachers (c), School counsellor (d), Support teachers (e), Primary education teacher (f), Preschool education teacher (g), according to post hoc Games-Howell comparisons, as the homogeneity test is significant in all cases.

The results demonstrate significant differences between principals, middle and high school teachers, and counsellors regarding the total score for the inclusive school variable, e.g.: ( $M=4.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ) principals as well as more than half of the high school teachers ( $M=4.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and counsellors ( $M=4.02$ ,  $p < .01$ ), believe that the school is inclusive. We can also observe that there are differences between preschool teachers and middle and high school teachers. Among them, preschool teachers ( $M=4.35$ ,  $p < .05$ ) believe more than middle and high school teachers ( $M=4.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) that the school is inclusive.

### Presentation of results that verify hypothesis 2

A simple regression analysis was performed for each factor and category of participants to identify the factors that predict the different perceptions of teachers and educational managers regarding school inclusion from the perspective of policies, cultures and practices (Table 6).

Table 6  
*Results of simple regression analysis to predict inclusive school cultures by managerial level*

Factors	Principals			Inspectors			Teachers		
	$\beta$	p	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	p	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	p	$\Delta R^2$
Practices	.25	.00	.23	.68	.00	.89	.35	.00	.67
Policies	.37	.00		.34	.01		.50	.00	
Gender	.01	.84		-.06	.46		.00	.99	
School environment	.00	.92		-.00	.97		.01	.41	
Age range	.17	.08		-.07	.61		.01	.72	
Teaching experience (in years)	-.02	.83		.07	.62		-.00	.91	
Continuous training	-.03	.73		.12	.21		-.02	.17	
School level	-.10	.24		.01	.90		-.03	.10	

A simple regression analysis was performed to identify factors that predict inclusive school cultures at each managerial level (inspectors, principals, and teachers). According to the data for all three categories, the factors predicting inclusive school cultures emerged as practices and policies,  $p < .01$ .

The simple regression model for the directors' category significantly predicted cultures in proportion to 23%. The strongest predictor is represented by policies ( $\beta = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by practices ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $p < .001$ ). For the inspector category, the simple regression model significantly predicted 89% of cultures, the strongest predictor being practices ( $\beta = .68$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by policies ( $\beta = .34$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, for the category of teachers, the regression model predicted 67% inclusive cultures, the strongest predictor emerged as policies

( $\beta = .50$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by practices ( $\beta = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results represent that the more inclusive the policies and practices, the more inclusive the culture becomes.

Next, we will present the simple regression analysis to identify the factors that predict inclusive school practices at each managerial level (Table 7).

Table 7

*Results of simple regression analysis to predict inclusive school practices by managerial level*

Factors	Principals			Inspectors			Teachers		
	$\beta$	p	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	p	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	p	$\Delta R^2$
Culture	.27	.00	.18	1.13	.00	.85	.38	.00	.62
Policies	.26	.01		-.24	.21		.44	.00	
Gender	.10	.26		.05	.62		-.01	.40	
School environment	.01	.87		-.07	.50		-.04	.03	
Age range	-.00	.93		-.03	.85		.02	.31	
Teaching experience (in years)	-.01	.86		.05	.78		-.04	.29	
Continuous training	.12	.19		-.13	.25		.01	.48	
School level	-.06	.45		.13	.36		-.01	.42	

The simple regression model for the directors' category significantly predicted the practices in the proportion of 18%. The strongest predictor is represented by cultures ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by policies ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .01$ ). For the category of inspectors, the simple regression model significantly predicted the practices in a proportion of 85%, the only predictor being represented by cultures ( $\beta = 1.13$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Last but not least, for the category of teachers, the regression model predicted 62% inclusive practices, the strongest predictor turned out to be represented by policies ( $\beta = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by cultures ( $\beta = .38$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results show that perceptions of school-inclusive practices of all three categories, by managerial level, are predicted by cultures,  $p < .01$ . This emerges as the only significant factor in each category. As for the category of teachers and principals, we can see an additional factor represented by policies. Thus, principals and teachers perceive that the more inclusive policies and cultures are, the more inclusive school practices become.

Regarding the last dimension, inclusive school policies, a simple regression analysis was performed to identify the factors that predict this dimension at each managerial level (Table 8). According to the data, cultures are the only common factor perceived by each category (superintendents, principals, teachers) to predict inclusive school policies,  $p < .01$ .



Table 8  
*Results of simple regression analysis to predict inclusive school policies by managerial level*

Factors	Principals			Inspectors			Teachers		
	$\beta$	p	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	p	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	p	$\Delta R^2$
Culture	.36	.00	.26	1.41	.01	.64	.48	.00	.67
Practices	.23	.01		-.61	.21		.38	.00	
Age range	-.22	.03		0.6	.76		-.03	.26	
Gender	-.08	.33		.14	.37		.01	.55	
School environment	-.02	.81		.09	.57		.01	.39	
Teaching experience (in years)	.18	.07		-.29	.30		.06	.11	
Continuous training	.14	.10		-.18	.33		.02	.18	
School level	-.07	.41		-.21	.37		.00	.90	

The simple regression model for the directors' category significantly predicted policies in proportion to 26%. The strongest predictor is represented by cultures ( $\beta = .36$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by practices ( $\beta = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and age ( $\beta = -.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). It is observed that for the dimension of inclusive school policies, age is an additional factor that emerged significantly only for the category represented by principals. Thus, the younger the principals, the more inclusive they believe school policies are.

For the category of inspectors, the simple regression model significantly predicted policies in proportion to 64%, the only significant predictor being represented by cultures ( $\beta = 1.41$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Last but not least, for the teachers category, the regression model predicted 67% inclusive policies, the strongest predictor being cultures ( $\beta = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ ), followed by practices ( $\beta = .38$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These results highlight that teachers and principals believe that the more inclusive cultures and practices are, the more inclusive policies become.

## Discussion

Based on an explanatory, comparative, and correlational non-experimental design, the results showed that principals better perceive the implementation of IE in the school on all three dimensions—policies, practices, and inclusive cultures.

Firstly, the data of the present research highlighted that in the perception of Romanian teachers, the emphasis is on facilitating the accommodation of new students in school, accepting everyone, and making efforts to remove the barriers that stand in the way of participation in the educational process. However, the aspects related to the students' future preparation so they can manage var-

ious situations, as well as the professional training regarding diversity and the coordination of support services, came out less rated. IE training programs should focus on teachers' teaching and learning of inclusive practices so clear and specific methodological elements can be adapted to classes to meet these needs. Training courses should emphasize the importance of a culture of collaboration and cooperation within the multidisciplinary team and case management. Acceptance of diversity, especially of gender, is more difficult to achieve in traditional and conservative Romanian culture. Changing attitudes can take generations, but vocational training courses can address gender diversity issues.

Inclusive practices involve actively engaging all students, valuing their daily experiences, making adaptations, individualized planning, overcoming barriers, collaborating, and providing support (Forlin et al., 2013; Finkelstein et al., 2019). In Romania, teachers focus on curriculum topics like health, relationships, and environmental education and encourage student participation in extracurricular activities. However, there is less emphasis on teacher collaboration and tailoring tasks to individual needs. It indicates a gap between general curriculum goals and personalized learning practices. These results show that both teachers and educational managers need to work on policy aspects (e.g., preparing students for the future to cope with diverse situations, professional training on diversity, and better coordination of service support) and practices (e.g., collaboration in teaching and individualization of assignments), to develop inclusive cultures in the school. Professional training programs in inclusive education should emphasize collaboration not only in the multidisciplinary team for students with SEN but also in teaching, beyond exceptional cases, so that collaboration and synchronization of educational actions is a habit that leads to progress in student achievement. Individualization and differentiation in teaching should again be applied not only to students with SEN but to all students as an element of adapting teaching to the needs of students.

Secondly, school principals presented significantly better perceptions of school inclusion. This result can be explained by occupying a specific managerial position. School principals are more directly involved in the day-to-day management of inclusion initiatives in their schools, such as overseeing the development and implementation of individualized support plans for students with diverse needs, coordinating support services, and providing guidance and support to teachers. In contrast, teachers are directly involved in the classroom, facing various challenges. They need the support of the school principal to manage the different situations and identify solutions, as his role in promoting a culture of inclusion in their school community is known (DeMatthews et al., 2020).

Thirdly, the results obtained through regression analysis led to identifying common and distinct factors among the three categories (teachers, principals, and inspectors), which predict their perception of the implementation of IE in

schools. According to the data, inclusive cultures are indicated by inclusive practices and policies for all three categories. The results show that according to the perception of teachers, principals, and inspectors, inclusive policies and practices are needed to improve inclusive cultures. Inclusive policies involve encouraging participation by all students and staff and supporting activities that increase the ability to respond to the diversity of everyone's needs (Booth & Ainscow, 2016).

Regarding inclusive school practices, the only common factor perceived by each category that significantly predicts cultures represents this dimension. All three categories perceive that to have inclusive practices in school, it is necessary to have inclusive school cultures. On the other hand, for teachers and principals, an additional factor can be distinguished that did not emerge significantly for inspectors: inclusive policies. In other words, principals and teachers believe that in addition to cultures, inclusive school policies are also necessary for school practices to be truly inclusive. The perception of inspectors, principals, and teachers regarding inclusive school policies is predicted by cultures, being the only common factor. This factor shows that all three participants believe school cultures must be genuinely inclusive to have inclusive policies. Cultures, in the perception of the teaching staff involved in this research, are seen more as openness to the community and interest in the school-family relationship. Less attention is paid to parent-school collaboration and openness to diversity, especially regarding gender. Although they show interest in the school family relationship, the partnership between these relevant actors is not well-rated. In the teachers' perception, inclusive values are represented by non-violence but not by respect for diversity. To have genuinely inclusive cultures involves a good collaboration between all teaching staff, the recognition of diversity, and the coexistence of different life forms, which promotes beneficial communication between the relevant actors (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Ainscow, 2020).

This time, compared to the previously presented dimensions, we have an additional factor represented by the age of principals: the younger they are, the more inclusive they think school policies are than principals with more years of life. This factor is specific only to directors and not to the other two categories. The data show a significant correlation between the three factors that underlie the formation of an inclusive school. This result indicates that school policies and practices positively correlate with an inclusive school culture. A possible explanation lies in the fact that educational managers are the primary facilitators, as they can help shape the overall organizational climate, policies, and practices in an educational system (Lian, 2020). Thus, the results of this study highlighted even more the essential role of academic managers, especially school principals, in improving and promoting school inclusion in Romania as well, in agreement

with other studies (Urton et al., 2014; Thompson, 2015; DeMatthews et al., 2020; Khaleel et al., 2021; Adams et al., 2023).

Another possible implication is that principals could incorporate strategies into the Institutional Development Plan (IDP) to enhance inclusive education (IE) implementation in schools systematically. By doing so, they can establish learning communities that support achieving these goals. Additionally, the findings provide valuable data from Romania that can contribute to international discussions on how IE is perceived and implemented by educational managers and teachers.

## **Limits and Future Research**

The first limitation of the study was the lack of qualitative data. Only a quantitative perspective can provide in-depth interpretations and authentic data on the inclusive reality in the school. Also, we cannot detect to what extent the professors' answers are not socially desirable. It is desirable to continue the research in the future, starting from the conclusions reached from a qualitative perspective and using interviews, focus groups, or case studies to overcome these obstacles. The second limitation of this research is that it evaluated and analyzed only the teachers' perspectives. Future research will continue to investigate the parents' and students' perceptions about implementing IE in schools.

## **Conclusion**

The quantitative research design allowed the identification of relevant factors and the comparison of the perceptions of teachers and educational managers regarding the implementation of IE in Romanian schools. Using Ifl, an instrument that has proven outstanding psychometric qualities for the Romanian context, it was possible to provide an image of the perspective of the teachers and educational managers about implementing IE in Romanian schools.

The results showed that openness to inclusion and non-discriminatory acceptance of any student are declarative values often supported by the teachers. However, acceptance of diversity and tolerance towards any category of students, including gender divergent, is not well represented. We can conclude that, in terms of policies and values, inclusive education is well-represented in schools. Unfortunately, the other two inclusive dimensions still leave room for improvement: there is still no culture of collaboration between teachers, and collaboration with parents is perceived as more one-way school-parent, less with the reverse initiative, parent-school. At the level of inclusive practices, ele-

ments still need to be improved: collaboration in the multidisciplinary team, individualization of instruction, coordination of support services, students' preparation toward resilience and adaptability, preparation for the labour market, and democratic involvement. The teacher training programs should address these themes but approach them through inclusive teaching, with lessons designed for all students, not in a segregationist manner, with activities for typical students and students with SEN.

The measured differences indicate that principals perceive inclusive education (IE) as being more effectively implemented in their schools compared to teachers' perceptions. Also, the results showed that the external factors related to policies, cultures, and inclusive school practices are considered more relevant for implementing IE at the school level than the internal factors related to the person (age, seniority, gender, school environment). In conclusion, the findings suggest that while principals have a more optimistic view of implementing inclusive education (IE) in their schools, teachers perceive more challenges. This discrepancy highlights the need for improved communication and alignment between school leaders and teachers to ensure that inclusive practices are effectively understood and applied. Additionally, the results provide valuable insights for international discussions on IE implementation, using data from Romania to inform global perspectives.

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## Poglądy menadżerów i nauczycieli oświaty na temat wdrażania edukacji włączającej w rumuńskich szkołach

### Streszczenie

Edukacja włączająca (IE), trzydzieści lat po Deklaracji z Salamanki (1994), nadal stanowi wyzwanie wymagające rozwiązań opartych na dowodach. W Rumunii edukacja włączająca skupiała się głównie na integracji uczniów ze specjalnymi potrzebami edukacyjnymi (SEN) w szkołach ogólnodostępnych. Jednakże nie osiągnięto jeszcze pełnego włączenia. Kluczową rolę w pomyślnym wdrażaniu IE w szkołach odgrywają nauczyciele i menadżerowie oświaty. Niniejsze badanie ma na celu zbadanie czynników, które w istotny sposób przewidują różnice między postrzeganiem nauczycieli i menadżerów oświaty na temat wdrażania IE w rumuńskich szkołach. Aby osiągnąć cel badania, zastosowano projekt ilościowy, nieeksperymentalny, przekrojowy, porównawczy i korelacyjny. W sumie 1035 uczestników, w tym 123 menadżerów oświaty (inspektorów i dyrektorów), odpowiedziało na rumuńską, dostosowaną kulturowo 4. edycję Indeksu na rzecz włączenia społecznego. Wyniki pokazały, że dyrektorzy postrzegają szkoły jako bardziej włączające niż nauczyciele. Czynniki, które przewidują te różnice, to czynniki związane z polityką, kulturą i praktykami, a nie z wiekiem, stażem pracy, płcią i środowiskiem. Jedynie w przypadku młodszych dyrektorów w zakresie polityki szkoły włączającej zidentyfikowano wyraźny czynnik związany z wiekiem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja włączająca, szkoła włączająca, indeks włączania.

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Beata JAKIMIUK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5573-7091>

Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

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**Contact:** [beata.jakimiuk@kul.pl](mailto:beata.jakimiuk@kul.pl)**How to cite [jak cytować]:** Jakimiuk, B. (2024). Students' Perception of Learning Environment: As-Is and Should-Be. *Podstawy Edukacji. Education for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, 17, 191–203.

## Students' Perception of Learning Environment: As-Is and Should-Be

### Abstract

The school environment is most often analyzed from an adult viewpoint. This study shows various aspects of school life from students' perspectives in actual and preferred terms (teachers' perceptions have been excluded) and those who experience and face various situations in the school environment. The research was conducted among 1195 elementary school students from 4th to 8th grade. The research tool was the TROFLEI questionnaire (Technology-Rich Outcomes-Focused Learning Environment Inventory). The study has enabled the identification of aspects of everyday school reality that are of utmost importance to the students. The study results suggest a change of teaching methods and styles in Polish schools, dropping the schematic approach and paying attention to student's personal development and interpersonal relationships among students and teachers. All that constitutes a necessary condition to create a friendly atmosphere at school and determines the successful realization of its function.

**Keywords:** school, students, learning environment, school climate, school relationships.

### Introduction

School is a space where students live and develop, where different experiences, events and situations positively or negatively impact development. However, as Day (1999) notes, it is a rare practice for schools to begin their improvement process by inviting students to talk about what makes the learning experi-

ence positive, what brings disappointment and what increases and decreases their motivation to learn.

In a report by UNICEF Poland (2019), out of 11 children's activities analyzed, being at school ranks last among the reasons for happiness in children and first among the reasons for unhappiness. The data presented in the report show that children associate school with unpleasant experiences, so research is needed in this area. Publications on this issue include an analysis of, among other things, the way the school functions as an institution, the quality of education, and educational problems (e. g. Jagieła 2023; Molinari and Grazia, 2023, Aldridge and Fraser, 2008; Closs et al., 2022; Afari et al., 2013; Maxwell et al., 2017; Khalil and Aldridge 2019; Rusticus et al., 2022; Brozmanová and Kosová, 2022; Piasecka, 2015; Szymański, 2014; Wysocka and Tomiczek, 2014).

The research on everyday life at school from the student's perspective presented in this paper is intended to provide grounds for a more in-depth reflection on the practice of the educational process and the functioning of students in school relationships. The research material presented in the following section and its interpretation will, hopefully, broaden the insight into the expectations, requirements, interpretation of events and the way students experience everyday school life.

### **Purpose of the study**

The perspective of school environment analysis adopted in this study refers to students' assessment of everyday school life, which they describe in terms of their beliefs about how they function in daily school life (actual state) and how they would like to function (preferred state). The aim of the research presented in this article was to a) gain insight into the different aspects of school life from the student's perspective, b) explore the discrepancies between the actual and the preferred state, c) identify the students' needs regarding the functioning of the school and determine how they vary.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Research Sample**

The study included 1195 students in grades 4–8 (primary school). Students completed an online questionnaire in class, under the supervision of their teachers, on smartphones or computers, using a link provided to them. The study was conducted in 2022. The characteristics of the study group are shown in Table 1.



Table 1  
Composition of the research sample

Grade	Number of students		Sex			
	N	%	F		M	
			N	%	N	%
4	198	17%	108	9%	90	8%
5	216	18%	113	9%	103	9%
6	259	22%	134	11%	125	10%
7	264	22%	139	12%	125	10%
8	258	22%	136	11%	122	10%
Total	1195	100%	630	53%	565	47%

### Tools and Procedures

The study used the Technology-Rich Outcomes-Focused Learning Environment Inventory (TROFLEI) questionnaire (Aldridge et al., 2004). The questionnaire was translated into Polish and adapted for this study, with the original structure and parameters preserved. The TROFLEI tool examines the school environment: student cohesiveness, teacher support, student involvement, task orientation, Investigation, cooperation, equity, Differentiation, computer usage, and young adult ethos. 8 indicators define each of these 10 dimensions.

Table 2 presents the characteristics of the analyzed areas of daily school life in connection with their assignment to the following 3 dimensions: relationships (R), personal development (P), system maintenance and system change (S). The R dimension measures the nature and intensity of interpersonal relationships in the school environment and the extent to which individuals are involved in this environment and support and help each other. The P dimension is concerned with the basic directions of development and self-improvement. The S dimension includes the extent to which the school environment is organized regarding precise requirements, maintaining control and responding to change (Dorman and Fraser, 2009).

Table 2  
The analyzed areas of daily school life and their indicators

Analyzed area	Description	Dimension
Student cohesiveness	Determines the extent to which students know, help and support each other	R
Teacher support	The extent to which the teacher helps, befriends, trusts and is interested in students.	R

Table 2 (cont.)

Analyzed area	Description	Dimension
Student involvement	Students' level of attentiveness, participation in discussions, performance of extra work and enjoyment of activities	R
Task orientation	The extent to which it is important to fulfil responsibilities and comply with requirements, complete planned activities, and comply with the content	P
Investigation	Extent and methods of developing problem-solving skills and utilizing them	P
Cooperation	The extent to which students work together instead of competing on educational tasks	P
Equity	The extent to which students are treated equally by the teacher	S
Differentiation	The extent to which teachers treat students as individuals, taking into account their abilities, achievements and interests	S
Computer usage	The extent to which students use their phones and computers as a tool to communicate with others and access information	S
Young adult ethos	The extent to which teachers require students to take responsibility and treat them as young adults	P

*Note:* Based on Dorman and Fraser, 2009.

## Data Analysis

Students were asked how often the situation presented occurs in the classroom (actual state) and how often the same situation should occur (preferred state) using a 5-point Likert scale (almost always, often, sometimes, rarely, hardly ever). The results were analyzed using the arithmetic mean of the answers provided by the students in the questionnaire and the mode and the standard deviation.

## Results

The primary school students who took part in the survey rated everyday school reality by assigning to each of the 8 indicators a numerical value ranging from 1 to 5 to indicate the actual state and then to indicate, in their opinion, the preferred state for these indicators. The results obtained from the students' responses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3  
Actual state of school environment and state preferred by the surveyed students

Environment scale	Actual			Preferred		
	M	Mo	SD	M	Mo	SD
Student cohesiveness	3.42	4	1.02	4.24	5	1.01
Teacher support	3.23	4	1.12	3.96	4	1.00
Student involvement	3.16	3	1.13	4.00	4	1.22
Task orientation	3.47	4	1.28	4.00	5	1.24
Investigation	3.37	3	0.90	4.02	4	1.06
Cooperation	3.12	3	1.14	4.21	4	0.93
Equity	3.66	4	1.25	4.39	4	0.73
Differentiation	2.27	1	1.44	2.56	1	1.36
Computer usage	3.42	3	1.17	3.90	4	1.06
Young adult ethos	3.50	3	1.10	4.12	4	0.81

Based on the survey results presented in Table 3, it can be seen that *equity* is the most important among the analyzed areas of school reality for primary school students. The results obtained in the survey on the preferred state are  $M=4.39$ , which may mean that students pay special attention to fair treatment at school. Primary school respondents most frequently indicated a 4 ( $Mo=4$ ) value with a small response variability ( $SD=0.73$ ). Indicators defining the area of equity were phrased in terms of equal treatment of students in the classroom by the teacher, including support, praise, responding to student responses, helping, listening, asking and answering questions and motivating. Hence, it follows that these aspects of everyday school life require more attention from the teacher and that acting relatively towards students should be a priority of school reality.

Primary school students also attribute high importance to student cohesiveness ( $M=4.24$ ). The indicators defining this area were related to mutual familiarity, kindness, making friends, cooperation, providing and receiving help and being liked. Results show that classroom atmosphere and mutual relations are essential for the students surveyed. It is also confirmed by the results obtained in the area of *Cooperation* ( $M=4.21$ ), which testifies to the need to perform tasks

or class projects together, work in a group, and learn from each other without competing. Primary school students want to be treated as young adults ( $M=4.12$ ). It means that young people generally want to be treated as responsible, trustworthy, independent thinkers who do not need control.

The results presented in Table 3 show that the primary school respondents also attach great importance to *Student involvement* ( $M=4.0$ ), *Task orientation* ( $M=4.0$ ), *Investigation*, i.e. inquiring, analyzing, reflecting, searching and finding answers, problem-solving ( $M=4.02$ ).

Analyzing the actual and preferred states also made it possible to identify those least important to students among the surveyed areas of daily school life. The lowest values were obtained in the area of *Differentiation* ( $M=2.27$  for the actual state and  $M=2.56$  for the preferred state). Students' responses varied the most when the area of *Differentiation* for the actual state ( $SD=1.44$ ) and for the preferred state ( $SD=1.36$ ), with being the most frequently indicated value ( $Mo=1$ ).

It is also worth analyzing the differences between the obtained research results concerning the actual and the preferred state of the investigated areas of school reality experienced by students. The differences observed in this case are shown in Figure 1.

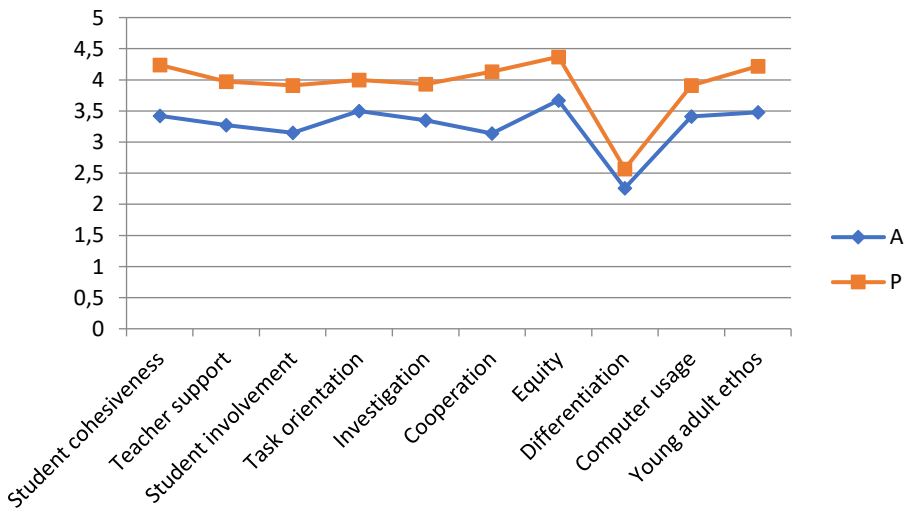


Fig. 1

Comparison of actual and preferred state of the analyzed areas of a school environment

Lines A (actual state) and P (preferred state) illustrate the results obtained for the analyzed categories of school reality. Figure 1 clearly shows that in each analyzed area, higher scores were obtained for the preferred state than for the

actual one, which confirms the reasonably obvious assumption that students would like to improve the current state of school reality. In one category, *Differentiation*, the results are lower than those obtained in the other categories and have a similar value in the actual and preferred state.

It is also possible to notice a similar distance between the lines for most pairs of dots representing each category. However, a more precise analysis of the differences between the results obtained for the actual and the preferred state is possible when the numerical values of these differences are identified, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Differences between the results of analyses for the actual state and the preferred state of the school environment*

Environment scale	Actual	Preferred	Difference
	M	M	
Student cohesiveness	3.42	4.24	0.82
Teacher support	3.23	3.96	0.73
Student involvement	3.16	4.00	0.84
Task orientation	3.47	4.00	0.53
Investigation	3.37	4.02	0.65
Cooperation	3.12	4.21	1.09
Equity	3.66	4.39	0.73
Differentiation	2.27	2.56	0.29
Computer usage	3.42	3.90	0.48
Young adult ethos	3.50	4.12	0.62

Based on the data in Table 4, it can be concluded that the most significant difference between the preferred and the actual state of school reality is observed in *Cooperation* (1.09). Students predominantly lack joint activities, assignments, projects, and cooperation. Another high score for differences between the actual and the preferred state was obtained in *Student Cohesiveness* (0.84), which confirms the need to pay attention to mutual relations, cooperation and the integration of students. There is also an apparent deficit in *Teacher Support* (0.73). Students expect the teacher to be involved to go beyond routine duties to help them learn, engage them in conversation, take the student's feelings into account, take an interest in the students and their problems, and ask questions in such a way as to enable them to understand the issue.

There is also a clear need for improvement in *Student Involvement* (the difference between the actual and the preferred state is 0.84) and in the area of *Investigation* (0.65). The numerical values of the differences in the results be-

tween the actual and the preferred state of the category defined as *Young Adult Ethos* (0.63) testify to the fact that treating the student as a responsible, reliable, independent person who does not require excessive control is another deficit in the school reality of students.

## Discussion

The study provides an exciting insight into students' experiences, perceptions, and judgements about their functioning in school reality. It enables the identification of needs and deficiencies in various areas of school life, considering their perspectives. The findings show that for primary school students, fairness, which includes various aspects of equal treatment of students in the classroom by the teacher, is the most essential area of everyday school life (Table 3).

The authors of the TROFLEI questionnaire used in this study included *equity* in the dimension defined as system maintenance and system change **S** (Table 2), which involves a clearly defined scope of requirements, means of control and response to change. Of significant importance to the respondents in this study is the integration of students in the classroom, including in the **R** relationship dimension (Table 2), which defines the nature and intensity of interpersonal relationships in the classroom environment and the extent of involvement in this environment, support and mutual assistance. Another area critical to the students surveyed is *Cooperation* (Tables 3 and 4), i.e. the extent to which students cooperate rather than compete with each other when completing educational tasks, included in the **P** personal development dimension (Table 2), which deals with basic directions of development and self-improvement. Students attribute high importance to being treated like adults – responsible, trustworthy, independent-thinking, and not requiring too much control, which is becoming increasingly important as they age (Table 3). *Young adult ethos* is included in dimension **P** (Table 2). The study also found that *Student involvement* (**R** dimension), *Task Orientation* (**P** dimension) and *Investigation*, i.e. involvement in the life of the classroom, complying with responsibilities and requirements, inquiring, analyzing, reflecting, seeking and finding answers and solving problems (**P** dimension) are essential for primary school students.

The study also made it possible to determine the scope of differences between the actual and the preferred state of the analyzed aspects of daily school life (Figure 1 and Table 4), making it possible to identify areas of need and deficiency. Among the students surveyed, the most significant differences were found in the areas of *Cooperation* (**P** dimension), *Student Cohesiveness* of integration in class (**R** dimension), *Teacher support* (**R** dimension), and *Young Adult Ethos* (**P** dimension). Primary school students need more classroom involvement

(*Student involvement* – dimension **R**) and *Investigation* – for inquiring, analyzing, searching, and solving problems (dimension **P**).

The surveyed students indicated the areas of daily school life that matter most to them and, by assessing the actual and the preferred state, the areas with the most significant differences between the indications.

## Limitations and future directions

The present study has several limitations. Firstly, our analyses are natural sample-specific, and these profiles may not be found in other samples. Secondly, this study assessed select aspects of the school environment using a validated research tool. However, due to the contextual nature of our data, our capacity to establish causal interpretations of the results is restricted. The results apply to a particular study group; they may differ if carried out with other groups of students from other schools. Alternatively, they could be carried out separately for different types of schools, e.g. primary and secondary, or longitudinal studies could be carried out on selected groups of pupils. It would also be interesting to use the same instrument to survey pupils and teachers in classrooms and to implement solutions to improve the classroom climate. It will ensure that future researchers conduct the same survey with different criteria for selecting respondents to explore differences in perceptions of the school environment from a different perspective. Future studies should attempt to replicate the present findings to determine whether the results are similar or different. We were also unable to draw any in-depth conclusions as to why there are differences between perceptions of the current state of the school environment and the preferred state.

Further qualitative research could be considered for a more in-depth and comprehensive analysis of these issues. Thus, the findings of this study suggest several directions for future research and practical implications. Further research in this area can contribute to developing and implementing methods to improve classroom climate, pupils' sense of acceptance and quality of school life, and prevent exclusion. Our findings also have important practical implications for academics in the Faculty of Education who teach and co-ordinate different courses and teacher preparation programmes and supervise students. It suggests that teachers should be aware of the types of classroom support important for pupils' development, social skills, self-esteem, and openness to the world.

## Conclusions

The findings do not provide a complete picture of school reality, as it is more complex than the surveyed aspects. However, they allow for capturing some

critical phenomena from a student's perspective, contributing to the classroom climate and determining the student's functioning. They identify specific areas of importance to students and areas that need to be improved. Educational institutions are obligated to influence the individual in a way that supports his or her development and ability to adapt to the changing socio-cultural situation, build relationships with others, and develop and use talents and skills. The study revealed deficiencies in interpersonal relations between students, between teachers and students and in conditions conducive to personal development. Serious problems concerning the climate of the Polish school, especially in the dimension of relations, have also been shown by the PISA (OECD, 2013) study, in which the results of indicators concerning teacher-student relations rank Poland last among the 34 OECD countries analyzed. International research has also shown that Polish students have a low sense of belonging at school. In a study conducted in 2018, Poland ranked 66th from the bottom out of 75 OECD countries surveyed (OECD, 2019), with Polish students' low sense of belonging at school also demonstrated by earlier PISA studies.

However, there is a lack of systematic approaches to promoting psychosocial skills and respect for others, and it is up to each school to determine the appropriate measures to cultivate interpersonal skills, empathy and values of tolerance, diversity and kindness. Schools provide an ideal setting for the acquisition of social and emotional competencies. According to the OECD (2023), there is increasing recognition of the importance of developing social and emotional skills, considered as essential as academic skills. Nevertheless, the former are often evaluated less than the latter. In many schools, the instruction of social and emotional skills is a by-product of educational practice rather than a central focus. Contemporary schools are geared towards formal learning objectives, primarily the passing of tests and examinations by students at their respective educational stages. Much less attention is paid to the student's integral development, preparing him or her for life and functioning in a changing social and cultural environment. There is a lack of attention to what kind of person the school graduate will be, how he or she will act and how he or she will deal with various difficulties, barriers and challenges. Studies indicate that teachers' focus on students' academic performance rather than on their development is a risk factor for behavioural problems and mental health (Jagięła 2009; Welsh, 2000), whereas teaching staff's focus on meeting students' needs and aspirations and on their personal development are favourable conditions for creating a proper social climate at the school, determining the possibility of performing its functions, including formal ones (e. g. Przewłocka 2015; Kulesza 2011; Ostaszewski 2012; Thapa et al., 2013; Dorina, 2013; Zullig et al. 2011; Tubbs and Garner, 2008; Lombardi et al., 2019; Sattler et al., 2022). Therefore, many school problems could be solved and avoided if the students' subjective perception of



school reality was also considered instead of merely considering the objective reality in which teachers and students function.

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## Środowisko edukacyjne w percepcji uczniów – jak jest i jak powinno być

### Streszczenie

Środowisko szkolne jest najczęściej analizowane z punktu widzenia dorosłych. Niniejsze badanie ukazuje różne aspekty życia szkolnego z perspektywy uczniów w ujęciu aktualnym i preferowanym (pominięto percepcję nauczycieli), którzy stykają się z różnymi sytuacjami występującymi w środowisku szkolnym. Badanie przeprowadzono wśród 1195 uczniów uczęszczających do szkoły podstawowej – od 4 do 8 klasy. Narzędziem badawczym był kwestionariusz TROFLEI (Technology-Rich Outcomes-Focused Learning Environment Inventory). Badanie pozwoliło na identyfikację tych aspektów szkolnej codzienności, które są dla uczniów najważniejsze. Wyniki badania sugerują zmianę metod i stylów nauczania w polskiej szkole, a także odejście od schematycznego podejścia, zwrócenie uwagi na rozwój osobisty ucznia i relacje interpersonalne między uczniami oraz między uczniami a nauczycielami. Wszystko to stanowi niezbędny warunek tworzenia przyjaznej atmosfery w szkole i warunkuje pomyślną realizację jej funkcji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** szkoła, uczniowie, środowisko uczenia się, klimat szkoły, relacje w szkole.



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Ramona Elena TUTUNARU

West University of Timisoara, Department of Educational Sciences, Romania

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**Contact:** ramona.tutunaru@e-uvvt.ro

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## Interactive Teaching Methods Support Diversity and Students' Educational and Social Inclusion

### Abstract

The study entitled *Interactive Teaching Methods Support Diversity and Educational and Social Inclusion* analyzes the influence of interactive methods on the class of students as a social group, under the conditions of their presence in the didactic act, respectively the changes that occur in the learning process of students as a result of their use. The research method used was the semi-structured interview. The sample of participants consisted of 25 secondary school students. The research results provide information about the educational and social effects experienced by students as a result of integrating interactive methods into lessons. Specifically, freedom of expression and action, the realization that each person is unique, and the fact that human diversity is natural are benefits that accompany the presence of interactive methods. Indeed, the feeling of belonging to the group, the feeling of educational and social inclusion, the increased cohesion of the group of pupils, and the confidence in one's potential are the results of teamwork, the encouragement of free expression and dialogue, which are characteristic features of interactive methods. The learning process also undergoes essential changes, with interactive methods positively impacting the understanding of new information. School motivation and interest in learning are also enhanced by encouraging free, open expression. In conclusion, secondary school students' diversity and educational and social inclusion are supported by using interactive teaching methods.

**Keywords:** interactive teaching methods, diversity, educational inclusion, social inclusion.

### 1. The issues studied

We all observe the uniqueness of each educational approach. The people determine it, the time, the place, the information, and the values on which the

action is constructed. The uniqueness of the educational act is an expression of diversity.

The diversity of human beings, the incredible ways in which they can express themselves and act, their knowledge, their level of openness towards others, and their level of creativity all combine to express a new product. Today's human being is a being who seeks information, adapts what he possesses, and creates, in turn, and who expresses the idea of diversity in everything he does. These attributes of today's human beings are even more strongly present in today's teachers, who are fully aware that the harmonious development of children requires practical, well-thought-out actions tailored to each individual.

Interactive methods and teaching strategies are designed to support understanding new information, active learning, dialogue and cooperation, education, information, practice, and searching for the best possible working options. A didactic activity is also appreciated in terms of the teaching methods it proposes, and the proper selection and integration of these methods generate attractiveness and effectiveness. The method can also be seen as "a way of action, a tool with which pupils, under the guidance of the teacher or independently, acquire and deepen their knowledge, form and develop intellectual and practical skills and abilities, aptitudes and attitudes" (Bocoş, 2002, p. 122). In modern didactics, "the teaching method is understood as a certain way of proceeding, which tends to place the pupil in a more or less directed learning situation, which comes close to identification with scientific research, the pursuit and discovery of truth and its link to the practical aspects of life" (Chiş, Ionescu, 2001, p. 126 ).

Interactive methods lead students to be placed in situations of debate on a topic they are interested in, using different arguments that help them decipher the problem, understand its content more efficiently, and develop critical thinking concerning what they read or the information they receive. By using interactive methods, students can express themselves more easily, both orally and in writing, and argumentatively express a point of view. "Interactive methods are aimed at optimizing communication by observing inhibitory tendencies that may arise within the group" (Pânişoară, 2003, p. 140).

Interactive methods combine with engaging learning. "It is desirable that pupils' active and interactive involvement and (inter)active learning should help them to discover the pleasure of learning, which can give rise to positive feelings – of confidence in their potential, desire for knowledge, fulfilment, et cetera." (Bocoş, 2002, p. 63). These methods encourage interaction and socialization among pupils. They often involve working in small groups or pairs, which stimulates the exchange of knowledge, ideas and experiences, as well as the confrontation of opinions to clarify the situation and identify solutions. The effective use of interactive methods presupposes getting to know the educational group as a whole, getting to know each pupil, and focusing on the meeting topic. Only

a correct projection of the situation in which these elements coexist makes it possible to choose the best teaching methods capable of activating the pupils and generating "light", results and satisfaction for each pupil, inclusion in the working group facilitating social inclusion. In other words, the involvement of the pupils positively influences the educational group in the direction of the idea of equality of its members, equality of access to education being desired to be accompanied by equality of process and outcome.

## **2. The general aim of the work**

This research aims to study the effects of interactive teaching methods on the social group class of students and the learning process.

## **3. Research methodology**

### **a. Specific objectives pursued**

- 1. To identify at least 3 significant influences of interactive methods on the class of students as a social group under their presence in the teaching act.*
- 2. To observe at least 5 changes in students' learning process due to integrating interactive methods in the teaching process.*

### **b. Instruments used for data collection and study participants**

The research is qualitative. The primary method used to obtain data is an interview. The interview we applied was semi-structured and contained 10 items. The sample of participants consisted of 25 secondary school students from Timisoara, Romania. The selection criterion for the students forming the group of interviewees is to be secondary school students (grades V – VIII). They, having been informed about the topic and purpose of the interview, expressed their willingness to participate in the study. Because they were minors, their parents were informed about the content of the interview and the purpose of the interview in order to find out their children's opinions on the subject of the research topic. It was understood that, with the help of the interviews, we want to identify the student's perspective on using interactive methods in the classroom and what influence their presence as part of the class collective has on the learning process. Parents gave their informed consent for their children's participation in the study.

The interviews were conducted individually face-to-face and involved interaction dialogue for about 10-15 minutes.

### **c. Presentation and interpretation of results concerning the objectives pursued**

The first question addressed to the students was, "Are you familiar with the concept of interactive teaching methods?" 80% of the respondents answered yes without hesitation. The others needed further explanation to give a positive answer.

Asked to give examples of at least 3 interactive teaching methods, 60% of the respondents answered, 15% needed support, and 25% could not formulate answers. Brainstorming, cube method, clusters method, I know/ I want to know/ I have learned, and R. A. I. method (Answer. Throw. Ask) were the most frequently present in their examples. Among the answers given, we mention other methods: the Jigsaw method (mosaic), the "Change the pair" method, the Lotus flower technique, et cetera. The fact that most students gave examples of interactive methods shows that they are present in the classroom, know how to work, and what each teaching method offered as an example entails.

Regarding the frequency of using interactive methods, the opinions of the interviewees were varied. 35% of the respondents reported using them often, 40% said they use them occasionally, and 25% said rarely.

Romanian language and literature came first when asked which school subjects they use the most. 80% of pupils mentioned this subject. Other subjects mentioned were Mathematics, History, and Biology. Most school subjects found a place in their explanations. When asked if there were subjects that did not require the presence of interactive teaching methods, the answer was unanimously "yes", and there were various examples. It is worth noting that in Romanian language and literature classes, intercultural methods are present without exception. All pupils interviewed also learned subject-specific information through interactive teaching methods.

How do interactive methods influence learning? Positive or negative? The pupils unanimously answered "positive". Asked to be explicit, to say how they learn if interactive methods are included in the lessons, the pupils' answers were mainly: "better" and "easier". "When I talk with colleagues, what we learn seems simpler," and "When we use new techniques, I am more interested in learning" are other answers from the interviewed students.

Asked, "What concrete effects does the presence of interactive teaching methods have on the process of learning new information?" the pupils gave the following answers: "It helps me to understand better", "I work in a team with other colleagues, and I like it", "I had a good time", "we helped each other", "I was curious", "I didn't think I could do it, but I did it", "I spoke without fear", et cetera. Through their explanations, the pupils addressed the multiple effects of interactive methods in teaching activities, from their impact on learning to their influence on group cohesion and well-being socialization. It is worth noting



that learning and socialization are interconnected. Using interactive methods, pupils learn, communicate and work together. They are interested, work, participate together, and mobilize much better. The motivation for learning is also different. Interest in the topics discussed will increase if interactive methods are integrated into the lessons. Each teaching method engages them, dis-inhibits them and increases their self-confidence.

What effects do interactive methods have on one as part of the group of pupils? Some of the answers to the previous item were repeated for this question. In part, the answers given to the question that emphasized the relationship between interactive methods and the learning process are repeated, albeit in different words, in this question, which relates interactive methods to the way of being in the school group. Without exception, students express positive feelings. The most frequent answer refers to freedom of expression. The most frequent response is that they feel at ease and are not afraid to speak and have opinions. The pleasure of working together, of learning one-word teachers who frequently introduce interactive methods in their lessons." The most common answer was "involved". Other answers: "modern", "open", "empathic", "intuitive".

Asked to answer the statement: "Interactive methods make me...", pupils gave a variety of answers: "pay more attention", "talk", "speak", "freely", "know more", "ask", "collaborate with colleagues" et cetera.

The Presentation of the data obtained as a result of the interview allows us to express structured information concerning the first objective of the study: to identify at least 3 significant influences of interactive methods on the class of students as a social group under the conditions of their presence in the teaching act. Freedom of expression and action is the main effect students feel if the teaching activity involves interactive methods. Increased school group cohesion is another result of the presence of interactive methods. Pupils feel they belong to the group and act as such, developing much better relationships with their classmates, dialogue, cooperation, teamwork, and being a real presence during the teaching activities. Increasing the unity of the educational group is the third significant effect of the presence of interactive methods. Through their specific features, they enable pupils to spend time together, to get to know each other better and to act, taking into account the opinions of others. Through the diversity of forms of expression, interactive methods work against segregation, supporting diversity in all its forms and nuances.

The study's second objective, Observation of at least 5 changes occurring in students' learning due to integrating interactive methods into the teaching process, communicates positive data on the relationship between learning and interactive teaching methods. A better understanding of new information is supported by self-confidence, which positively influences school motivation and in-

terest in learning. The reduction of stress and rigidity of teaching action through dialogue and cooperation are consequences of interactive methods.

#### **4. Limitations and recommendations**

The sample of study participants is limited in number. 25 secondary school pupils expressed their views on the impact of interactive methods on them as an educational and, therefore, social group, i.e. on school learning. In another vein, only secondary school pupils were asked to provide answers.

The interview contained 10 items, limiting the perspective on interactive methods' impact on teaching. Making the items more fun would give a better picture of the subject. Of course, the presence of other research methods would also be a good omen.

Our recommendation is to expand the sample of study participants in two directions. We encourage increasing the number of participants. We also believe that the information would be more prosperous in content if, in addition to secondary school pupils, primary and secondary school pupils and students participated in the study. The expert opinions of teachers would complete the picture even better, and their expertise and experience would undoubtedly add value to the investigation.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The research conducted on interactive teaching methods and the effects they have on the classroom and the learning process in secondary education (grades V–VIII) allows us to conclude that each teacher influences their development on several levels., by the responsible way in which he/she prepares his/her meetings with students, In designing educational activities, the best decisions must be taken, taking into account the diversity found in each educational group. Thus, considering the group's characteristics and the lesson's theme, the teacher proposes a teaching strategy, specific methods, and the student's experiences, determining the selection of the most appropriate elements.

The research data showed that interactive teaching methods have a positive effect on the cohesion of the educational group, have a beneficial influence on the diversity of modes of expression and action, encourage dialogue and cooperation between pupils, and positively impact educational and social inclusion. In terms of the learning process, interactive methods are correlated with increased interest and motivation at school, the desire to know, to communicate

and to take on ideas from other colleagues, and equality at a group level is reflected in the quality of education.

To summarize, diversity and pupils' educational and social inclusion are strongly supported through using interactive teaching methods.

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## Interaktywne metody nauczania wspierające różnorodność oraz edukacyjną i społeczną integrację uczniów

### Streszczenie

Prezentowane badanie wspiera różnorodność oraz integrację edukacyjną i społeczną, analizuje wpływ metod interaktywnych na grupę uczniów w akcie dydaktycznym, a także zmiany zachodzące u uczniów w procesie uczenia się. Zastosowaną metodą badawczą był wywiad częściowo ustrukturyzowany. Próba uczestników składała się z 25 uczniów szkół średnich. Wyniki badania dostarczają informacji na temat efektów edukacyjnych i społecznych doświadczanych przez uczniów w wyniku włączenia metod interaktywnych na lekcji. W szczególności wolność wypowiedzi i działania, świadomość, że każda osoba jest wyjątkowa, fakt, że ludzka różnorodność jest absolutnie naturalna, to korzyści, które towarzyszą obecności metod interaktywnych. Z pewnością poczucie przynależności do grupy, poczucie integracji edukacyjnej i społecznej, zwiększona spójność grupy uczniów, wzrost pewności siebie i wiary we własny potencjał są wynikiem pracy zespołowej, zachęcania do swobodnej ekspresji i dialogu, które są charakterystycznymi cechami metod interaktywnych. Proces uczenia się również ulega istotnym zmianom, a metody interaktywne mają pozytywny wpływ na zrozumienie nowych informacji i motywację. Zachęcanie do swobodnej, otwartej ekspresji wpływa na zwiększanie zainteresowania nauką. Podsumowując, różnorodność, a także edukacyjna i społeczna integracja uczniów szkół średnich, są skutecznie wspierane przez optymalne wykorzystanie interaktywnych metod nauczania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** interaktywne metody nauczania, różnorodność, integracja edukacyjna, integracja społeczna.

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Katarzyna WÓJCIK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0218-7510>

Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa, Poland

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# Forms of Interaction Between a Primary School and the Family of a Student with a Statement of Special Educational Needs in Inclusive Education

## Abstract

Inclusive education, along with integrated and special education, is one of the forms of education for students with statements of special educational needs, which in Poland can be issued due to certain types of developmental dysfunctions. It presupposes that students are educated in mainstream schools, with the smallest possible repertoire of special interventions. In the educational and therapeutic process of this group of students, parents play an important role, so the interaction between the school and the student's family is essential. The present study addresses the issue of the primary school's interaction with the family of a student with a statement of special educational needs. The focus of the research was on forms of collective interaction. The results of the survey indicated that parents of students with statements of special educational needs had little involvement in collective forms of interaction with the school. One of the main issues exposed in the study is parental education as one form of interaction.

**Keywords:** inclusive education, student with disabilities, parents and teachers, interaction.

## Introduction

The process of upbringing takes place in several environments that shape the human being. The two most important are, invariably, the family and the school, each with its own characteristics and specific functions. Some of them

are shared, while their overall goal of the best possible development of the child requires interaction in terms of educational interventions. It is desirable to adopt the principle that teachers and parents who want to cooperate should adhere to the view that their competence is a product of cooperation (Segiet, 1999). Despite experiencing many difficulties, the family is still the greatest ally in the implementation of the modern school. Cooperation is based on the principle of voluntariness and mutual support, which is the basis for creating a common line of action between the coordinating actors.

The obstacle to the main functions of the school, i.e. teaching, education, and care, is the lack of interaction with parents. It is believed that the level of parental education determines both the content and the extent of the interaction process (Cudak, 2004).

The literature on the subject mentions many forms of interaction. The forms of cooperation can be individual, taking in a teacher-parent dyad, or collective, which involve the participation of at least several parents in a given activity. One of the challenges of a modern Polish school is considered to be the level of parents' pedagogical culture, which determines the subject of cooperation, its scope, and its effectiveness. This level has a significant impact on the relationship between the family and the school, which in turn has an impact on improving the teaching and education process and higher student achievement.

Parent education is considered to be a form of cooperation between the school and the student's family, a real participation of parents in the life of the school, and a component of a broadly understood human pedagogical culture. Since the family environment is responsible for the development and education of the human being, the school should support parents in their tasks. The educational function of the school is implemented primarily through pedagogical activities, expanding parents' knowledge of care, upbringing, prevention, and education. These activities are also aimed at continuously increasing the level of reflexivity of parents in relation to the educational process in the broad sense (Bartkowiak, Famuła, 2002).

The praxeological approach to this collaborative process is valid for all students and requires special attention when it comes to the development of a child with special educational needs (SEN). The joint assessment of the student's current functioning, the definition of courses of action, and the adaptation of common working methods to achieve development according to the possibilities and needs of the SEN student are indispensable.

## **Parents of a student with a statement of special educational needs in inclusive education**

A student with a statement of special educational needs in Poland is a child or adult learner who has a document issued by a psychological and pedagogical

counselling centre called a statement of special educational needs. Underage students can only be diagnosed at the request of their parents or legal guardians. The assessment committee consists of the head of the counselling centre, a special educator, a psychologist, a doctor, and other specialists included in the team based on the child's individual deficits, e.g. a specialist working with students with visual impairments, a specialist working with students with hearing impairments and deaf students, a speech therapist, a speech therapist working with neurological patients, and others (Regulation of the Ministry of Education of 7 September 2017 on statements and opinions issued by multidisciplinary decision boards operating in public psychological and pedagogical counselling centres).

A statement of special educational needs is the basic document of a student with a disorder used in education. It mainly contains a diagnosis, and recommendations (e.g. forms of psychological and pedagogical support to be provided to the student). On its basis, methods and forms of education are adapted at school according to individual recommendations from the psychological and pedagogical counselling centre. It is based on this document that a support teacher can be employed at the school (if such a recommendation has been made), and extracurricular classes are allocated at the school, e.g. revalidation classes, speech therapy, sensory integration classes, which are also linked to an increase in the educational subsidy per student. The statement also justifies the recommendations and an indication of the optimal form of education for the educational stage.

A statement of the special educational needs can be issued by psychological and pedagogical counselling centres for: students with disabilities (deaf, with hearing impairments, blind, with visual impairments); with motor disabilities, including aphasia; with mild, moderate, or severe intellectual disabilities; with autism, including Asperger's syndrome; with multiple disabilities; and for socially maladjusted and those at risk of social maladjustment (Regulation of the Ministry of Education of 9 August 2017 on the conditions for organizing education, upbringing and care for children and youth with disabilities, social maladjustment, and those at risk of social maladjustment).

The above-mentioned group of students can learn in inclusion education, which is one of the three types of education in Poland, along with segregated (special) and integrative education. Inclusive education involves the joint education of students without disabilities and those with special educational needs and is carried out with the least amount of special educational intervention in regular schools and departments, also known as mass schools or, as it is proposed, inclusion schools (Chrzanowska, 2019).

Inclusive education grows out of anti-discrimination trends, focused on the call for 'Education for All', a UNESCO initiative that is reflected in the education policies of many countries around the world, which involve a shift from integra-

tion to inclusive education (Chambers, Forlin, 2021). Inclusion in education is one of the links to social inclusion in the broadest sense.

Parents of students with statements of special educational needs are given particular attention, both in academic reflection and in educational practice, and are most often considered to be parents of a child with a disability. The school's cooperation with this group of parents includes not only educational, caring, and teaching interactions, but also therapeutic ones.

The tasks of the parents of students with SEN and the forms of their interaction with the school depend on the type of institution the child attends, the location of the school, the facilities and resources, the possibilities for assistance and support from various institutions, school staff, especially teaching staff, and also depend on the type of disability. The different stages of education determine the characteristic actions of parents in the education of their children. The first stage concerns the decision to choose the right school for the child, and the type of school (special education, integrative education, inclusive education), which is the right of parents in a Polish school. The second stage of parental actions is related to the student's education at school. The third stage takes place during the acquisition of knowledge and experience of the school's work, during the process of interaction for the benefit of the school, the class, and, above all, the student (Apanel, 2014).

Regardless of the forms, it seems reasonable to adopt the principle that "the family and aligning the behaviour of parents and teachers are one of the best educational methods to learn about the child's needs and capabilities to ultimately create conditions conducive to optimal development" (Plichta et al., 2017). Cooperation between parents and teachers of a child with a disability is one of the factors that can accelerate the holistic development of a young person (Reczek-Zymróż, 2009). Improving this process is a challenge for contemporary Polish and European education. The school's wide range of resources, including highly qualified teaching staff, seem to be of help here (Linder, Schwab, 2020).

Research on inclusive education has been carried out in Poland but refers only to some and few aspects. Research in this field concerning the education of students with mild intellectual disabilities has been conducted by: B. Cytowska (2002) and G. Szumski, in collaboration with A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz (2010), A. Zamkowska (2009). Teachers' views on inclusive education were studied by Z. Gajdzica (2011), I. Chrzanowska (2019), enriched by research on the effectiveness of education of students with SEN (Chrzanowska, 2010). It is also worth citing the explorations of Z. Palak (2000) on students with visual impairments and research conducted in several voivodeships as part of the 'School for All' project (Al-Khamisy, Bogucka, 2002). The results of a study covering rural schools in Bydgoszcz, Poland, were presented by B. Skotnicka (2019). A review



of research in the field of inclusive education in Poland was presented by B. Cy-towska (2016). Despite the successive extension of the pedagogical literature on inclusive education in recent years, a fragmentary approach to the issue of interaction between the school and the family of a student with a disability is evident. The need to explore this area of research was therefore recognized.

## **Methodology**

The aim of the study was to examine the course of the interaction between a primary school and the parents of a student with special educational needs in inclusive education in Częstochowa, Poland. Specific problems concerning the forms of interaction and the expectations of the actors of interaction were also identified. The results presented in this paper address one of the research areas identified and answer the following questions: What forms of collective interaction for the benefit of the school and the integrative class occur between the school and the parents of students? What forms of collective interaction on behalf of the school and the integrative class do teachers and parents of students with special educational needs expect?

Due to its framework, the present paper discusses only a part of the findings. The research was conducted in 2020 in 24 public primary schools in the city of Częstochowa, Poland, providing inclusive education to students with statements of special educational needs. The diagnostic research was adopted, based on the use of the method of diagnostic survey and the questionnaire technique. In the course of the exploration, four research tools were used, which were survey questionnaires that were used to survey parents, form teachers, support teachers of this group of students, and school counsellors. These above-mentioned groups of teachers were found to be most often involved in interaction with the parents. Teachers completed the survey questionnaires multiple times, individualizing their experiences and the knowledge they gained about the parents of each student.

The purposive selection was used in the study. The study participants were 126 parents of students with SEN, form teachers of 127 students, school counsellors working with 148 students with SEN, and 78 support teachers.

## **Analysis of present research**

In the course of the research exploration, parents of students with statements of special educational needs were asked to indicate the forms of collective interaction with the school, both undertaken and expected.

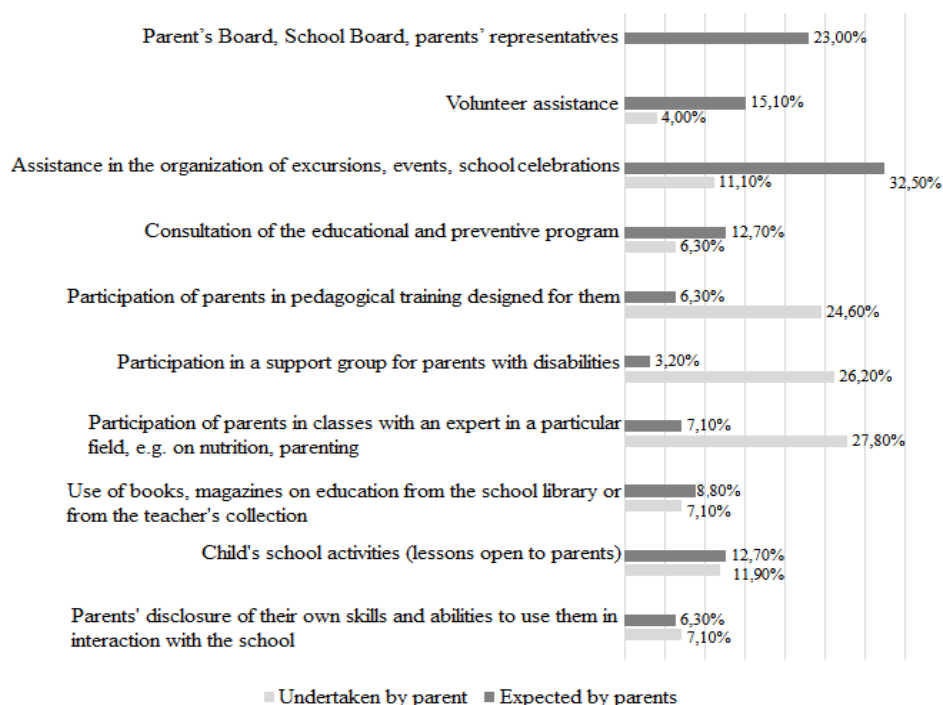


Diagram 1

Collective interaction taken and expected by parents

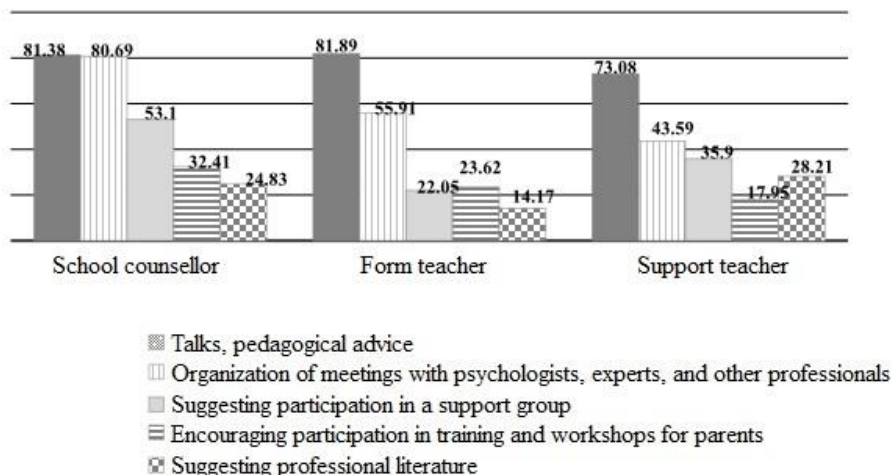
Source: author's own elaboration.

An analysis of the survey results revealed that the predominant trend among parents of students with statements of special educational needs is that they do not have any interaction with the school in the categories indicated. The form of interaction that occurs most frequently is assistance in organizing excursions and school and class events and celebrations, accounting for about one-third of the respondents. This is the highest score achieved among the categories indicated. The other most common forms are participation in the parents' board and the class board. Among the least frequent are a support group for parents, participation in pedagogical training for parents, and parents' disclosure of their skills and abilities to use them in cooperation with the school.

The compilation of the data revealed the significant disparities that exist between the forms of interaction undertaken by parents and those expected. At the forefront is the need to participate in parent education activities such as participation in training, support groups, and classes with experts in various fields.

In view of the above, it was considered valuable in the course of the empirical research to identify the forms of educational activities used in regular primary schools that implement inclusive education in Częstochowa, Poland. In the

survey questionnaire, teachers were asked about the use of forms of parent education in the previous year.



*Diagram 2*

Forms of parent education used by teachers

Source: author's own elaboration.

The results of the survey indicated that the most common forms of parent education used by teachers were talks and providing pedagogical advice. Meetings with psychologists, experts in particular fields, and other professionals, usually organized by a school counsellor, were ranked slightly lower. Approximately half of the school guidance counsellors and form teachers surveyed suggested that parents participated in support groups in or out of school. A small group of teachers admitted that they offered parents to participate in workshops and training addressed to parents to develop pedagogical skills. A small number of them offered professional literature and magazines on parenting and raising children with SEN. Form teachers were the least likely to do so. As can be assumed, school guidance counsellors, especially support teachers with a background in special education, are more likely to have knowledge of professional literature.

The teachers taking part in the survey were also asked to indicate the expected forms of collective interaction by parents. The results are presented in the diagram. 3.

The results of the survey indicated that the expectations most often formulated by teachers converged across all groups of teaching staff surveyed. Form teachers, school counsellors, support teachers expressed the expectation of parents of students with statements of special educational needs to participate in

classes with experts in various fields, pedagogical training for parents, and support groups. It is noteworthy that the above-mentioned forms of interaction are conducive to raising the pedagogical culture of parents.

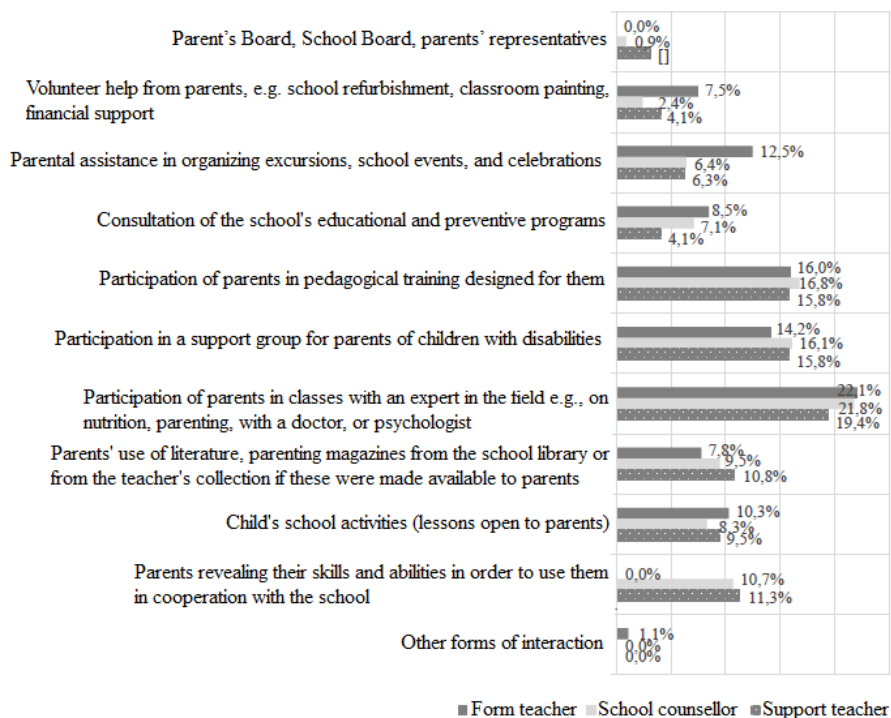


Diagram 3

Teachers' expectations of the forms of collective interaction between parents and the student's school

Source: author's own elaboration.

It should be noted that there are definitely more frequent expectations of form teachers relating to parents' support in organizing events and celebrations for the integrative class and the whole school and volunteering. An interesting phenomenon is no expectations of teachers to get involved in the democratic structures of the school, such as the Parents' Board, the School Board, and parents' representatives. This need was noted by a small percentage of support teachers and a school counsellor. This group of teachers is more likely to expect parents to use the literature provided by school libraries and to reveal their skills in order to interact with the school their children attend.

Quantitative data have been extended with qualitative data, allowing for an understanding of the context of the phenomena being explored. One form

teacher pointed out the forms of assistance: "Parents of students with statements of special educational needs should be provided with psychological support. Very often, they find it difficult to come to terms with their child's disability, which affects parents' contact with the school and teachers. Parents conceal a lot of information which prevents the school and teachers from taking appropriate action" (W058).

The need for parent education was also recognized by support teachers: "In my opinion, there is a need for parents also to be included in therapy or, for example, a compulsory number of classes to learn about parenting and methods of working with children with disabilities" (Ws068), "I think it would be good to make parents of grade 4 aware, through education, of the existence of the autism spectrum, so that they are not afraid to send their children for examinations to the psychological and pedagogical counselling centre. Children are often not issued with a statement of special educational needs until grade 7 or 8, and a student could be helped much earlier" (Ws069).

One school counsellor emphasized the need for interaction in the mutual exchange of information, which in turn serves to develop uniform educational interventions applied at home and at school: "It is important to be (mutually) open to cooperation, present a unified approach, and to take into account information collected from each other" (P016).

Support teachers indicated "the teacher's interpersonal skills, listening skills, consistency in action, interaction with parents, and emphasising that cooperation is key to helping the child function" (Ws063).

## **Conclusions and recommendations for pedagogical practice**

The research procedure was aimed to verify the problems formulated. The material collected allowed generalisations to be made, but these were made with caution, as it can be assumed that the issue studied is determined by more factors than just those analysed in the study.

The survey showed that parents of students with statements of special educational needs have little involvement in the collective forms of interaction with the school.

The predominant forms of collective interaction included helping to organize excursions and events, school and class celebrations, participation in the Parents' Board, and voluntary work for the school. The most common parent education activities organized by the school were conventional forms such as talks and pedagogical counselling.

One of the main issues contained in the submitted research results is parent education. Parents expressed the need and expectations to participate in classes

with experts in various fields, pedagogical training designed for them, and to participate in a support group for parents of children with disabilities. Parents also showed a willingness to interact with teachers in organizing events and celebrations for the integrative class or school and participating in activities open to parents.

In terms of forms of collective interaction, the teachers' expectations included the participation of parents in classes with experts, pedagogical training for parents, and participation in a support group for parents of children with disabilities to raise the parents' pedagogical culture.

It is noteworthy that the respondents surveyed expect parents to participate in pedagogical activities. In the area of expectations, teachers presented the view that parents should participate in forms of activities to improve their pedagogical culture. However, they do not have a sufficient range of parent education activities. This is because they are limited to the most basic ones, which are conversations and talks. Parents express a willingness to participate in workshops, and meetings with experts, but in the vast majority, such forms of activities are not offered to them or are not available to them.

It is therefore proposed to increase the range of services in educational centres in order to increase the degree of reflexivity of parents in the child's upbringing, care, education, and therapy. It is proposed that the school provide various forms of support and psychological and pedagogical assistance to the parents of students, primarily by organizing pedagogical training, meetings with experts in various fields, and support groups. It can be assumed that improving the pedagogical competence of parents and surrounding them with emotional support will become a resource for an effective interaction process.

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## **Formy współdziałania szkoły podstawowej z rodziną ucznia z orzeczeniem o potrzebie kształcenia specjalnego w edukacji inkluzyjnej**

### **Streszczenie**

Kształcenie inkluzyjne, obok integracyjnego i specjalnego, jest jedną z form kształcenia uczniów z orzeczeniem o potrzebie kształcenia specjalnego, które w Polsce może być wydane ze względu na niektóre rodzaje dysfunkcji rozwojowych. Zakłada ono edukację uczniów w szkołach ogólnodostępnych, przy jak najmniejszym repertuarze specjalnych oddziaływań.

W procesie edukacyjno-terapeutycznym tej grupy uczniów istotną rolę odgrywają ich rodzice, dlatego też nieodzowne jest współdziałanie szkoły z rodziną ucznia. W przedłożonym artykule poruszone zostało zagadnienie współdziałania szkoły podstawowej z rodziną ucznia z orzeczeniem o potrzebie kształcenia specjalnego. Zaprezentowane badania dotyczyły form współdziałania zbiorowego. Wyniki badań wskazują, że rodzice uczniów z orzeczeniem o potrzebie kształcenia specjalnego w sposób mało zaangażowany włączają się we współdziałanie ze szkołą w formach zbiorowych. Jednym z głównych zagadnień eksponujących w prezentowanych wynikach badań jest pedagogizacja rodziców jako jedna z form współdziałania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja inkluzyjna, uczeń z niepełnosprawnością, rodzice i nauczyciele, współdziałanie.



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Cosmina Simona LUNGOCI

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6823-4351>

West University of Timisoara, Department of Educational Sciences, Romania

Flavia Bianca BARBONI

pre-school teacher

Kindergarten no. 3, Timisoara, Romania

Mihaela MIHALACHE

primary school teacher

“Mihai Eminescu” National College of Oradea, Romania

Maria VÂLSAN

primary school teacher

Secondary School Dumbrăvița, Romania

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**Contact:** [cosmina.lungoci@e-uvt.ro](mailto:cosmina.lungoci@e-uvt.ro); [flavia.barboni74@e-uvt.ro](mailto:flavia.barboni74@e-uvt.ro); [mihaela.mihalache02@e-uvt.ro](mailto:mihaela.mihalache02@e-uvt.ro); [maria.valsan02@e-uvt.ro](mailto:maria.valsan02@e-uvt.ro)

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## The Importance of Remedial Activities in the Development of Literacy in Primary School Pupils from Disadvantaged Backgrounds

### Abstract

The 2022 PISA results show a high level of functional illiteracy among Romanian students: 42% of Romanian students did not reach the second level in literacy tests. (OECD, 2023) Studies identified in the literature indicate the great importance that emergent literacy skills have on the future acquisitions that students achieve in the educational process, especially for students with low socio-economic status. For a teacher, to facilitate the development of these competences, it is

necessary to apply appropriate methods and strategies adapted to the particularities of the pupils. Given these considerations, we set out in this study to investigate the impact of an intervention aimed at emergent literacy on first grade students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The research carried out is a quantitative quasi-experiment. The research sample consisted of 15 first graders from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, some of them bilingual and not enrolled in kindergarten. For data collection, a literacy assessment booklet was used as a literacy assessment instrument, used as a pre-test and post-test. In between the two tests there were didactic activities in which the researchers worked with each participant, on an individualized basis, on all the essential aspects related to emergent literacy. The findings of this study show that the pupils who participated in the remedial activities aimed at emergent literacy showed, at the end of the intervention, an improvement in literacy competence on all the dimensions targeted by the research instrument.

**Keywords:** literacy, remedial activities, disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

## 1. Introduction

Communication competence in the mother tongue is one of the eight European key competences underpinning the Romanian education system. Although the majority of the population tends to believe that the development of pupils' literacy skills starts in primary school, we can see that teachers' concern for the development of these skills starts in kindergarten and, according to recent studies, should be even more sustained in order to facilitate the acquisition of literacy in primary school.

Through this research we wanted to find out whether an additional, remedial literacy intervention for children from low socio-economic status backgrounds could lead to higher levels of early literacy achievement than traditional teaching/learning in the preparatory and first classes. We also aim to track the effectiveness of the intervention program for students who do not miss school frequently and do not refuse to participate in remedial activities for various reasons. This investigation is particularly important given that reading performance in primary grades is a strong indicator of reading skills in the long term and therefore may influence children's academic and career trajectories, with possible negative repercussions for those from low socio-economic backgrounds. Although emergent literacy skills are part of the national curriculum, the concept of the word, phonemic awareness and word recognition often do not receive the necessary attention, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often enter school without these skills and who experience delays in learning. The report on the state of pre-university education in Romania 2021/2022 (Ministry of Education, 2023) finds that the dropout rate at primary level remained at 1.3% as in the previous school year. The difference by area of residence remains as high (0.9 percentage points), with rural areas still disadvantaged. Drop-out rates in preparatory and first grade remain at their highest

levels. At the level of the preparatory class, the value of the indicator increased compared to the previous school year by 0.1 p.p., while it remained the same at the level of the first class.

In order to justify the need for an intervention targeting emergent literacy and to outline the literacy problem in Romania, we analyzed the results from the 2022 PISA tests and 42% of Romanian students did not reach the second level in literacy (OECD, 2023), level 2 meaning that students can find the main idea in a medium-length text, can find information in the text based on explicit criteria, and can reflect on the purpose and form of texts when asked to do so. It was noted that the statistically significant results are situated at two extremes: very good results and very poor results, with no significant average scores. Very poor results were mostly obtained by children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. We believe that these pupils should be supported in their learning in order to reach an average level, which could be made possible through remedial, individualized activities, so that in the next standardized tests the results obtained can be on an upward trend. (Reese, 2008; Dolean et al., 2019) However, studies in which students have benefited from remedial activities to develop literacy skills have shown positive results in relation to the academic progress of these students. (Balea et al., 2023; Dolean et al., 2019; Lonigan et al., 2013; Vellutino et al., 2008; Reese, 2008) Particularly in the early years of primary education, the focus should be on assessing emergent literacy skills and intervening with the aim of remedying identified problems and ensuring optimal progress.

Studies conducted on identifying the effects of these interventions draw attention to the need to place greater emphasis on emergent literacy skills. (Balea et al., 2023; Dolean et al., 2019; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998; Apel & Lawrence, 2011; Lonigan et al., 2013; Chambrè et al., 2020; Schmitt & Gregory, 2005; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997) The earlier the initial assessment and interventions are implemented during the primary school, the greater the progress the student will make. As stated earlier, the effects of early interventions are also observable later in students' school career. (Schmitt & Gregory, 2005; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997).

The long-term effects of carrying out remedial activities for the development of literacy skills cover several aspects. These may include lowering the level of functional illiteracy in Romania, reducing school drop-out and absenteeism, better results in national assessments and increasing educational equity. At the same time, the educational ideal may be associated with more graduates prepared to integrate socially and in the labor market, as it is known from long-term research that literacy influences the social and professional success of individuals.

## 2. Other theoretical background

The study conducted by Balea et al. (2023), entitled *Kick-start literacy for all. Comparative results from romanian preparatory grade classrooms*, published in the *Journal of Pedagogy*, aimed to investigate whether there is a difference between the literacy skills of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have benefited from remedial activities and the literacy skills of students who do not come from disadvantaged backgrounds. This study involved 300 pupils in preparatory classes. Of these, 260 benefited from remedial activities.

The research questions of the study asked whether pupils involved in literacy activities to develop emergent literacy skills performed better at the end of the preparatory class than their peers in relation to emergent literacy skills and whether pupils who performed poorly on the baseline literacy assessment but received remedial activities would perform better than their peers in the control group and with similar baseline test scores.

The results of the study show that the target group scored on average 56 points higher at the final assessment than at baseline and 17 points higher than the control group. Thus, the research questions posed at the beginning of the study were affirmative. However, the alphabet recognition component did not show significantly different scores between the two groups.

The researchers of the study suggest that teachers of preparatory classes should introduce more instructional activities in their lessons that focus on developing the concept of print, phoneme segmentation, word concept and word recognition.

Another study, entitled *Contribution of family risk, emergent literacy and environmental protective factors in children's reading difficulties at the end of second-grade*, published in 2019, by Zahra Esmaeeli, Fiona E. Kyle and Kjersti Lundetrae, investigated the role of family risk in predicting children's reading difficulties at the end of second grade, considering a multifactorial model including emergent literacy and environmental factors. Emergent literacy, which includes skills such as letter knowledge, phonemic awareness and vocabulary, was identified as a strong predictor of later reading difficulties. Reading difficulties have also been shown to be inherited in the family, and children with a familial risk of reading difficulties showed delays in emergent literacy and a less favorable home reading environment. The results of this study offer practical implications for parents and teachers, highlighting the importance of promoting rich reading environments at home and supporting the development of emergent literacy skills.

### 3. Definition of concepts

The main concepts addressed throughout this research are: emergent literacy, phonemic awareness, morphological awareness, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, remedial activities and socio-economic status.

*Emergent literacy* is defined by Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) as the set of literacy skills that a child forms before entering primary school. In particular, emergent literacy is considered to be acquired before learning to read and write. So emergent literacy is the early and fundamental stage in the development of literacy skills in children, preparing them to become competent readers and writers in later stages of formal education. This stage encompasses a range of complex issues, integrating verbal, cognitive and social skills, contributing to the foundation of written language learning. Emergent literacy includes aspects such as pre-literacy, awareness of letters and sounds, familiarization with books and written words, vocabulary and language development, and interest in reading and writing. Thus, while literacy refers to the ability to read and write in general, emergent literacy focuses on the initial stage of the development of reading and writing skills in young children.

*Phonemic awareness* refers to the ability to distinguish, separate and manipulate phonemes within the pronunciation of words. (Ehri, 2022) In relation to this, Høien et al. (1995) define morphological awareness as the ability to abstract and manipulate segments of spoken language. According to Ehri (2022) and Duke et al. (2021), decoding involves transforming graphemes into phonemes and combining them to generate word pronunciation. Phonics refers to a form of instruction that teaches students the main grapheme-phoneme relationships and their use to decode and write words. A beginning reader must at some point discover the alphabetic principle: that letter units match sound units. (Stanovich, 2009) However, students may have difficulty naming letters or making phoneme-grapheme correspondence. (Dodd & Carr, 2003).

*Vocabulary* is the totality of words actually used by someone in expression and which vary from one category of speakers to another. In a school context, related to the development of literacy competence, vocabulary involves recognizing words in written form and understanding them in the context of communication. (Duke et al., 2021) Depending on the amount of vocabulary acquired during preschool, Kargin et al. (2023) emphasize that reading comprehension skills can be determined. A rich vocabulary is associated with easier decoding and pronunciation of words. (Duke et al., 2021; Kargin et al., 2023) At the same time, an important theoretical idea emphasizes that readers construct mental representations of the information they read during reading. (*National Reading Panel*, 2000) Thus, it is necessary for complex mental representations that the

number of words in a person's vocabulary is rich. Research has shown that vocabulary is a key predictor of literacy proficiency.

*Morphological awareness* is a linguistic skill through which a child makes connections between words, starting from their smallest units of meaning (Apel & Lawrence, 2011; Duke & Cartwright, 2021) For example, if a child has developed morphological awareness competence, he or she can make connections between a derived word and its root or determine the meaning of prefixes or suffixes (Duke et al, 2021; Apel & Lawrence, 2011; Duke & Cartwright, 2021) Duke et al. (2021) state that reading skills are influenced by morphological awareness.

*Fluency* is the ability to combine the accuracy, automaticity, and prosody of oral reading, which together facilitate the reader's construction of meaning. (Kuhn et al., 2010) It is demonstrated during oral reading by the ease of recognizing words, appropriate rhythm, phrasing and intonation. Fluency is also a factor in both oral and silent reading that can limit or support comprehension. (Kuhn et al. 2010) Accuracy, automaticity, and act prosody manifested in the reading process are also characteristics of fluency mentioned in the studies of Duke et al. (2021), Duke and Cartwright (2021), and Kim et al. (2013).

*Comprehension* is the ability to understand information heard or read by a person. (Duke & Cartwright 2021; Dooley & Matthews 2009) In terms of emergent comprehension, Dooley and Matthews (2009) find that children in the pre-school period confer meanings on components of the external environment, meanings that they transfer further into their reading.

*Remedial activities* refer to additional educational actions and interventions that are designed to help students overcome difficulties and improve their performance in specific areas of learning. These activities are planned and implemented to provide additional support to pupils who are experiencing difficulties or who need a different approach to achieve their educational goals.

*Socio-economic status* represents the totality of factors such as education, occupation and income in the family environment. (Baker, 2014) Based on it, one can identify those at risk, in terms of poverty. In the case of children from low socio-economic status families, the literature states that emergent literacy skills and literacy rates are low. (Lonigan et al., 2013; Dolean et al., 2021) Also, Dolean et al. (2021) in their research states that even the absenteeism rate in these students is high. Therefore, there is a need to organize intervention plans for these students.

#### **4. Methodology**

The present study aims to investigate the impact of remedial activities with first grade students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have difficulties in

emergent literacy on the development of literacy and writing-reading skills. In carrying out the research, several practical aspects will be pursued. First, it will aim to identify, following the pre-test, the areas of emergent literacy in which pupils have difficulties. Secondly, the post-test will be used to track the progress of students' emergent literacy activities.

#### **4.1. Research hypothesis**

The general hypothesis of the research states that the implementation of remedial activities individualized to the needs of students with low socio-economic status, with the aim of developing emergent literacy proficiency, results in a significant change in their scores on emergent literacy assessments.

#### **4.2. Research design**

The present research is a quantitative, quasi-experimental design. The mode of data collection is pre-test – post-test. The research does not have a control group because the purpose of the study is focused on identifying the impact of implementing emergent literacy activities with first graders who have difficulties in this area, the results obtained relate strictly to the particular situation of the students participating in the study. The research design also implies the realization of the interventions with the experimental group.

Therefore, the variables followed in this study are: emergent literacy proficiency, emergent literacy development activities and the socio-economic status of the participants.

#### **4.3. Participants**

The present study involved first grade students. The sample consisted of 15 first graders from a primary school in Timisoara, Romania. Of the participants, 5 were female and the remaining 10 were male (N=15). The ages of the participants ranged from 6 to 9 years old, although they were all enrolled in the same class, which is usually made up of children aged 7 to 8 years old. Their background is urban. In terms of socio-economic status, parents' low level of schooling, lack of employment, very low incomes and mainly single-parent families.

Table 1 contains the demographics data of the study participants, and Table 2 contains information on socio-economic status variables for each participant.

Table 1  
*Participants' socio-demographic data (N=15)*

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	5	33,33
Male	10	66,66
<b>Age</b>		
6 years	1	6,66
7 years	7	46,66
8 years	6	40
9 years	1	6,66
<b>Environment</b>		
Urban	15	100
<b>Bilingual</b>		
Yes	9	60
No	6	40

Table 2  
*Socio-economic status of participants (N=15)*

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
<b>Revenues</b>		
Low	10	66,66
Medium	5	33,33
<b>Parents' schooling level</b>		
Primary school	10	66,66
Secondary school	4	26,66
High school	1	6,66
<b>Family type</b>		
Single-parent	10	60
Nuclear family	5	40

#### 4.4. Research instrument used for data collection

For the assessment of emergent literacy competence we used *The Emerging Literacy Assessment Workbook* written by Prof. Dr. Charles Temple and Prof. Dr. Codruța Temple and published in 2023. The tool contains items for the assessment of emergent literacy, divided into the following categories: notions of printed text (NPT), recognizing and reproducing the alphabet (RRA), notion of word (NW), phonemic segmentation (PS), recognizing words (RW), and writing



words (WW). Each section contains a number of assessment items to which the corresponding score is assigned. In addition, for each assessment item, instructions are given on how to explain the item to the assessor and how the assessor should solve the item. *The Emerging Literacy Assessment Workbook* contains support materials, such as alphabet charts, to make the assessment process simpler. At the end of the instrument, there is the summative score sheet, with which we can use to realize the total score.

*Notions of printed text* (NPT) is the first dimension of the research instrument. In the assessment, six items belong to this dimension. Among the knowledge and skills targeted within this dimension are: knowledge of how to hold a book, understanding that one reads the text, not the pictures, orientation on the printed page, understanding the concept of a word, understanding the concept of a letter, and understanding that a letter can be large or small. It can also be seen that there is a stepwise transition from simple to more complex items.

*Recognizing and reproducing the alphabet* (RRA) is the second dimension of the instrument. In the assessment, three items belong to this dimension. The main knowledge and skills that the RRA targets are: naming the phoneme of each grapheme, phonemic hearing and writing each letter after dictation. The tool assesses the RRA for print letters.

*Notion of the word* (NW) is the third dimension of the instrument. In the assessment, two items belong to this dimension. The main knowledge and skills targeted by the NW are: awareness of the separation of words in writing by a space, the indication of words in a text, and approximating the position of a word in a text without knowing how to read it, but only by hearing the text beforehand.

Phoneme segmentation (PS) is the fourth dimension of the instrument. In the assessment, one item is assigned to this dimension. It contains 22 words that the child has to segment by letters. It can also be observed with this item that, as the child moves on to the next words, the segmentation becomes increasingly difficult. For example, the first words in the item have a simple CV/VC form. The following words contain more letters, oscillating, and the word form becomes one in which two consonants of the form CVCC/CCVC are joined.

*Word recognition* (WR) is the fifth dimension of the instrument. In the assessment, one item is given for WR. Students will have to read each word in turn. This is a practical test to check whether they have mastered the alphabet and can mentally realize phonemic blending. Although there are not many words in this assessment item, the level of concentration is high for the student.

*Writing the words* (WW) is the sixth dimension of the instrument. One item is allocated for this dimension. The student will be given words to write on a sheet of paper. In order to avoid confusion about the word the assessor says, the assessor formulates a sentence that includes the corresponding word. This

is the most difficult item in the instrument as it involves a variety of knowledge about the alphabet, phoneme-grapheme correspondence and the blending of several phonemes in a word.

The activity guide *Literacy Labs* was used to carry out the emergent literacy development activities. Methods and techniques realized by the New Horizons Foundation within the project *Schools with glitter* (<https://scolicusclipici.noi-orienturi.ro/>). The activities proposed in this guide are directly related to the evaluation tool used. These two tools were developed within the same project, aiming to develop emergent literacy skills for pupils who have difficulties in this area.

The guide contains activities divided into five major areas of reading literacy pursued in primary grades. These are: phonological and phonemic awareness, phoneme-grapheme correspondence, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. The guide also contains explanations and videos of the activities. This proved to be extremely helpful in the process of designing the activities. In addition, the Schools with glitter project website provided story books and worksheets based on them which we used in the realization of the activities both as stand-alone teaching materials and as inspiration for the realization of other teaching materials.

#### **4.5. Research procedure**

This research involved several stages covering the period from October 2023 to April 2024. In the first phase, a school was identified in which primary school pupils face academic and socio-economic difficulties. Then followed the selection of the pupils, which was made on the basis of the recommendations of the class teacher, referring to the pupils' school results recorded in the preparatory class. This was followed by the submission of the informed consent form for completion by the parents of the participants.

This was followed by a period of about a week during which we administered the pre-test to the students. On average, each participant was allocated over an hour to administer the instrument. For all students, two meetings were necessary to complete the pre-test. After completing the pre-test, we centralized the results in a database and began designing remedial activities.

For several months, we carried out weekly activities with the students. Activities were conducted in small groups, and in situations where differentiated activities were needed, we designed personalized requirements. For each activity we chose, with the help of the guide, the major areas we wanted to develop. After the realization of each activity, observations were noted on the way the activity was carried out, the progress made by each participant where appropriate, the level of achievement of the operational objectives and disruptive factors of the activity where they appeared.

After completion of the months allocated to the intervention, post-testing was started. The time allocated for the post-test was one week. During the post-test, there was a higher rate of completion of items by pupils. They were able to complete the post-test in less than an hour, compared to the pre-test, which required 2 meetings with each student. Once the assessment process was completed, the data were recorded in the database and analyzed in order to confirm or not the research hypothesis.

#### 4.6. Results

##### PRESENTATION OF DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Table 3

*Descriptive results obtained by participants at pre-test and post-test (N=15)*

DI \ P	NPT1	RRA1	NW1	PS1	WR1	WW1	T1	NPT2	RRA2	NW2	PS2	WR2	WW2	T2
1	4.5	50.5	1	13.12	10.98	2.33	82.43	6	87	12	21.75	12	5	143.75
2	5	50	1	12.25	9.14	2.33	79.72	6	80.5	12	18.1	12	5	133.6
3	5	9	0	2.38	0.5	0	16.88	5.5	27.5	9.5	0.55	6	0	49.05
4	5.5	9.5	1	16.71	2.66	0	35.37	6	32.5	9	19.5	8.25	3.5	78.75
5	5	7.5	2	11	3.16	0	28.66	6	25	8	10.5	7.8	1.5	58.8
6	4	25.5	0	5.97	5.12	0	40.59	6	52.5	7	13.78	12	4.5	95.78
7	5	8	5	2	0	0	20	6	25	8	5	1	1	46
8	4	6	4	0	0	0	14	6	42	9	8	1	0	66
9	6	59	6	10	9	4	94	6	79	12	22	11	5	135
10	5	47	4	4	3	0	63	6	90	12	17	11	4	140
11	6	44	8	1	1	3	63	6	72	11	10	7	3	109
12	4	21	1	2	0	0	28	5	70	6	5	7	3	96
13	2	9	0	0	0	0	11	5	51	4	1	0	0	61
14	5	24	0	5	1	1	36	6	73	10	13	10	3	115
15	5	46	3	11	6	2	73	6	88	12	19	12	5	142

Note: P= participants; DI= instrument dimensions; T1= pre-test; T2=post-test; NPT1= Notions of printed text, pre-test; NPT2= Notions of printed text, post-test; RRA1= Recognizing and reproducing the alphabet, pre-test; RRA2= Recognizing and reproducing the alphabet, post-test; NW1= Notion of the word, pre-test; NW2= Notion of the word, post-test; PS1= Phoneme segmentation, pre-test; PS2= Phoneme segmentation, post-test; WR1= Word recognition, pre-test; WR2= Word recognition, post-test; WW1= Writing the words, pre-test; WW2= Writing the words, post-test.

As a result of the descriptive analysis of the data, it can be observed that the literacy level before the intervention is very low, on a scale from 0 to 150, where 0 represents the minimum score and 150 the maximum score. In the pre-test, the lowest score achieved by participants was 11 points and the highest score was 94 points. We notice a large difference between the 2 extreme scores. We also note that on several dimensions there were students who scored 0 points, with word writing being the dimension to which most null scores were assigned. In the pre-test, on the first two dimensions, no student scored zero, which indicates that they have knowledge of printed text and recognize and reproduce the alphabet to a greater or lesser extent. In the post-test, we observe that the scores increased, the lowest score being 46 points, the highest being 143.75 points, very close to the maximum score of the test. We notice that writing words was the variable for which three students scored zero in the post-test as well, indicating that they have not yet mastered this literacy skill, remaining constant compared to the pre-test.

For statistical representativeness, paired t-tests for dependent variables were used to analyze the data. In Table 4 we have recorded the effect sizes for each dimension of emergent literacy. This technique was used to test whether there were statistically significant differences in the level of emergent literacy in the pre-test relative to the post-test on all dimensions.

Table 4

*Comparative analysis of the total results obtained on the Pre-test and Post-test and the 6 dimensions of emergent literacy (paired t-tests)*

	<i>(n = 15)</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
<i>T1 – T2</i>	52.272	16.433	12.319	14	.000	1.62
<i>NPT1- NPT2</i>	1.100	.783	5.436	14	.006	1.50
<i>RRA1 – RRA2</i>	31.933	11.404	10.844	14	.000	1.44
<i>NW1-NW2</i>	7.033	2.728	9.983	14	.135	2.81
<i>PS1 – PS2</i>	5.850	4.413	5.133	14	.000	0.91
<i>WR1 – WR2</i>	4.432	2.889	5.942	14	.001	1.10
<i>WW1 – WW2</i>	1.922	1.548	4.810	14	.016	1.57

Note: significant \*  $p < .001$ .

Note: n = number of participants; M= mean; SD= standard deviation; T1= pre-test; T2= post-test; NPT1= Notions of printed text, pre-test; NPT2= Notions of printed text, post-test; RRA1= Recognizing and reproducing the alphabet, pre-test; RRA2= Recognizing and reproducing the alphabet, post-test; NW1= Notion of the word, pre-test; NW2= Notion of the word, post-test; PS1= Phoneme segmentation, pre-test; PS2= Phoneme segmentation, post-test; WR1= Word recognition, pre-test; WR2= Word recognition, post-test; WW1= Writing the words, pre-test; WW2= Writing the words, post-test.

The effect size for the whole intervention,  $d=1.62$ , is statistically significant. Thus, we can state that the intervention played an important role in the students' progress in developing emergent literacy skills. The effect size with the highest value,  $d=2.81$ , is recorded in the case of the dimension Notion of the word. Therefore, the intervention had a statistically significant effect in the development of this dimension among the students. The effect size with the smallest value,  $d=0.91$ , is recorded for the Phonemic Segmentation dimension. We can state that, in relation to this result, the intervention implemented had a small impact on the evolution of students' ability to phonemically segment words. The second smallest effect size,  $d=1.10$ , was recorded in the case of the Word Recognition dimension. Compared to the other dimensions, the impact of the intervention on this dimension is small. However, we can state that all the six dimensions of emergent literacy were developed in the students following the intervention.

The results of the t-test,  $t(14) = 12.319$ ,  $p = 0.000$ , show that t is significant. The effect size is of high intensity,  $d=1.62$ . The results show that the difference between the pre-test results and the post-test results is statistically large. We can state that after analyzing the results, the hypothesis of the study is valid. We can also see that the participants have made significant progress overall as a result of the activities carried out with them.

## **5. Conclusions**

The research results record statistically significant progress in the emergent literacy skills of first graders. This result was also recorded in the study conducted by Balea et al. (2023) on a sample of preparatory grade students. Although the sample in the two studies was different, the age difference between the two samples is small and the dimensions developed in the research are identical. The study conducted by Balea et al. (2023) states that the results of students who received interventions to develop the dimensions of emergent literacy were higher than the results recorded by the control group and than the results recorded by their peers with similar results in the control group.

In our research, participants have low socio-economic status. This is associated with, among other things, low income and single parent families. (Reese, 2008) Research indicates that, in addition to the characteristics associated with low socio-economic status, high school absenteeism affects the development of emergent literacy skills of students. (Dolean et al., 2019) Also in our study, school absenteeism was a factor that had a negative influence on the results recorded by the students.

In the case of the 5 students who did not register even 50% of the maximum score, we estimate, based on the literature, a slow progress and the accumulation of a growing gap with the class average, which could lead to dropout. Therefore, we recommend to continue remedial interventions by supplementing human (involving psychologists and other specialists) and material resources to ensure their access to quality education and better socio-economic status.

The conclusions of this study are that interventions specifically designed to develop emergent literacy skills are effective for first graders from low socio-economic status and urban communities. However, despite notable progress, on average, the level of emergent reading literacy proficiency of several students in our study is below that required for first grade, making it necessary to continue targeted remedial activities.

Although all the six skills are included in the school curriculum, word concept, phonemic segmentation and word recognition do not receive sufficient attention, neither at school entry nor during the schooling. In order to close the achievement gap between pupils with low socio-economic status and those from advantaged backgrounds, and to ensure equal opportunities for social progress, more time and interventions should be provided for the former. According to Dodd & Carr (2003) socio-economic status should be an important factor in the design of the teacher intervention strategy.

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## Znaczenie zajęć wyrównawczych w rozwoju umiejętności czytania i pisania u uczniów szkół podstawowych ze środowisk defaworyzowanych

### Streszczenie

Wyniki badania PISA z 2022 r. wskazują na wysoki poziom analfabetyzmu funkcjonalnego wśród rumuńskich uczniów: 42% rumuńskich uczniów nie osiągnęło drugiego poziomu umiejętności czytania i pisania w testach umiejętności czytania i pisania (OECD, 2023). Badania zidentyfikowane w literaturze wskazują na ogromne znaczenie pojawiających się umiejętności czytania i pisania dla przyszłych osiągnięć uczniów w procesie edukacyjnym, zwłaszcza dla uczniów o niskim statusie społeczno-ekonomicznym. Aby nauczyciel mógł ułatwić rozwój tych kompetencji, konieczne jest zastosowanie odpowiednich metod i strategii dostosowanych do specyfiki uczniów. Biorąc pod uwagę powyższe rozważania, w niniejszym badaniu postanowiliśmy zbadać wpływ interwencji ukierunkowanej na rozwijające się umiejętności czytania i pisania u uczniów pierwszej klasy pochodzących ze środowisk defaworyzowanych pod względem społeczno-ekonomicznym. Badanie ma charakter ilościowego quasi-eksperymentu. Próba badawcza składała się z 15 pierwszoklasistów z defaworyzowanych środowisk społeczno-ekonomicznych, z których część była dwujęzyczna i nie uczęszczała do przedszkola. Broszura oceny umiejętności czytania i pisania została wykorzystana jako instrument do gromadzenia danych, wykorzystany jako test wstępny i test końcowy. Pomiedzy dwoma testami odbywały się zajęcia dydaktyczne, podczas których badacze pracowali z każdym uczestnikiem, w sposób zindywidualizowany, nad wszystkimi kluczowymi aspektami pojawiających się umiejętności czytania i pisania. Wyniki tego badania pokazują, że uczniowie, którzy uczestniczyli w zajęciach wyrównawczych mających na celu kształtowanie umiejętności czytania i pisania, wykazali pod koniec interwencji poprawę kompetencji w zakresie czytania i pisania we wszystkich wymiarach określonych w zastosowanym narzędziu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** umiejętność czytania i pisania, działania naprawcze, defaworyzowane środowiska społeczno-ekonomiczne.



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Alina GIL

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3041-6640>

Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa, Poland

Rafał GŁĘBOCKI

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1908-9020>

Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa, Poland

Urszula NOWACKA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4465-2452>

Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa, Poland

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**Contact:** a.gil@ujd.edu.pl; r.glebocki@ujd.edu.pl; u.nowacka@ujd.edu.pl

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## Fostering Cross-Generational Collaboration in Adult Education. Case Study on GSmart MOOC

### Abstract

The constant changes in today's world, in almost all areas of life, are forcing individuals to continually upgrade their education, expand their competencies to adapt to a changing and unpredictable reality, and efficiently take advantage of the many opportunities provided by modern technology. Learning management systems (LMS) like Moodle, Canvas and Blackboard are becoming increasingly popular in educational institutions, highlighting the growing integration of technology in education. Integrating cloud services such as Google Workspace and Microsoft 365 has dramatically improved the capabilities and accessibility of distance education. These platforms offer tools that enable real-time collaboration, information sharing and effective communication between teachers and students. Today – thanks to constant access to the Internet – learners have a variety of ways to (self-)learn formally and informally, including through mobile devices or social or information services.

The article describes the concept of MOOCs – these are quick courses organized in a virtual space to acquire knowledge, skills and social competencies in an easy and accessible way, availa-

ble to everyone, regardless of the age of potential participants, their qualifications, location or possession of specialized software – and an example of the application of the MOOC concept in adult education which is the GSmart MOOC tool developed within the framework of the international Erasmus+ project entitled Generation: Smart. Social Competences Transmedia Bridge To Cultivate A New Culture For Cross-Generational Collaboration (GSmart) was implemented by us. The emergence of MOOCs, such as GSmart, in adult education underscores a significant shift toward more inclusive, flexible and interactive learning environments. The continued evolution and adoption of MOOCs will be crucial in shaping a future in which lifelong learning is integral to personal and professional development. Moreover, the example of our course may encourage others to apply the concept in various other possible ways.

**Keywords:** Education, Distance learning, Cloud services, MOOC.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Distant Learning Dynamic Landscape

Today's networked society implies the need for continuous learning. It requires a good understanding of unstable reality and awareness of information overload. Manifestations of instability include changes in education (education and competition in the labour market), media (e.g., the issue of cyber security), the economy (labour activity and financial stability), and socio-political ones.

The e-learning landscape in Europe has undergone significant growth and change in recent years. Remote learning for college students has reached record levels, and there has been a notable shift in attitudes towards the benefits of remote education. Surveys have shown that most students want to continue some form of online education even after the COVID-19 pandemic is over. Around 55% of students consider affordability in self-directed learning (*10 Learning and development trends shaping the 2024 training landscape*, 2024) a critical factor in choosing an online school. Learning Management Systems (LMS) like Moodle, Canvas, and Blackboard have become increasingly popular in educational institutions, emphasizing the growing integration of technology in education (*75+ Incredible eLearning Statistics (2024–2028)*, 2023).

The integration of cloud services, such as Google Workspace and Microsoft 365, has dramatically improved the capabilities and accessibility of distance education. These platforms offer tools that enable real-time collaboration, sharing of information, and efficient communication between educators and learners. They provide a wide range of applications, including document creation, spreadsheets, presentations, and cloud storage, making working remotely easier for students and teachers. The scalability and flexibility of these cloud services support a more personalized and interactive learning experience, catering to the diverse needs of online learners in today's dynamic educational environment. This development marks a significant shift in how education is delivered and ac-

cessed, leveraging technology to overcome geographical and logistical barriers (*Google Apps for Education vs. Microsoft 365 for Education*, 2015).

Nowadays – thanks to constant access to the Internet – learners have at their disposal a variety of ways of (self-)learning formally and informally, including through mobile devices or services: social or informational (e.g., articles, multimedia content). Global audiences of digital educational content prefer learning to be treated as an experience of acquiring information to build their knowledge. The transformation, as mentioned above, of educational participants from "offline students" to "online students" increases the need to learn more and more about the preferences of "new" learners. Participants' desire in the networked society for permanent access to information has catalyzed the development and growing popularity of global multimedia communication and learning systems. Often, these are media Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) sites, such as Coursera, EdX (Open EdX), Future Learn, and Canvas Network.

This article discusses how MOOC platforms exemplify how digital learning can support fairness and inclusivity in education by bridging generational gaps. Through offering accessible and flexible learning opportunities, MOOCs ensure that people of all ages, backgrounds, and technical abilities can engage in life-long learning. This approach directly tackles issues of educational fairness by providing high-quality educational resources to those who might otherwise be marginalized due to age, location, or lack of specialized software. Additionally, the focus on collaboration across generations fosters diversity by bringing together learners from different age groups, promoting mutual respect and understanding, and improving social skills. The inclusive design and wide accessibility of MOOCs play a significant role in advancing educational practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion.

## **1.2. MOOCs and Adult Education**

The concept of MOOCs, or Massive Open Online Courses, originated in the United States but is now gaining popularity worldwide. MOOCs are fast-paced courses organized in a virtual space to acquire knowledge, skills, and social competencies in an easy and accessible way. MOOCs are courses accessible to anyone regardless of the age of potential learners, their qualifications, their location, or whether they have specialized software (all they need is a computer and Internet access). Also, the massiveness and diversity of the courses result in – whether one wants to learn on his/her own or use online courses to educate one's employees – a massive convenience in accessing knowledge. The educational materials used in MOOCs are generally in the form of presentations, lectures (often recordings), exercises, assignments, tests, articles, and other textual, graphic, audio, and audiovisual forms. The tasks and exercises prepared for

the courses are developed mainly through interactive quizzes. Various types of interaction are often used, e.g., chat and forum, which allow direct contact between learners and course instructors but simultaneously promote knowledge sharing and generation of new knowledge (co-creation and improvement of the included educational content). In addition, many MOOCs emphasize the possibility of practical training (combining usability translatability of learning into practice with the educational canon) created often through cooperation during the creation of courses of universities with companies, business organizations, and research units supporting development and promoting innovation (Gruba, 2015).

The courses' form, content, and exercises are intended to interest the audience in the topic, stimulate their creativity, and develop self-reliance in expanding and constructing knowledge (Kościńska, Sendur, 2022). There is an ongoing discussion about the appropriate quality of online courses in educational, organizational, and logistical dimensions, e.g., the quality of the academic material itself, the quality related to clarity, comprehensibility, the sequence of modules and activities, and the ease of navigating through the materials contained in the course (Valentine, 2002; Gurba, 2015). Gurba (2015) proposes to take into account three dimensions of assessing the quality of online courses: the degree of institutionalization of the learning process using e-learning tools, the context of methodological maturity and flexibility, and the richness of the forms of knowledge communication, feedback communication and horizontal flow of information between learners (Gruba, 2012). MOOCs, like online learning as a whole, sometimes carry challenges related to learners' lower attention span, many distractions in the educational process, inadequacy of the learner's knowledge, technical problems, often too little interaction with the instructor and other learners, et cetera. However, despite some misgivings, the belief that knowledge should be available to everyone everywhere, including outside the walls of schools and universities and outside of formal education, is making MOOCs increasingly successful. The success of MOOCs is also because they allow a more flexible choice of an individualized educational path, the attractiveness of the forms and tools used in MOOCs is also growing every year, and, most importantly, the quality of the courses offered (assessed on an ongoing basis by the recipients) is increasing.

The digital age has revolutionized many areas of life, including adult education (Bellum, 2013). Massive open online courses have changed their face, offering accessibility, flexibility, various content, and professional and personal development support.

The importance of the MOOC concept in adult education is shown in the Table 1 below.

Table 1  
*The importance of the MOOC concept in adult education*

<b>MOOC features relevant to the point of view of adult education</b>	<b>Description of the various features of MOOCs and their impact on the education of adults</b>
<b>Development of professional competence</b>	<p>Continuing education has become essential in an era of rapid market changes and technological advances. MOOCs offer adults the opportunity to develop and update their professional competencies. The courses cover various topics, from IT to management to soft skills. As a result, participants can tailor their learning to their needs and career aspirations. They enable the acquisition of new and often unique skills required in a rapidly changing job market, which is crucial for a lifetime of learning. In addition, participation in MOOCs helps develop digital competence, self-discipline, and time management skills, which are valuable in many aspects of life.</p>
<b>Flexibility, thematic diversity and accessibility</b>	<p>Adult learners often combine learning with work and family responsibilities. MOOCs allow them to adjust the pace and timing of their learning to fit their schedules, offering a variety of learning formats – from short courses to comprehensive certification programs, allowing them to tailor their education to meet their individual needs and goals. Courses cover various topics, from the sciences to the humanities to professional and personal skills. As a result, adult learners can deepen their knowledge in their field and explore new areas, fostering comprehensive development and adaptation to the changing job market.</p> <p>Adults who, for various reasons, cannot participate in traditional forms of education, such as classroom instruction, find a convenient alternative to MOOCs. Platforms such as Coursera, edX, and Udemy offer courses in various fields that are accessible to anyone with Internet access. As a result, working people, parents, and those living in areas with limited access to traditional forms of education can continue their education.</p>
<b>Democratization of education</b>	<p>MOOCs also represent a step toward the democratization of education. Economic, social, or geographic factors no longer limit access to knowledge. Anyone with access to the Internet can take courses taught by lecturers from the world's top universities. It opens the door to education for many adults who may not have had this opportunity.</p>
<b>Community and networking</b>	<p>MOOCs not only provide knowledge but also build learning communities. Participants can share experiences, collaborate on projects, and make professional contacts. For many adult learners, networking is as important as the educational process.</p>

Source: Own elaboration based on the cited literature.

The lifelong learning perspective guides EU education policy, which includes measures for, among other things (*Long-term National Development Strategy*,

*Poland 2030 Lifelong Learning Perspective, Annex to Resolution No. 160/2013 of the Council of Ministers, 2013*):

- Learning outcome orientation – emphasizing the broadest possible access to quality learning,
- To subordinate activities to the interests of people, learners in different situations (at school and university, in apprenticeships and courses, at work, in various organizations, and directly in everyday situations) and at different ages – emphasizing the need for consistency in the actions of multiple institutions, ministries, and partners,
- Equal treatment, appreciation, and promotion of learning in various life forms and stages, including adult education

MOOCs in adult education facilitate the realization of all the demands identified above.

## **2. Practical application of the MOOC concept**

### **2.1. MOOC-Specific Use Case**

One example of the application of the MOOC concept in adult education is the GSmart MOOC tool (GSmart – IO3 Framework, 2023) developed as part of an international Erasmus+ project entitled *Generation: Smart. Social Competences Transmedia Bridge To Cultivate A New Culture For Cross-Generational Collaboration* (GSmart Erasmus+ project no. 2020-1-PL01-KA204-081415, 2021). The Project's goal was to develop, test, and validate an innovative educational model based on cross-generational collaboration and then, using the model, develop a GSmart MOOC to promote and develop this collaboration. It is a self-study guide designed for educators who teach adult learners how to foster a culture of cross-generational collaboration.

Cross-generational collaboration, defined as "[...] ability of different-age people to partner in two domains: every life and working life" (GSmart – IO1 Report: Research, 2021), focuses on the social responsibility of the older generation, including decision-makers and educators for the younger generation. Cross-generational collaboration is essential to everyday life and effective management in companies and organizations. In an era of generational diversity in the labour market, understanding and leveraging each generation's unique characteristics and values becomes crucial to success.

Research conducted as part of the Project allowed the design of an educational model, including a training program, aimed at the Project's target group of educators and others supporting adult learners (GSmart – IO2 Framework, 2022). The research focused on cross-generational collaboration in the social



environment, in the work environment as perceived by managers, and in the work environment and daily life as perceived by seniors.

The modern world is characterized by extraordinary diversity, especially regarding generational structure. Representatives of as many as four generations are now meeting in the social space: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z. This mix of experiences, skills, and perspectives, while promising, also poses challenges for Cross-generational collaboration. Cross-generational collaboration in the work environment, social life, and everyday life is crucial for effective knowledge sharing, mutual respect, acceptance, trust, teamwork, innovation, productivity, and organizational culture. Each generation brings its own unique experiences, skills, and knowledge. The results of the Project's research clearly show, for example, that the Baby Boomer generation often has a wealth of work experience and industry knowledge. At the same time, Millennials and Generation Z are more adept at digital technologies and adapting new tools, and they are a generation characterized by high creativity. An essential element of cross-generational collaboration for seniors and managers is exchanging knowledge and experience, complementing each other's competence gaps at different ages to carry out professional tasks and responsibilities. When listing the difficulties of managing generations, seniors mention stereotypes and prejudices about age in the workplace. One in two surveyed seniors would primarily like to develop such social competencies as teamwork and cooperation, conflict resolution, and communication skills. The most critical areas of life in which respondents would like to expand their knowledge and competencies included communicating with modern technologies, healthy lifestyles, nutrition, safety, and cyber security. One in two respondents would like to extend their knowledge and competencies in direct contact with an instructor or educator, and one in three would like to do so in a mixed/hybrid format. Noteworthy, there is a strategy for managing employees from different age generations in one in three surveyed companies, institutions, or organizations. In one in three entities, respondents use generational diversity management to improve the functioning of the company, institution, or organization.

Cross-generational differences regarding worldview, human beings, value systems, applicable norms, and social coexistence rules have always accompanied man. In the current situation, they are perhaps exacerbated by the rapid pace of technological progress and the dynamics of the reality in which we live. At the same time, cross-generational collaboration in companies and organizations is inevitable and necessary to enable the different generations' practical competencies. Organizations can achieve more significant innovation, productivity, and employee satisfaction through understanding, respect, flexibility, and focus on common goals, resulting in overall success and development. Therefore, the presented GSmart MOOC tool addresses the problems of cross-gener-

ational collaboration, promoting and developing various aspects of such cooperation.

## **2.2. GSmart MOOC aims, content, and structure.**

The GSmart MOOC is a blended training program that serves as a self-study guide for educators who teach adult learners in everyday life and the working environment. The course is specifically designed to cater to the needs of the Project's target group. The service aims to instruct educators on using the GSmart project solutions to promote cross-generational collaboration.

The service structure embraces a landing page and five parts – modules that concern the merits of the course. Short video presentations have introduced five modules on the landing page. They were explicitly designed to encourage the audience to continue their increase of know-how in the subject of cross-generational collaboration education.

Each of the subject matter modules regards one particular topic:

1. Introduction – this section has been devoted to presenting the GSmart MOOC's concept and allowing the audience to navigate the service efficiently. The course's structure and educational paths have been shown, as the following parts have been based on them.
2. Theory – in this module, the theoretical background is described. It regards the GSmart Research and the Cross-Generational Collaboration (CGC) Model. This part focuses on inspiring educators to zoom theory into practice. Therefore, this part includes practical exercises facilitating the comprehension of the Project's ideas.
3. Domain choice – the module lets the audience choose the right educational track depending on who they teach. The course enables educators to follow two tracks—the first deals with everyday life, and the other deals with the professional environment.
4. Practice – having chosen the best educational track, the educators continue to the course's module, presenting ways of practically incorporating the Project's methods into educational practice. The application can follow hybrid activities, workshops, or – if an educator decides– a creative merge of the two approaches.
5. Follow-up – in the summary module, the authors of the GSmart MOOC propose that educators participate in the Educators' Discussion Café, an online forum – GSmart community. It is a cosy online place to exchange ideas on cross-generational collaboration in adult education. To ensure skills interoperability in the educational market, obtaining a certificate to participate in GSmart MOOC is possible. The forum offers opportunities to network with other educators and brainstorm new projects.

### **2.3. GSmart MOOC Three-Level Taxonomy**

The GSmart MOOC employs a three-level taxonomy to enhance educators' learning and teaching experience. These are the taxonomy's components and objectives:

1. Knowledge acquisition and understanding

This first level focuses on the foundational aspects of the course, encompassing modules 1, 2, and 3. The aim here is for educators to deeply understand the core concepts, theories, and knowledge that form the basis of the course. This stage is a 'back-end,' meaning it is more about acquiring information and concepts before applying or teaching them.

2. Skills and attitudes transfer

The second level is a progression from simply understanding the concepts to being able to impart this knowledge effectively to others. It involves developing the necessary skills and attitudes to transfer the newly acquired knowledge. This stage is crucial for educators as it is about up-skilling and preparing to teach these concepts in various settings, be it everyday environments or more formal work settings.

3. Practical application

The final level involves applying the knowledge and skills in real-world scenarios. It can be described as a 'front-end' process, more about outward application and interaction. This stage typically happens during training sessions and continues afterwards as a follow-up. It involves modules 4 and 5 and emphasizes cross-generational problem-solving within an educated group of adults. The focus here is on practical implementation and seeing how the concepts and skills learned can be applied to solve actual problems or enhance understanding in diverse groups.

This three-level approach ensures a comprehensive learning experience, starting from fundamental understanding, moving through skill development, and culminating in practical application. It is particularly effective in adult education and professional development contexts, where the end goal is knowledge acquisition and the ability to apply this knowledge in real-life situations.

### **2.4. GSmart MOOC Trial – Evaluation and Feedback**

Two training sessions were organized to present the GSmart MOOC's innovative educational solutions. They were integral to disseminating information about the course and played a crucial role in the evaluation processes. The objectives and impact were as follows:

1. Knowledge sharing

The primary objective of these training sessions was to share knowledge about the GSmart project's innovative educational methods and tools. It

aligns with the first level of the GSmart MOOC's three-level taxonomy, where knowledge acquisition and understanding are paramount.

## 2. Targeted Audience

The participants in these sessions came from the Project's targeted groups. It implied a focused approach, where the training is tailored to the needs and backgrounds of specific groups, ensuring that the information is relevant and impactful for them.

## 3. Introduction of GSmart MOOC

These sessions served as a platform to introduce the GSmart MOOC to the audience. Informing the participants about the available educational resources and encouraging them to engage with the MOOC for a more comprehensive learning experience was a significant step.

## 4. Engagement and interaction

When organizing these sessions, the GSmart project facilitated direct engagement and interaction with the target audience. This approach is beneficial for clarifying doubts, receiving immediate feedback, and understanding the needs and perspectives of the learners.

## 5. Promotion of innovative solutions

The sessions likely showcased how the GSmart MOOC incorporates innovative educational solutions. It could include technology, new teaching methodologies, and unique content delivery approaches distinct from the GSmart initiative.

## 6. Feedback and improvement

Through these training sessions, the organizers would have the opportunity to gather feedback from the participants. This feedback is valuable for refining and improving the MOOC and other educational solutions GSmart offers.

## 7. Building a learning community

Such events are often instrumental in building a community of learners and educators interested in similar topics. This community can provide ongoing support, collaboration opportunities, and a network for sharing experiences and resources.

Overall, these training sessions represent a vital component of the GSmart project's strategy to disseminate knowledge, engage with its audience, and enhance the effectiveness of its educational offerings. They bridge the gap between the MOOC's online resources and the real-world application and understanding of its content.

### **3. Conclusion**

The emergence of MOOCs, such as GSmart, in adult education highlights a significant shift towards more inclusive, flexible, and interactive learning envi-

ronments. These platforms unite people of different ages and backgrounds, making education accessible to everyone. The GSmart MOOC exemplifies how such innovations can promote cross-generational collaboration, enhance digital competencies, and cater to diverse learning needs. MOOCs' continued evolution and adoption will be crucial in shaping a future where lifelong learning and cross-generational cooperation are integral to personal and professional development. This trend aligns with the growing demand for dynamic, interconnected educational experiences that cater to different age groups and learning styles, leading us toward a new era in adult education.

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## **Wspieranie współpracy międzypokoleniowej w edukacji dorosłych. Studium przypadku dotyczącego GSmart MOOC**

### **Streszczenie**

Zmiany zachodzące w dzisiejszym świecie, w niemal wszystkich dziedzinach życia, zmuszają jednostki do ciągłego podnoszenia poziomu wykształcenia, poszerzania swoich kompetencji w celu dostosowania się do zmieniającej się i nieprzewidywalnej rzeczywistości, a także efektywnego korzystania z wielu możliwości oferowanych przez nowoczesne technologie. Systemy zarządzania nauczaniem (LMS), takie jak Moodle, Canvas i Blackboard, stają się coraz bardziej popularne w instytucjach edukacyjnych, podkreślając rosnącą integrację technologii w edukacji. Integracja usług w chmurze, takich jak Google Workspace i Microsoft 365, znacznie poprawiła możliwości i dostępność edukacji na odległość. Platformy te oferują narzędzia, które umożliwiają współpracę w czasie rzeczywistym, dzielenie się informacjami i skuteczną komunikację między nauczycielami i uczniami. Obecnie – dzięki stałemu dostępowi do Internetu – uczniowie mają wiele sposobów na (samo)uczenie się w sposób formalny i nieformalny, w tym za pośrednictwem urządzeń mobilnych lub usług społecznościowych lub informacyjnych.

W artykule opisano koncepcję MOOC – są to szybkie kursy organizowane w przestrzeni wirtualnej w celu zdobywania wiedzy, umiejętności i kompetencji społecznych w łatwy i przystępny sposób, dostępne dla każdego, niezależnie od wieku potencjalnych uczestników, ich kwalifikacji, lokalizacji czy posiadania specjalistycznego oprogramowania – oraz przykład zastosowania koncepcji MOOC w edukacji dorosłych, jakim jest narzędzie GSmart MOOC opracowane w ramach międzynarodowego projektu Erasmus+ zatytułowanego Generation: Smart. Social Competences Transmedia Bridge To Cultivate A New Culture For Cross-Generational Collaboration (GSmart) realizowanego przez nas. Pojawienie się MOOC, takich jak GSmart, w edukacji dorosłych podkreśla znaczącą zmianę w kierunku bardziej integracyjnych, elastycznych i interaktywnych środowisk uczenia się. Ciągła ewolucja i przyjęcie MOOC będą miały kluczowe znaczenie dla kształtowania przyszłości, w której uczenie się przez całe życie jest integralną częścią rozwoju osobistego i zawodowego. I niech przykład naszego kursu zachęci innych do zastosowania tej koncepcji na wiele innych możliwych sposobów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja, kształcenie na odległość, usługi w chmurze, MOOC.

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Katarzyna PARDEJ

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7111-7834>

Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw, Poland

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## Career Counsellor's Assistance in Choosing a Technical School in the Opinion of Parents

### Abstract

This article presents the results of the author's research, which aimed to identify how parents perceive career Counsellor's assistance in the choice of post-primary school and to what extent labour market forecasts are considered in the decision-making process. The research results correspond with the view presented from the perspective of their children published in the article "Career Counsellor's Assistance to Students in the Choice of Post-primary School and Profession Sought in the Labour Market" (Pardej, 2024a). The qualitative research used the interview method. The analysis of the research material was conducted using the MAXQDA 2022 program. The research sample consisted of parents of first-year students of Warsaw technical schools studying the professions of the future N=53 (Monitor Polski, Journal of Laws, 2023, item 145).

Regarding the choice of secondary school and profession, parents and their children most often use the services of a career counsellor at primary school (40 coded segments). In many families, however, the decision-making process occurs without consulting a career counsellor (28 coded segments). According to parents, their children are more likely to seek the help of a career counsellor at school than at the psychological-educational counselling centre because of the long-term contact, followed by the child's openness to cooperation. Parents see many areas for improvement regarding the competence of career counsellors and the lessons they teach. Parents have a (usually everyday) knowledge of the labour market and desired occupations (30 coded segments). If they check labour market forecasts, they often do so together with their children (12 coded segments) or give up this activity (23 coded segments). In contrast, occasionally, they do so alone (either children or parents).

**Keywords:** parents of Warsaw technical school students, career counselling, choice of Polish secondary school, labour market.

## Introduction

According to the Integrated Skills Strategy 2030, a key objective is, among others, to develop effective career counselling for children, young people and adults from all social and professional groups. Diagnosing the resources and potential of individuals and providing information on possible educational and career paths is a crucial function of career counselling. Its development should be based on a reliable diagnosis of the demand for occupations, qualifications, and skills and adequate information on the demand and supply of skills at national and regional levels. Career counselling is present in the Polish education system. Its importance and the need to disseminate it among students and their parents are emphasised. Schools are obliged to carry out planned activities in this area. Informed choice of school and profession is considered to be one of the essential elements of effectively implemented education, which has a principal impact on the functioning of graduates in the labour market and in civil society (Integrated Skills Strategy 2030. Policies for developing skills in line with lifelong learning, 2020, p. 35).

The career counsellor's tasks and career counselling curriculum content for grades 7 and 8 of primary school are included in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 12 February 2019 on career counselling (Journal of Laws, 20 February 2019, item 325). According to the curriculum content, students in the final grades of primary school should acquire knowledge and skills in four areas: get to know their resources, get to know the world of professions and the labour market, get to know the educational market and understand the essence of lifelong learning, as well as to be able to plan their development and make educational and professional decisions. The tasks of career counselling include, among others, systematic diagnosis of students' demand for activities related to the implementation of career counselling, conducting classes, development and implementation of the programme, cooperation with other teachers in the implementation of the programme, coordination of information and counselling activities carried out by the school (collecting, updating and making available educational and professional information appropriate for the given level of education) (Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 12 February 2019 on career counselling, Journal of Laws, 20 February 2019, item 325, § 5.1, Appendix 3).

It is not uncommon for students' parents to be involved in the decision-making process (25% parents of lower secondary school students, 10% parents of first-year technical school students), taking on the role of advisor and consultant, but at the same time using this opportunity to give the child a sense of freedom and self-determination. Parents accepting their child's decision waive their responsibility for their child's possible future and educational failure. (Kamie-



niecka, 2015, p. 24, cf. Pisula, 2009, pp. 86–87). Parents are often uncertain about the correctness of the choice made by their child, which they will only find out about in the future as a result of confrontation with the labour market. They lack ideas on how to help their child constructively and usually limit themselves to talking to them in the privacy of their homes. When suggesting a course of study to their children, they are not convinced it suits them. Sometimes, they do not use the knowledge about their child's interests and passions to choose a specific educational and professional path or a field of study consistent with their predispositions and capabilities (Kamieniecka, 2015, p. 24; see also Łukasiewicz-Wieleba, 2013, p. 182, 185).

Students who make a career choice according to their individual preferences, aptitudes, and talents are more satisfied and engaged in learning and are subsequently better prepared to participate in the labour market (Integrated Skills Strategy 2030. Policies for developing skills in line with lifelong learning, 2020, p. 35). In addition, having their interests and obtaining the required number of points during the recruitment process to the secondary school of their choice means that fewer students experience difficulties in choosing a secondary school (64% of parents of first-year students in technical schools) (Pardej, 2024b, p. 11).

A career counsellor should accompany parents and children in this arduous process. Career counsellors say they bring the issue of educational and career counselling closer to the parents of students (89% of counsellors from lower secondary schools, 67% of counsellors from technical schools). They inform them about the world of professions and the requirements of specific professions and provide knowledge about the labour market, enable them to confirm students' competences and professional qualifications (70% of career counsellors); they also provide them with content devoted to the development of students' social competences, analysis of their strengths and weaknesses, career planning and personal development (80% of career counsellors); they present issues related to students' further education planning (90% of career counsellors) (Podwójcic, 2015, pp. 91–92).

## Results of own research

This article presents some of the results of the author's research<sup>1</sup>. The qualitative study used the interview method, where the research technique was an individual, standard, categorised interview, and the research instrument was the author's Interview Questionnaire.

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<sup>1</sup> The research was carried out within the framework of an internal project of the Maria Grzegorzewska University, BNS 52/23, implemented on the basis of a competition grant.

The research was carried out in three technical schools in Warsaw, i.e. the Mechatronics Technical School No. 1 in the Secondary and Technical School Complex No. 1, Technical School No. 7 in the Stanisław Wysocki School Complex, former "Kolejówka", and the Jan Karski Technical School No. 8 in School Complex No. 42. The director of the fourth selected technical school refused to allow the study to take place.

The research covered 53 parents of first-year students of technical schools studying the following occupations (in alphabetical order): rail transport electrician technician, electrician technician, IT technician, logistics technician, mechatronics technician, programming technician, tourism organisation technician, renewable energy devices and systems technician and rail transport technician. The results of the study should not be generalised to the entire population. It is a sectional view, referring to the group under study. Analysis of the research material was carried out using MAXQDA 2022. The interviews were given consecutive numbers from R1 to R53.

The research aimed to identify how parents perceive the assistance of career counsellors in choosing a post-primary school and to what extent labour market forecasts are taken into account in the decision-making process.

The approach to a given issue from the student's perspective is presented in the article "Career Counsellor's Help to Students in Choosing a Secondary School and a Profession Sought on the Labour Market" (Pardej, 2024a, pp. 89–106).

The research subject was parents' experiences of the young people's choice of post-primary school.

Reflections on career counselling led the author to formulate the following main problem: What role did the career counsellor play in choosing a technical school as perceived by parents? The main problem was formulated with detailed questions:

1. Where do parents and their children use the services of a career counsellor?
2. How is the support of the career counsellor in educational institutions (primary school vs psychological-educational counselling centre) evaluated according to parents?
3. What knowledge do parents of students have of the career counsellors and the lessons they teach?
4. How do parents feel about the usefulness of the career counsellor's services and the relevance of their advice?
5. Are labour market forecasts taken into account when choosing a secondary school?
6. How do parents argue the validity (or lack thereof) of checking labour market forecasts in decision-making?

After using a tool to support qualitative data analysis, the MAXQDA 2022 program's two main categories were distinguished: career counselling and the

labour market. A total of 298 fragments were coded. The MAXQDA program made it possible to analyse the research material in detail and select the statements faithfully quoted in the various sections of the article. We have limited ourselves to citing the most characteristic statements made by respondents.

The parent group was predominantly female (87%). Most respondents were born in the 1970s (62%), fewer in the 1980s (36%) and the least in the 1960s (2%). Most of them have higher education (83%), much less have secondary education (13%), and occasionally basic vocational and primary education (2% each). The largest groups are parents with two (53%) and three children (20%). Only 13% of parents have one child. Even fewer respondents have four, five or six children (6%, 6%, and 2%, respectively). The child attending the first class of the technical school is, in the majority of cases, the first in order of birth (60%), fewer children were born second (36%), and the fewest children were born third (4%). Most respondents live in Warsaw (53%), although only slightly fewer parents live outside Warsaw (47%).

### **Career counselling and the choice of a secondary school**

Parents most frequently commented on the use of the services of a career counsellor at primary school (40 coded segments): "There were career counselling classes at school" [R2]; "I contacted a career counsellor at school" [R8]; "At school yes, because my friend is a counsellor" [R18]; "Yes, I used counselling at school" [R18]; "The counsellor invited us (me and my son) for an individual talk about school choice. The conversation occurred after the first semester of 8th grade" [R30]. Parents could count on the support of a counsellor also in the psychological-educational counselling centre to which they reported (6 coded segments): "Yes, we used the counselling centre" [R8]; "We were in the counselling centre twice, i.e., the first time – for a test and interview, the second time – for a choice proposal" [R8]; "My son had classes at school, and we were in the counselling centre to identify our son's strengths" [R38]; "We were in the counselling centre because we needed to renew the decision on the need for special education and this occasion we consulted on the choice of school" [R42]. It was not common for parents to use the service of a career counsellor employed at the primary school and also at the psychological-educational counselling centre (2 coded segments): "Yes, we used a career counsellor at school and the counselling centre" [R19]; "We used a career counsellor at school and the counselling centre" [R25]. Some parents show particular concern for their child's future and choose to meet with a career counsellor employed elsewhere than the primary school and the psychological-educational counselling centre (2 coded segments): "No, but my son had a meeting; it did not change his decision much" [R24]; "Yes, we used private counselling" [R52].

Secondary school students find it challenging to decide on their educational and career paths (Akpochofo, 2020, p. 5921–5922). A career counsellor's participation enhances secondary school students' ability to make career decisions, improves their career adaptability and strengthens their ability to make informed career decisions (Maree, Magere, 2023, pp. 29–31). Psychosocial strengths (e.g. courage) help secondary school students in their career choice and career planning decisions. Most of them (70% of Greek secondary school students in grades 11 and 12) have already chosen their future education and profession, regardless of their grades. However, no significant relationship was found between courage and whether students decided on a future education or occupation. Psychosocial strengths (courage) play a positive role in designing career guidance and counselling interventions for young people (Argyropoulou, Katsioulou, Drosos, Kaliris, 2018, pp. 32–36). Those who have become more decisive have less difficulty in making career decisions ( $d = 1.26$ ), while those who show indecisiveness towards the end of the year (i.e. when the decision deadline is approaching) show an increase in negative emotions ( $d = 0.72$ ) (Angehel, Gati, 2019, pp. 1–15, see also: Bacanlı 2016, pp. 233–250).

In some families, the decision related to the child's further education was made without the help of a career counsellor (28 coded segments): "We did not feel the need" [R4]; "We did not use it" [R41]; "Our son was home-schooled, he did not go to school" [R49]. They argued this fact because their child already had his/her plans for further education clarified and, therefore, lessons with a career counsellor were not helpful for them (13 coded segments): "My son assured me that he would manage and choose his school" [R1]; "No, he decided himself which school he wanted to go to" [R7]; "He knew where he wanted to go, so the counsellor did not have much advice to give him" [R11]; "No, because there was no need for it" [R31]; "From the very beginning he knew what he wanted, I did not look for other interests for him" [R32]; "He has well-established interests" [R45]; "Career counselling at school – unnecessary lessons, my son knew from grade 7 which direction he wanted to go to, although he did not know exactly which school to go to" [R27]; "He wants to be like his dad. He is going to be an IT specialist" [R45].

The respondents also included parents whose children considered their choice of secondary school only with their family (4 coded segments): "I encouraged my son to become a firefighter, but he is afraid of heights. We chose mechatronics" [R40]; "My husband was involved in choosing the school" [R42]; "I did the work myself. I created a list of 20 schools" [R46]; "My husband is an IT specialist. My son wants to become a pilot. The level was too low for us at the aviation technical school. After attending IT technical school, he can continue his dream. He would be outstanding in the aviation school, and the others would be average. Yes, he wants to be like his dad" [R45]. One mother limited her in-

volvement to giving her son a warning (1 coded segment): "I told him to watch the deadlines" [R1].

In the decision-making process, parents of students mainly adopt three attitudes, i.e. directive parents, parents who engage in dialogue and treat their child as capable of managing their destiny, liberal parents – passive parents or supportive parents (Wojtasik 2011, pp. 107–108). Most parents considered choosing a post-primary school when their child was in the final year of lower secondary school (44%). The overriding factors influencing the school choice decision included the reputation of the school (63%), proximity to home (53%) and academic performance (51%). Most parents showed satisfaction with their child's choice (77%), but as many as 23% admitted that they had to compromise (West, David, Hailes, Ribbens, 1995, pp. 30–31).

The interviewees' statements were further enriched by an attempt to compare the help received from a career counsellor in primary school versus in a psychological-educational counselling centre. Comparing the differences in being able to consult a career counsellor at primary school versus at the psychological-educational counselling centre, parents note that (3 coded segments): "We had better contact with the career counsellor at school than at the counselling centre, because he knew the teacher. My son opens up better when he knows the person longer. These were cyclical classes" [R8]; "In the counselling centre, a career counsellor diagnosed him with his predispositions and said he should attend a technical school. My son assessed the lessons conducted by the counsellor at school positively. He found out what professions there are and what to expect when performing a given profession" [R25]; "My son had classes at school, and we went to the counselling centre to determine his strengths" [R38].

In their narratives, parents referred to the person of a career counsellor. They see areas for improvement in the career counsellor's attitude and the way they conduct their lessons and admit a lack of satisfaction with their actions (9 coded segments): "The career counsellor used outdated tests that I used 20 years ago when I taught career counselling to unemployed people" [R2]; "He had a template approach. Take the test, and you'll find out what you're good at" [R2]; "Not much conversation, insight, even into these results" [R2]; "They didn't have a good teacher" [R5]; "They had a teacher whose disposition didn't suit her to teach the subject. She was very pessimistic" [R5]; "She didn't give my son any suggestions for other directions – like, maybe try here; she didn't say where it was easier to get admitted; that was missing" [R34]. One interviewee shared his concerns: "A bad teacher in such a subject can do more damage than good" [R5]. Another expressed his belief that teachers were not involved: "Teachers have stopped interfering in anything" [R22]. Alongside this type of opinion, there were ambivalent opinions according to which parents expressed satisfaction with the career counsellor (2 coded segments): "She got to know each of these

children. She did not speak in general terms, but talked in detail about each child" [R30]; "She helps with everything" [R17]. Among the statements, some present a neutral opinion (2 coded segments): "We didn't have a problem with her" [R10]; "The teacher made a presentation and discussed the professions" [R20].

Other fragments from the parents' statements illustrate their opinion on the lessons conducted by career counsellors in primary school. The majority of the statements related to their dissatisfaction with the lessons mentioned above (8 coded segments): "It's seemingly there, but it's done sloppily" [R5]; "I was very dissatisfied with the subject" [R5]; "It's a good thing that the children approached the subject with a pinch of salt because he would mess up (the career counsellor)" [R5]; "They (the students) didn't know anything" [R6]; "My son was not enthusiastic about these lessons" [R15]. Almost half as many statements indicated a favourable opinion (3 coded segments): "My son said the classes were ok" [R12]; "I think the lessons were interesting" [R29]; "He liked the lessons" [R50]. Some parents found it difficult to express their own opinion on the career counselling lessons (8 coded segments): "Let's be honest, this subject requires going beyond the knowledge acquired, it enters the personal life of the student" [R5]; "He had some lessons at school, something was going on, but I think he saw this teacher twice" [R11]; "I don't know what it was like in the counselling lessons, because it is complicated to learn anything from my son" [R24]; "They said to take into account the child's dreams, not to impose your opinion on him" [R36]; "My son had these lessons, but they were of no interest to him" [R37]; "I don't know how the lessons went" [R43]; "My son had the subject, but I don't know what came out of it" [R39]; "My son didn't say anything about the lessons with the career counsellor" [R53]. Two parents admitted that they did not know if their child attended career counselling lessons (2 coded segments): "The lessons with the career counsellor at school were optional, and I don't know if my son attended these lessons or not" [R13]; "There were lessons with a career counsellor at school, but I don't know if my son attended them" [R51].

Career counsellors admit that they prefer to conduct observations and interviews with young people in the classroom, while they find survey questionnaires too engaging and time-consuming. Students' needs are identified more or less carefully depending on the tools used in the diagnosis process. Their selection depends on whether the person teaching the lessons is qualified in career counselling (Frąszczak, Głowacka, Kąkolewski, Korczak, Łuczak, Zasada, 2022, p. 9, see also Chłoń-Domińczak 2015, p. 55). As far as the diagnosis of parents' needs for career counselling is concerned, it takes place only in the last two grades of primary school and is limited to the recruitment process, thus focusing on the enrolment of students in secondary schools; parents of students in the younger grades are not covered. Career counsellors say that parents are reluctant to take on the role of co-participants in the educational process, i.e., they

are reluctant to support their children in preparing them to make decisions about their choice of post-primary school and profession. The school's cooperation with parents in the field of career counselling is most often limited to indirect contacts (using the electronic school logbook, e.g. sending out information about activities that can be undertaken or events that support career planning – 85% of respondents), and direct contacts are rare (Frąszczak, Głowacka, Kąkolewski, Korczak, Łuczak, Zasada, 2022, p. 9, 13, 15). It is worth quoting the results presented in the report from the evaluation study concerning the assessment of support in the scope of career counselling addressed to the students of lower secondary schools in Małopolska and, after the reform, to grades 7 and 8 of primary schools, which was provided under the project Modernisation of Professional Education in Małopolska II initiated by the Board of the Małopolska Voivodeship. The majority of students said that attending classes with a career counsellor helped them to choose a secondary school (63.97%), a small group of students was opposed to this position (19.31), a small number of students had no opinion on the subject (16.11%). The tests used in classes with a career counsellor to identify strengths, weaknesses and vocational predispositions were rated as helpful by the students (79.74%), few students stated that the tests did not help them (14.54%), the least frequent answer was "hard to say" (5.54%) (Wiekiera-Michau, 2020, p. 12, 15).

Not everyone perceived the services of a career counsellor as helpful in choosing a school and profession (20 coded segments): "Honestly, they did not help him in choosing" [R3]; "Maybe other kids benefited from it more than my son. He didn't know anything" [R6]; "He had classes at school, but they brought nothing" [R13]; "The meeting with the counsellor did not change much in my son's decision" [R24]; "The lessons at school do not explain what is most important. The specialisations and what to look out for, what they are good at, which grades will be important to be admitted to a technical school" [R28]; "There was nothing to help in choosing a school" [R33], "My son had the impression that the counsellor was telling him what he wanted to hear" [R34], "These lessons did not bring anything to my son, he said it was a waste of time" [R35]; "My son had lessons with a career counsellor, but his preferences were not examined, and they should be, to give him direction" [R47]. One parent stated that although the career counsellor did not help choose a school, he did provide some practical information: "The counsellor did not help him choose a school, but he informed us what would happen if he was not admitted to the school he wanted to get into" [R30]. From a comparable number of parents' statements, we learn that the career counsellor met their expectations and provided helpful advice in choosing a school and a profession (16 coded segments): "We asked the teacher as a class community to email us useful messages and she sent us helpful links" [R10]; "When there was a problem, we turned to her and she out-

lined everything for us" [R10]; "I was in the parents' class council, parents reported their needs to me. I would pass them on to the counsellor, and the counsellor would put them all together and send the information by email" [R10]; "They found out what to expect from a particular profession, and it changed the view on choosing a school" [R12]; "It gives a lot" [R17]; "It gave my son something" [R12]; "She emailed me information about schools. I printed them out, and it helped me" [R18]; "The lessons at school were helpful, a lot of knowledge and direction" [R18]; "My son learnt about different professions and what to expect from a given profession" [R25]; "They helped in deciding whether to go to general secondary school or technical school" [R29]; "There was a lecture, presentations of the schools, what the recruitment process is like. I found them very helpful" [R36]; "I think that if someone doesn't know what school to go to, the lessons with the counsellor will help them because he did comprehensive research" [R38]; "The counsellor did the tests. She said interesting things about my son's skills and aptitude" [R52].

According to the parents, the advice received from the career counsellor was accurate (9 coded segments): "He chose logistics because it involves problem-solving, e.g. arranging a plan" [R17]; "He told the counsellor where he wanted to go and he confirmed" [R34]; "For my son, it was complementary and reaffirmed him that his decision was great" [R50]; "The teacher suggested that he should pursue a management profile and also study at a technical school because he has leadership qualities" [R52]; "There was an aptitude and interest test, in which subjects he felt better or worse; whether in manual, technical or languages. There were several jobs ticked off that he could do. Moreover, he decided that a technical school would be better than a general secondary school. My child needs special education" [R8]. There were no statements from parents presenting an opposing position.

The majority of students are ultimately satisfied with their choice of post-primary school (62.6 per cent), with students from primary vocational schools (88.2 per cent), technical schools (62.2 per cent) showing the most excellent satisfaction, and general secondary schools (47.5 per cent) showing the least satisfaction (INDEKS Social Research Centre, 2017, p. 22, see also Hausman, Goldring, 1997, pp. 24–25). According to lower secondary school students, in order for them to be prepared to choose upper secondary school and profession, career counsellors/school counsellors most often talked to them about a given profession, school and professional work (72%). In addition, they were presented with secondary school offers (68%) and informed where to find information on jobs and professions (58%). Students also participated in interest groups (58%) and others. (Klementowska, 2018, p. 166).



### Labour market forecasts and the choice of secondary school

Parents of first graders most often commented that there was no need to check the labour market demand for workers in the profession their children were studying when choosing a secondary school and a profession. They are convinced that there is a demand for workers in their chosen professions, and this is a well-known fact (26 coded segments): "I didn't have to do it because I know it's not easy. You have to look for good warehouse workers" [R2]; "There are plenty of logistics centres here in Warsaw, people choose for themselves" [R2]; "We found out from ordinary life, i.e. from television, from conversations with friends" [R6]; "At the moment, I believe that the greatest demand is for renewable energy systems" [R7]; "Heat pumps, photovoltaic panels – this is the future" [R7]; "I have a brother who sells photovoltaics and there is great demand" [R7]; "I know how much electricians earn. It is difficult to find a good electrician" [R19]; "At the moment, I think there is a demand, if not for passenger transport, then freight" [R21]; "He will find employment among friends" [R29]; "We know it is easy to get a job" [R37]; "I deal with the IT area, and I am aware of the demand; we did not have to check it" [R47]; "In the company I work with, there is still a shortage of people with IT qualifications" [R47]; "We generally knew that IT is in demand" [R50]; "I can see that there is a demand" [R51]; "I have heard from my patients who graduated from the mechatronics technical school that 4th, 5th-graders are recruited for jobs" [R35]; "There is work. It's important too" [R1]; "You hear everywhere that there is a shortage of people in this profession" [R26]. Parents say that the professions their children have chosen to study at the technical school are a guarantee of finding employment, as they are the professions of the future (4 coded segments): "The profession of a logistics specialist will probably never disappear" [R3]; "It is a profession that will also be in demand. It's not a matter of fashion" [R26]; "It's a profession in short supply" [R48]; "This profession looks promising, and that shouldn't change" [R52]; "It's a profession that is evolving and offers opportunities in different directions, such as space" [R27]. From two statements, it can be concluded that checking the labour market forecast is pointless because of the rapid changes (2 coded segments): "What for? That could change completely in five years anyway" [R5]; "It wasn't that important. We didn't go into all that. It all changes every year" [R10].

According to the forecast of demand for employees in vocational education professions on the national and voivodeship labour market announced by the Minister of Education and Science (Monitor Polski, Journal of Laws, 2023, item 145), the occupations which students have decided to learn are of particular importance for the country's development and are expected to be in particular demand. The type of profession acquired (47%) ranks second, just behind intel-

ligence and ability (56%) among the factors that determine finding a job after graduation (Grabowska, Gwiazda, 2019, p. 88).

There are more arguments explaining why it is or is not worthwhile to check the labour market demand for workers in a given profession (6 coded segments): "Why check if he doesn't know if he would be admitted to this school" [R21]; "What are we going to check – if they need a train driver in the PKP – if we don't know if he would be admitted to this school" [R21]; "What for, they have the ease of re-branding" [R29]. One parent admitted that it did not matter to him (1 coded segment): "It wasn't that important to me. When I took the documents to the school, the teachers receiving them said that there was plenty of work and that it was a good choice for my son" [R1]. According to parents, it is not worthwhile to verify which professions are in short supply if they are not sure that their child will be admitted to a technical school, if public opinion suggests that there is a shortage of workers in a particular profession or if the vocational qualification acquired provides the basis for a quick change of profession.

The largest number of respondents said that no one in the family had checked the labour market forecasts (23 coded segments): "Honestly – no" [R5]; "We didn't check" [R21]; "No one looked for it in the market" [R29]; "We didn't check it, but we know that it's easy to get a job" [R37]. Three parents admitted that they did not check labour market forecasts (3 coded segments): "I did not check" [R1]; "I did not check specifically" [R27]; "I did not formally check it" [R39]. Two parents, on the other hand, referred in the interview to their children's lack of interest in labour market verification (2 coded segments): "My son did not check" [R3]; "Maja did not check" [R16].

In some families, parents together with their children checked the labour market demand for workers in the profession their children were studying (12 coded segments): "We looked once or twice" [R10]; "Yes, we both checked" [R18]; "He checked more, but I verified his information" [R28]; "Yes, we looked together" [R34]. Only in one case did the parents get help from a career counsellor in this respect (1 coded segment): "We checked with the career counsellor on the need for railway control workers" [R30]. Parents often undertook this activity on their own and sometimes shared the results of their explorations with their children (7 coded segments): "I checked with my husband" [R3]; "I checked. I'm familiar with it regularly" [R23]; "I checked, my son didn't. I showed him" [R25]; "I was looking a bit, but I don't remember now" [R33]. Sometimes, the situation was the other way around. The responsibility in this matter was mainly on the students (5 coded segments): "My son checked" [R12], "Yes, he checked the salaries himself" [R20]; "My child checked, I didn't really" [R32]; "My son also reads different forums, and he tells me. He's up to date, even more than I am" [R24]; "He looked at the [pracuj.pl](http://pracuj.pl) website, and he was looking for offers

for rail electricians, and we talked about it" [R25]. Parents began a dialogue with their children on the information they had acquired.

The results obtained – in the course of the search for professions with a positive impact on the development of the national economy – were satisfactory (15 coded segments): "It came out very promising" [R4]; "There was quite a lot of demand" [R16]; "There is much demand for these professions and he is watching the wages" [R22]; "More and more people are admitted" [R24]; "They are opening up to the market" [R24]; "There is demand all the time" [R30]; "There is work" [R34]. Of all respondents, only one shared a pessimistic vision of the future (1 coded segment): "It did not look good" [R33].

One of the most important factors influencing the choice of school, according to students and graduates from all over the country, turned out to be the brand (quality) of the school – 32.3 per cent and the profession, the job prospect – 27.8 per cent (Kruszakin, 2017, p. 25), a similar position on this issue is taken by the parents of students, for whom the quality of education is crucial (Ericson, 2017, p. 498).

## **Conclusions of the research**

Parents have had the most experience with career counsellors in primary school, whom they consulted with their children on their choice of post-primary school and profession (40 coded segments). They used the services of a career counsellor at a psychological-educational counselling centre much less frequently (6 coded segments). Occasionally, a career counsellor's help at educational establishments and one employed at another workplace was sought (2 segments coded each).

Decisions were made without consulting a career counsellor (28 coded segments). This situation was because the child had made (before 7th and 8th grade) a choice of post-primary school and profession (which was explained by the child having interests or wanting to continue in the profession of one of the parents), the parent's belief in the child's independence in this matter, and the decision to choose within the family.

When comparing the parents' opinions on the help received from the career counsellor at primary school and at the psychological-pedagogical counselling centre, they found that long-term contact with the career counsellor at school fosters the child's openness to working with him or her, the career counsellor at school contributes to learning about resources and the labour market. In contrast, at the psychological-pedagogical counselling centre, he/she contributes to learning about the child's resources and choosing a particular type of secondary school (3 coded segments). It is worth emphasising that only three respondents raised this topic, and it will be the subject of further research.

The majority of parents have pejorative opinions about primary school career counsellors and the career counselling lessons they conduct (9 coded segments). In their view, they are characterised by an inappropriate attitude, i.e. pessimism and indifference. The counsellor conducts career counselling lessons in a template fashion using outdated psychological tests, the results of which he/she does not discuss in depth. Attending the lessons does not guarantee that their children will learn about their resources, professions, labour markets, and education markets. Based on the lessons, they cannot plan their development and make educational and career decisions. These opinions failed in a minority of cases (2 coded segments). They show that the career counsellor has an individual approach to each student, that the lessons with them are exciting and that their children enjoy them. However, an equal number of statement fragments (as those with negative overtones) indicate that parents acknowledge that they do not have sufficient knowledge about the lessons taught by the career counsellor and have refrained from expressing their opinions on the matter (8 coded segments each).

As far as the evaluation of career counselling services in terms of usefulness in the choice of secondary school and profession is concerned, there was a slight predominance of fragments of statements indicating their uselessness (4 coded segments more), which was argued to be due to the lack of information on educational offers (or more precisely on the fields of study), on the criteria taken into account in recruitment to vocational-technical schools, as well as the lack of psychological tests (checking the child's career preferences). The opponents, in turn, stated that the career counsellor provided them with selected and practical information about educational offers, introduced them to the recruitment process, conducted psychological tests and made a diagnosis based on them.

In the case of the career counsellor's advice considered by the parents as relevant, it should be noted that it concerned the choice of the type of school and the child's vocational aptitude with the indication of the recommended professions and the reaffirmation of the child's right decision (9 coded segments). There were no statements from parents that would present an ambivalent position.

Regarding the relevance of checking labour market demand in deciding on the choice of secondary school and profession, most parents' statements referred to a lack of need to do so due to knowing the subject from their own experience, the media, and friends. It shows that their children's chosen professions are the professions of the future and guarantees that they will find a job in line with their learned profession or the development of an educational and professional path based on this profession (30 coded segments). The least frequent statements were that it is not worth checking the labour market forecast due to dynamic changes, lack of certainty that the child will qualify for a given school and the possibility of changing industries (6 coded segments). One parent

took a neutral position and stated that labour market forecasts played no role in decision-making (1 coded segment).

Concerning checking or not checking labour market forecasts, the most coded fragments of statements concerned its performance (12 coded segments) or failure to perform it (23 coded segments) by parents and children. The least coded fragments of statements indicated that this activity was undertaken either by the parent (non-checking – 3 coded segments; checking – 7 coded segments) or by the child (non-checking – 2; checking – 5 coded segments). The data retrieved by the children became the basis for dialogue with parents in the decision-making process. Notably, only one coded statement indicates that a career counsellor was consulted on this issue.

The labour market outlook, according to parents, looked optimistic (15 coded segments). They stated that there was a demand for workers in the profession their children had chosen to learn at the technical school, and they indicated that there was continuity in this phenomenon. They further noted the monitoring of earnings. Surprisingly, one parent had the opposite opinion to the one above (1 coded segment).

## Conclusion

Not all parents and their children use the help of a career counsellor when choosing a secondary school and a profession. However, those who decide to take this step most often seek the help of a career counsellor employed by the primary school. In implementing the curriculum in career counselling classes, they note several areas needing change, such as young people being fully prepared to make such an important decision as choosing an educational and career path, considering the labour market forecast.

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## Pomoc doradcy zawodowego w wyborze technikum w opinii rodziców

### Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań własnych, których celem było rozpoznanie, jak rodzice postrzegają pomoc doradców zawodowych w wyborze szkoły ponadpodstawowej oraz w jakim stopniu w procesie decyzyjnym uwzględniane są prognozy rynku pracy. Wyniki badań korespondują z ujęciem przedstawionym z perspektywy ich dzieci opublikowanym w artykule „Pomoc doradcy zawodowego uczniom w wyborze szkoły ponadpodstawowej oraz zawodu poszukiwanego na rynku pracy” (Pardej, 2024a). W badaniach jakościowych wykorzystano metodę wywiadu. Analizę materiału badawczego przeprowadzono z wykorzystaniem programu MAXQDA 2022. Próbę badaną stanowili rodzice uczniów klas pierwszych warszawskich techników kształcących się w zawodach przyszłości N=53 (Monitor Polski, D.U. 2023, poz. 145). W sprawie wyboru szkoły ponadpodstawowej i zawodu rodzice i ich dzieci korzystają najczęściej z usług doradcy zawodowego

w szkole podstawowej (40 zakodowanych segmentów). W wielu rodzinach jednak proces decyzyjny odbywa się bez konsultacji z doradcą zawodowym (28 zakodowanych segmentów). Według rodziców ich dzieci chętniej korzystają z pomocy doradcy zawodowego w szkole niż w poradni psychologiczno-pedagogicznej z uwagi na długotrwały kontakt, którego następstwem jest otwartość dziecka na współpracę. Rodzice zauważają wiele obszarów wymagających poprawy odnośnie do kompetencji doradcy zawodowego oraz prowadzonych przez niego lekcji. Rodzice posiadają (zazwyczaj powszechną) wiedzę na temat rynku pracy i pożądaných zawodów (30 zakodowanych segmentów). Jeśli podejmują się czynności sprawdzania prognoz rynku pracy, to najczęściej robią to razem z dziećmi (12 zakodowanych segmentów) lub razem rezygnują z tej czynności (23 zakodowane segmenty); natomiast sporadycznie czynią to w pojedynkę (dzieci albo rodzice).

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodzice uczniów warszawskich techników, doradztwo zawodowe, wybór polskiej szkoły średniej, rynek pracy.



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Katarzyna NOWAK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2031-3074>

Casimir Pulaski University of Radom, Poland

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## The Sense of Psychological Gender of Secondary School Students

### Abstract

Psychological gender is one of the crucial determinants of human behaviour, significantly linked to socio-cultural changes. Its conformity or nonconformity with biological sex plays an essential role in the process of identity development and correct social adaptation of adolescents. The study aimed to determine the main types of psychological gender of adolescents in late adolescence. The research group consisted of a total of 847 secondary school students. Kuczyńska's IPP Psychological Gender Inventory was used. Research questions were asked about the main types of psychological gender in the group of respondents in general and because of the influence of sociodemographic variables such as gender, age, family structure and economic status, and type of post-primary school. The results of the study showed that the dominant psychological gender type of the adolescents surveyed is the androgynous type. Within the adopted sociodemographic variables, variables such as family economic status and type of secondary school proved to be its moderators. It was found that the androgynous type of psychological gender is statistically significantly more often characterized by adolescents from families with good and excellent financial situations and studying in general secondary schools. In addition, it was noted that boys, compared to girls, experience a more significant crisis in psychological gender identification consistent with biological sex.

**Keywords:** psychological gender, gender diversity, youth, school.

### Introduction

Adolescence is a period of intensive changes in all spheres of development, beginning with the so-called pubertal leap, visible, among other things, in the

marked development of primary and secondary sexual characteristics (Obuchowska, 2005; Oleszkowicz, Senejko, 2016; Wolański, 2012). However, the process of sexual differentiation begins much earlier. It takes place in several stages, consisting of genetic sex determination, differentiation of the gonads, development of the sexual organs (external and internal) and sexual maturation. Genetic sex is already determined at fertilization. Initially, up to week 6, the fetal gonad is bipotential, i.e. it can transform in the female or male direction. This transformation is determined by the arrangement of chromosomes in the developing zygote (female XX or male XY arrangement), resulting in the differentiation of male and female genitalia from the 8th to the 20th week (Szaras-Czapnik, Romer, 2013, pp. 140–149). Thus, the sexual differentiation of the brain during the prenatal and neonatal periods depends on the presence of testosterone in male fetuses and its absence in female fetuses. In addition, it has been noted that specific hypothalamic nuclei may play an essential role in this regard, the size of which is different between male and female and between homosexual and heterosexual individuals (Kula, Słowikowska-Hilczer, 2003a, pp. 472–475).

However, pubescent adolescents are not only experiencing changes following the pattern of biological sex but are now also dealing with psychological, social and cultural perceptions of gender. An important issue then becomes the psychological sense of gender.

## Psychological gender

Psychological gender is shaped by genetic gender. It consists of gender roles, gender identification and gender psycho-orientation. It develops during the foetal and postnatal period under the influence of the hypothalamus and limbic system and the social influence on the child (family and environment) (Kula, Słowikowska-Hilczer, 2003b, pp. 7–16). The sense of gender develops gradually, usually revealing itself between the ages of two and three, while in the pre-school period, between the ages of four and six, gender identity is established (Brannon, 2002; Kula, Słowikowska-Hilczer, 2003a; Vasta, Haith, Miller, 2001).

Among the most popular concepts of gender schemas describing in different ways, the process of gender identification conditioned by socio-cultural factors are Seligman's concept of the five layers of erotic life, Sandra Bem's concept of gender identity formation and the cognitive-developmental approach.

Seligman's theory of the five layers of erotic life indicates the emergence of successive levels in the formation of human sexuality (Seligman, Walker, Rosenhan, 2003). The basis is gender identity, i.e. the awareness of being female or male. The next layer is sexual orientation, indicating the orientation of sexual desire. It is divided into heterosexual (congruence of genitals with gender iden-

tity and turning the urge to the opposite sex), homosexual (congruence of genitals with gender identity and turning the urge to the same sex) and trans-sexual (divergence of genitals with gender identity). The third level is formed by sexual preferences, which influence sexual responses. The next layer is the gender role, i.e. the public manifestation of gender identity (girl- and boy-specific behaviour, fulfilment of social and cultural tasks, engaging in specific sexual behaviours). The final level is sexual functioning related to sexual activity (Seligman et al. 2003, pp. 34–37).

Bem's concept of gender schemas, on the other hand, focuses on explaining the psychological gender construct – i.e. the process of the formation of gender-related psychological traits following the definitions of femininity and masculinity typical in a given society. Gender schemas are contained in cognitive schemas containing expectations related to the characteristics and behaviour of women and men (Brzezinska, Dąbrowska, Pełkowska, Staszczak, 2002).

Bem (1976, p. 54) proposed a theory of two mutually independent factors of masculinity and femininity in place of the one-dimensional and bipolar concept of gender. Thus, an individual may have one of several possible combinations of masculine and feminine traits: a type consistent with one's biological sex scores high on one and low on the other dimension (men with high scores on the masculinity scale and low scores on the femininity scale, the reverse for women), a type inconsistent with one's biological sex, the 'crossed' type – women with high scores on the masculinity scale and low scores on the femininity scale, the opposite for men, an androgynous type characterized by high scores on both dimensions and an undifferentiated type scoring low on both.

In Bem's (1976; 2000) conception, androgynous persons process information differently from gender-specific persons, especially about themselves and others. According to the author, they function more efficiently in social situations because balanced masculine and feminine traits enable them to adapt faster and function better in an increasingly complex social reality. The responsibility for balancing masculine and feminine traits in an individual lies with parents, educators and the broader socio-cultural influence during the socialization process.

The distinguished categories of people have varying levels of gender and behavioural schema submission. Gender-typical persons quickly assimilate gender-specific attributes and patterns of functioning. In contrast, gender-atypical persons are inclined to integrate models of masculinity and femininity in their behaviour, do not function in an explicit schema and distance themselves from social patterns (Miluska, 1995, pp. 19–38).

On the other hand, the cognitive-developmental approach focuses on two models of gender identity formation: stadial and information processing. The first is based on developmental continuity and invariability regardless of the child's environment. The second considers the processing of information from

the environment and its assimilation. In it, gender roles are observed, socially reinforced and considered appropriate in a given environment. According to the second model, gender identity depends on the socio-cultural context. It is determined by the accepted ways of behaviour, dress, family and professional roles of women and men (Gulczyńska, Jankowiak, 2009, p. 30–39).

## Psychological gender and adolescence

The gender construct built up early is heavily revised during adolescence. Adolescents' sense of psychological gender is then influenced by bodily changes, socio-cultural transformations and the psychological conditioning associated with the acceptance of one's gender.

Adolescent psychology recognizes that certain aspects of sexual maturation can cause psychological discomfort, especially in adolescents who have not been prepared for these developmental changes. They are a source of anxiety, embarrassment and oversensitivity about the self. They can contribute to an attitude of denial about one's gender, a desire to remain gender indeterminate, or experimenting with characteristics of the opposite sex. Among adolescents, so-called binders, masking gender attributes, have recently become increasingly popular, and there is growing opposition to misgendering in favour of gender-indefinite pronouns. It has been observed that more pubertal difficulties occur in girls and manifest themselves, for example, in mental infantilism, eating disorders or the so-called Diana complex, in which a girl does not want to be a woman and imitates boys in dress and behaviour. However, these are usually temporary phenomena (Obuchowska, 2005).

Another important aspect related to adolescents' sense of psychological gender is the impact of socio-cultural factors. Shaffer (1985, p. 540) emphasizes the importance of identifying with the representatives of a given sex in a specific culture and the need to belong to one of the sexes. In Polish culture, adolescents still encounter the fact that masculinity is stereotypically identified with characteristics such as domination, rivalry, independence, strength, and ease of decision-making. At the same time, sensitivity, emotionality, caring, and ability to sacrifice are considered to be typically feminine (Miluska, 1996). In most maturing adolescents, the process of psychological identification with one's gender manifests itself in behaviour that aligns with a specific gender stereotype formed in the socialization process (Imieliński, Dulko, 1988; Strykowska, 1992). However, young people today are witnessing intensive changes in the perception of gender-specific characteristics in recent years. In modern terms, there is a move away from stereotypical thinking about femininity and masculinity, the significant role of patriarchy in the family and the strict division of duties and

occupations into so-called masculine and feminine (Karkowska, 2017). Due to cultural and civilizational changes in new societies, there is a different model of gender identity formation than before. The change in the traditional perception of the roles of women and men is influenced by feminist movements and economic change. The schematic division of gender roles is gradually loosening. Young people observe that women are increasingly well-educated, working in professions traditionally reserved for men, entering the public sphere and finding themselves ideally at home. They are fighting for their rights and the elimination of political, economic, and cultural discrimination and violent behaviour. Conversely, men take over some of the women's family responsibilities, such as sharing in domestic life and childcare. (Krause, 2020; Szyszka, 2008). Fathers take on the role of mentor and counsellor in the upbringing of both boys and girls, teaching them to combine the roles of mother and father, worker and family member. They raise children differently than they were raised themselves. They recognize the need to compromise between tradition and modernity (Karkowska, 2017). Adolescents are witnessing a dynamic change in the understanding of femininity and masculinity socially, economically and culturally.

Finally, difficulties related to the psychological sense of gender are worth referring to. Many studies indicate that crises occurring in this area affect the way an individual functions, including the appearance of disruptions and disturbances in his/her behaviour in various life situations for this reason (Bem, 2000; Brzezińska et al., 2002; Deborah, 2000; Holowka, 1982; Miluska, 1996; Strykowska, 1992). Gender dysphoria can be considered an acute form of such a crisis. Many authors have recently reported a massive, even exponential, increase in gender dysphoria among adolescents, with accompanying increased anxiety and depressive states, as well as self-destructive behaviour. (Dyachenko, Perekhov, Soldatkin, Bukhanovskaya, 2021; Fuss, Auer, Briken, 2015; Frisen, Söder, Rydelius, 2017; Jones, Robinson, Oginni, Rahman, Rimes, 2017; Li et al, 2024; Zucker, 2017). Gender dysphoria involves suffering due to incongruence between assigned biological sex and gender identity. It is treated as a severe medical condition, as described in the DSM-5 (2015) and ICD-11 (Dora, Grabski, Dobroczyński, 2021) classifications. In adolescents, it manifests as an intense desire to be a person of a different gender, often accompanied by the need to change appearance, name and pronouns to match gender identity better. Diagnosis of gender dysphoria requires meeting specific diagnostic criteria, which include a sustained period of at least six months of intense desire to be a different gender or belief that one is.

It is also important to note that another multifaceted phenomenon is transgenderism, also emerging during adolescence, encompassing a wide range of gender identities that differ from the sex assigned at birth and do not necessarily involve gender dysphoria or the need for transition. The distinction between

psychological gender, gender dysphoria and transgender is crucial in understanding the diversity of gender identities among young people. Each of these terms refers to a different aspect of the gender experience, and understanding these differences is vital to adequately supporting students with diverse gender identities.

## **Psychological gender issues of young people in the education system**

Adolescents observing and participating in contemporary social, cultural and economic change are noticing a departure from the traditional understanding of gender roles and their attributes. Female and male roles, occupations, career paths and family roles performed by both genders are confused. There are also important implications for how young people function in today's schools. Students presenting gender diversity pose a significant challenge to the education system, not only in Poland.

The main problems related to this include, firstly, the widespread lack of knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of gender diversity in schools (Blair, Deckman, 2020; DePalma, 2011; Pullen, Robichaud, Dumais-Michaud, 2015; Bartholomaeus, Riggs, Andrew, 2017; Carlile, 2019). Many teachers and school staff still lack sufficient information on the topic and access to training or educational workshops, resulting in prejudice, discrimination, and isolation of gender-diverse students (Frydrych, 2020; Meyer, Leonardi, 2017; Rands, 2009).

Other educational problems relate to the lack of support in curricula that do not consider the needs of young people in terms of gender diversity. The lack of inclusive educational content and appropriate teaching materials promotes the marginalization of these students. They often experience acts of discrimination because of, for example, the use of inappropriate pronouns (misgendering), which exacerbates their feelings of exclusion. Teachers find it challenging to teach inclusively and to build an inclusive school climate (Bartholomaeus, Riggs, 2017; Boucher, 2011; Day, Perez-Brumer, Russell, 2018; Meyer, Leonardi, 2017; Snapp, Burdge, Licon, Moody, Russell, 2015).

Another difficulty relates to inadequate school infrastructure for adapting toilets and changing rooms for gender-diverse pupils. It is not uncommon for these places to be associated with significant discomfort and even danger for them, through which they avoid using these facilities. The lack of adequate facilities is consequently associated with absenteeism from physical education or other gender-segregated classes (Calzo et al., 2014; Berg, Kokkonen, 2021; Devís-Devís, Pereira-García, López-Cañada, Pérez-Samaniego, Fuentes-Miguell, 2017; Kjaran, 2019).

Another problem is the harassment and discrimination of gender-diverse young people in the school environment (Bower-Brown, Zadeh, Jadva, 2021; Collier, van Beusekom, Bos, Sandfort, 2013; Hatchel, Valido, De Pedro, Huang, Espelage, 2018; Marx, Hatchel, Mehring, Espelage, 2004; McBride, 2019; Myers, Swearer, Martin, Palacios, 2017; Wyss, 2004). Polish schools still lack adequate procedures or countermeasures aimed at counteracting such problems.

It should also be noted that the school environment often does not provide specialized support for students with gender diversity (Abreu, Kenny, Hall, Huff, 2019; Chen-Hayesa, 2001; Martino, Kassen, Omercajic, 2020). There is still a lack of psychologists in many institutions, including those adequately trained in this area. Educators often report a reluctance and lack of preparation to deal with issues of gender diversity or to intervene in cases of gender-based bullying (Leung, Kassel-Gomez, Sullivan, Murahara, Flanagan, 2022; Bler, Deckman, 2020).

The educational problems of gender-diverse youth are complex and multifaceted. They pose significant challenges. In order to effectively support such students, comprehensive educational, infrastructural and psychological measures are needed to promote inclusivity, acceptance and safety in the school environment. This need is significant because today, there is a dynamic process of changing the understanding of gender roles. It is increasingly leading to the treatment of androgynous gender as the most desirable combination of co-occurring male and female personality traits. This change finds expression and is already observable in the functioning of contemporary adolescents. This article empirically analyses the issues mentioned above and presents the research results concerning the types of students' sense of psychological gender in late adolescence.

## **Research Methodology**

The development dynamics in the modern world require women and men in every age group to change their attitudes to traditional views of gender roles (Deborah, 2000; Hołowka, 1982). These shifts include changes in customs, forms of professional activity, transformation of the patriarchal image of the world and greater acceptance of otherness (Schmidt-Waldherr, 2001; Wejnert, 2001). The present study referred to Sandra Bem's concept of gender schemas (1974, 1976, 1981, 2000). Human psychological gender is understood "as a system of gender-related psychological traits, such as femininity or masculinity, which are shaped in the individual from early childhood through his or her participation in social life" (Kuczyńska, 1992a, p. 237).

The study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the distribution of psychological gender types in the adolescents studied in the total group and because of their biological sex?

2. what is the distribution of the psychological gender types of the students, given their age?
3. Are there differences in the psychological sex of the adolescents due to family structure and material situation?
4. Are there differences in the psychological gender types of adolescents attending secondary schools with different profiles?

The research was conducted using a tool for determining psychological gender type – the Inventory for the Assessment of Psychological Gender (IPP) by Alicja Kuczyńska (1992a, 1992b), based on the assumptions of Bem's (1981) Gender Schema Theory. The IPP inventory assesses psychological gender, understood as the willingness to use a particular gender dimension to both the self and the world. The IPP, therefore, measures an aspect of psychological gender, making it possible to assess the extent to which the self-concept of the individual under study is influenced by cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity (Kuczyńska, 1992a, p.27). The questionnaire consists of 35 items relating to specific personality traits, of which 15 traits are categorized as characterizing males, 15 as characterizing females, and 5 items are neutral/buffer and are not included in any of the scales. Respondents rate each trait on a five-point scale ranging from 1 – I am not at all like this to 5 – I am entirely like this. The score for each scale is the sum of the responses from the items making it up. Taken together, the scores obtained by the subject in terms of femininity and masculinity allow one of the four possible psychological gender types to be identified.

In Bem's (1976, p. 54) conception, there was originally an androgynous type (androgynous), a type consistent with biological sex (sex-typed), a type inconsistent with biological sex (cross-typed sex) and an undifferentiated type (undifferentiated). Kuczynska (1992a,b) distinguished the following psychological gender types in the IPP Inventory:

- sexually defined persons – who score high on the scale corresponding to their sex and low on the scale corresponding to the opposite sex; these are women and men
- androgynous persons – women and men who are characterized by high scores on both scales
- sexually indeterminate persons – women and men who are characterized by low scores on both scales
- cross-sexually specified persons – who score high on the scale corresponding to the opposite sex and low on the scale corresponding to their sex; these are masculine women and feminine men

The gender dimension is an essential dimension of the individual's ego. Sexually defined and cross-sexually defined persons use characteristics in their self-description that are in line with social definitions of femininity or masculinity. On the other hand, androgynous and sexually indeterminate individuals have



formed a description of themselves outside the cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity, using adjectives culturally defining femininity or masculinity to an equal degree. Hence, the results are not a measure of the intensity of femininity or masculinity but of the readiness to use a given gender dimension in one's description.

The tool's reliability in Kuczyńska's (1992b) study was  $\alpha = 0.7834$  for the Masculinity scale and  $\alpha = 0.7856$  for the Femininity scale, which are satisfactory values. In the updated psychometric characteristics of the IPP Inventory, these values were above  $\alpha = 0.8$ , which confirms its research utility (Błajet 2019; Korzeń 2005).

The research cooperated with the Psychological and Pedagogical Clinic No. 3 in Radom 2023. The Microsoft Teams platform was used for the research to share the questionnaire and collect data from secondary school students whose principals agreed to join the research. Participation was voluntary – any post-primary school from Radom and Radom County could join directly. Pupils were often allowed to complete the questionnaire during parenting lessons or outside school hours. Each student answered the questionnaire independently, using a smartphone, tablet, or computer connected to the Internet, whether school-owned or private. The average time to complete the questionnaire was 9min 22sec.

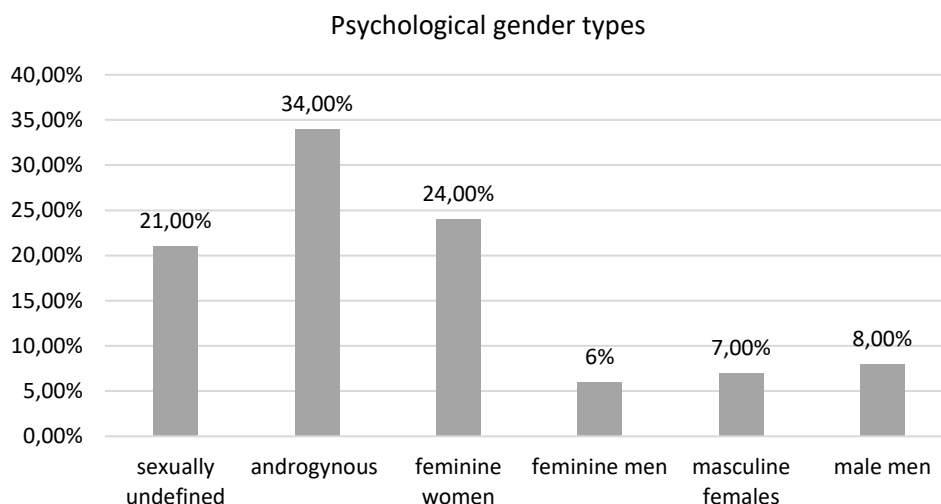
A total of 850 people from Radom and Radom County took part in the survey. Due to the completeness of the questionnaires, data from 847 respondents, of whom 63% were girls (N=537) and 37% boys (N=310), were qualified for further study analysis. The age of the students ranged from 15–19 years, with the most significant number of students aged 16 (31.2%) and 17 (29.9%) years, followed by 15 years (23%), with the most minor proportion of respondents being the oldest students aged 18 (13.2%) and 19 (2.7%) years. The average age of the students surveyed was 16 years. In the survey, the most significant number of respondents, i.e. 64%, attended a general school, 30% attended a technical school, and 6% attended a vocational school. The students were mostly city (53%) and rural (39%) residents, with the fewest indicating a small town (8%). The vast majority of respondents came from entire families (79%), followed by students indicating family structures such as divorced (8%) or single-parent families (7.6%), patchwork families (approx. 4%) and adoptive (approx. 1%) or foster (approx. 1%) families. The material situation of the family was most often assessed by the respondents as good (50%) and average (24.5%) or very good (22.5%). Only 2% of students described the situation as bad or very bad.

## **Analysis of results**

The following describes the results obtained in the group of respondents as a whole and then in the groups of respondents distinguished by variables such

as biological sex, age, family structure and economic status, and type of secondary school.

The data presented in Figure 1 indicate that the psychological gender types androgynous (34%) and "female-female" (24%) predominate in the entire group of students, followed by the type "sexually undefined" (more than 20% of respondents). The most minor representative types are 'feminine men' (6%) and 'masculine women' (7%). Only 8% of respondents identify with the 'masculine men' type.



*Chart 1*

Psychological gender types in the entire group of adolescents surveyed

Source: own study

The results show that more than 50% of the students surveyed are characterized by psychological gender types known as androgynous and sexually indeterminate. The adolescents identify themselves with traits typical of both sexes simultaneously (34%) or remain neutral (21%). The sense of psychological gender in line with biological sex was significantly higher among girls (24% identified themselves as "female females") than boys (8% were "male males").

The analysis of psychological gender types by biological sex showed some differences between girls and boys. In the group of schoolgirls, more than a third obtained a psychological gender type defined as "feminine female" (38%), as well as androgynous (33%). The smallest number of respondents identified the type as "sexually indeterminate" (16%) and "masculine female" (approx. 12%). In the group of boys, on the other hand, more than one-third obtained the psychological gender type androgynous (35%) and almost one-third the type "not

sexually specified" (27%). The smallest number of pupils (21%) identify the type "masculine male" and "feminine male" (16%).

A comparison of the results in the girls' and boys' groups shows a more outstanding correspondence between biological and psychological sex in the girls' group (almost 40% of respondents) than in the boys' group (20% of respondents). However, in both groups, more than a third of the students are of the androgynous type, so analysis with Pearson's chi-square test did not show that the variable of biological sex significantly differentiated the adolescents ( $p=n.i.$ ;  $\chi = 369.068$ ;  $df = 5$ ; Kramer's  $V = 0.66$ ).

Further analysis of the sense of psychological gender by age shows some variation between students 15 to 19 years of age. In the group of the youngest students, 15-year-olds, the most representative type (about 30% each of the population) was "female females" and "sexually indeterminate."

In comparison, the least representative type (about 6%) was "male females". Among 16-year-old respondents, the dominant psychological gender type is the 'androgynous' type (almost 40%), followed closely by the 'sexually indeterminate' type (23%). The 'feminine male' gender type occurred in the smallest percentage (around 5%). The 17- and 18-year-old students were most characterized by the "androgynous" psychological gender type (more than 30%) and the "feminine women" type (about 27%), to the smallest extent by the "feminine men" type (about 5%) in the 17-year-old group and "masculine women" (6%) in the 18-year-old group. In the oldest group, the vast majority of 19-year-olds (48%) obtained the androgynous psychological gender type, but this is the smallest group of the population ( $N=23$ ).

The results concerning types of psychological gender in particular age groups showed that the dominant type is the androgynous type. Thus, Pearson's chi-square test analysis did not show that the age variable significantly differentiates adolescents ( $p=n.i.$ ;  $\chi = 32.1$ ;  $df = 20$ ; Kramer's  $V = 0,097$ ). It is noteworthy, however, that the psychological gender type "sexually indeterminate" and "androgynous" is more pronounced in the groups of younger students, while the tendency to identify with biological sex increases in the group of older respondents and concerns the type "choice female".

Data on the distribution of psychological gender due to family structure also indicated some variation in the sense of psychological gender of the young people surveyed. It is worth noting, however, that most of them came from complete families ( $N=672$ ). This group of respondents was, to the greatest extent, characterized by the 'androgynous' psychological gender type (33%), as well as the 'feminine female' (25%) and 'sexually indeterminate' (21%) types.

Analysis of the data obtained makes it possible to note that family structure does not differentiate the respondents' sense of psychological gender ( $p=n.i.$ ;  $\chi = 37.55$ ;  $df = 25$ ; Kramer's  $V = 0,094$ ). Some subtle correlation ( $p = 0.051$ ) was

noted within the 'feminine male' type, which characterized more than 30% of respondents raised by a single parent. The dominance of the "androgynous" type leads one to reflect that the presence or absence of a parent of a particular gender does not differentiate the psychological sex of adolescents. If it does, it is more conducive to identification in line with biological sex in girls ("female females").

The following variable analyzed was the material status of the family. In the group of students assessing it as good and very good (more than 70% in total), the "androgynous" psychological gender type was the most representative, followed by the "feminine women" type. Respondents describing it as average (more than 20%) obtained significant variation in their sense of psychological gender. Almost 30% obtained the 'feminine female' type, while about a quarter of the respondents were of the 'androgynous' or 'undefined' type. On the other hand, among the students who described their material situation as bad and very bad, the psychological gender type "sexually indeterminate" definitely dominates (a total of almost 80% of respondents). The size of these groups does not allow legitimate conclusions to be drawn.

Pearson's chi-square test analysis of the family material situation variable showed that it differentiated the respondents at a statistically significant level ( $p < 0.000$ ;  $\chi = 48, 25$ ;  $df = 20$ ; Kramer's  $V = 0.119$ ). The 'androgynous' psychological gender type was characterized to a significantly greater extent by pupils from families with good material status. In contrast, the 'masculine male' type became apparent in families with poor material status.

A comparison of data on the psychological gender of pupils attending different types of post-primary schools showed further intervening variation in results.

Students in general secondary schools were characterized in the highest proportion by the androgynous psychological gender type (35%) and the "female-female" type (approximately 29%). The smallest number of respondents was of the 'masculine' (4%) or 'feminine' (5%) male type. Among technician respondents, the dominant psychological gender type is the androgynous type (32%), followed closely by the 'sexually indeterminate' type (25%). In the smallest percentage (5%), the 'male-female' gender type occurred. In the group of pupils from vocational schools (which was by far the smallest in number), a similar trend to that of the technical students was observed: the highest percentage was characterized by the sexually indeterminate (45%) and androgynous (30%) psychological gender type. Similarly, the male-female gender type also occurred in the smallest percentage (7%).

Pearson's chi-square test analysis showed that this variable significantly differentiated the adolescents ( $p < 0.000$ ;  $\chi = 35.5$ ;  $df = 10$ ; Kramer's  $V = 0.145$ ). A comparison by school type showed that the psychological gender types 'female-female' and 'female male' were predominant in comprehensive schools.

In contrast, male-male males were predominant in technical and trade schools. This relationship is probably due to the biological sex type of students choosing a specific type of school.

## **Discussion of results**

This article focuses on the emergence of psychological gender types characterizing contemporary adolescents in late adolescence. The analysis of the obtained data allows verification of the research questions posed.

Concerning the question about the distribution of psychological gender types in the surveyed adolescents in the total group and concerning their biological sex, the occurrence of the "androgynous" type was found in the vast majority, including both girls and boys. This result may reflect the social transformation or unification of female and male roles and the effect of the so-called gender-neutral upbringing implemented (Ulrich, Becker, Scharf, 2022). It is also important to note the trend, which is growing at a breakneck pace, of presenting an 'asexual' gender image on the Internet and the dangerous 'fashion' of promoting 'gender choice' or even encouraging young people to make gender transitions on various types of social media (Hutchinson, Midgen, Spiliadis, 2020; Littman, 2018, 2019; Zucker, 2019). This trend may significantly contribute to the rise of the androdynamic type of psychological gender in adolescents. However, our research observed a much stronger tendency to identify the psychological gender type with the biological gender type ("female females") in girls than boys. It is probably more difficult for boys today to identify with masculinity, as the concept has been changing dynamically over the years. The new socio-cultural male role model encompasses both feminine and masculine characteristics and behaviours, being in a partnership, caring for children, disclosing feelings, and taking care of one's own body and physical appearance while rejecting the androcentrism, aggressiveness and misogyny characteristic of the previous 'traditional' male role model (Skoczylas, 2011).

In turn, in response to the question about the psychological gender distribution of students due to their age, it was noted that its primary type is also the "androgynous" type, with initially, in the group of the youngest students (15- and 16-year-olds), the type "sexually unspecified", is clearly outlined, and the tendency to identify consistent with biological sex increases with age and affects girls ("women"). Although the statistical significance of these observations has not been confirmed, it is worth noting that they are in line with data indicating that adolescence is associated with gender dysphoria, which disappears with age in approximately 80–90% of adolescents (Mayer, McHugh, 2016; Ott, Corliss, Wypij, Rosario, Austin, 2011). Difficulties with gender identification in

adolescents are therefore worth considering, among other things, as a transitional developmental phenomenon.

The next question asked whether a different distribution of psychological gender types characterized adolescents from families with different family structures and material situations. Interestingly, the family structure variable did not differ statistically significantly between the young people studied. The 'androgynous' type predominated in each of the groups that emerged. On the other hand, the family material status variable showed that the tendency towards the androgynous type was statistically significantly associated with a higher level of family well-being. In contrast, a more vital identification of boys with the "masculine male" type was observed in families with a poor material situation. In the literature, the available reports focus more on parents' reactions related to their child's gender diversity (Abreu, Rosenkrantz, Ryser-Oatman, Rostosky, Riggle, 2019; de Bres, 2022; Ferfolja, Ullman, 2021; Schlehofer, Cortez-Regan, 2022). There is a lack of research on the relationship between family structure and children's psychological gender. This issue is an essential field for further analysis in Polish conditions.

A similar reflection applies to the variable of economic status. Studies by other authors show that parents' material well-being, as well as their higher level of education, political affiliation, being a member of the middle class and being Caucasian, is related to a more positive attitude towards the search for gender identity and their child's rejection of traditional gender roles (Antill, Cunningham, Cotton, 2003; Neary, 2019; Pinho, Gaunt, 2021).

The final research question was related to whether there are differences in the psychological gender types of adolescents attending secondary schools with different profiles. The variable of post-primary school type made it possible to observe that the psychological gender types "female-female females" and "female males" are statistically significantly more often characterized by students in general secondary schools. In contrast, "male-male males" are characterized by students in technical and trade schools. These results can probably be primarily explained by the biological sex of the pupils choosing a particular type of school.

The above results allow two important conclusions to be drawn. Firstly, they indicate that the adolescents surveyed identify with the androgynous type of psychological gender in the highest percentage. Secondly, more significant agreement in identification with biological sex is found in girls, while boys strongly indicate an androgynous or sexually indeterminate type of psychological sex.

The presented research results require further verification, especially in the national population of adolescents of both sexes. Other variables related to the psychological characteristics of adolescents (e.g. personality traits, quality of life) should also be controlled. It would also be interesting to capture the dynamics of psychological gender development and to conduct a comparative

analysis of the data obtained with the results of adolescents of both genders in early adolescence, i.e. between the ages of 10/12 and 15.

## Conclusions

Adolescence is a particular time that brings with it a crisis of identity formation involving several dimensions, including gender identification. Using the category of psychological gender (not always consistent with biological sex) allows a different perspective on the role of the socio-cultural environment, which becomes an essential context for developing specific human characteristics (Miluska, 1996). The result of the dominance of androgyny in adolescents in late adolescence obtained in the presented research may, therefore, refer to a specific normative developmental tendency of adolescence, according to which a young person seeks several answers to questions concerning his/her IAM. On the other hand, this result may reflect changes in the perception of gender and the associated social and cultural roles and indicate an increasing trend, particularly under the influence of the Internet, towards developing an androgynous psychological gender.

Given the importance of this topic for young people today, it is worth formulating some general indications to include in the education system, aimed at young people but also their teachers and parents :

- the need to provide knowledge on psychological gender, gender identity, gender role, sexual orientation, gender diversity, transsexuality, gender dysphoria, as well as the distinction between these constructs and their significance in adolescence
- raise awareness of changing gender characteristics due to ongoing socio-cultural and economic transformations
- counteract stereotypical perceptions of gender attributes
- the role of mass media and the Internet in constructing gender images
- the role of cultural influences on gender

This study helps to fill a gap in the psychological gender of young people in Poland, opens up further avenues of research and, importantly, points to the urgent need to develop inclusive pedagogy because of the dynamic growth of gender-diverse young people.

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## Poczucie płci psychologicznej uczniów szkół ponadpodstawowych

### Streszczenie

Płeć psychologiczna jest jednym z ważnych determinantów ludzkiego postępowania, związanym w istotny sposób z przemianami społeczno-kulturowymi. Jej zgodność bądź nie z płcią biologiczną odgrywa istotną rolę w procesie rozwoju tożsamości oraz prawidłowej adaptacji społecznej dorastających. Celem przeprowadzonych badań było określenie współczesnych typów płci psychologicznej młodzieży w późnej fazie adolescencji. Grupę badawczą stanowiło łącznie 847 uczniów szkół ponadpodstawowych. Zastosowano Inwentarz Płci Psychologicznej IPP Kuczyńskiej. Postawiono pytania badawcze dotyczące głównych typów płci psychologicznej w grupie respondentów ogółem oraz z uwagi na oddziaływanie zmiennych socjodemograficznych takich jak: płeć, wiek, struktura i status ekonomiczny rodziny oraz typ szkoły ponadpodstawowej. Wyniki badań wykazały, iż dominującym typem płci psychologicznej badanej młodzieży jest typ androgyniczny. W ramach przyjętych zmiennych socjodemograficznych jej moderatorem okazały się zmienne takie jak status ekonomiczny rodziny oraz typ szkoły ponadpodstawowej. Ponadto zauważono, że chłopcy w porównaniu z dziewczętami doświadczają większego kryzysu w identyfikacji płci psychologicznej zgodnej z płcią biologiczną.

**Słowa kluczowe:** płeć psychologiczna, różnorodność płciowa, młodzież, szkoła.

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Anna MAŁOLEPSZY\*

Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa, Poland

Małgorzata PIASECKA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8578-1488>

Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa, Poland

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**Contact:** malolepszy.an@gmail.com; m.piasecka@ujd.edu.pl**How to cite [jak cytować]:** Małolepszy, A., Piasecka, M. (2024). Values as Determinants of Asexual People's Attitudes Towards Domestic Partnerships in the Light of Educational Experiences. Challenges for Education. *Podstawy Edukacji. Education for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, 17, 295–309.

## Values as Determinants of Asexual People's Attitudes Towards Domestic Partnerships in the Light of Educational Experiences. Challenges for Education

### Abstract

The article aims to present, as a result of the conducted research, the attitudes of people identifying as asexual towards domestic partnerships with particular emphasis on the context of values experienced in the process of family upbringing by these people. It was assumed that upbringing in a family is a point of reference that allows for identifying specific values and patterns of behaviour that have a significant role in shaping a person's identity. Asexual people, often misunderstood by their environment, perceive relationships primarily as a space of emotional closeness built on the foundation of, among others, such values as trust, honesty, freedom, agreement of views, understanding, respect, tolerance, openness, safety, maturity, cooperation and equality. Creating a healthy educational environment that supports diversity, develops respect for different identities and helps eliminate stereotypes, such as those regarding asexuality, is a challenge for education under the banner of equality education.

**Keywords:** values, upbringing, equality, asexuality, domestic partnership, education.

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\* Anna Małolepszy was a JDU student, while this manuscript has been prepared.

## Introduction – towards equality education

Equality is a social value that is the basis of social order, ensuring equal opportunities and equal access to civic rights and obligations. Lack of equality leads to discrimination, marginalization and exclusion of various social groups (Teutsch, 2002, p. 22). The principle of equality and the prohibition of discrimination are among the fundamental principles expressed in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 1997. Under the fundamental act, the legislator is obliged to respect the dignity of every person regardless of their status and personal characteristics and shape legal regulations to ensure equal treatment of similar entities in the sphere of political, social and economic life. International and European law norms also influence the established national legal regulations. "Poland's accession to the European Union and the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* accelerated the development of anti-discrimination law in our country. A special act in this respect is the Act of 3 December 2010 on implementing certain EU provisions on equal treatment" (Bodnar, 2020, p. 4).

Globalization, integration, and migration characterize the modern world through increasingly diverse ethnically, culturally, and religious societies. Changes also include traditional customs, functions, and social roles. In this situation, education faces a large and important task. Its fundamental duties include providing every child with an education, guaranteeing access and equal opportunities in learning, and preparing for adult life on a solid foundation of universal values.

Equality education is an interdisciplinary, crucial social problem, which gives rise – especially today – to an extremely urgent need for debates on the need and necessity of working to deepen human reflexivity in the complex modern world, in which equality should mean irreducible respect for the indisputable rights of every human being (see Obrycka, Piekarski, Sałapata, 2020). Equality education is usually identified with gender equality and feminism, but women's rights are only a starting point in a broadly understood equality. An equal school and education free from discrimination are, in this sense, a kind of aftermath of feminism. Equality education shows how to teach/learn that society is diverse and pluralistic, that people represent different races and sexual orientations, and that they practice different religions (Majewska, Rutkowska, 2007, p. 119). Equality education teaches the coexistence of this diversity in the dimension of tolerance, empathy, effective communication of needs, and subjective dialogue despite differences.

## Values as the foundation of shaping a person in the educational process

Values play a fundamental role in human life, influencing all attitudes, decisions and relationships, both on a personal level, closely related to the issue of



understanding one's own "I", and on a general level, reaching more broadly into social structures. Values are considered an inseparable element of human existence; they are the direct priorities, beliefs, and goals that define an individual's future path. Value is everything that "is connected with positive emotions, that focuses human desires and aspirations, that is considered important and significant in life, worthy of desire, that which individuals care about most or that they seek as an important thing" (Marianski, 1989, p. 165). Values constitute the essence of existence and development not only of man but also of culture and civilization. Culture is the affirmation and cult of values; it is their social choice and individual experience (Tyszka, 1994). The study of values is the study of the heart of culture. The enormous influence of culture on social life takes place in four main ways: firstly – as a socialization mechanism; secondly – as establishing a system of values and criteria defining values; thirdly – as establishing patterns of behaviour, i.e. reactions to specific situations; fourthly – as constructing models (ideals) of behaviour that are the embodiment of specific values (Łukaszewski, 1984).

Based on history, tradition and religion, each social community has developed its canon of values or ideas essential to a given community. Their implementation is the basis of individual and group identity. A socially accepted and sanctioned system of values creates a common belief among group members about the importance of various matters. It is related to the natural human tendency to evaluate and, in connection with this, to the hierarchy of people, objects, phenomena, events or ideas. Norms are based on the values that function in a given community, which in turn determine the applicable patterns of morality standards of behaviour in specific situations at the level of the actions of an individual, group, or nation. Thanks to norms, we know how to behave towards other people and what behaviours we can expect towards ourselves. The values professed by an individual or community condition the actions taken. Depending on a given culture, values can create different sets and hierarchies. However, it should be emphasized that a coherent system of values gives culture durability, allowing for better understanding and ordering of social phenomena. It strengthens the continuity of social structures and is a key that enables better understanding and fuller participation in different cultural patterns (Włodarczyk, 2003).

Meanwhile, the existence of man and culture is inscribed with continuity and change as a fundamental factor of development and progress. Social change is "any significant change in social structures, norms and customs, institutions and social roles, as well as values that determine human actions, life plans and worldviews" (Boksański, 2016, p. 11). Human civilizations have undergone profound modifications for centuries, caused by breakthrough moments of revolu-

tion, innovation and adaptation. Furthermore, it must be said that the variability of the surrounding world always leads to increased social and cultural diversity.

A rapid pace of socio-cultural changes characterizes the contemporary world. A natural consequence of this phenomenon is the revision of norms and values and restructuring of patterns of behaviour and social activities. These changes generate difficulties in finding one's way in the new world. The older generations, which were subject to socialization in conditions of constancy of cultural values and unchanging norms and principles of social life, were characteristic of the culture called by Margaret Mead the term post-figurative (Mead, 2000)<sup>1</sup>. This generation is the group of recipients of all social messages and is responsible for responding to modernization in general. The younger generations somehow steer these changes, giving them a specific direction. The cooperative nature of the intergenerational relationship is an equally important asset of modernity, primarily due to its reference to the rational choice theory (Karkowska, 2022, p. 84). Representatives of both generations make estimates of the possible advantages and disadvantages that may result from mutual interactions while considering their limits. Intercultural transmission allows for maintaining a certain balance between control influences and proper socialization (Karkowska, 2022, p. 85).

The basis of socialization is the family, which is a particular type of system in which its specific members remain in mutual relations and interact with each other. The intentional education process also occurs in the family, aiming to transmit values. Education theorists have distinguished five fundamental values preferred in education, the correct transmission of which can be a solid foundation for developing socially approved attitudes and behaviours. These are altruism, tolerance, freedom, responsibility and justice (Łobocki, 2010). The form and course of upbringing in the family are determined mainly by specific elements of the family environment, which include love in the family, parenting attitudes, parenting styles, plans and ambitions related to the child, parenting competencies, as well as mistakes made by parents along with their sources (Krakowska, 2022, p. 32).

The family environment is also the setting for how an individual acquires gender identity. It is modified by various factors, such as identification with both parents, patterns of masculinity and femininity promoted in the family and the environment, as well as the way parents perceive the roles of mother and father, which is reflected, for example, in attitudes towards the spouse or child (Karkowska, 2022, p. 102). Mirroring is a potent educational tool, allowing for posi-

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Mead, in her analysis of the formation of human identity in the process of socialization and in determining the power of intergenerational transmission, distinguished culture into the following types: postfigurative, cofigurative, prefigurative; see Mead, M. (2000). *Kultura i tożsamość. Studium dystansu międzypokoleniowego*. Warszawa: PWN.

tive or negative modelling of a child's attitudes and behaviours (Borecka-Biernat, 2023, p. 61). In shaping identity, including human gender and sexuality, family upbringing is a fundamental source for shaping social attitudes in the face of numerous diversities.

## **Asexuality – the essence of the phenomenon**

In recent years, discussions around human sexuality have expanded beyond the binary view of heterosexuality and homosexuality to encompass a much broader spectrum of sexualities, identities, and experiences. A distinct orientation, asexuality, has emerged that challenges societal norms and assumptions about human sexuality. It can be said that modern society has made much progress in better understanding and greater acceptance of numerous diversities, including those related to human identity and sexuality. Nevertheless, asexuality is still a phenomenon that faces false perceptions, stereotypes and challenges, which affects its marginalization in the mainstream society. It also constitutes a niche in the dimension of undertaken scientific research. The review of the subject literature documents attempts to describe and define this phenomenon. However, these are conclusions made in the context of research aimed at the problem of an antinomic approach to sexual identity, i.e. on the heterosexual-homosexual line<sup>2</sup>. A significant breakthrough in the understanding of asexuality came about thanks to the research of Anthony Bogaert, a Canadian psychologist and sexologist, who published the first studies focusing exclusively on this phenomenon (Bogaert 2004, 2006, 2015, 2017). In trying to define asexual people, he assumed that these people have never experienced physical attraction towards another person. However, he strongly emphasized that the adopted definition of asexuality does not exclude any sexual activity despite the lack of experienced attraction (Bogaert, 2004). At this point, it is necessary to recall that a fundamental distinction is essential for defining asexuality. It is about physical attraction and sex drive.

In simple terms, physical attraction is a feeling that is placed in the other person towards whom one feels sexual attraction. Libido, on the other hand, is sexual energy, the amount of which does not depend on the other person but results from human physiology. It can be said that the direction of this drive is directed towards no one. Asexual people can have both high libido and residual libido because it is conditioned by many individual factors, not sexual orientation itself (Żukowicz, 2021).

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<sup>2</sup> Mentions of the phenomenon of asexuality have been noted, for example, by the following researchers: Randall L. Sell, M. R. Johnson, P. Nurius, W. Masters, V. Johnson, R. Kolodny.

Table 1  
*Desire and drive, according to the Asfera Association<sup>3</sup>*

Physical attraction	Sex drive
A feeling otherwise known as sexual desire.	A feeling otherwise known as libido.
A feeling directed towards another person associated with perceiving them as sexually attractive	Sexual energy demanding reduction.

Source: Asfera. *Słownik pojęć*. [Dictionary of Terms] See <https://asfera.org.pl/sownik-pojec/> [access: 20.11.2023].

It is also worth mentioning the division into sexual orientation and romantic orientation. While sexual orientation, in the narrowest sense, is supposed to concern sexual attraction and perceiving the other person as sexually attractive, romantic orientation is supposed only to indicate the direction of establishing deep relationships in order to create domestic partnerships (Strzelczak, 2019). Such an approach could somehow explain the phenomenon that occurs among asexual people. Despite the lack of physical attraction, they want to enter into a romantic relationship with people to whom they can give genuine feelings. They can function adequately in such a relationship and derive sincere satisfaction.

Asexuality is not a sexual or genital dysfunction. It is not a physical condition; "it is not synonymous with erectile dysfunction or impotence. (...) Asexuality is a sexual orientation, which does not affect the ability to engage in sexual activity" (Asexuality Archive, 2012, p. 10). Nowadays, asexuality is often seen as a spectrum from which emerge atypical branches of sexual orientation, where feelings of physical attraction do not occur in the way that is typical for non-asexual people. Such a spectrum is partially presented in the table below.

Table 2  
*Orientations and micro elements of the asexuality spectrum according to the Asfera Association*

Abrosexuality	It applies to people whose sexual orientation is variable or fluid.
Eosexuality	It applies to people who know they are on the asexual spectrum, but none of the existing labels fit them.
Cupiosexuality	It applies to people who, despite not feeling physical attraction, want to enter into a sexual relationship.

<sup>3</sup> Asfera is an association established in 2019 whose goal is to improve the well-being of asexual people, which is manifested by active education about orientation, increasing social awareness, and direct help to asexual people who are in difficult life situations.

Table 2 (cont.)

Dreamsexuality	It applies to people who experience physical attraction only during sleep.
Vitrumsexuality	It applies to people who feel separated from the physical attraction they are experiencing as if they were looking at it from behind some dimension, window, glass, et cetera.

Source: Asfera. *Słownik pojęć*. [Dictionary of Terms] See <https://asfera.org.pl/sownik-pojec/> [access: 20.11.2023].

Although asexuality is most often considered in the category of sexual orientation, not all researchers agree with this position. They ask whether asexuality can be unquestionably called sexual orientation, or would it be more accurate to turn to the category of diverse experiences of sexual desire? They direct their doubts towards its possible connection with hypoactive sexual drive syndrome, otherwise known as HSDD or hypolipidemia. According to this view, asexuality is an orientation that "masks" the actual sexual orientation, which is not evident due to low sex drive and not engaging in any sexual activity because of it. However, according to Bogaert, a person who does not feel a physical attraction to either sex (and has never felt such an attraction) is best described as having an asexual orientation (Bogaert, 2006). This position is also confirmed by the DSM-V classification of mental disorders of the American Medical Society, according to which: "If a long-term state of lack of desire better explains a person's asexuality, then the disorder should not be diagnosed in both women (FSIAD – Female Sexual Interest/Arousal Disorder) and men (HSSD)" (Żukowicz, 2021, p. 34).

The phenomenon of asexuality as a manifestation of the diversity experienced in the contemporary world has significant implications not only individually but undoubtedly socially. The foundation of the education of society is values, and education for respecting diversity is an autotelic value, i.e. a value in itself.

## Research Methodology

The above theoretical introduction constitutes, within the possible framework of the article, a prelude to the presentation of the applied research procedure. The conducted study concerned the attitudes of people identifying as asexual towards domestic partnerships, with particular emphasis on the context of values experienced in the process of family upbringing by these people. It was assumed that family upbringing is a point of reference that allows for identifying specific values and patterns of behaviour that play a significant role in shaping a person's identity, including gender identity and specific preferences.

The research goal was to learn about the attitudes of the asexual people surveyed towards domestic partnerships, taking into account the role and significance of values experienced in their family upbringing environments. The realization of this goal required answers to the following detailed questions.

1. How do the surveyed asexual people refer to their sexuality and domestic partnerships?
2. What values in domestic partnerships are valued by the surveyed asexual persons?
3. What was the upbringing process like in the family of the asexual persons studied?
4. What values were respected in the family environment of the asexual persons studied?

In order to operationalize concepts from thematic areas covered by the construction of the above problems, they were indexed using definitional indicators. Such indexing enabled reliable capture and further analysis of the studied phenomenon.

In the study, the diagnostic survey method was used, which covered "all types of social phenomena of significance for upbringing, as well as the states of social awareness, opinions and views of specific communities, the growth of the studied phenomena, their tendencies and intensity" (Pilch, Bauman, 2001, pp. 79-80). The adopted research method used the technique of an open, individual interview, which was the most appropriate to the research subject (see Żegnalek, 2010). An interview questionnaire was constructed, which consisted of the following sections: perception of one's sexuality and domestic partnerships, preferred values in domestic partnerships, the course of the upbringing process in the family environment, and values respected and experienced in the family. The selection of people for the study was deliberate. Information about possible participation in the study was posted on the internet group *Aseksualni Polska*. Currently, this group has about 4,600 members and is probably the most prominent Polish internet community associating with people identifying as asexual. The constituted research group included 24 people, among whom were 12 women, 7 men and 5 people with other gender identities, including four identifying as non-binary and one identifying as agender (AMAB, i.e. assigned male at birth). The study involved only adults between 18 and 45 years of age who gave their consent to the study, which was a formal requirement of the study. Among the respondents, 14 had higher education, 9 were in secondary education (including six people in the course of studies), and one was in primary education. 21 respondents came from the city, and the remaining 3 were from the countryside.

The study was conducted using the subjects' preferred instant messenger. The statements given were recorded, written down, and then processed under the principle of anonymity.

## Analysis and discussion of results

Here, the research results will be presented, constituting condensed possible answers to the questions, considering the editorial restrictions imposed on a scientific article.

At the outset, it should be emphasized that the respondents had varied experiences with domestic partnerships, reflected in their affiliation to distinct groups: A, B, and C.

Table 3  
*Division of asexual persons surveyed*

Group	Number of respondents
A	4
B	12
C	8

Source: A. Małolepszy (2024). *Postawy osób identyfikujących się jako aseksualne względem związków partnerskich w kontekście wartości doświadczanych w procesie wychowania* [Attitudes of Persons Identifying as Asexual Towards Domestic Partnerships in the Context of Values Experienced in the Upbringing Process] (Unpublished Master's thesis), Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa.

Group A consisted of four people currently in a domestic partnership, group B consisted of twelve people who were not currently in a domestic relationship but had previous domestic relationship experiences, and group C consisted of eight people who had never been in a domestic relationship. This division allowed for the exploration of diverse perspectives, resulting not only from current life situations but also from previous experiences in perceiving one's sexuality, relationship to domestic partnerships, and, of course, in the context of current, preferred, or experienced values.

When defining their sexuality, the people participating in the study related it to their relationship with their partner, which was a kind of growing rapprochement of this relationship on the lines of closeness in general, intimacy, and sex.

In the context of closeness, intimacy and sex, the respondents presented various attitudes that expressed their boundaries and needs. The sphere of closeness, understood as the most superficial physical contact (e.g. holding hands or hugging), was not a problem for most of the respondents from groups A, B and C. All respondents expressed their acceptance of this form of closeness, and some even emphasized its fundamental importance in the relationship. Including intimate contacts of a more or less sexual nature (e.g. kissing or touching) differentiated the groups of respondents. For three of the people studied, any contact that went beyond their sexual boundaries was unacceptable; they had difficulty imagining themselves in situations that required sexual intimacy. Others, however, despite initial resistance, accepted such closeness over time.

Table 4

*The attitude of the asexual respondents towards the sphere of closeness, intimacy and sex in relationships*

		Closeness	Intimacy	Sex
Group A	Yes	4	4	3
	No	-	-	1
	No opinion	-	-	-
Group B	Yes	12	11	9
	No	-	1	3
	No opinion	-	-	-
Group C	Yes	8	5	3
	No	-	2	5
	No opinion	-	-	-

Source: A. Małolepszy (2024). *Postawy osób identyfikujących się jako aseksualne względem związków partnerskich w kontekście wartości doświadczanych w procesie wychowania* (Unpublished Master's thesis), Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa.

The most significant discordance of responses was found in the area of sexual activity. Fifteen people expressed their willingness to engage in sexual activity, while nine people, including most of Group C, considered it unacceptable. It is worth emphasizing that many of the respondents, despite their lack of interest in sex, are willing to engage in sexual activity due to their partner's needs, which indicates a willingness to compromise and make sacrifices. The diverse approach to the sphere of closeness and intimacy shows how diverse the needs and boundaries of asexual people can be, which requires an individual approach to each relationship and partnership.

An important aspect that differentiated relationships in partnerships of asexual people was understanding their own needs and the needs of their partner.

Table 5

*List of prioritization of needs in relationships by the surveyed asexual persons*

Needs	Group A	Group B	Group C
Balance	4	4	3
Partner	-	5	3
Personal	-	2	2
No opinion	-	1	-

Source: A. Małolepszy (2024). *Postawy osób identyfikujących się jako aseksualne względem związków partnerskich w kontekście wartości doświadczanych w procesie wychowania* (Unpublished Master's thesis), Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa.



The analysis of the prioritization of needs indicates three main approaches among the respondents: balance between one's own needs and the needs of the partner, partner's priority, and the priority of one's own needs. All people from group A declared striving for a balance of needs, which reflects the desire to create relationships based on mutual respect and understanding. In group B, there was greater diversity. Some people focused on balance, others on their own or partner's needs, which resulted from previous relationship experiences and personal preferences. Despite not being in a relationship, similar diversity occurred in group C, where the respondents expressed a hypothetical position on whose needs would be a priority for them.

In terms of preferred values in relationships, the study showed that the values that the respondents considered crucial and desirable were primarily communication, trust, honesty, freedom, agreement, understanding, respect, tolerance, openness, security, maturity, good heart, support, self-development, self-care, agreeableness, motivation, commitment, cooperation and equality. Regardless of the relationship status, the respondents unanimously indicated that the key elements are communication, trust, and honesty, which are the foundations of every partnership. Another significant value is the agreement of views, which enables harmonious cooperation and mutual understanding. Freedom, the ability to spend time independently or integrate with others, is a highly valued value. The emphasis on the so-called good heart as a feature meaning selflessness and a tendency to help the weaker is worth noting. At the same time, the respondents indicated values that they find unacceptable in a relationship. These included lying, manipulation, conservatism, extremism, intolerance, lack of similar perspectives, domination, inequality, calculation, indifference, sexism, violence, egoism, consumerism, possessiveness, polygamy, stagnation and hierarchy. It is worth noting that a large proportion of the respondents cannot imagine a relationship with a person who promotes any form of intolerance, including homophobia, queerphobia, xenophobia, racism or misogyny. Extreme conservatism was also listed as highly unacceptable. Some people would not tolerate relationships in which there would be a clear hierarchy or dominance of one party over the other, as well as possessiveness affecting life's personal and social sphere. The asexual people studied in partnerships prefer values that promote balance, trust and openness while avoiding all forms of domination, intolerance and extremes.

An essential aspect of the analysis undertaken on the vital issue of values was the respondents' statements on the course of the upbringing process in their families. The researchers intended to search for clues to the formation of asexual preferences in the influence of the family. Most respondents (16 people) came from complete families, while 8 participants grew up in single-parent families. Family structure, although necessary for the context of upbringing and

shaping values, did not seem to impact the relationship status of the respondents significantly. Those raised in intact and single-parent families were evenly distributed across groups A, B, and C, suggesting that other factors, such as individual experiences and values, maybe more influential in shaping relationship approaches.

The families from which the participants came practised different parenting styles: autocratic, democratic, mixed, permissive and neglectful. The most common style was the mixed style, which usually combined an autocratic approach with elements of neglect or rejection. Such complex parenting styles could influence later attitudes towards values in relationships. People raised in an autocratic environment, often neglected, could develop a strong desire for equality and openness in their relationships, seeing them as a contrast to authoritarian, controlling parenting practices.

The family relationships of the respondents were varied: from very good, through good and average, to poor. There were also mixed relationships, where contact with one parent was close and supportive and with the other more distant or conflictual. A better quality of family relationships, understood through the prism of critical indicators such as a sense of support, a sense of comfort, the frequency of conflicts and the activity of parents in the child's life, was conducive to the later formation of positive partnerships. People who felt more significant support and comfort in the family were more likely to seek relationships based on the same values. Therefore, it can be stated that the quality of family relationships results from the mutual interaction of these indicators, which shape attitudes towards values in later relationships.

Data analysis shows that people with better family relationships were more likely to replicate the values promoted in their family environment in their relationships. Values such as trust, honesty, understanding and cooperation, which were present in their families, became the foundation for building partnerships for them. It is understandable because the experience of a positive model of relationships based on mutual support and respect encouraged the respondents to reflect the same principles in their personal lives.

In turn, people who had worse relationships with their families were more likely to reject the values promoted in their family environment and seek the opposite in their relationships. For example, people raised in families with an autocratic or neglectful parenting style may have sought to create a relationship based on equality, cooperation and freedom as a reaction to experiences of control, domination or neglect. Such an approach can be interpreted as an attempt to supplement and compensate for emotional deficiencies resulting from difficult family experiences. In their behaviours and actions, the subjects may strive to create relationships with room for openness, acceptance and mutual support, which allows them to build a more balanced and satisfying emotional life.

## Conclusion

The subject of equality education, as indicated in the introduction, is the problems of discrimination and stereotyping of various social groups and individuals due to various characteristics, such as gender, skin colour, national or ethnic origin, religion or worldview, degree of physical fitness, health condition, age, sexual orientation, social and economic status. It should, therefore, be emphasized that it cannot be "identified only with sex education or gender education (education in the field of biological and cultural gender issues)" (Kamińska, 2020, p.103).

This article concerns asexual people who are characterized by an uncommon type of sexuality, which may generate the problem of lack of acceptance or exclusion from social groups. That is a significant challenge for contemporary education.

The conducted research on the attitudes of asexual people towards domestic partnerships in the context of preferred values provides knowledge on how important an individual approach to their needs and boundaries is. The respondents indicated the values that are key to them. Trust, honesty, freedom and equality are the values that should play the leading role in equality education. Equality in relationships understood as a balance in meeting partners' needs and avoiding domination or extreme attitudes, is essential for these people. In turn, intolerance, hierarchization of relationships, possessiveness and all forms of discrimination are unacceptable. Equality education should, therefore, promote dialogue based on respect for diversity, both in the context of sexual orientations and individual preferences, while avoiding the imposition of stereotypical and exclusionary norms.

The conclusions from the research fully confirm that equality education should be based on promoting values such as trust, honesty, acceptance and equality. It is also crucial to sensitize young people to diverse experiences and needs, which allows for creating a space where everyone can feel accepted and respected, regardless of their identity or preferences. This education should also emphasize the importance of communication and compromise and reject all forms of intolerance that can marginalize or exclude individuals from social life.

Knowledge of the phenomenon being studied is insufficient to learn non-discrimination and tolerant attitudes. It should be emphasized that equality education cannot be limited to knowledge transfer. For it to have a genuine social effect, care should be taken to educate people about equality and diversity. It is understood as undertaking specific actions in various educational institutions run by specific teachers, educators, pedagogues, and educators in formal and informal education.

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## **Wartości jako determinanty postaw osób aseksualnych wobec związków partnerskich w optyce doświadczeń wychowawczych. Wyzwania dla edukacji**

### **Streszczenie**

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie, w wyniku przeprowadzonych badań, postaw osób identyfikujących się jako aseksualne względem związków partnerskich ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem kontekstu wartości doświadczanych w procesie wychowania rodzinnego przez te osoby. Założono bowiem, że wychowanie w rodzinie stanowi punkt odniesienia, pozwalający na wyodrębnienie konkretnych wartości i wzorców zachowań, które mają istotny udział w procesie kształtowania tożsamości człowieka. Osoby aseksualne, często niezrozumiane przez otoczenie, postrzegają związki przede wszystkim jako przestrzeń emocjonalnej bliskości budowanej na fundamencie między innymi takich wartości, jak: zaufanie, szczerość, swoboda, zgodność poglądów, wyrozumiałość, szacunek, tolerancja, otwartość, bezpieczeństwo, dojrzałość, współpraca oraz równość. Tworzenie zdrowego środowiska wychowawczego, które wspiera różnorodność, rozwija szacunek dla odmiennych tożsamości i pomaga eliminować stereotypy, takie jak te dotyczące aseksualizmu, to jest wyzwanie dla edukacji pod szyldem edukacji równościowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wartości, wychowanie, równość, aseksualizm, związek partnerski, edukacja.





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Julia BILARZEWSKA  
Independent Researcher

Katarzyna GRUNT-MEJER  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5679-5322>  
SWPS University, Department of Psychology and Law in Poznań, Poland

Sara LADRA  
Independent Researcher

Julia NETER  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7010-1849>  
Independent Researcher

Izabela MARCINIAK  
Independent Researcher

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**Contact:** [julia.bilarzewska@gmail.com](mailto:julia.bilarzewska@gmail.com); [kgrunt-mejer@swps.edu.pl](mailto:kgrunt-mejer@swps.edu.pl); [ladrasara@gmail.com](mailto:ladrasara@gmail.com); [juliettner@gmail.com](mailto:juliettner@gmail.com); [marciniakizabella@gmail.com](mailto:marciniakizabella@gmail.com)

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## What Do Young People Want to Know about Sex, and Where Do They Look for Answers? Case Study of Poland

### Abstract

The survey included 341 people aged 18–30 who answered the following questions: What sexuality-related question have you wanted answered recently? Were you able to get an answer to this question? Where did you try to find the answer to your question? The sources of knowledge about sexuality that the respondents valued were also checked. The responses were subject to thematic analysis.

Analysis of the responses revealed five major topics containing 39 themes. The topics were sexual health (the most frequently sought answers concerned contraception, physiology and anatomy), sexual activity (the most frequent question concerned anal sex), sexual pleasure (the most frequent theme concerned orgasm), psychology and relationships (the most frequent theme concerned the quality of desire and sex in long-term relationships), and socio-cultural knowledge (the dominant theme concerned gender identity and sexual orientation). The most common source of knowledge is the Internet, mainly social media.

The results indicate a significant need for even elementary education on anatomy, physiology and contraception. Questions related to the impact of pornography and the need for respondents to understand rapid social changes, including diverse orientations and identities, are also prevalent.

**Keywords:** sex education, conservatism, politics, Poland, Eastern Europe, young adults.

## Socio-political context

In 2015, the conservative Law and Justice Party came to power in Poland. Its members and its supporting social groups of right-wing and religious fundamentalists use a narrative in which "gender" (understood primarily as a construct that undermines the division between "naturally" female and male) is a dangerous ideology that threatens the natural order and family values. Actions taken in the area of sexual and reproductive rights are presented as a plan to depopulate Europe that is supposed to lead to profits for companies or clinics offering contraceptives, in vitro fertilization procedures, and abortion (Korolczuk & Graff, 2018). Despite some changes after the 2023 elections, no changes have been observed to date in three critical areas for sexual and reproductive health: the rights of sexual minorities, access to legal abortion and contraception, and sex education.

In recent years, a ruling of the Constitutional Tribunal was enacted, which made abortion illegal in the case of severe fetal abnormalities. According to the law, abortion can be performed only in two cases in Poland: (1) if the life of the pregnant woman is endangered and (2) in the case of a pregnancy resulting from a crime. This law is one of the strictest in European countries (Amnesty International, 2020). Doctors do not perform abortions even if one of the two remaining premises is fulfilled because they are fearful of being attacked by fundamentalists. It has resulted in the first cases of preventable deaths of women and the denial of women's right to abortion in the case of life-threatening danger<sup>1</sup>. Among other things, this would mean a significant limitation on grassroots sex education that promotes equality and acceptance. Non-heteronormative people do not enjoy many civil rights in Poland, such as the possibility of marriage and the right to protection from discrimination (Majka-Rostek, 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: <https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pl/content/sprawa-smierci-kobiety-w-ciazy-w-szpitalu-w-pszczyntnie-zaistniala-ustawowa-przeslanka>; <https://bip.brpo.gov.pl/pl/content/rpo-ciaza-blizniacza-kobieta-szpital-smierc>; <https://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/7,100865,29845502,zakaz-aborcji-zabija-ciezarne.html>



The increasing conservative radicalization of the public sphere has also harmed the state of Polish sexual education. Since the political changes of 1989, sex ed in Poland has been the subject of a worldview dispute, and it was only available for a short time (with parental consent) in Polish schools. Conservative circles have advocated since 1989 that knowledge about sexuality should only be taught by parents following their values (Wąż, 2017). As a result, the curriculum for the only subject that potentially addresses sexuality (Education for Family Life) has focused mainly on a moralistic anti-sex campaign rather than content that promotes safer and more enjoyable sex. In April 2020, the Polish Parliament voted on a civic bill that bans sex education, under which sex educators would face prison sentences (Savage, 2020; Bodnar, 2020). The PRO (Right to Life) Foundation is engaged in social action in which vans are driven on the streets of Polish cities informing that the LGBT lobby wants to teach masturbation to 4-year-old children<sup>2</sup>, which is supposed to be a paraphrase of the WHO guidelines on sex education. The last Minister of Education publicly described sex education as demoralizing to youth<sup>3</sup>.

## The state of sex education in schools

As mentioned earlier, only Education for Family Life (EFL) theoretically offers knowledge about human sexual life and "about the principles of conscious and responsible parenthood, the value of the family, life in the prenatal phase and methods and means of conscious procreation" (Journal of Laws of 2014, item 395). Unfortunately, these EFL textbooks differ from the recommendations of the World Health Organization concerning comprehensive, holistic sexual education (WHO, 2010). The content concerning sexuality is not based on the latest medical and sexological knowledge, and it has not been adapted to students' stages of development. Moreover, it reproduces and perpetuates gender stereotypes (Gorajska et al., 2018) and promotes homophobic and transphobic messages (Grunt-Mejer, 2017). These textbooks present the "naturalness" of gender differences, gender complementarity and binarity, leaving no room for non-stereotypical gender behaviours and expressions (Chmura-Rutkowska et al., 2016). Homosexuality and trans-genderism are presented as disorders of sexual development (Król, 2007, 2009). In the textbooks recommended by the Ministry of National Education on this issue, one can read about the possibility of preventing homosexuality and therapy for homosexual people, both of which are con-

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<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/warszawa/warszawa-zatrzymanie-furgonetki-fundacji-pro-prawo-do-zycia/gy0p7sl>

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from: <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114883,27977054,przemyslaw-czarnek-o-edukacji-seksualnej-typu-b-demoralizacja.html>

trary to the current state of sexological knowledge and the Position of the Polish Society of Sexology (2016). Waszynska, Groth, and Kowalczyk (2013) indicate that the transmission of such incorrect knowledge by teachers can foster misinformation, the emergence of fears and anxieties among youth, and the spread of intolerance and prejudice.

The EFL textbooks recommend an "ecological lifestyle of marriage" based on natural family planning methods (Król, 2009). "Ecological" refers to the assumption that any contraception (i.e., condoms, spermicides, birth control pills) interferes with the natural physiological process and is a means of sexually exploiting women, thus resulting in women's health problems and a threat to gender equality (Król 2007). There is also false information that some contraceptives have early abortive effects (Król, 2013). A potential unintended pregnancy has only one acceptable solution: giving birth to the child. Abortion is portrayed as the murder of a child, resulting in lifelong trauma and a host of health risks for the woman (Król 2007).

The EFL textbooks portray male masturbation as an immature, selfish activity that can lead to addiction and sexual problems with partners; female masturbation is not mentioned (Król 2007). On the one hand, girls are portrayed as uninterested in sex and not naturally desirous (Król 2007); on the other hand, it is mainly women who are warned against premarital sexual activity and are warned in very frightening terms of the unwanted consequences of intercourse. Girls are held responsible for not allowing sex before marriage, including "not provoking" men. When addressing the topic of rape, the textbooks lack any consideration of male culpability, responsibility, and self-control; rape itself is trivialized, and no mention is given of where to report it or what penalties the offender faces (Grunt-Mejer, 2017).

The lack of professional teaching staff results in classes being taken over by individuals with a high potential for worldview conflicts of interest, such as the priests, nuns and lay catechists who conduct (Catholic) religion classes in schools. Some schools counteract these systemic deficiencies by inviting professional sex educators or using school funds or special programs funded by city budgets. However, such attempts to fix the system are met with disapproval by the current Minister of Education and Science, who encourages school superintendents to prevent sex educators from entering schools. According to the minister, "the superintendent is the guardian of normality in schools who prevents the demoralization of children through extended sex education" (Bagińska, 2021).

## **Young people's current knowledge about sexuality**

The assumptions of right-wing politicians about the validity of teaching sexuality in the privacy of the home are not supported by data on at-home sex education.

According to a report by the Ponton group, 53% of respondents did not receive any information on contraception at home, and most young people did not talk to their caregivers about sexual violence, masturbation and sexual orientation. At the same time, at school, they are provided with unreliable information or none at all<sup>4</sup>.

Bulkowski et al. (2015) examined knowledge of selected issues (structure and functioning of the female and male reproductive systems, sexually transmitted infections, fertility and ways of preventing pregnancy) among young adults. The results showed that a high percentage of respondents have misconceptions that may promote risky sexual behaviour. For example, more than half of the respondents hold the misconception that the use of condoms prevents the risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections; nearly one in three women and one in four men incorrectly believe that oral sex cannot lead to STI; and more than one-third of the respondents view coitus interruptus as an effective method of preventing pregnancy. The respondents' sexual activity did not moderate the results. In almost all questions, pupils who could attend EFL classes at secondary school but did not so do even once scored better. The pupils (8%) who had contact with professionals outside of school as a source of information had more excellent knowledge about human sexuality than their peers. The same applies to young people who read youth and pro-health magazines and those who obtained knowledge about sexuality from teachers other than EFL teachers (Bulkowski et al., 2015).

## Where young people get their sexuality knowledge from

The three sources of information on human sexuality most often mentioned by young people are peers, family life education teachers, and parents. Young people learn about sexuality most often from each other, and they gain knowledge from online portals, magazines, and pornographic content, all of which are diverse in terms of the values they represent (Bulkowski et al., 2015). Among boys, pornographic films are cited as the fourth most important source of knowledge about sexuality. Unfortunately, contact with pornographic content can be a source of inferiority and can lead to misconceptions about relationships and human sexual responses (Pilarczyk, 2018). Among girls, women's and health magazines are fourth in the hierarchy (Bulkowski et al., 2015). On the one hand, many sexual health professionals contribute to social media; on the other hand, there are many sites spreading misinformation about sexuality, thus creating unrealistic expectations.

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<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from: <https://ponton.org.pl/raporty/>

NGOs such as "Ponton", "Spunk", "Jaskółka", "Navigator", and "IFMSA Poland" sex education groups, and students of higher education institutions are working on behalf of reliable sexual education. However, due to limited opportunities, they usually offer short meetings or phone advice in critical situations. In recent years, there has also been Anja Rubik's *sexed.pl* initiative, which promotes knowledge about sexuality for youngsters and adults in an attractive way and with the participation of celebrities. In recent years, numerous grassroots activities aimed at supporting LGBT+ people have also emerged (e.g., "Tolerado", "Stonewall Group", or "Campaign Against Homophobia"). They conduct educational activities, support groups and various other promotional activities. Even though these initiatives are valuable in terms of content, access to them is minimal. People from smaller towns or with fewer cultural resources are particularly vulnerable to exclusion in the context of sound sex education.

## Purpose of the study

Given the increasing role of grassroots initiatives and the increasing difficulty of accessing valuable, factually correct information about sexuality in schools, it is vital to determine what kind of content young people currently need and where they can find it. Knowing what information is sought and the most convenient ways of obtaining it can help design both a channel and content with a broader reach and impact than the initiatives described above.

## Method

The survey was conducted using an online questionnaire and was distributed in Facebook groups using the snowball method. The survey consisted of 2 metric questions (gender and age), one closed question and three open questions related to sought-for sexual knowledge:

1. What sexuality-related question did you want to be answered recently?
2. Were you able to get an answer to this question?
3. Where were you able to find the answer to your question? Provide sources of information.
4. If you regularly use available sources of sexuality knowledge, such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, blogs, newspapers, books, TV shows, podcasts, et cetera., provide their names.

## Study group

Four hundred twenty people responded to the survey. Responses from minors were excluded as the survey required adult participation due to the difficulty of obtaining consent from a minor's guardian in an anonymous online survey. The study was anonymous, assumed no significant risk of subject discomfort, and included adult participants. Therefore, the local ethics committee (SWPS University) waived the requirement for approval. Each participant was informed that he or she could withdraw from participation at any study stage without any consequences. Responses from people over 30 years old were also removed as the survey was designed to identify the educational needs of young adults who experienced problems with sound sex education in schools between 2000 and 2020, a period of increasing conservative political influence on the design of sex education.

The final sample consisted of 341 individuals aged 18–30 years ( $M = 21.6$ ,  $SD = 3.00$ ), including 280 females (82.1%), 55 males (16.1%), and 6 (1.8%) individuals who identified their gender as other. Twenty-five individuals indicated that they had not recently sought answers to any question about sex. The remaining 316 participants indicated 345 questions about sexuality to which they had recently sought answers.

## Thematic analysis

The researchers conducted a thematic analysis of the responses given by the respondents, following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (Brown & Clarke, 2006). In the first step, the responses were divided into five sections, 1 section for each researcher. Each researcher reviewed her data set and independently created codes. The authors then discussed the codes as a group and identified the main topics (1<sup>st</sup>-order codes), themes (based on 2<sup>nd</sup>-order codes) and sub-themes (based on 3<sup>rd</sup>-order codes), thus creating a code tree. The code names and definitions were precisely described and agreed on.

In the second step of the analysis, four researchers (IM, JB, JN, SL) independently identified all responses using an agreed pool of codes. One person's response could receive more than one code. It occurred primarily when the participants gave several problems/questions in one response.

The fifth researcher (KGM) assigned a final code to each response (or, in some cases, two final codes). When at least two researchers assigned the same code, this code remained the final one.

The coding convergence rate of the four researchers was determined by four identical indications of a second-level code (a theme) for a particular respond-

ent's answer, and it was 63.3%. It means that out of 316 coded responses, in 200 cases, all four researchers gave the same code on at least the second level of the coding tree, e.g., health (1st level) -> drugs/medication (2nd level). In 54 responses (17.1% of the responses), three researchers assigned the same code; in 58 cases (18.3% of the responses), two researchers assigned the same code (where the other two researchers may have assigned a standard code or two different codes). In the four remaining cases, where four researchers suggested four different second-level codes, the code was discussed in a group, and a shared decision was made about the final coding.

Five main topics (based on 1<sup>st</sup>-order codes) emerged: Sexual Activity, Health, Socio-Cultural Knowledge, Psychology and Relationships, and Pleasure; these initially consisted of 29 themes (based on 2<sup>nd</sup>-order codes) and 19 subthemes (based on 3<sup>rd</sup>-order codes). After the second step of the analysis, for the sake of greater clarity, it was decided to group some of the codes that occurred only once into the typical "other" category, e.g., "long-distance relationship", which occurred only once in "psychology and relationships -> long-distance relationship", was eventually coded as "psychology and relationships -> other". This process resulted in 5 topics consisting of 28 themes and 17 subthemes.

## Findings

### Sought information

The most frequently sought information was issues related to health, mainly contraception (both female, which was most often hormonal, and male, which was most often condoms) and Anatomy and functioning of the body. In the latter two cases, the questions mainly concerned the structure of the female genital organs (e.g., hymen, vaginal depth, "normal" size of labia, and location of the G-spot). In addition, female ejaculation, sex during menstruation and delayed menstruation were frequently raised. Questions about male sexual functioning most often concerned sexual dysfunction (erectile dysfunction and premature ejaculation) and questions about pre-ejaculation. Other questions in the Health topic included the probability of getting pregnant during various sexual activities (unwanted pregnancy) and problems with getting pregnant (wanted pregnancy). There were also multiple questions about the possibility of getting infected with STIs during various activities and methods of testing for STIs. Additional questions were related to menstrual cups, lube use, the effect of pregnancy and childbirth on sex, and pain dysfunction in women.

In the Sexual Activity theme, many people were looking for information about anal sex: preparing for it from the safety and hygiene side and information

about dealing with pain during it. Other questions on this topic included oral sex, ways of making sex more interesting with toys, and kinky sex.

In the Pleasure topic, a significant number of questions concerned the lack of pleasure from sex, even though this topic was raised only by women aged 18–22. There were also many questions about the lack of orgasm during penetration, the distinction between clitoral and vaginal orgasm, and ways to practice reaching orgasm or satisfying the partner.

In the Relationships topic, the most frequent themes were low libido and the factors determining its level, desire discrepancy between partners and its impact on a relationship. Other questions regarded sexual violence, how to recognize it in the context of a relationship, and the role of emotions in sexuality.

In the Socio-cultural topic, there were many questions about sexual phenomena and labels related to gender identity and the direction of sexual or romantic attraction, e.g., non-binarity, pansexuality, polyamory, xeno-sexuality, and cis-sexuality. In particular, the themes of trans-genderism (in the context of understanding and communicating with transgender people), as well as asexuality and homosexuality (in the context of learning about oneself), were frequently raised. All the topics and themes are listed in Table 1.

74.1% of participants had had their questions answered; 18.7% said they had not found the answer; the rest had not recently sought answers to questions about sexuality. 96.1%. Of those who had found an answer indicated the source of information. Of those who did not find an answer, only 15.4% (10 people) indicated the sources where they tried to get the answer. These were usually websites and, in 2 cases, friends.

Table 1  
*Topics, themes and subthemes with example questions*

Topic	Theme	Subtheme	Example of a question	Frequency
Sexual activity	initiation	-	How to prepare for the "first time"?	3
	kink/fetish	-	How to spice up gentle BDSM?	6
	masturbation	-	Does masturbation worsen intercourse with your partner?	4
	penetration	-	Why don't I feel anything during penetration?	2
	sex positions	-	What are Christian sex positions?	5
	anal sex	-	Is an enema necessary before anal sex?	19
	oral sex	-	How do I start oral sex?	4

Table 1 (cont.)

Topic	Theme	Subtheme	Example of a question	Frequency
Sexual activity	toys	-	Is there a risk of becoming addicted to vibrators?	10
	other	-	What is a "rainbow kiss"?	1
Health	anatomy & physiology	women's	Does female ejaculation exist?	31
		men's	Can a penis break?	10
		other	Reasons for decreased libido.	6
	contraception	types	Health effects of hormonal contraception.	17
		effectiveness	What is the most practical combination of contraception types?	10
		morning-after pill	How do I get emergency contraception (the morning-after pill)?	4
		other	How should I protect myself during anal sex?	37
	infections	-	STD testing (types, cost)	14
	pregnancy/fertility	-	Possibility of fertilization without penetration.	15
	wellness	-	What does a visit to a sexologist look like?	7
	dysfunctions	-	What should I do if I have pain during intercourse?	8
	treatment/drugs	vaginismus	How to treat vaginismus?	2
		-	Effects of SSRI drugs on the experience of pleasure during sex.	2
other	-	Are there foods I can eat to make my intimate areas taste better?	11	
Socio-Cultural Knowledge	sex and gender norms	-	What does it mean that someone is cisgender?	7
	norms	-	Am I the only one who cries after sex?	9
	problematic behaviour/preferences	-	Am I addicted to pornography?	4
	identity and orientation	LGB	Is it ok among gay men if one never wants to be passive?	6
		asexuality	Can asexual people also feel the need/joy of masturbation?	5



Table 1 (cont.)

Topic	Theme	Subtheme	Example of a question	Frequency
Socio-Cultural Knowledge	identity and orientation	polyamory	Can I be polyamorous?	2
		transgender	How do you refer to a trans person?	5
		other	Are there heterosexual people who do not like sex?	11
	other	-	I wanted to learn more about the sexuality of people with disabilities.	5
Psychology & Relationships	quality of sex life	attractiveness	Am I at least a bit attractive?	2
		desire and desire discrepancy	Why do I not feel like having sex with my partner?	12
		psychological problems	How do you not mentally block yourself sexually?	4
		other	How does sex affect life satisfaction?	2
	relationship communication	-	How to talk to your partner without shame about sex fantasies?	3
	violence, trauma, rape	-	Can rape happen in a relationship? How do I understand it, and what steps should I take?	2
	emotions in a relationship	-	Do I meet my partner's expectations?	5
Pleasure (2)	other	-	Traumas associated with pornography and being in a long-distance relationship.	3
	orgasm	-	How to bring a woman to orgasm?	22
	lack of pleasure	-	Why does sex hurt and does not feel good?	8

## Sources of sexual knowledge

The respondents most often searched for information on the Internet: through search engines, social media (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok), websites specifically dedicated to the search topic (medical portals, doctors' blogs, websites and forums dedicated to sexuality), or YouTube. Other sources were mentioned less frequently, including books and trusted persons such as friends, acquaintances, family, partners, and gynaecologists—a few indications concerned television and newspapers.

Table 2 presents the source indications. Frequencies are not aggregated; for example, the keyword "internet" does not include the frequency of the keywords "Forum," "Portal," "YouTube," et cetera. In 109 cases, the answer was "internet" (or "search engine" or "Google") with no specification of what type of site the respondent ultimately accessed. If the specific name of a portal/app/group, et cetera., was given, it was coded below as it was given, also without aggregating the frequency, e.g., if someone gave the source name "Sypialniawka" ("Bedroom"), which is a Facebook group, it was coded only under its specific name in Table 3. It did not saturate the theme "Facebook" in Table 2. This solution was dictated by the difficulty in estimating the channel for sources with multiple channels (e.g., "sexed.pl" can refer simultaneously to a website, Instagram, book, and TV campaign).

In Table 2, we have listed the channels indicated by the respondents for acquiring information; in Table 3, we have listed the specific names of the sources.

Table 2

*Indications of information acquisition channel (when respondents did not indicate a specific source name)*

Source – channel	Specific indications	Frequency of indication
Internet, google, search engine	Internet (Google search engine)	109
	forums	16
	medical portals	15
	YouTube	13
	blogs	7
	Wikipedia	6
	pornography	1
Social media	Facebook	29
	Instagram	43
	TikTok	3
People	gynaecologist	13
	colleague, friend, close person	9
	doctor	7
	family	5
	partner	4
Other sources	others	3
	books	13
	research papers	6
	flyer	2
	TV	3
	Church	2
	newspaper	1

Table 3

*Indications of a specific source name (whether or not respondents indicated the channel of that source)*

Source – channel	Channel indications	Frequency of indication
Kasia "co z tym seksem"	Instagram & app	30
sexed.pl	book, Instagram, webpage	10
Sypialniawska	Facebook Group	9
Bez Tabu	-	4
Stonewall	YouTube	2

## Discussion

The survey was designed to identify the questions and concerns of young adults in Poland who have experienced a lack of systemic sex education in schools. The survey indicated that a significant proportion of questions concerned fundamental issues related to bodily functions, sexually transmitted infections, and contraception, all of which are areas that fall under sexual education program types B and C. There is a lack of this content in Polish education, which (if it exists at all) most resembles a program focused on sexual abstinence). The problematic situation concerning reproductive issues (including access to abortion and contraception) is a result of changes in Polish law which have taken place during the last decade. Abortion has become almost wholly forbidden, which also translates into a lack of transfer of knowledge about it (about both the methods and the dangers of abortion performed in inappropriate conditions) to a broader group of people than just future doctors. Information about grassroots initiatives of women helping each other to have safe abortions abroad mainly reaches highly educated people who are involved in women's issues, leaving a significant group of women excluded from this information. The situation regarding emergency contraception, currently available (since 01.05.2024) in Poland by so-called "pharmacy prescription", is also problematic, as there are uncertainties about the legal status of prescribing it to women between 15 and 18 years old<sup>5</sup> and the trial nature of distribution, involving only a proportion of pharmacies. Many pharmacies do not have the drugs on sale regularly, which limits access, especially for women in smaller towns and rural areas and for the less affluent. Good educational programs should take into account these systemic limitations: they should target very different groups of young people and provide information about grassroots initiatives involving

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/w-srode-wchodzi-w-zycie-rozporzadzenie-w-sprawie-pigulki-dzien-po-0>

contraception and abortion, ways of obtaining financial support, and the scope of Polish law (including the lack of a penalty in the case of self-administration of abortion pills).

On the one hand, many of the questions relating to gender, sexual, and relational identities indicate a remarkable need for education about the meaning of GSRD labels (such as polyamory, cisgender, et cetera.); on the other hand, these questions concern training in social skills such as appropriate communication with non-binary and transgender people. Some respondents indicated that questions about identity and the confusion about these issues call for initiatives beyond the typical information provision. Psychological counselling should also be offered for those with doubts about the direction of their attractions and those seeking answers to the question of whether, as one respondent put it, "I am normal".

Similarly, the topic of sexual dysfunction and relational problems would require interventions other than purely informational ones. Respondents often asked about the problem of desire discrepancy and low desire, which may suggest the presence of other kinds of relational and individual problems reflected in or resulting from decreased desire. The primary source of information (the Internet) is not a place where it is easy to find an adequate answer; neither does it reveal the complexity of the problem of desire, the multifactorial sources of discrepancy and loss of desire, and, above all, it does not discuss several relational problems related to desire. It is easy to be a target of internet advertisements for drugs and techniques of questionable effectiveness and safety (Grunt-Mejer, 2022). The same problem applies to the questions raised by the respondents about erectile dysfunction, rapid ejaculation, and pain during intercourse. Additionally, special attention in the planning of educational initiatives should be devoted to the issue of violence: from preventive actions that are primarily aimed at training in respecting other people's boundaries, communication (clear expression and respect of consent and signs of lack of consent) and awareness that consent applies equally to newly met people and those in stable relationships, to actions helping people who have experienced violence (how to report it and where to seek psychological and medical support).

At the same time, some of the questions (e.g., persistent questions about anal sex and female ejaculation) can be interpreted as a sign of the influence of pornography and the sexual scripts that pornography promotes. It means that the planning of grassroots educational interventions should also include content typically not included in basic sex education curricula and should be based on ongoing research into the needs of young people. Questions related to pornography also addressed the fear of sexual addiction and the effects of pornography on relationships. Research on this issue indicates that pornography leads to a range of effects, depending on the context of its use (Koletić et al. 2021): mes-

sages about positive effects and adverse consequences should, therefore, be nuanced and should take into account that a significant proportion of men and women use internet pornography and that the number of users rises with the ever-increasing availability of such material. It calls for honest, non-dogmatic messages about how to make pornography safer to use, about the differences between sexuality on screen and in real life, and where and when to seek help if someone's use of pornography is out of control.

Sources of obtaining information indicate the dominant role of the Internet, which is popular due to its low cost, 24-hour availability, and relative anonymity, all of which allow the exploration of topics which young people would be ashamed to ask about if using other forms of communication. When planning educational activities, it is worth taking into account these advantages and using the formula of anonymous consultations on more complex issues or – in the case of planning classroom training – by collecting questions and problems from participants anonymously beforehand.

Knowing what kinds of sites and media are most frequently visited to look for answers can inspire the design of message content, forms of information delivery, and channels. For example, the Kasia "co z tym seksem" (Kate "What About This Sex") website and app, which were cited most often by respondents, raise issues of safe sexual initiation, anal sex, and informed consent, all of which are topics that our respondents also identified as necessary.

## **Limitations of the study**

The first limitation of the study is that it was impossible to include responses from underage participants as this would require permission from legal guardians and thus prevent total anonymity. Collecting data on the sex education needs of younger people in another study is highly recommended. Another limitation is the unrepresentativeness and small sample size; these were caused by the fact that the survey (a snowballing link distributed through student organizations and social media focused on sexuality topics) was likely to reach primarily college students and those who are better educated. Thus, they already have more excellent knowledge of sexuality than the average young adult. Fewer responses came from men, so the needs of this group may be less well reflected in the results than women's. Given these limitations, it is essential to gather additional information before creating educational content regarding educational needs and specific problems and questions that a particular target group may have.

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## Co młodzi ludzie chcą wiedzieć o seksie i gdzie szukają odpowiedzi? Studium przypadku w Polsce

### Streszczenie

W badaniu wzięło udział 341 osób w wieku 18–30 lat, które odpowiedziały na następujące pytania: Na jakie pytanie związane z seksualnością ostatnio chciałeś uzyskać odpowiedź? Czy udało Ci się uzyskać odpowiedź na to pytanie? Gdzie próbowałeś znaleźć odpowiedź na swoje pytanie? Sprawdzone także źródła wiedzy o seksualności, które respondenci cenią. Odpowiedzi poddano analizie tematycznej.

Analiza odpowiedzi ujawniła pięć głównych tematów obejmujących 39 tematów. Tematyka dotyczyła zdrowia seksualnego (najczęściej poszukiwane odpowiedzi dotyczyły antykoncepcji, fizjologii i anatomii), aktywności seksualnej (najczęstsze pytanie dotyczyło seksu analnego), przyjemności seksualnej (najczęstszy temat dotyczył orgazmu), psychologii i związków (najczęstszy temat dotyczył seksu analnego). Dotyczyła też jakości pożądania i seksu w długotrwałych związkach oraz wiedzy społeczno-kulturowej (dominujący wątek dotyczył tożsamości płciowej i orientacji seksualnej). Najczęstszym źródłem wiedzy jest Internet, głównie media społecznościowe.

Wyniki wskazują na duże zapotrzebowanie na edukację – już na poziomie podstawowym – z anatomii, fizjologii i antykoncepcji. Dominują także pytania związane z wpływem pornografii i koniecznością zrozumienia przez respondentów szybkich zmian społecznych, w tym różnorodnych orientacji i tożsamości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** edukacja seksualna, konserwatyzm, polityka, Polska, Europa Wschodnia, młodzi dorośli.



**VARIA**



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Magda KARKOWSKA

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8769-840X>

University of Lodz, Poland

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**Contact:** magda.karkowska@now.uni.lodz.pl

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## Antoni Kępiński – a Man, Philosopher, Physician. Biographical Impressions and Inspirations for Pedagogical Activity

### Abstract

This article aims to reconstruct the basis of the therapeutic concept of Antoni Kępiński, one of the most outstanding Polish psychiatrists, along with considering the possibility of relating the main assumptions of axiological psychiatry, as well as the phenomenological and existential foundations underlying his way of perceiving the relationship with the patient, to more general, pedagogical relationships in the process of upbringing. For this purpose, I will analyze critical events (turning points) in the psychiatrist's biography, theoretical inspirations that are a source of reflection as well as the subsequent development of the concepts of mental health, illness and individual well-being. Then I will reflect on which of them can be an inspiration for contemporary pedagogical thinking and activities.

**Keywords:** axiological psychiatry, phenomenology, relationship, inspiration, upbringing.

Antoni Kępiński is one of the best-known and most outstanding Polish psychiatrists. He was born on November 16, 1918, in Dolina near Stanisławów. He came from a family with strong intellectual background; his father was a district governor, and his mother was a home lady. As an eighteen-year-old, in 1936, he began to study medicine at the Jagiellonian University, what were interrupted

by the outbreak of World War II. As a participant in the September Campaign, Kępiński attempted to get to Hungary and France to join the newly organized Polish military units. While crossing the Pyrenees, he was detained by the Spanish authorities and imprisoned in the concentration camp in Miranda de Ebro. Released, he went to Great Britain, where he served in the Polish Army in the United Kingdom for some time. In 1945–46, he continued his medical studies in Edinburgh, and in July 1947, he returned to Poland. Shortly after his return, he started working in one of the clinics of the Medical University in Krakow. There, he defended his doctoral thesis in psychiatry (1949), obtained his Habilitation degree, the highest university degree (1960), and was appointed a professor (1972). He died as a result of a severe illness on June 8, 1972.<sup>1</sup>

Analysing Kępiński's biography, we notice that there are no accidental events in it – everything he participated in, even if it was a coincidence, was used in the process of biographical learning. Turning points in biography are of particular importance in this context.

This article aims to reconstruct the basis of the therapeutic concept of Antoni Kępiński, one of the most outstanding Polish psychiatrists, along with considering the possibility of relating the main assumptions of axiological psychiatry, as well as the phenomenological and existential foundations underlying his way of perceiving the relationship with the patient, to more general, pedagogical relationships in the process of upbringing. For this purpose, I will analyze critical events (turning points) in the psychiatrist's biography, theoretical inspirations that are a source of reflection and the subsequent development of the concepts of mental health, illness and individual well-being. Then I will reflect on which of them can be an inspiration for pedagogical thinking and action today.

## Turning points in Antoni Kępiński's biography

Turning points in biographies are usually understood as significant events constituting the beginning of something new, accompanied by moments in which there is a reflection on what has happened so far. They often add a new quality to biography and have a developmental significance: new perspectives of action are revealed, and there are corrections and revisions of plans for the future and ways of assessing or interpreting the past. (Szmidt, 2012)

Twenty-year-old Kępiński studied medicine at the Jagiellonian University. When, as a third-year student, he was returning home through Krakow's Matejki Square, he was attacked by a group of young extremists, because he was wearing a red student cap, the colour of which was assigned to the field of study and

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: [https://nauka-polska.pl/#/profile/scientist?id=216198&\\_k=yhh0y2](https://nauka-polska.pl/#/profile/scientist?id=216198&_k=yhh0y2)

did not result from political beliefs. The whole situation, as well as the severe beating, resulted in a long break from attending medical classes. Probably, Kępiński was so deeply immersed in despair, so shocked and unreconciled with what happened to him, that he suffered a psychotic episode as a result of the attack – this is the opinion of, among others, Krystyna Rożnowska. (Rożnowska, 2024)

This experience, with all its drama and separation from the reality and events happening around him and their rational dimension, was supposed to make him admire psychiatrists, their knowledge, and the range of skills needed to diagnose and deal with patients. Another thesis says that the very inexplicability of the attackers' actions initiated Kępiński's interest in psychiatry. Already as a doctor, in his practice, he represented the view that severe mental experiences, including episodes of illnesses classified as mental, can be a source of strength and have auto-formative potential. (Kępiński, 2002) The question always arises whether the psychiatrist's mental problems make him understand his patients better. We do not know whether Antoni Kępiński thought so, but we know he was a declared opponent of hasty diagnoses, pigeonholing and treatment regimens. He realized that the world of a mentally ill person is more diversified than the one of a healthy person, which is why he approached each person individually with respect and readiness to listen.

An additional and significant event in Kępiński's biography was his eight-year stay outside Poland (1939–1947). The novice worked as a paramedic and male nurse. However, after the defeat of the September Campaign, like many young people, he tried to get to France, where Polish army units were being formed under the command of General Sikorski. Unfortunately, the crossing was interrupted by internment in Hungary and then by arrest in Madrid, as a result of which Kępiński was imprisoned and sent to the Miranda de Ebro concentration camp, where he spent 2.5 years. After leaving it, he went to Great Britain. In Edinburgh, he completed his medical studies and started working as a doctor for the first time. Although he had all the necessary qualifications to continue his medical career in emigration, he returned to Poland in July 1947, and then, equipped with letters of recommendation from England, he started working at the Neurological and Psychiatric Clinic in Krakow at Botaniczna street (later, the clinic was moved to Kopernika Street, where the 6th Neurological and Psychiatric Department of the hospital dedicated to St. Lazarus was established). Several turning points can be marked during the period in question. The first one was the stay in the Miranda de Ebro camp. Despite the difficult conditions in the field, Kępiński tried to remain calm and maintained his mental hygiene as much as possible, and, above all, good relationships with his fellow prisoners.

Since it was more of an internment camp than a labour one, Kępiński talked a lot with the people he met and wrote letters to his family in which he asked about the situation in the country, health and everyday affairs of the recipients.

He did not complain and did not want to distress his relatives, hoping that the situation he found himself in would end soon. He read the Holy Bible, Kipling's stories and Nowakowski's books. He diligently studied anatomy and physiology from medical textbooks purchased and sent by the Polish Red Cross, and he also learned English and Spanish. Work-related activities included tedious but also useful ones, such as peeling potatoes and senseless ones, such as carrying soil in baskets from one place to another and moving stones (Mateja, 2019, pp. 129–169).

Kępiński did not particularly care about the two situations in April and October 1941 in which he was beaten and sent to solitary confinement only because he caught the attention of a man guarding the soup queue. It may be assumed that during his stay in the camp, he learned to adapt to challenging conditions, to find meaning in the problematic and hopeless everyday life without absorbing or worrying those in the distant homeland waiting for his return and praying for his health and life. The breakthrough of the time spent in internment lies in the unique ability to recognize what is abnormal as usual without losing faith and hope for the return of true normality, also by shifting attention away from oneself and focusing it on what, even temporarily, brings oblivion and on those who need conversation, comfort or even co-presence. Memories, visualizations of dreams, stories from pre-war times, and plans for the future played a significant role in these processes. It is safe to say that Kępiński dabbled in therapeutic activities for several years before he became a psychiatrist. His maturation as a person and a doctor seemed to be accelerated by self-reflection on whether he could complete his medical studies and become financially independent.

Kępiński reached the British Isles via Gibraltar in the spring of 1943 and then reported to the RAF military centre, where he attended a pilot course, which he was unable to complete successfully. He soon reached Edinburgh, where he resumed his medical studies at the turn of October and November 1944. He received his medical diploma two years later. Employment in three Scottish hospitals, and then English supplies – this was not how one could imagine the beginning of a medical career. Also working for food and accommodation in a military, under-heated sub-tenant room, was not what he expected. Therefore, driven by the desire to become independent and self-fulfilled, but also because of the growing longing for his family, he returned to Poland in July 1947. It was another turning point in the psychiatrist's career. It combined two completely different realities: studies in pre-war Poland, living in a Krakow home full of warmth and love, plans and dreams of working as a doctor and returning from a seven-year war wandering to a country where the only family member left in Krakow was his mother. It was a return to a country where people who had actively fought for Poland's freedom in the ranks of the Home Army were sought (Kępiński's sister, Łucja, and her husband were among them), where working

youth were not cared for<sup>2</sup>, work orders were issued, tenants were moved to surviving apartments, et cetera. Despite this, Kępiński found himself well in the demanding reality: he moved in (although only for half a year) with his lonesome mother. He started working in a neurological and psychiatric clinic in Krakow. Then he left, according to his employment referral, to care for a team of labour brigades near Lwówek Śląski.

Jacek Bomba, who observed the beginnings of the doctor's career, when asked what, in his opinion, determined Kępiński's choice of specialization, emphasized that Antoni had the mind of a philosopher and anthropologist, not a medical practitioner. First, he wanted to understand reality and the causes of diseases and only then treat them, which is sometimes impossible in clinical and emergency medicine. He dismissed the reason of Kępiński's interest in psychiatry was the desire to understand his situation, including overcoming bad memories, as is the case with some psychologists and psychiatrists. (Mateja, 2019, pp. 49–53).

On January 31, 1948, Kępiński married his childhood friend, Janina Kłodzińska, and, apart from his wife, he gained another friend for the rest of his life in the person of his brother-in-law, Doctor Stanisław Kłodziński, who practised as an ophthalmologist (now a pulmonologist). All sources describe the Kępińskis' marriage as successful and lasting, emphasizing that it was not an arranged relationship – the spouses fell in love, and they committed themselves to each other, knowing that it is easier to go through the world together than separately. Jadwiga Kłodzińska provided support and help; she cared for her husband and the house and organized trips and social gatherings. They had no children but cared for several animal pets. They were very happy. This relationship, along with the beginning of a psychiatrist's career in the clinic, can be considered a kind of summary of youth and entry into the stage of mature biography.

The last turning point that had a significant impact on the life and scientific legacy of Antoni Kępiński was cancer. It seems the threat of his diagnosis in 1970 (multiple myeloma) turned his life upside down. Nothing could be further from the truth. Kępiński did not stop working, and the renouncement was not made immediately. When, in the last case, it was no longer possible to take care of himself and continue managing of the clinic, he moved to the nephrology ward. He was given a hospital room where his wife, beloved cat (Antoś) and dog (Czarusia) could stay at all times. Realizing that time was passing to his detriment, he prepared for printing 'Fear', 'Psychopathology of neuroses', and 'Rythm of Life'. However, he left many notes, lectures, and other valuable materials that made possible to publish his works posthumously.

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<sup>2</sup> The evidence may be, for example, the decision to dispose of rotten fish intended for consumption by the Junaks, which Kępiński, as a doctor in charge of the unit, made, and for which he had to pay for the batch of "wasted food" from his own wages.

He woke up at 4 a.m. and wrote intensively, because later, he had scheduled treatments and visits from guests: doctors, students, and friends. The endless stream of visitors even prompted someone to hang a note on the door urging more restraint when visiting a seriously ill man. He died on June 8, 1970, at only 52 (Mateja, 2019).

## Sources of Antoni Kępiński's concept of therapy

Kępiński's first master was doctor Władysław Stryjeński. They thought similarly about patients who consulted a psychiatrist – their differences are not due to the disease but to greater sensitivity than the general population, which is most often the cause of deterioration of the condition and the occurrence of disease symptoms. Later, several other doctors introduced him to the secrets of psychiatry, but he covered most of the path to outstanding achievements – not only thanks to his medical knowledge. An analytical mind, intelligence and war experiences supported him—observation of complex situations where he often found himself also provided grounds for an accurate diagnosis. Kępiński read many works by philosophers, psychologists and psychiatrists. He probably learned his first philosophical writings while still a high school student and later used them in his medical practice, including Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Giovanni Pico Mirandola<sup>3</sup>. They show that the basis of humanistic psychiatry is that the patient is an integral person with legal personality, value and full respect for subjectivity. Then it was time to recall Descartes' thoughts – mental illness violates Cartesian logic and disrupts the concept of referent (in the world of a person who suffers from schizophrenia, objects change their properties, so concepts are unstable) through the specificity of feeling the world, it creates the illusion of duality – being in both the real and the fantastic world and the line between them is thin and not always obvious. (Kępiński, 2002)

Immanuel Kant's thoughts in "Critique of the Power of Judgment" also seem valuable in building a psychiatrist's knowledge. The philosopher writes about the power and uniqueness of imagination, which among living creatures only humans have (Kant, 1964), while the psychiatrist notes that its transformation and blurring of the boundaries between what is and what the affected mind perceives and treats as accurate, true, serves to build one's imaginary world, which can be both beautiful and dangerous in the sense of controlling the patient's intentions and actions.

The inspiration for Kępiński's therapeutic activities was primarily phenomenology. What is characteristic here is both the mapping of nature and all human

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<sup>3</sup> Paulina Walesiak, retrieved from: <https://ogrod-nauk.pl/antoni-kepinski-i-jego-niezwykla-monografia-poznanie-chorego/>



activities in the world (Husserl, 1982), realized in acts of transcendence (I in the world), as well as the reflection of the universe in man, the saturation of the personality with values flowing from the environment, building one's own beliefs and self-image based on about observation, but also interpretations made by others, which is possible thanks to the processes of socialization and internalization (the world inside me). At the same time, every act of experiencing the world and oneself in the world is an act of self-confirmation and self-interpretation of the surrounding reality. The development process uses two integrated forces: the logos of life and the individual's creative imagination. The entire universe, and therefore man as a part of it, is changeable and subject to constant transformations, so creating a specific, unchanging method of cognition and supporting development processes through dualisms (body-soul, finite-infinite, subject-object) loses its meaning. (Tymieniecka, 1987)

These assumptions give a unique character to Kępiński's therapeutic concepts – each disease history is also the history of a person's life, has biographical sources and is deeply rooted in lived experiences and turning points. Diagnosis becomes a specific act of cognition and is the result of a thorough exploration of not only the current condition of the patient but also environmental factors contributing to the deterioration of health. The recovery process is about modifying how the patient experiences these factors.

Next to phenomenology, Victor Frankl's (2011) logotherapy was the second significant source of inspiration for a psychiatrist.

Kępiński and Frankl share similar war past – both were prisoners of camps, and thus contributed to their further biographies not only a certain amount of negative experiences but also the need to work with them – to search for the meaning of themselves so as not to destroy hope, but also in order to restore faith in the possibility of change.

The search for the meaning of life and the pursuit of values accompanying existential analysis, were more of introspective than retrospective nature. Kępiński tried to convey the main ideas of it to his patients with probably varying degrees of success, focused on setting a goal and striving for something. Lack of aspirations, boredom, existential emptiness and frustration are often followed by anxiety and neurotic disorders. The truth of these assumptions was confirmed by the psychiatrist personally, who tried to occupy his time during internment with reading, a writing dialogue with his family, organizing the camp community, learning languages, and praying to eliminate the destructive impact of the surrounding conditions and the situation in which he found himself on his psyche. In his writings, Frankl presents faith in the sense of searching for truth. This meaning, just like the meaning of our lives, is individual, and existential therapy aims to awaken responsibility for oneself, for one's own life, despite the wrong circumstances and what has happened to us. Whatever has happened to us, we will not be given a second

life to live it, writes Frankl. These are the only ones we have that can be used so as not to feel regret for what we could have changed or what we had influenced. The purpose of existence in logotherapy is broadly understood. We can direct it towards creative work or action (creative, i.e. one that changes something in us and around us or combines these aspects), experiencing something (ideas, faith, grace), contact with other people, the way we endure suffering and what is inevitable in our lives and at the same time does not depend on us. (Frankl, 2011)

In some places, logotherapy is combined with the postulates of phenomenological thinking, and the point of contact is the concept of transcendence as the uniquely human ability to go beyond oneself and search for meanings and possibilities despite or above what surrounds us. The author wrote, 'There is space between the stimulus and the reaction; in this space lies the freedom and power to choose our response' (Frankl, 2011).

Kępiński's biography seems to exemplify this principle in many moments of his life. Whether he was beaten by militants, interned in Spain or dying of cancer, he was able to put it into practice.

Therapeutic work implies reflection on the motives of our actions and their proper structuring. There is no point in thinking about 'why'; you must first consider 'what for' before applying 'how'.

To cut a long story short, effective action is one in which we first set a goal and then develop the means to implement it. There is a similarity in education – we derive goals and principles from values, and methods appear later. For Kępiński, the philosophical source of information about the meeting with another person in the therapy process, was probably Martin Buber's concept of I and You (Buber, 1992). The Jewish philosopher writes about the fundamental relationship of a spiritual aspects of a person with another human, leading to the acquisition of self-awareness, speaking in the first person, constituting one's "I" towards others and recognizing one's "I" in others. It helps set boundaries. It touches on the process of shaping identity and the emergence of someone who has experienced evil, good, suffering, joy and sadness, health and disease in life. (Buber, 2022) Therefore it applies to the reconstitution of a person in the process of therapy, what Buber did not mention about. Personal, therapeutic contact with the patient is a variation of Buber's set, i.e. a situation in which "I" relates to "You". It causes a profound effect, becoming the beginning of change.

Interestingly, this change affects both the patients themselves and the doctor. Exceptional nature of psychiatry lies in its uniqueness – experiences, methods of treatment, recognition what helps to regain health and what hinders it. This therapeutic encounter is probably, as Siemion Frank (2007) would say, an encounter with a mystery, unique and undefined, which needs to be understood and tamed in order to give a chance to emerge what is new, unknown, and which helps to live better and cope with everyday life.

Another type of reference included the works of famous psychologists of both psychoanalytic and humanistic orientation, among which it is worth mentioning the writings and reflections of Sigmund Freud, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Carl Gustav Jung, Alfred Adler and Harry Stack Sullivan. Antoni Kępiński combined what was individual with what was social; he looked for interpersonal conditions in intrapsychic processes and vice versa – everything he became familiar with served to deepen and improve his already vast knowledge, adapting therapy to the needs of patients.

### **Basics of Kępiński's therapeutic concept. Axiological, understanding psychiatry**

The basis of Antoni Kępiński's therapeutic concept is his theory of energy and informative metabolism, which is also a kind of model of living nature. Its primary assumption is that there is a continuous process of energy and information exchange between every living organism and its environment. (Kokoszka, 1999) While the energetic part belongs to the body (soma), the information part refers to the psyche (psyche). Within it, we can distinguish the self-preservation instinct, which consists of innate mechanisms of action and reaction intended to ensure the body's survival; the emotional layer – which consists of mechanisms that subconsciously regulate our behaviour; and finally, the socio-cultural layer, which consists of what is adopted in the socialization process – patterns, norms, rules of social life (also certain moral content, scripts and narratives that introduce an individual to the world – note by MK).

Therapy penetrates all these layers but excludes shaping the patient, so its nature is non-directive and facilitative. Refraining from judgments and valuations is an element of phenomenological reduction (epoche), withdrawing what constitutes knowledge and judgments about the reality around us before becoming familiar with it and adopting the assumptions of humanistic psychology. The therapeutic process is therefore carried out on three parallel levels: intellectual understanding of the symptoms of the disease and searching for their causes, corrective emotional experiences that change the way one perceives oneself, the surrounding world and other people in the process of direct contact with problems, feelings, reflections and doubts caused by attitude, behaviour and the patient's statements (Kokoszka, 1999). Only their disclosure, denunciation, and acceptance can initiate a change in patients' perception of themselves, the situation, or the problem. The conversation plays a unique role at this stage, which reveals what is crucial in the patient's daily functioning. Finally, a corrective experience of values allows one to return to everyday life, hierarchize individual elements of reality, and regain hope and meaning by organizing one's in-

ternal space and setting the boundaries between what is internal and external. Kępiński used Buber's in-depth dialogue, carried out in the formula of a meeting between I and You (Buber, 1992). He also used non-specific therapeutic factors, which are components of influence, agency, identification (transference), and charisma—all of these skills characterized him. In this approach, it is about the ability to identify what elements of relationships with others and self-image have been disturbed – the ability to restore the patient's will to live and regain faith in the possibility of reconstructing the experienced world depends on an accurate diagnosis at this stage. It is also about the power of words and revealing the factors that cause the patient to take on the role of a victim or aggressor, indicating why he gives up his subjectivity and unique opportunities to create his own life and become a person in the process of self-realization and self-actualization. (Rogers, 2002; Maslow, 2004) However, the author's diagnosis and therapy concept would not be possible without the values that constitute its foundation. The axiological triad consists of freedom, love and truth.<sup>4</sup> By connecting and complementing each other, they (to varying degree) directed therapeutic work, constituting simultaneously a signpost and the center of the psychiatrist's therapeutic influence. By making them the basis of therapy, the doctor admitted that they were a reference point in other types of relationships and, therefore, as one might assume, in upbringing. They allow one to be human being and discover the meaning of life both on the individual and social level. Rejection of values and actions inconsistent with them arouses fear and leads to internal conflicts and axiological conformism because – however trivial it may sound – they are the ones who order the world and our thinking, helping to hierarchize the surrounding reality.

## The humanistic dimension of the doctor-patient relationship based on the writings of Antoni Kępiński

For him, the patient was a guide introducing the doctor to the world of the disease. He treated him as a partner with whom they should seek recovery together. It does not change that it was Kępiński who had knowledge and therapeutic experience, both of them significant, considering the large number of patients he dealt with. Kępiński's relationships with patients have always been professional. Devoid of both familiarity and affection. Based on the stories patients told him, I can say that Docent – as Kępiński was addressed for many years – focused on making them believe in themselves: that they can live despite traumatic experiences, that they can overcome fear and separate delusions from reality.

Kępiński treated not only with words, as is commonly believed. He was able to ideally prescribe and sometimes mix pharmacological treatments, as among others, told me Halina Bortnowska, a publicist whose mother was Kępiński's patient"<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Some commentators on Kępiński's activities mention other values: faith, hope and love

<sup>5</sup> Magda Roszkowska talks to the author of the book about Antoni Kępiński, Anna Mateja, retrieved from: <https://weekend.gazeta.pl/weekend/7,177333,25596208,antoniiego-kepinskiego-interesowal-czlowiek-a-nie-tylko-choroba.html/>

Antoni Kępiński made a breakthrough in Polish psychiatry, as he was a precursor of a modern approach to patients based on sensitivity, understanding, openness, and respect for the other person's dignity. He combined psychiatry and psychotherapy with individual case study, commonly applied in social pedagogy. As an advocate of the community approach, he also supported patients outside the hospital. A therapeutic community was organized in the hospital, and the main purpose of it was to maintain what was achieved through pharmacotherapy and individual meetings with doctor. It was also extended by a club called Zawilec, where current and former clinic patients met. (Mateja, 2019) Kępiński believed that isolation, lack of responsibilities and dull daily routine make recovery difficult. The main therapeutic factor is the bond with those in similar situation that allows one to survive the most difficult experiences, as he discovered during his internment in Miranda de Ebro. Establishing relationships with others and escaping loneliness support the recovery process to the same extent as pharmacological treatment and psychotherapy do.

He did not limit the patient's knowledge to the natural sphere – it had primarily a humanistic dimension – limiting himself to scientific and medical knowledge alone makes it impossible to make a proper diagnosis because the patient treated as an object takes a defensive attitude. At the same time, Kępiński wanted to avoid mistakes common in therapy (e.g. judge's or mask ones). First, he focused on establishing a bond with the patient based on empathy and trust, which did not exclude distance and professionalism. Distance to one's life and oneself contains the element of consent to what we do not influence – including the passing of time, the evolution of what we find, and passing away. Not accepting the above can cause frustration and block our internal growth.

The treatment with the word, conversation mentioned in the above quote was strengthened by a parallel, horizontal patient-doctor relationship, respecting the principle that the patient's well-being is more important than scientific goals, affirmation of the human person (*amo ergo sum*), creating an atmosphere of support for which the starting point was a common search for a path to recovery. Dialogue and therapeutic contact also involve silence: kindness, alertness, and approval, understood as helping the patient and as an incentive to change and act. As Zdzisław Ryn, one of Kępiński's many students, writes, everyone felt better and uplifted by him (Ryn, 2007).

As a doctor, Kępiński was insightful, and it is noteworthy that he combined treatment with a biological profile with an existential and phenomenological approach to the patient, characterized by deep understanding, dialogue and consistency in behaviour. As a person, the psychiatrist was cheerful, patient, and understanding of the weaknesses of others, but also very consistent in what he said and did (Leśniak, 2014). He was considered an expert and authority in the clinic, always helping, distinguishing and supporting those who experienced dif-

faculties. He could bring out the best in others, look for goodness and hope, and point out the creative aspects of illness. (Ryn,2007)

## **Inspirations and impressions for pedagogical thinking and action**

When looking for connections between the concept of therapy developed by Antoni Kępiński and upbringing or education, it is worth returning to its sources, considering the phenomenological relationship between a person, his interior and the world of the culture surrounding him. When developing his concept of mental illness therapy, the psychiatrist stuck to the relationship between a person and his environment and noticed that past experiences largely determine our mental condition. It was confirmed in the doctor's biography.

Therefore, the processes of upbringing and socialization considered from a phenomenological perspective appear to us as alternating cycles of interiorization – norms, rules of social life, cultural patterns and externalization – of what has been lived, known and experienced. Interiorization is mainly about taking over cultural heritage, in which intergenerational transmission plays a fundamental role. We enter ready-made structures of language, customs, and ethical and aesthetic norms, subordinating what is individual to collective. To some extent, we lose authenticity and uniqueness – all the more we need a Master, a spiritual guide – someone who will explain the world, a strange, unique and not always understandable world. Language does not fully express our experiences, although it undoubtedly determines the limits of our world (Wittgenstein), hence the demand for deep contact with another person, face to face, based on conversation, the interpenetration of I and Thou (Buber) and facing mystery (Frank), a specific exchange of perspectives, points of view and references ("my world is your world") (Schütz, 1986 after Krasnodębski). Such contact is present both in the opening, non-directive therapeutic meeting and upbringing – only when it has the features mentioned above it awakens introspective abilities in the person being raised (Śliwerski, 2001) – opening up to the other person, their presence and message. Only then is it possible to internalize the values represented by the parent, teacher or Master. In addition to internalization and externalization, transgression is another mechanism enabling contact with the world and oneself. It concerns both activities "from the world" and "to the world" (Kozielecki, 1987). The first type is cognitive, where the communicative message dominates.(explicite knowledge) It can also take the form (both in therapy and education) of feedback, resulting in the development of a reflected self (Mead) and, over time, self-knowledge. The second one refers to the body, to emotional, non-verbal, and not always logical or rational factors. It uses symbols, images, and signals from the body, not words. It is dominated by conjunctive knowledge (implicite knowledge).

Since culture is a set of expanding circles of common meanings that connect people, both in education, based on the extraction of potential from a person, and in therapy, the aim of which is to return to the surrounding reality, it is about searching for what connects us, people, and the means to which is interpersonal rapprochement in a horizontal plane, creating a horizontal relationship that is a form of support and becomes a reference point on a map densely woven with meanings referring to what is here and now, but also to what once was.

According to the concept of information and energy metabolism, what comes from culture and what is social and collective, gradually, over time and with overlapping influences (ethos, agos), distances us from the biological, drive nature, making us look for values that could be a reference point in our activities. The importance of values in education is that they allow us to build ourselves, internalize what is important on the basis of habitus. They also refer to future. In contact with values, using impressive methods or one's example, the idea is to awaken in the student the desire to be someone who has specific features – this may be about imitation, getting closer to the person of the Master, but also about prospective implementation and embodiment of others. Personal role models (examples like idols, authorities) are also about becoming a "better version of yourself". Values are the carriers of specific attitudes. They help to hierarchize reality and thus determine what is most important in life and set personal goals. This last aspect is also essential in therapy and was used by Antoni Kępiński: he understood therapy as a process in which the old is annihilated and the new is born. You have to deny something in yourself and around you to bring to life something different, unknown, related to values other than those previously professed. It is confirmed in biographical breakthroughs but also in resocialization or in naturally occurring development processes, where internal transformation leads to revitalizing resources and the reconstruction of the development initiative (Erikson, 2004). Contact with values and the Master, authority or therapist who represents them directs the student, ward or patient to search for purpose and meaning in life. This process refers to Frankl's logotherapy, reconstructed earlier as one of the sources of Kępiński's therapeutic concept.

So, what is the goal of therapy? According to the assumptions of humanistic, non-directive psychology, it is the process of recovery, regaining contact with ourselves and the surrounding world, which leads to transgressive behaviour, self-fulfilment and self-actualization. In the course of them we revise our self-image and visions of the surrounding world in order to be closer to reality, other people and, using the right of choice, strive to become oneself, fully functioning human being (Rogers, 2004). Education understood as a horizontal relationship of two entities leads to similar effects – through dialogue, contact with You and I, often due to understanding biographically significant turning points, results in the search for – and finding individual purposes and meaning in life.

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The uniqueness of Antoni Kępiński's therapeutic concept is undoubtedly based on the fact that he opened (or even broke down) a door to modern psychiatry, introducing an innovative, personalistic approach to the patient, which preceded the appearance of humanistic psychiatry (Jankowski, 1976) in Poland by several decades. It is worth noting that this was not a concept that required, as it happens in medicine, the use of expensive, unavailable solutions. Kępiński treated with words, empathy and commitment, and above all, with the ability to restore hope for health improvement. He used philosophical and psychological inspirations, but above all turning points in his life and the self-knowledge that resulted from them. He was able to use the difficult situations he experienced in a formative way and encouraged his patients to do the same. What is also particularly noteworthy is that while living and working in unobvious, difficult times, he avoided politics, connections, glitter, and popularity, remaining true to himself. For the above reasons, it is worth using in upbringing and education as well as interpersonal communication this original concept based on love for people and acceptance of their weaknesses, because it combines a non-directive, horizontal I and You relationship with the world of culture, spiritual encounter, intropection and the emergence of a person from dialogue saturated with values.

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## **Antoni Kępiński – człowiek, filozof, lekarz. Biograficzne impresje i inspiracje dla pedagogicznego działania**

### **Streszczenie**

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest rekonstrukcja podstaw koncepcji terapeutycznej Antoniego Kępińskiego, jednego z najwybitniejszych polskich lekarzy psychiatrów wraz z rozważeniem możliwości odniesienia głównych założeń psychiatrii aksjologicznej, a także podstaw fenomenologicznych i egzystencjalnych leżących u podłoża jego sposobu postrzegania relacji z pacjentem, do bardziej ogólnych, pedagogicznych relacji w procesie wychowania. W tym celu poddano analizie kluczowe wydarzenia (punkty zwrotne) w biografii psychiatry, a także inspiracje teoretyczne stanowiące źródło refleksji i przemyśleń oraz późniejszego rozwijania koncepcji zdrowia psychicznego, choroby i dobrostanu jednostki. Następnie podjęto namysł nad tym, które z nich współcześnie mogą stanowić inspiracje dla pedagogicznego myślenia i działania.

**Słowa kluczowe:** psychiatria aksjologiczna, fenomenologia, relacja, inspiracje, wychowanie.

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Wioletta SOŁTYSIAK

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4680-398X>

Jan Długosz University in Czestochowa, Poland

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**Contact:** [wsoltysiak@ujd.edu.pl](mailto:wsoltysiak@ujd.edu.pl)**How to cite [jak cytować]:** Sołtysiak, W. (2024). Entrepreneurial Education Profiles of Students from the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia. *Podstawy Edukacji. Education for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*, 17, 347–364.

## Entrepreneurial Education Profiles of Students from the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia

### Abstract

The aim of this article is to know the opinions of students of pedagogical studies in terms of their self-assessment of selected competences that can form the profiles of entrepreneurial groups. The argument consists of two parts. The first one is the review of literature on the terminology of competences. The second part covers the presentation of the results of (preliminary) own research in groups of full-time students, conducted by a survey method using a questionnaire survey. The research covered students from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland. Entrepreneurial competences were divided into three groups: 'Ideas and capabilities', "Resources" and "Action", according to the document *The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework* (2020). The research showed that Polish students have most entrepreneurial characteristics, especially in terms of the traits in the group "Resources" and "Action". Students from the Czech Republic mainly attributed themselves characteristics from the "Action" area. Students from Slovakia are to a small extent aware of possessing their entrepreneurial qualities.

**Keywords:** action, education, ideas and possibilities, entrepreneurial competence, resources.

### Introduction

According to Monika Adamska-Staroń (2009a, p. 98) "Education influences the consciousness, psyche, mind, behaviour of a person, their spirituality, and

has an impact on the shape of the social world. Changes in education promote society transformation.”

Education is to support the individual in their quest for development and to fulfil various family, social and professional roles (Wyzga 2018, p. 178). It is done by “bringing to light their self-knowledge, inspiring unconventional discovery and cognition of the world, independent thinking, interpreting, questioning the “found” certainties, obviousness, creative action, activity directed to the development of oneself but also society (Adamska-Staroń, 2009b, p. 170). Developing and acquiring competences, including in the area of entrepreneurship, can better prepare children and youth to enter adult life, which is full of challenges and constant changes.

This article is aimed at presenting literature on entrepreneurial competence as a key competence in the European education system. Selected definitional concepts of entrepreneurial competence and entrepreneurial qualities will be discussed. This will be followed by an analysis of the results of our own research, which will involve the self-assessment of students from the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia in terms of their subjective perception of traits from the entrepreneurial group in their personality resources. Three subgroups of competences have been assigned for entrepreneurial competence. These are: qualities in terms of ideas and possibilities, resources and action. For each of the groups mentioned, competences were detailed, and assigned. This was the basis for the presentation of differences in student responses and for making recommendations for further action. The analysis will be carried out in the context of preparing students for social tasks, and for entering the labour market, on the basis of ideas and possibilities, acquired skills, and by taking conscious and creative action.

## **Entrepreneurial competence**

According to the definition of Władysław Kopaliński’s Dictionary of Foreign Words, a competent person is ‘entitled to act, to decide; having the classification to make judgements and assessments; authoritative, authoritative’ (Kopaliński 1994, p. 270). Competences are often equated with qualifications, however, according to Stefan Michał Kwiatkowski, for the competences developed during education to become qualifications they must undergo an examination procedure. Those acquired outside formal education must be subjected to validation procedures (2018, p. 17). Competences are distinguished from qualifications by their uniqueness, singularity and immeasurability (Borowiec-Gabryś, Kilar, Rachwał, 2018, p. 71).

The concept of entrepreneurship can be approached in two ways. The word competence derives from the English words *competency* and *competence*. The

first meaning originates from the United States and is considered in a behavioural sense. It is the component of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The second meaning, *competence*, goes back to the British etymology and is based on standardised outcomes of activities, e.g. learning outcomes adopted in the European and National (Polish) Qualification Frameworks (Piróg, 2015, p. 366).

As stated by Waclaw Strykowski (2005, 15): "It is competences that determine the qualifications of people in particular professions, and they are a kind of guarantee of doing a good job and achieving success. Solely individuals with specific and high competences can be professionals". The attribute of competence is its "dynamics revealed in action, in a person's relationship with reality", which is why he uses terms of competence when describing qualifications (Strykowski, 2005, 15).

The intensity of work by researchers in the field of entrepreneurship has brought changes in its understanding and thus the multiplicity of its definitions.

The original definition of entrepreneurship has evolved and is no longer limited solely to an economic meaning. New definitions of entrepreneurship emphasise its much broader scope, taking into account its various components and capturing it as a set of certain personal characteristics. There is no single definition of entrepreneurship on which authors agree. Entrepreneurial competences are multidisciplinary. They are the subject of research by various specialists, e.g. in labour pedagogy, higher education didactics, higher education management, social policy or economics, sociology, psychology.

Entrepreneurship education has evolved over the last decades. There has been a shift from being a component for economic development strategies to an academic perspective, where the main research subjects are at earlier stages of education, then students.

According to the Tomasz Rachwał's definition, entrepreneurship is "a set of personal traits such as activity, enthusiasm for work, initiative, creativity [...], self-confidence, self-discipline, honesty, willingness to take balanced risks [...]. According to the author, these traits allow one to find oneself in the role of an entrepreneur as well as to actively participate in social and economic life" (Rachwał, 2004, p. 169).

Entrepreneurial behaviour can be a consequence of the formation of entrepreneurial intentions. Entrepreneurship teaching-learning programmes provide opportunities to develop and acquire entrepreneurial qualities. Not every student manifests entrepreneurial behaviour aiming at implementation in business. Young people often perceive the word entrepreneurship through the prism of starting a business or fulfilling themselves within a company, where it is important to have a number of entrepreneurial qualities. Developing entrepreneurial qualities is a predisposition that can be a good contribution to career development, not only in terms of one's own business, but in terms of the ability to find one's way in the labour market.

According to many authors, educational programmes can influence attitudes of students, and inspire and stimulate activity in entrepreneurial qualities.

Since 2002, education in Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship in Poland has been formalised and became compulsory as part of general education, alongside other subjects, preparing young people for adult life. The situation is similar in the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Particular attention is paid to equipping young people with the knowledge to understand the social and economic phenomena that surround them, as well as to presenting that improving practical skills and shaping attitudes can influence entrepreneurial behaviour, so that they can enter the labour market more confidently without being afraid to take responsibility for their decisions. The discussion on the role of entrepreneurship in education has been ongoing for many years.

In view of the dynamic social and economic changes in the world, there is a growing awareness of the need for education in the area of competence from an early age (Balachowicz, 2022). According to Damian Ostrowski, personality is shaped at the lower stages of education, same as the capacity for creativity, for innovation, for entrepreneurship.

Unfortunately, students at the lower levels of education are not sufficiently prepared to be independent or creative. After all, each of us is creative in our own way, and education is to develop this creativity, so that students and graduates are able to adapt to the environment and the associated changes. As stated in the Report *Beyond the Horizon – Direction to Education* (2020, p. 55): “Teaching creativity also involves supporting experimentation and the expression of one’s own opinions and feelings, [...] recognising the right to be wrong”.

At further educational stages, knowledge is enriched, competences are broadened and new skills are acquired (Waciegga, Wróbel, 2018, p. 463), attitudes and behaviours formed are deepened (Ostrowski, 2011, p. 112).

The European Commission considers entrepreneurship as one of the key competences, which should be taught at all stages and levels of education, including in non-formal learning (European Commission, 2006).

I will refer to the words of Maria Dudzikowa, who stated that “the cognitive structure is composed of specific abilities, fed by knowledge and experiences; built on a set of beliefs that, with the help of these abilities, it is worth and possible in the given context of an individual’s own situation to initiate and implement effective tasks to achieve changes in one’s own personality and behaviour in accordance with the standards desired by oneself’ (1994, p.206).

Entrepreneurial intentions and behaviours are conditioned by various factors. It has been recognised that the entrepreneurial process begins with entrepreneurial intentions, the individual perception and proper evaluation of one’s own entrepreneurial qualities. Therefore, the following should be taken into ac-

count. among others: competences, acquired skills or possessed resources, predispositions or character traits.

The impact of education on the development of entrepreneurial qualities can contribute in the long term to innovative education, which is important for the development of young people, future citizens and labour market participants.

Competence is one of the most important pedagogical concepts, behind which there are various personality traits, attained knowledge and acquired skills or abilities of an individual to act. According to Jerzy Nikitorowicz (2021, p. 204), “competences are specific dispositions to undertake and implement actions with the awareness of striving for a specific effect, taking into account social and cultural conditions and situations”. In the case of competences, resources, abilities, i.e. the potential of the individual, and possibilities in action are important (Meczkowska, 2003, p. 693, Strykowski, Strykowska-Nowakowska, 2017, p. 35).

Definition of entrepreneurial competence, which is attributed to a specific person, emerges from the cited authors’ definitions of the characteristics of entrepreneurial competence.

When writing about competences, it is important to bear in mind their changing nature, often subject to reconstruction due to social, economic, political or environmental conditions. Whether it is pandemic, the war in Ukraine, or the recent flooding in Poland, one can wonder or speculate how much influence the events will have on the formation of competences in the future.

The war in Ukraine has triggered and tested competences in aspects of defence and international cooperation, and negotiations. It has caused a massive migration of the Ukrainian population, as a result of which multicultural competences were stimulated, such as skills of finding oneself in communication with a person from another culture, acceptance of cultural behaviour. Understanding of the ethical dimension of the situation, i.e. respect for the dignity of refugees, respect for the “other” person, recognising the injustice of war, compassion and empathy. Polish society has passed this test with flying colours. There has been an opening up to the other, there has been an increase in cooperation, in sharing of one’s goods, in providing unpaid services, in taking the Ukrainian population under one’s roof, in hiring in companies.

The pandemic has certainly had an impact on raising the level of digital competence, students and teachers, groups of employees, communities.

The September 2024 floods caused that the decision-makers had to find their way in managing people and resources, in emergency conditions, coordinating rescue efforts, in an environment that was turbulent and difficult to predict. There has been an increase in the importance of environmental risk management skills and the ability to construct a strategy for adapting flood-prone areas, reformatting people’s past ways of thinking, thinking in terms of the con-

sequences of climate change and the real risks associated with it. The actions and activities that people, organisations, and the government took had to take place under time pressure. Some were spontaneous, such as the various collections of food, equipment or funds, taking in people and animals, psychological support, and architectural support. Every town, municipality, school, joined in to help those in the post-flood areas. Other actions, both governmental and institutional, should be pertinent and coordinated, as well as appropriate management of human teams and resources should be implemented in order to produce tangible results.

It is supposed that as a result of disasters such as flooding, interpersonal competences are strengthened among the population, sensitivity to the social environment is activated, the level of empathy, support for the needs of the other increases.

Action competences are strengthened, group cooperation, judgement and quick reaction, planning and organising work, managing teams are activated.

Looking at environmental, ecological disasters, it is noted that more and more emphasis must be placed on shaping and developing skills related to environmental sustainability and appropriate spatial planning to minimise the risk of future disasters (Balachowicz, 2022).

Reference has been made to recent developments, as it is impossible to discuss competencies in entrepreneurial qualities while ignoring the reality and events that are unfolding next door. These events activate behaviours, resources and ideas in the community, important for active action, support of the population and rebuilding of infrastructure. Traits from the catalogue of entrepreneurial competences are activated.

Education in the development of entrepreneurial qualities focuses on developing real skills that are necessary in adulthood, for the realisation of one's goals and objectives, in a rapidly changing world. We live in an uncertain, and changing reality. It is difficult to forecast today which will be the competences required 15 years from now. According to sociologists' estimates, nowadays generations are replacing each other more frequently, instead of every 25 years as was the case until recently (Błażejowski, 2021, p. 229). What competences will determine finding one's place in social and cultural life, in the life of an active person, in times of smoother change, in the era of rapidly developing automation? It can be assumed that many professions will change their nature and new specialisations will emerge. Well-qualified, competent, professional workers will be sought after.

"Entrepreneurship-focused programmes refer to the development of key life skills to help navigate this uncertain future' (Grabarek, 2022, p. 392). As noted by the authors (Karpiński, 2001, Kwiatkowski 2018, p. 23), it is difficult to predict the future, as the development of economies does not occur linearly,



there are events (e.g. war, pandemic, floods) that affect leaps in socio-economic change. Thinking about competences for future generations makes educational sense for the design of educational programmes, for the community that nothing is certain and lifelong learning is written into our genetic code.

The competence referred to as entrepreneurship is recognised by some researchers as the competence of the future, due to its growing importance for economic development (Borowiec-Gabryś, Kilar, Rachwał, 2018, Kwiatkowski). Katarzyna Grabarek points out the skills that need to be developed for the future are problem solving, teamwork, empathy or learning to accept failure. (2022, s. 392).

Young people need to be prepared for an uncertain future, and a way to have a better entry into adulthood may be to develop entrepreneurial qualities that relate to key life skills (Lackéus, 2013). These qualities should include developing the competences of being creative and open to collaboration, which are key words when discussing entrepreneurial attitudes, but also learning to identify problems. This should also involve motivating people to be persistent in their efforts to achieve their goals, developing their passions in life, because, as stated by Stefan Kwiatkowski, this is a construct closely related to intrinsic motivation that allows anticipating future achievements (2018, p. 79). Moreover, the author notes that people who have a conviction of their proficiency, entrepreneurial competences, are “programmed| to change the world, to make it better.

Monika Borgiasz believes that “shaping a young person can only take place by adopting entrepreneurial attitudes” (2017, p. 199). It can certainly foster the shaping of traits important for human development, but who they will be in life, what motivations they will follow, also depends on many other factors.

There are various typologies of competences. The division of competencies by Siwan Mitchelmore and Jennifer Rowley (2010) is often cited in publications. The researchers identified 25 entrepreneurial competences, which Danuta Piróg grouped into personal (social), behavioural and managerial characteristics (2015, p. 371).

Another division of entrepreneurial competences was developed on behalf of the European Commission as part of The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp) project. Entrepreneurship was defined as a transversal competence “which applies to people in all spheres of life, from personal development, to active participation in society, to entering or re-entering the labour market as an employee or self-employed person and to contributing to the start-up of different kinds of cultural, social or economic ventures. Competence is divided into three categories: ideas and the ability to realise them, resources and action” (Rachwał, 2019, p. 23).

Entrepreneurial competence is one of the eight basic key competences in the European education system, competences that are essential for the knowledge society. Entrepreneurial competences, until recently considered as

specialised competences, are becoming general competences. This is also the case with digital and language competences (Kwiatkowski, 2018).

Entrepreneurial attitudes need to be shaped, they can become a contribution to educational, social, professional success.

## Research part

As noted by López-Núñez, Rubio-Valdehita, Armuña, Pérez-Urria (2022), the entrepreneurship guidelines in “EntreComp: The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework” can be used to map current educational needs, identify linkages to different skills, adapt and design new curricula, build competency-based selection models, identify team strengths and validate skills acquired through learning.

Based on the literature, three groups of entrepreneurial competences were identified. Competencies (competence characteristics) were assigned to each group. The division into subgroups of competences was made on the basis of the EntreComp set of entrepreneurial competences, developed on behalf of the European Commission in 2020. The division of competences that was used in the EntreComp document was applied and they were divided into three groups. The first was called “Ideas and Possibilities”, covering the following competences: seeing opportunities, creativity, vision, valuing ideas, ethical and ‘balanced’ thinking (sustainable consequences of one’s actions).

The group “Resources” or mental resources covered the following competences in the self-assessment survey: motivation and perseverance, mobilisation of colleagues and others, knowledge of finance and economics in order to be able to make analyses, self-awareness and self-efficacy, consolidation of resources (acquiring and managing resources).

The competence area “Action”, i.e. translating ideas into practice, means planning and management, cooperation with others (teamwork) and dealing with uncertainty, with risk, taking initiative, permanent experiential learning (Kwiatkowski, 2018, p. 19. Sasin, 2022).

All three categories together define entrepreneurship and describe it as the ability to transform ideas and possibilities into actions that generate value (Sasin, 2022).

Competence in entrepreneurial traits is the basis for preparation to enter adult social and cultural life, into the labour market. Lecturers sometimes receive questions from students, about the purpose of the topics discussed, about the practicality of educational programmes. About application in real life? In response, I would like to use the opinion of Professor Roman Galar, who claims that “studies should prepare for a profession, but to the extent not exceeding half of the classes. The rest should serve to shape a knowledgeable citizen” (Galar, 2023).

Introducing entrepreneurship into educational programmes, into curriculum, work methods of an activating nature, through experience, experimentation, project methods, methods that require the student to inquire and question, that are based on both research and theory and practice, develop, enrich the student with important competences, skills and attitudes (Kožuš, 2021; Sołtysiak 2012). This is the response to dynamic socio-economic changes, to the needs of the labour market, but also for the personal and intellectual development of the student.

In both the Entrepreneurship Action Plan 2020 and the New Approach to Education, the European Commission calls on Member States to provide all young individuals with practical entrepreneurial experience before they leave compulsory education, and emphasises the importance of learning-by-doing methods (European Commission, 2014).

According to recent educational concepts, the fastest learning is through experience, creative activities and creativity (Adamska-Staroń, 2018; Kožuš, 2021; Krzyżek, 2010; Łukasik, 2019; Sołtysiak, 2022).

In a dynamically changing world, education should aim to be creative and innovative, to prepare the problem-solving student in a non-stereotypical way (Kožuš, 2021, p. 10). One of the tools for activating students to learn are simulation games that allow them to take on the role of an entrepreneur – to make decisions like those made by business managers and to compete with other players in the market.

The contemporary social and economic situation and the labour market expect professionals, graduates with passion, with the ability to think creatively, create innovations, with developed analytical skills, able to work in multicultural environments, understanding the laws of the market, characterised by interdisciplinary, communication, leadership skills, able to adapt to changing conditions and lifelong learning (Patel, Vannai, Dasani, Sharma, 2024; Sołtysiak, 2018). According to the authors, in order to achieve a sustainable level of development in entrepreneurship, as exemplified by research in India, it is very important that the spirit and culture of entrepreneurship is ingrained in students, at the 'school' level. Education in developing entrepreneurial qualities contributes to fostering important qualities for potential employees, as well as can bring support to the goals for sustainable development in the country. It fosters an apt transition of professionals from the education systems to the labour market.

## **Research assumptions**

The author, following Tomasz Rachwał, considers entrepreneurship “a cross-cutting competence that applies to people in all spheres of life, from personal

development through active participation in society, to exiting and/or re-entering the market as an employee or self-employed person, as well as to starting various types of ventures (cultural, social or economic)" (2019, p. 23).

For the purposes of the research, the author adopted a definition of individual entrepreneurship as a certain process that begins with the perception and positive assessment of one's own capabilities, in terms of one's competences, skills or character traits. The article analyses selected personality traits, skills, resources possessed and readiness to be active in one's environment (their subjective evaluation by respondents), taken into account in most models of entrepreneurship. Recognising that entrepreneurial behaviour is conditioned by a number of factors.

In line with the state of the art, it was assumed that the construction of profiles – models of entrepreneurial traits among students can take place through self-assessment, i.e. discovering one's potential in a chosen field. In this case, it referred to entrepreneurial traits, in terms of finding out to what extent students perceive competences from the groups in their self-assessment: "Ideas (ideas) and possibilities", "Resources" and "Action".

The author used the model developed within the 'EntreComp' project, in terms of identifying entrepreneurial traits among students from the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia.

The research attempted to determine the relationship between student self-assessment among the three groups of entrepreneurial traits and the students' country of origin. Pearson's Chi-square test of significance was used for this purpose, the statistical significance of the differences in responses between the student groups was tested and  $V_c$  – the strength of effect index, the degree of dependence between the variables was given.

The research was conducted among students of pedagogical studies, in their first and second year, the respondents were between the ages of 20 and 24. The research was conducted from May 2022 to June 2023. At Jan Dlugosz University in Czestochowa, 164 students returned completed survey questionnaires. In the Czech Republic, at Palacký University in Olomouc, the sample consisted of 85 students. In Slovakia, at the Žilina University in Žilina, the sample consisted of 26 students. A survey method, using a questionnaire survey, was used to investigate students' self-assessment.

## Research results

Students responded to a self-report question on their perception of themselves as having selected entrepreneurial traits.

Table 1 shows the results of the chi-square independence test for the trait group "Ideas and Possibilities". The % of affirmative responses is given. Re-

sponses to the question included a choice – tick, any number of traits out of a possible 5. In the first column of the table, the names of these traits from the competence group “Ideas and Possibilities” are entered.

Table 1

*Relationship between students' country of origin and self-reported characteristics from the ideas (ideas) and capabilities group – chi-square independence test*

Ideas and Possibilities	Czech Republic		Slovakia		Poland		In total		$\chi^2$	p	V <sub>c</sub>
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Is creative, looking for solutions	67	24.54	25	9.16	135	49.82	228	83.52	1.85	0.40	0.08
Develops visions	48	17.84	19	7.06	92	34.20	159	59.11	2.22	0.33	0.09
Evaluates ideas	30	11.11	15	5.56	65	24.07	110	40.74	2.79	0.25	0.10
Understands the ethical dimension of his/her actions	20	7.14	13	4.81	70	25.93	103	38.15	8.09	0.02*	0.17
Self-esteem, I have knowledge and skills	28	10.29	14	5.15	106	38.97	148	54.41	19.84	0.00*	0.27

df=2 p<0.05 N=275

N- number of observations, affirmative answers; chi-square – value of test statistic, df – degrees of freedom, p-value for chi-square test, V<sub>c</sub> – strength of effect index, \* statistical significance

Source: Authors' research

The Czech, Polish and Slovak students who underwent the survey considered creativity to be the most important characteristic. Polish students had the highest response rate, with almost half of the students (49.82%) stating that they were creative solution seekers.

The relationship between the study groups was not statistically significant.

Statistically significant differences, at the p=0.00 level, were shown for the trait named “Self-esteem, I have knowledge and skills”. The degree of relationship between the variables, which is a measure of the strength of the effect in this test, was V<sub>c</sub>=0.27. This indicates a moderate strength of the relationship between the variables studied.

The trait concerning the ethical dimension of one's actions did not reach high values in the students' responses, for the Czech students 7.14% and for the Slovak students 4.81% respectively. Only one in four respondents in Poland, i.e. 25.93% of students, considers it a valuable trait from the catalogue of entrepreneurial traits, in the group “Ideas and Possibilities”. Statistical significance, at p=0.02 and a weak effect of the relationship between variables V<sub>s</sub>=0.17 are noted.

Table two shows the results of the chi-square independence test for the resource trait group. The % of affirmative responses is given.

Table 2

*Relationship between students' country of origin and resource group characteristics – chi-square test of independence*

Resources	Czech Republic		Slovakia		Poland		In total		$\chi^2$	p	V <sub>c</sub>
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Motivation	67	24.54	19	6.96	128	46.89	214	78.39	1.57	0.47	0.08
Encouraging others	20	7.38	16	5.9	100	36.9	136	50.18	28.82	0.00*	0.33
Possesses theoretical knowledge (knowledge of economics and finance)	51	18.75	5	8.09	87	37.99	160	58.82	8.55	0.01*	0.18
Self-confidence, sense of efficacy	52	19.05	21	7.69	131	47.99	204	74.73	7.99	0.02*	0.17
Sense of self-awareness	34	12.55	18	6.64	85	31.37	134	50.55	4.97	0.08	0.14
Acquisition and management of tangible and intangible assets	18	6.69	11	4.09	74	27.51	103	38.29	10.95	0.11	0.20

df=2 p<0.05 N=275

N- number of observations, affirmative answers; chi-square – value of test statistic, df – degrees of freedom, p-value for chi-square test, V<sub>c</sub> – strength of effect index, \* statistical significance

Source: Authors' research.

In the group of entrepreneurial traits – „Resources”, Czech students most frequently claimed that resource they possessed is motivation, this was nearly 25% of the responses. Slovak students did not recognise it as leading in the group. In contrast, Polish students, close to 50%, considered this attribute to be important for entrepreneurship. It should be added that the trait “Self-confidence, sense of efficacy” was also considered an important trait by Polish students, with a number close to 50%. Czech students also ranked it highly, as almost one in five (19.05%) respondents attributed it to their self-esteem. In this case, statistical significance (p=0.02) and a weak dependency effect between variables V<sub>s</sub>=0.17 are noted.

Statistical significance at the p=0.02 level was recorded between the competences in the “Resources” group and the students for the trait “Encouraging others” and a moderate degree of relationship between the variables, with a moderate strength of effect V<sub>c</sub>=0.33.

Furthermore, statistical significance at the p=0.01 level was recorded for the trait defining a student with economic and financial literacy and a weak effect of the relationship between the variables V<sub>s</sub>=0.18.

It should be mentioned that in the group of “Resources” traits, Polish students attributed the said traits to themselves to the greatest extent.

Table 3

*Relationship between students' country of origin and action group characteristics – chi-square test of independence*

Actions	Czech Republic		Slovakia		Poland		In total		$\chi^2$	p	V <sub>c</sub>
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Planning	62	22.96	24	8.89	120	44.44	206	76.30	3.46	0.18	0.11
Team management	55	20.30	18	6.64	110	40.59	183	67.53	0.08	0.96	0.08
Collaboration	52	19.19	19	7.01	118	43.54	189	69.74	1.24	0.54	0.07
Ability to cooperate in a team	51	18.89	19	7.04	108	40.00	178	65.93	0.30	0.86	0.03
Dealing with uncertainty, risks	40	14.71	20	7.35	114	41.91	174	63.97	10.86	0.00*	0.20
Takes the initiative	0	0.00	17	6.16	69	25.00	86	31.16	60.31	0.00*	0.47

df=2 p<0.05 N=275

N- number of observations, affirmative answers; chi-square – value of test statistic, df – degrees of freedom, p-value for chi-square test, V<sub>c</sub> – strength of effect index, \* statistical significance

Source: Authors' research

In the group of entrepreneurial traits "Action", the trait "Planning" was associated with the highest percentage by students from the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia. No statistical significance was noted in this case. At a similar level are the responses concerning the attribution of traits under the names: "Team management" "Cooperation" and "Ability to cooperate in a team". It can be assumed that students are able to become active individuals when the situation demands it. Particularly Polish students, as the response percentage is within 40%, for Czech students the response percentage is within 20% and for Slovak students within 7%.

Statistical significance was recorded for the trait "Dealing with uncertainty, risks", p=0.00 and V<sub>s</sub>=0.20.

In contrast, a strong correlation effect occurred between the variables country of origin and the trait "Takes the initiative". V<sub>s</sub>=0.47 and p=0.00. In this case, one in four (25.00%) Polish students attributed this trait to themselves, 6.16% Slovak students, and 0.00% Czech students respectively.

## Summary

Research of the authors (Kraśnicka, Glod, Ludvik and Perekova, 2014, p. 328) shows that "the opportunities to equip students not only with the necessary knowledge, but also to shape their attitudes and behaviours, including entrepreneurial ones, are not fully exploited".

Balachowicz (2022, p. 111) notes that there has been growing dissatisfaction with the social effects of education since the 1970s. Not only education, but also the state has failed to develop a clear direction for educational change.

I agree with Krzysztof Rubacha (2021, p. 220) that the standards for the education of educators show few hours of pedagogy or psychology in which skills could be developed in terms of various competences. "The internship programmes themselves do not place the student seriously in school work, therefore some students understand that they are not prepared to cope with school life and educational practice".

According to Józefa Bałachowicz (2022), the problem of Polish society is low communicative competences and poor motivation for civic interaction in daily life.

In the course of their lives, university graduates are forced to function in different socio-cultural, economic, environmental conditions, in different working environments. The measurement of a quality worker should be the ability to retrain, to learn quickly.

Therefore, the topic of developing competences, referred to as entrepreneurial competences, seems important.

The author was interested in what competences in the field of entrepreneurial qualities are ascribed by students. Polish students rated themselves as having many entrepreneurial traits to the greatest extent, but the percentages are not high, exceeding 50%. From the group of competencies "Ideas and Possibilities", the trait "creativity" reached the highest percentage of 49.82%. From the group "Resources", students most frequently marked "self-confidence", "sense of efficacy" 47.99% and "motivation" 46.89%. By contrast, in the "Action" group, qualities were assigned at a similar level, around 40%. These are qualities such as "ability to plan", "team management", "cooperation" and "ability to work in a team" and "dealing with uncertainty, risk".

Can these responses indicate that Polish students consider themselves to be entrepreneurial? Based on these pilot research, it can only be assumed that to the greatest extent Polish students are endowed with entrepreneurial potential. Other research, by Teresa Kraśnicka, Grzegorz Głód, Ludislav Ludvik and Jindra Peterkov, show that both Polish and Czech students rated their entrepreneurial potential highly. About one third of the respondents stated that they lacked entrepreneurial attributes. They were unable to recognise or assess them (2014, p. 328).

Limitations of the research. This was a preliminary research. It was conducted on a relatively small sample. The research was conducted in three universities. The groups were not homogeneous. Drawing conclusions should be narrowed down to the research sample. They are a starting point for further analyses in order to be able to determine which competences need to be developed or worked on so that when a student leaves the walls of a university, they are aware that they have developed their personality traits, acquired compe-



tences and gained skills, achieved new knowledge resources important for their future, which will allow them to function better in social life, in the working environment.

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## **Edukacyjne profile w zakresie przedsiębiorczości studentów z Czech, z Polski i ze Słowacji**

### **Streszczenie**

Celem artykułu jest poznanie opinii studentów kierunków pedagogicznych, w zakresie ich samooceny na temat wybranych kompetencji, które mogą tworzyć profile grup przedsiębiorczych. Wywód składa się z dwóch części. W pierwszym dokonano przeglądu literatury przedmiotu w zakresie ujęcia terminologicznego kompetencji. Druga część przedstawia wyniki (wstępnych) badań własnych, w grupach studentów studiów stacjonarnych, przeprowadzonych metodą sondażu, z wykorzystaniem kwestionariusza ankiety. Badania przeprowadzono wśród studentów z Czech, ze Słowacji i z Polski. Kompetencje w zakresie przedsiębiorczości podzielono na trzy grupy: „Pomysły (idee) i możliwości”, „Zasoby” i „Działanie”, zgodnie z dokumentem *The Entrepreneurship Competence Framework* (2020). Badania pokazały, że studenci Polscy posiadają najwięcej cech przedsiębiorczych, szczególnie w zakresie cech z grupy „Zasoby” i „Działanie”. Studenci z Czech głównie przypisywali sobie cechy z obszaru „Działanie”. Studenci ze Słowacji w małym zakresie są świadomi posiadania cech przedsiębiorczych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** działanie, edukacja, idee i możliwości, kompetencje przedsiębiorcze, zasoby.

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Natalia Maria RUMAN

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7127-7651>

University of Silesia, Faculty of Arts and Sciences on Education, Poland

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**Contact:** natalia.ruman@us.edu.pl

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## The Dangers of Adolescents Resulting from Internet Use. A Reflection on the Example of Two Secondary Schools, in Pszczyna and Český Těšín

### Abstract

The Internet these days has endless possibilities. It is used in virtually every human activity. The purpose of this article is not to demonize the Internet but to examine various dimensions of how young people function in the virtual world. The goal is also to determine what negatives students face and what positives result from using this technology.

The first part will present the most essential news in the new media field and, in particular, the characteristics of the Internet. Issues related to various aspects of Internet use will be addressed – from the psychological mechanisms of Internet use by young people through media education and the dangers of various online activities to the socio-practical phenomena occurring in the digital world.

The knowledge gained through the theoretical part will form the basis for conducting empirical research. The purpose of the research will be to determine the importance of Computer and Internet use in the lives of secondary school students. The results of this research discussed, together with their elaboration and the presentation of ways to counteract the threats and methods of positive use of the Internet, can be a valuable source of helpful knowledge both in the pedagogical work of those involved in education and valuable for parents, since they are most responsible for the education of their children in the use of media.

**Keywords:** Internet, computer use, cyberbullying, youth media use.

## Introduction

The Internet "is the fabric of our lives. If information processing technology were to be considered today's equivalent of what electricity was in the industrial age, then the Internet, because of its ability to transmit the power of information to all spheres of human activity, could be likened to both an electric grid and an electric motor." as a well-known media scholar, Manuel Castells, describes the importance of the Internet network. It is hard not to agree with these words, given that the Internet has become not only a tool used by 2,3 billion people in the world (or about 33% of the world's total population) but also a tool that determines the organization of essential enterprises of economic, social, political and cultural dimensions. Navigating the areas of the Internet "creates almost unlimited opportunities to acquire various types of information and shapes several psychophysical functions: reflexes, motor coordination, and ability to focus attention. In addition, it develops knowledge and interests. It allows people to make new contacts." (Castells, 2003, pp. 23–24).

The Computer is an attractive tool, which is due to several factors, including the fact that excluding unexpected failures – it is always ready to work; it creates the possibility of repeatedly returning to the same content; it gives a sense of influence over what is happening; it helps in effective learning; for players who win with the Computer, it gives a sense of increased satisfaction, while for those who lose, it does not create a sense of great defeat; it allows one to relieve stress and emotions; it facilitates communication; and it allows one to meet some needs that are difficult to meet in real life. (Augustynek, 2010, pp. 8–9; Techmańska, 2019, p. 246).

Computers and the Internet are also tools for work, and no one needs to be convinced that they facilitate work in almost all fields. Computers also help people with disabilities. Of course, the use of these devices and media can be associated with many negative consequences, among which are Internet crime, excessive fascination with the Internet, verbal aggression, the destructive impact of computer games on the psyche of their users, as well as health problems resulting from excessive time spent in front of a computer screen (Kamieniecki et al., 2017, pp. 31–34).

As Ryszard Tadeusiewicz points out, "For psychologists dealing with personality issues, it is obvious that the personality traits of an Internet user are revealed (among other things) in the form of the ways he uses the Internet. It can also be thought that certain psychological traits make people more inclined to use the network, while others are more conducive to shying away from using the Internet. It is also related to gender, age, and education. A particular person's psychological profile and personality traits also have a lot to say here. Moreover, the relationship between the Internet and the psyche can be two-

way. On the one hand, a particular person's psychological silhouette may determine whether and how he or she uses the Web, but on the other hand, it can also be expected that Web use (especially long and intensive use) affects the psyche. However, it is not yet known exactly how." (Tadeusiewicz, 2002, pp. 18–19; Angielczyk, 2019, p. 58).

A symptom of Internet abuse in the life of an individual that is closely related to the perspective of cognitive-behavioural psychology is FOMO (fear of missing out). The fear of "falling out of the loop" is the feeling that something fundamental will be missed if we "disconnect from the network" for a while. The most vulnerable to the harmful effects of psychological mechanisms of Computer and Internet use are children and adolescents, especially those who use it regularly from an early age. As early as two years old, children demand to be allowed to use the Computer – they want to press keyboard keys, put on headphones, and watch photos or videos on the Computer. This activity requires the help of parents, but the child, observing adults at the Computer, on his initiative, insists on it (Laska, 2006, pp. 105–106; Skoczylas, 2023, pp. 118–119). The principles instilled in a child will directly impact their future Internet use. The Internet is becoming their source of knowledge on all sorts of issues. Young people make numerous friends on the Internet. They are very active on social networks, upload their photos to the Web without restraint, and express all kinds of opinions without restraint. At this time, virtual self-creation is as essential (or sometimes more important) as others' perceptions in the real world. Comparing oneself and one's ordinary life with the colourful world created on the Internet can make young people feel depressed and worthless (Chocholska, Osipczuk, 2009, pp. 33–34).

Functioning in virtual reality is related to the culture we can observe in today's society. Zbyszko Melosik pointed out the connection between popular culture, which is seen as a factor of socialization, and growing up in a media society. Modern culture is primarily characterized by consumerism, immediacy, the rapid pace of change, the disappearance of great ideals, the cult of the body, youth and sexuality, appearances and schematicity. These cultural features are compounded by the media, which promote a specific pattern of life even though people seem to be individual, diverse individuals (Melosik, 2000, p. 41; Witek, 2018, p. 40).

Almost every member of society strives for social success – having a good job, prosperity, and position. "Social messages – propagated by the mass media – proclaim: "You can't be a failure." In doing so, there are two basic contexts for success. Pursuing power determines the first, position (standing) and money, the second by so-called popular fame." It means that there is only one fundamental path to happiness. Getting too deeply involved in ideas or ambitious activities is received with disapproval. Z. Melosik also introduced the concept of

"instant culture," which refers to the habit and necessity of living a life of "immediacy" typical of our times." According to the author, the "rule of immediacy" also prevails on the Internet – "any message can be entered instantly. Free movement through information, cultures and societies is also possible. The prism of immediacy in modern culture has a huge impact on the identity and lifestyle of young people. Modern youth expects immediacy. They don't want to and can't wait." It is why children raised from birth in a culture shaped by the media, and to a large extent by new media, are highly susceptible to all its negative influences. It is exploited by marketing and advertising specialists, TV producers, and manufacturers of movies, games, music, and equipment. Even the youngest children want to own branded products, to be "up to date" and in line with current fashion (Melosik, 2008, pp. 98–102).

Therefore, it is worth looking at the psychological mechanisms that occur while using computers, computer games and the Internet. According to neuroscientists, children's ability to absorb and process media content depends on their experiences, specific circumstances, cognitive maturity, social environment, or cultural placement. "The perception and processing of images is a complex process in which many factors must be considered. (...) The impact of images on the viewer is tremendously relativized, as both children and adults perceive the images differently. (...) Only images that have some significant meaning will embed themselves in the brain and be permanently stored in it." (Holtkamp, 2010, p. 48; Jastrzębska, 2020, p. 97).

Whether a particular image is vital to a child may depend on whether the child assimilates it alone or in a group, personal interests, age and maturity. Which images will be absorbed by children and adolescents, how their brains will process them, and whether this will trigger negative behaviour is therefore not obvious or straightforward to pin down (Griffiths, 2004, p. 43). Children born after 1980 are even referred to as digital natives, meaning people characterized by growing up surrounded by media and the ability to use many simultaneously (Forma, 2006, pp. 66–67; Jopek, Kinda, 2019, pp. 78–80).

It is essential in the modern world to educate audiences on the proper use of means of communication, to make them aware of the mechanisms of the media, and, in particular, to inform them about the dangers of their improper use. The urgent need to educate for the reception of the media (that is, in today's terms, the need to conduct media education) was taken up (even in the Church!) in the Vatican II decree *Inter Mirifica*, issued in 1963: "The special task of these offices will be to see to it that the consciences of the faithful are properly formed in the field of the use of these means, as well as to support and guide all actions that Catholics take in this field." (Denek, 2000, p. 22).



## Literature review

R. Kośła wrote about cyber threats, stating that they are actions that block, distort or destroy information processed, stored or transmitted in ICT systems. He also points out that using these systems leads to disinformation, as the target of the attack is the information, not the system itself (Kośła, 2018, p. 18). I. Oleksiewicz, meanwhile, states that cyberbullying is one of the main threats to the world in the 21st century. (Oleksiewicz, 2018, p. 54).

The currently increasing number of young people at risk of addiction is becoming a social problem. Media reports and appeals from the scientific community are not indifferent to the growing threats to the development of children and adolescents. Thus, questions become topical not only about the causes and determinants of these phenomena but also about contemporary approaches and methods in diagnostic and therapeutic practice, i.e., the question of their effectiveness in the first place. The following article reviews contemporary theoretical approaches and trends in therapeutic interventions for children and adolescents (Kusztal, Piasecka, 2018, pp. 89–93).

Nomophobia and Phubbing are negative phenomena associated with the prevalence of smartphones and unlimited access to the Internet. Individual and social changes in behaviour conditioned by the ubiquity of smartphones require an analysis of these two types of problematic Internet use. Both types of behaviour are particularly prominent among teenagers. The article reveals the extent of nomophobia and phubbing among adolescents in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the link between these phenomena and well-being and the influence of the family on the style of smartphone use among young people (Tomczyk, Selmanagic, 2022, p. 46).

To guard against the disastrous consequences of cyber addictions, young people often conduct online searches for explanations of failures and crises experienced in everyday life. They find help by running sites that offer cybertherapy. This therapy is aimed at people who, for various reasons (e.g. lack of time, shyness), do not want to have a face-to-face session with a psychotherapist. Online psychotherapy comes in many forms (Jaroszevska, 2024, p. 5). It can be conducted via e-mail, live video sessions (Skype), chat or text messaging (SMS). The main advantage of e-therapy is its speed, which is focused on short-term contact. What is more, the price is also attractive compared to therapy conducted through traditional methods. On the other hand, it has disadvantages, such as the lack of emotional contact between the patient and psychotherapist, the impersonal relationship and the possibility of misunderstandings (Makara-Studzińska, Madej, 2017, pp. 23–24).

The Internet is a threat and a communication tool for young people. The article's authors presented the positives, showing Facebook as a tool for information management (Popiołek, Nierenberg, 2017, p. 96).

Adolescents form online groups, seek out authority figures, and form friendships. Contexts and structures of relating to others: how membership in different groups shapes the construction of interpersonal relationships, shows an article examining youth from Portugal (Brito et al., 2011, pp. 423–424).

Young people learn information literacy through technology (Koltay et al., 2011, p. 60).

It is essential to make classes or lessons more interesting with various technological innovations, as shown by the article's authors on blended learning (Spanjers et al., 2015, p. 61).

For a discussion of gender similarities that increase students' motivation to participate in STEM, see the article titled Focusing on gender similarities increases female students' motivation to participate (Jaško, Dukąła, Szastok, 2019, pp. 474–476).

Another article aims to demonstrate the importance of subjective reinforcement value when applying gamification elements in developing mobile applications and their use in educational and health promotion work. (Łosiak-Pilch, 2018, p. 202).

## **Risks associated with computer use**

Too much time spent in front of the Computer leads to disorganization of the day and a reduction in time that should be spent on other duties or more constructive leisure activities. In turn, the wrong time of day for computer use affects the child, preventing him or her from taking a light, media-free rest or interfering with the concentration necessary for learning. The range of content available on the Internet is also questionable due to its moral and social nature and huge volume. Too much information causes chaos, confusion and, in younger children, anxiety or fear. This mix of "content of widely varying social, moral meaning, lacking a reliable cultural basis, an explosion of advertising slogans leads to the child's perception of the real world through the prism of media images. (...) Abnormal relations between the child and the media can lead to destructive changes in the cognitive sphere of the child's personality." (Izdebska, 2008, p. 216; Siedlecka, Żukiewicz-Sobczak, Sobczuk, 2019, p. 35). In turn, watching violence leads to children acquiring "aggressive behaviours, increased levels of aggression, emotional desensitization, disturbed perception of the real role of violence in society, acquisition of impulsive and egocentric tendencies, stimulation of new aggressive behaviours, use of vulgarities." (Siemieniecki, 2012, p. 27).

The importance of two other dangers of improper media use is also worth noting. The first is the passive reception of content, which involves the unreflec-

tive absorption of messages (Szpunar, 2005, p. 378; Maj, 2019, pp. 144–145). It causes intellectual laziness, indiscriminateness, inhibition of creative activity and development of imagination, creativity, absorption of vulgarisms, and linguistically incorrect phrases, a generally negative impact on intellectual development. The second threat is adverse health effects – ophthalmic, neurological, and orthopaedic. Prolonged staring at a screen can result in myopia, conjunctivitis, burning, irritation, tearing, sudden loss of visual acuity, and changes in colour perception (Stunża, 2012, p. 29). In addition, the computer screen is a source of several types of radiation: ionizing, thermal, optical and electrostatic fields. Neurologically, on the other hand, excessive time spent at the Computer can cause anxiety, hyperactivity, feelings of restlessness and fear, and a tendency to aggression. In turn, limiting outdoor exercise at the expense of time spent in front of a monitor causes skeletal conditions, including postural defects, decreased physical fitness, scoliosis, decreased muscle mass, obesity, and neck and back pains (Ordon, Skoczylas-Krotla, 2003, pp.142–143).

Internet use is also linked to the danger of exposure to violence and pornography. Violence on the Internet is linked to the huge availability of computer games (downloadable or online), abounding in scenes of aggression. Through computer games, each person can test their skills in scenarios from horror movies or thrillers (Kozak, 2011, p. 34). "The Computer offers a beautiful world, an extension of the real play area. (...) Violent computer games can provide a model of aggressive behaviour here (...). However, as psychologists and sociologists emphasize, the decisive causes triggering violence lie outside the virtual world. They are to be seen in the truly experienced and psychologically unneutralized traumas from school or the family home." (Huber, Neuschaffer, 2003, p. 50–51; Kim, 2018, p. 668).

Children and teenagers are very eager to create accounts on social networks. The principle of "if you're not on Facebook, it means you don't exist" is being beaten. The space of social networks, especially Facebook, provides an additional social area for meetings, communication and social life (Borkowska, Witkowska, 2009, p. 10). Having an account comes with several risks. First, young people are all too eager to share all kinds of information about themselves on forums. Social networks encourage disclosing personal information, age, school, place of residence, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, instant messenger numbers, and Skype. "Children and adolescents quickly forget that their data is available to the general anonymous public, and the younger a community member is, the more private information he or she reveals." (Figurska, 2012, p. 29–30). The second aspect of the use of social networks is the posting of a vast number of photos, documenting travels, possessions, events, and often photographs showing oneself in an erotic capacity.

Meanwhile, such photos can be seriously harmful. After all, family, teachers, and strangers also have access to them. Possession of a compromising photo

can cause many problems, not necessarily in the present but also in the distant future, because one never knows whether the photo has not been copied and is stored somewhere (Barlińska, 2009, p. 107).

Based on the above considerations, it can be concluded that the use of the Internet, especially by young or inexperienced users, should be subjected to regular monitoring and combined with prevention at home and school. Awareness of the dangers arising from the seemingly most straightforward forms of Internet activity can protect children, adolescents, and their parents from many difficult and problematic situations.

### **Computer and Internet use – in the opinion of surveyed students**

The subject of the research in this article is the collective of students of secondary schools in Pszczyna and Český Těšín, and their opinions on Computer and Internet use. The aim of the research, in turn, is to determine the importance of Computer and Internet use in the lives of adolescents. These studies were analyzed many times, contributing to many research concepts in articles on this topic.

Growing from the same Slavic roots, Poland and the Czech Republic are culturally similar. Centuries of development side by side have made us neighbouring countries. Young people in Poland and the Czech Republic think alike and have similar experiences using the Internet.

The theoretical goal was to deepen young people's knowledge about the use of the Internet and the problems associated with this phenomenon. The practical goal allowed for the development of practical tips for teachers and parents who observe the activities of children and young people on the Internet. Parents and teachers must bear in mind that the presence of young people on the Internet is inseparable from the changing technological reality. They should only be warned of the dangers and supported when they forget about the principles of anti-cyberbullying.

The research problems formulated for this paper have been posed so that answers can be found in the research process. Obtaining these answers will carry out the tasks – acquiring knowledge to determine whether modern teenagers can live without computers and the Internet, whether they have experienced digital violence, how vital the Computer and the Internet are to them and whether it is already possible to talk about the problem of Internet addiction or other problems associated with excessive use of computers and the Internet. The analysis of our research will also allow us to determine what is the level of media competence of adolescents, what is their awareness of the safe use of the Internet, the ability to select valuable content accurately and to determine the attitude of parents toward the amount of time their children use the Internet.

## **Material and Methods**

Providing a comprehensive and factually correct answer to the formulated main research problem requires its decomposition into specific problems. Because of this, the following specific problems and corresponding specific hypotheses were identified. The research problem, which is the subject of the research undertaken, took the form of the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the most severe challenges and threats to youth cyber security distinguished?

RQ2: What are the potential problems associated with youth Internet use?

RQ3: According to the youth, what are the parents' solutions to protecting youth from the dangers of Internet access?

RQ4: What health changes do adolescents see as a result of prolonged time in front of the Computer?

In response to the research questions posed, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1: The most severe challenges to youth cyber security are the increasing time they use the Internet and the associated strong attachment to electronic devices electronic devices and excessive online activity.

H2: Potential problems for young people are hate speech, sharing images without permission, and ridicule.

H3: The only action taken to protect youth by parents is the intervention of taking away Internet access as a punishment for bad behaviour or failure to keep one's word.

H4: Adolescents have trouble seeing changes in health and appearance as consequences of prolonged time in front of the Computer.

The research confirmed the hypotheses.

Unfortunately, the youth surveyed use the Internet excessively and become potential recipients of hate speech and negative opinions, including ridicule. Parents are not informed in schools on how to talk to their children about technology use prevention. Simply banning Internet use for some time does not help young people understand the risks. Even health problems that affect young people are not an alarming factor.

## **Procedure**

The presented research uses the survey method. Surveys include all types of social phenomena of importance for upbringing, as well as states of social awareness, opinions and views of specific communities, the growth of the studied phenomena, their tendencies, and their intensity (Maszke 2008, p. 157). The

survey technique was used. It is a technique with a high degree of self-activity, and the role of the respondents comes down to distributing and collecting questionnaires. A survey is a standardized technique of receiving information in the process of communicating in writing without the intermediation of the examiner. In addition, the scaling method was used in the research. In the statistical literature, the Likert scale is treated as an ordinal or interval scale, and it seems that the more complex the scale, the greater the tendency to treat it as an interval scale. The advantage of this scale over simple scales is evident in the fact that individual positions on the scale cannot affect the final measurement result significantly. Considering the scale being constructed, these positions are supposed to balance each other.

In contrast, the specific properties of the simple scale can significantly impact the conclusions drawn from the research (Maszke 2008, p. 232). For this article, a 5-point Likert scale was used in the research. The task of the examined person is to respond to each question and select one of the five answers: 1 – I agree; 2 – rather yes; 3 – I have no opinion; 4 – I tend to disagree; 5 – I have to disagree.

The Internet Threats Questionnaire consisted of 10 statements containing an estimated scale with a five-point Likert scale. The tool consisted of one part related to knowledge and skills and referred to implementing and reflecting on preventive measures in everyday life.

The article uses the results of both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the survey, conducted from September 2023 to May 2024 among adolescents aged 15-19 in two secondary schools – K. Miarka District School Complex No. 2 and Albrechtová Stredni Szkola in Český Těšín.

**Measures:** The quantitative part involved surveying a representative sample of 1650 (1700 total questionnaires were distributed, but only 1650 returned) respondents at two Outposts.

The statistical breakdown of respondents by gender of the two schools

Table 1  
*Distribution of respondents by gender and place of residence*

Category	LP	%
woman PL	364	22.06
male PL	342	20.72
woman CZ	436	26.43
male CZ	508	30.79
total	1650	100

Source: Own work

The group was pretty homogeneous in terms of place of residence, as it included only 87 people (47 from Poland and 30 from the Czech Republic) living in rural areas, who accounted for only 5.27% of the respondents, 2.85% among Polish youth and 1.82% among Czech youth. It makes it unwarranted to analyze further the relationship between the place of residence and the danger hidden on the Internet. Women accounted for 22.06% of the Polish group and 26.43% of the Czech group. In contrast, men in the Polish group accounted for 20.72% and 30.79% in the Czech group.

The research project had the following objectives:

- To determine the magnitude of prevalence and risk factors of Internet abuse among adolescents;
- To qualitatively analyze the phenomenon of Internet abuse among young people;
- raising public awareness of the problem of Internet abuse among young people.

The first objective was to be achieved primarily through quantitative survey research, while the second was to be achieved primarily through extensive qualitative research based on in-depth individual interviews.

For the quantitative survey, the research procedure was as follows: The schools were informed by phone about the procedure, and I asked for their consent to participate. To both schools, I delivered questionnaires. At each school, as the person responsible for conducting the survey, I participated in conducting the survey. The young people filled out the questionnaires during class (usually parenting lessons). Beforehand, the respondents were informed about the purpose of the survey and the procedure for filling out the questionnaire.

As for the qualitative research – the interviews took place at the respondents' schools, where they could have a one-on-one conversation with the researcher. (Most often, it was the office of an educator). The interviews were conducted on general dispositions developed jointly for all project participants. Most questions were open-ended, and respondents were encouraged to narrate freely. The interviews were recorded and then subject to transcription.

During the interview, the following questions were asked:

1. What websites do you most often view, and why do you use them? What do you use them for?
2. Describe a problem encountered while using the Internet.
3. Describe online anonymity and comment on it, pointing out the positives or negatives.
4. What health problems or bodily changes have you observed in yourself during prolonged Internet use?
5. What was your reaction to cyber-aggression encountered on the Internet?

Table 2  
*Survey results by gender of respondents*

Q1 Do you use the Internet for more than 7 hours a day?	woman PL	%	male PL	%	woman CZ	%	male CZ	%
Definitely yes	32	1,94	41	2,48	15	0,9	14	0,84
Rather yes	68	4,12	72	4,36	68	4,12	101	6,12
I do not have an opinion	22	1,33	31	1,88	30	1,81	52	3,2
Rather no	163	9,87	102	6,18	198	12	181	10,97
Definitely no	79	4,79	96	5,82	125	7,57	160	9,7
Q2 You use a strictly scientific website to help you solve your homework	woman PL	%	male PL	%	woman CZ	%	male CZ	%
Definitely yes	113	6,85	129	7,82	223	13,52	309	18,73
Rather yes	85	5,15	104	6,3	134	8,12	121	7,33
I do not have an opinion	26	1,57	75	4,54	46	2,79	67	4,06
Rather no	108	6,54	26	1,57	22	1,33	4	0,24
Definitely no	32	1,94	8	0,48	11	0,67	7	0,42
Q3 You use social networking sites to establish relationships	woman PL	%	male PL	%	woman CZ	%	male CZ	%
Definitely yes	268	16,24	287	17,39	302	18,3	397	24,06
Rather yes	76	4,6	41	2,48	74	4,48	104	6,3
I do not have an opinion	11	0,67	2	0,12	38	2,3	6	0,36
Rather no	8	0,48	6	0,36	3	0,18	1	0,06
Definitely no	1	0,06	6	0,36	19	1,15	0	0
Q4 You go to erotic sites	woman PL	%	male PL	%	woman CZ	%	male CZ	%
Definitely yes	12	0,73	9	0,54	16	0,97	14	0,85
Rather yes	23	1,39	14	0,84	26	1,57	46	2,79
I do not have an opinion	33	2	24	1,45	51	3,09	52	3,15
Rather no	62	3,76	78	4,73	96	5,82	125	7,57
Definitely no	234	14,18	217	13,15	247	14,97	271	16,42
Q5 The problem you encountered on the Internet was hate	woman PL	%	male PL	%	woman CZ	%	male CZ	%
Definitely yes	326	19,76	285	17,27	361	21,88	430	26,06
Rather yes	32	1,94	49	2,97	54	3,27	57	3,45
I do not have an opinion	3	0,18	6	0,36	18	1,09	11	0,67
Rather no	1	0,06	2	0,12	3	0,18	4	0,24
Definitely no	2	0,12	0	0	0	0	6	0,36



Table 2 (cont.)

Q6 You have encountered that your photos or videos have been posted without your consent.									
Definitely yes	168	10,18	119	7,21	210	12,73	298	18,06	
Rather yes	146	8,85	180	10,9	171	10,36	144	8,73	
I do not have an opinion	28	1,7	34	2,06	41	2,48	40	2,42	
Rather no	13	0,79	9	0,54	14	0,85	17	1,03	
Definitely no	9	0,54	0	0	0	0	9	0,54	
Q7 The most significant danger on the Internet is the inability to be anonymous									
	woman PL	%	male PL	%	woman CZ	%	male CZ	%	
Definitely yes	286	17,33	237	14,36	214	12,97	250	15,15	
Rather yes	57	3,45	72	4,36	125	7,57	203	12,3	
I do not have an opinion	13	0,79	22	1,33	26	1,57	35	2,12	
Rather no	4	0,24	6	0,36	7	0,42	9	0,54	
Definitely no	4	0,24	5	0,3	64	3,88	11	0,67	
Q8 I would be able to survive 3 days without the Internet									
	woman PL	%	male PL	%	woman CZ	%	male CZ	%	
Definitely yes	13	0,79	10	0,6	22	1,33	16	0,97	
Rather yes	26	1,57	28	1,69	49	2,97	69	4,18	
I do not have an opinion	68	4,12	54	3,27	96	5,82	115	6,97	
Rather no	102	6,18	123	7,45	186	11,27	129	7,81	
Definitely no	155	9,39	127	7,69	83	5,03	179	10,85	
Q9 I have noticed changes in health or behaviour due to frequent internet use									
Definitely yes	130	7,88	114	6,9	111	6,73	102	6,18	
Rather yes	132	8	117	7,09	169	10,24	275	16,67	
I do not have an opinion	72	4,36	60	3,64	34	2,06	52	3,15	
Rather no	24	1,45	30	1,82	64	3,88	65	3,94	
Definitely no	6	0,36	21	1,27	58	3,15	14	0,85	
Q10 I opened a message from an unknown, harmful account at least once									
Definitely yes	46	2,79	68	4,12	71	4,3	31	1,88	
Rather yes	114	6,91	96	5,82	158	9,57	289	17,51	
I do not have an opinion	99	6	87	5,27	63	3,82	79	4,79	
Rather no	96	5,82	76	4,6	113	6,85	38	2,3	
Definitely no	9	0,54	15	0,9	31	1,88	71	4,3	

Most responses from Polish and Czech youth were placed next to the "rather not" opinion in question one regarding the amount of time spent on the Internet. On the other hand, when determining the Internet use to do homework, Polish and Czech adolescents admitted to using the technology; that is, 6.85% of Polish women and 7.82% of Polish men. Czech youth similarly declare doing homework with the help of the Internet – women 13.52% (definitely yes) and 8.12% (rather yes), 18.73% definitely yes men and 7.33% (rather yes), which is 47.7% of Czech youth.

Similarly, young people from Poland and the Czech Republic firmly admit to using the Internet for social media – 33.63% from Poland (16.24% of women and 17.39% of men) and 42.36% from the Czech Republic (18.3% of women and 24.06% of men).

At such a young age in both Poland and the Czech Republic, respondents also admit to using erotic websites – 2.12% of Polish women (combined definitely yes and rather yes) and 1.38%, while 2.54% of women and 3.64% of men from the Czech Republic.

Polish and Czech youths, unfortunately, equally encountered hatred on the Internet to a similar degree – 19.76% of Polish women, 17.27% of Polish men, 21.88% of Czech women and 26.06% of Czech men declaring a "definitely yes" answer. These results are also comparable.

Few respondents identified the situation of using their image without permission on the Internet. It is a problem that affects people regardless of their home country. As many as 19.03% of Polish female adolescents have encountered such a situation (the sum of answers definitely and rather yes), male adolescents in 18.11%, and Czech women in 23.09% and 26.79% of men. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that Polish and Czech youth face the same problems.

Polish and Czech youths similarly express their opinion when asked about anonymity online. The most aware of the threat are women in Poland – 20.78% and men in the Czech Republic – 27.45%.

In the following questions, note respondents' high percentage of "I have no opinion" responses. Perhaps young people are unwilling to speak openly and honestly on this topic, particularly in the eighth question, where respondents were asked to specify the possibility of experiencing three days without the Internet. As many as 15.57% of Polish women cannot imagine such a situation, 15.14% of men, 16.03% of Czech women and 18.66% of men. The question is whether they are already pretentious addicts (e.g., phonoholism, phubbing). In the following question, respondents admitted noticing changes in their health – as many as 15.88% of Polish women, 13.99% of men, 16.97% of Czech women, and 22.85% of men, respectively.

The last question concerned opening a message from an unknown account at least once, which had caused harm to respondents. Unfortunately, men from

the Czech Republic were found to be the most irresponsible on this question – 19.39%, compared to their colleagues from Poland – 9.94%. Women are much more cautious in Poland – 9.7%- than female colleagues in the Czech Republic – 13.87%.

The survey shows that Pszczyna and Czech teenagers are in constant contact with the Internet. Here is a selected excerpt from the compiled survey:

Table 3  
*Respondent's answers to the questions asked*

Categories	Definitely yes		Rather yes		I do not have an opinion		Rather no		Definitely no		Average measure	Standard deviation
	Lp	%	Lp	%	Lp	%	Lp	%	Lp	%		
You use the Internet for more than 7 hours a day	102	6.2	309	18.7	135	8.2	644	39	460	27.9	2.36	1.24
You use a strictly scientific website to help you solve your homework	774	46.9	444	26.9	254	15.4	110	6.7	68	4.1	4.06	1.12
You use social networking sites to establish relationships	1254	76.0	295	17.9	57	3.4	18	1.1	26	1.6	4.66	0.75
You visit erotic sites	51	3.1	109	6.6	160	9.7	361	21.9	969	58.7	1.74	1.08
The problem encountered on the Internet was hate	1402	85.0	192	11.6	38	2.3	10	0.6	8	0.5	4.80	0.56
You have encountered that your photos or videos have been posted without your consent	795	48.2	641	38.8	143	8.7	53	3.2	18	1.1	4.30	0.84
The most significant danger on the Internet is the inability to be anonymous	987	59.8	457	27.7	96	5.8	26	1.6	84	5.1	4.36	1.03

Table 3 (cont.)

Categories	Definitely yes		Rather yes		I do not have an opinion		Rather no		Definitely no		Average measure	Standard deviation
	Lp	%	Lp	%	Lp	%	Lp	%	Lp	%		
I would be able to survive 3 days without the Internet	61	3.7	172	10.4	333	20.2	540	32.7	544	33.0	2.19	1.12
I have noticed changes in health or behaviour due to frequent internet use	457	27.7	693	42.0	218	13.2	183	11.1	99	6.0	3.74	1.15
I opened a harmful message from an unknown account at least once	216	13.1	657	39.8	328	19.9	323	19.6	126	7.6	3.31	1.15

Source: Own work

The analysis of the first thesis is alarming because students are busy with their phones most of the day, not the natural world around them. Over 25% of respondents use the Internet for more than 7 hours, which is more than they sometimes spend at school or in class.

Another thesis: The authors were inspired by an article about the potential of young people using modern IT tools concerning and using scientific websites for homework (Kuźmińska-Solśnia, 2006, pp. 115–119). Most respondents favour using the Internet mainly for academic purposes, which is optimistic. During in-depth interviews, the research participants said they are frequent visitors to gaming websites, which they openly admit. Online therapy also appears in the answers, which gives the client more freedom and openness.

Respondents were also allowed to list other sites. Such statements appeared: Automotive – 216 (13.09%), promotional newspapers/shops – 167 (10.12%), language translators – 141 (8.54%), assisting in technology (for repairing, converting, et cetera.) – 75 (4.54%).

Of course, the respondents also use social networking sites, as well as what can be scary (!), erotic websites, which they openly admit.

The fifth thesis concerned the problems (the authors based their question on reading the article – (Tokunaga, 2010, pp. 277-287) of hate speech problems encountered by respondents on the Internet. Nearly 96% of respondents have

encountered hate, i.e. hate speech. Respondents could describe a problematic situation they experienced during the interview. Unfortunately, only the following answers appeared:

- Screens are shown as "on".
- Photos that have been processed for ridicule,
- misunderstanding of the content by others,
- lack of defence and consequences for the aggressor,
- the desire to erase something, to turn back time.

In the seventh thesis, concerning being anonymous on the Internet, the respondents consider this feature dangerous. During the interview, they gave the following associations:

Someone impersonates them, does not show their identity, has an illusion of beauty, "falls for shopping", unverified information, password theft, addiction (?) [question mark added next to it without explanation], viruses, charges for particular pages or files.

The following thesis concerned the respondents' future and whether they could survive without the Internet for three days. Surprisingly, more than 60% of those taking the survey have a positive attitude to such a situation and would easily cope. This result makes us optimistic because most young people consider online life natural. It is a generation in which the Internet plays an important role, like breathing water or oxygen. Of course, always being online does not necessarily mean that the user always pays maximum attention to the Internet. Usually, attention is divided between several activities and "jumps", such as doing homework and checking online news.

The ninth thesis concerned the changes in pathology and behaviour that the respondents noticed in themselves. During the in-depth interview, we received exciting answers. They mentioned: tears were pouring from my eyes, I do not want to sleep, I do not do my duties, I constantly think about what I have read or seen, I quote in everyday life what I have heard, or I try to do something in the way that was recorded.

The last thesis concerned the opening of a message from an unknown source, which caused harm to the respondents. It turns out that less than 45% of respondents made a mistake and fell for unknown incoming messages. Moreover, it is enough to avoid connections to untrustworthy sites, in particular not to enter IDs and passwords on them, make sure the connection is encrypted when we are to provide essential data, change passwords to Internet devices and applications, do not open e-mail attachments from unknown sources, as they may contain viruses or harmful programs. Let us read the regulations of the Internet services we use. If the Computer works slowly and crashes, it does not always mean some failure. Let us check if it is not infected, make sure it has an anti-virus program, and if we fall victim to a malicious program, let us not send

a ransom to recover data, but with the help of an IT specialist, let us restore a backup copy.

During the interview, teenagers listed the following websites they use:

- those that help write essays, artificial intelligence is better than I do after all (boy, age 16, PL)
- those that help explain how to solve homework well, providing calculations and formulas (girl, age 17, PL)
- gossip and entertainment (girl, age 16, CZ)
- sports and more sports (boy, age 16, CZ)
- I like movies, especially romantic ones. Netflix is in first place with me (girl, age 16, PL)
- stock market tables (boy, age 16, CZ).

The above statements were paltry, as most youths answered: "variously, depending on the need" (98 PL and CZ women – 35.6% and 134 men – 35.26%).

When asked about the problem they encountered online, respondents listed the following:

- I played and did not associate that so much money from my dad's account was taken for it (boy, age 16, PL)
- I sent a friend a short video, and it turned out that she sent it out to everyone in the class. It was not very comfortable (girl, age 16, PL)
- Inability to undo payment and purchase decisions (girl, age 17, CZ)
- Hate speech, insulting, challenging (girl, age 16, CZ)
- dangerous acquaintances, thought he was my age (boy, age 16, CZ)
- I did not even know my friends had pictures of me like that and started a group making fun of me (boy, age 16, PL)

The above statements show the dangers faced by the respondents. As can be seen, similar dangers affect young people from Poland and the Czech Republic.

For those surveyed, anonymity exists on the Internet. The youth described it in this way:

- you write whatever you want, the most made-up things about a person or yourself and others believe it, unfortunately (girl, age 16, PL)
- it is cool because, without consequences, you are hidden under a nickname (boy, age 16, CZ)
- you can come out of the mask you wear; if someone is shy, then on the Internet, they can check themselves and speak out without any problem (girl, age 17, PL)
- this is the advantage of the Internet: without fear, you give vent to your emotions (boy, age 17, PL)
- anonymity is to protect yourself. I never give my actual data (girl, age 16, PL)

Unfortunately, only a few of the people quoted above answered this question. This question probably caused the most significant difficulty for respondents.

In interviews conducted, Pszczyna and Czech teenagers stressed that they often respond to electronic aggression, which takes place most often on social networks:

- I do not report it to anyone because it is just verbal text. What can happen to me? One day, they will finally stop writing (boy, 16, CZ)
- I get concerned, I cry, then I have to talk about it to a friend, and I get over it (girl, 16, PL)
- sometimes, someone does not know the limit of a joke, and that is it, you have to let it go (boy, 17, PL)
- the fact that there is freedom of speech does not mean that we should accept everything; I report to whom I can an act of aggression (girl, 17, CZ)
- I have a thin line of tolerance towards evil. If you allow once, there will be more of it, unfortunately (girl, 17 years old, CZ)
- I have had depressive states because of such situations, I am very emotional and approach everything in this way (girl, 16, CZ)
- I'm anxious, fussy, cannot focus and see everything in black colours (girl, 16, PL)
- I wrote back even worse to the one who wrote to me like that, and he detached himself (girl, 16, PL).

These are only selected statements. Indeed, more girls (146 – 53%) than boys (108 – 28.42%) took over as a result of experiencing electronic aggression. So, not only are girls more likely to be victims of online aggression, but they are also more likely to be concerned about it.

It was also interesting to ask the youngsters about contacts in the real world after making contact online. It turns out that girls have more courage, or perhaps hope, that the person claiming to be a friend/friend is truthful. Here is a description of some of the youth's experiences:

- well, it worked out that we had fun writing, and then she proposed to meet, but it turned out that she was a bit lacking the ideal from the photo, she was fat, and that was it, that is, she lied (boy, age 17, PL)
- we played together, then in the vacations, we said that together we could maybe for a pizza and something to jump, but he did not come in time and make contact even when the game stopped (boy, age 16, CZ)
- I had a difficult time with my family, so it was easier for me to write than to talk, and so I met a friend from Czechowice-Dziedzice, then my mother told me that maybe she should come to my place that we should go out together, but when we met, her looks and style did not suit me, I could not open up like that (girl, age 16, PL)
- I wrote to my boyfriend, who is Pole but lives in the Czech Republic, I wanted to meet him, because on the Internet it is a little weak, and he disappointed

me, all the time at the meeting he kept his nose in the phone, failure (girl, age 16, CZ)

- we met 1 year and 2 months ago, then she lied that I was older, then I confessed, and now we see each other regularly, I can say that I found love on the Internet (girl, age 17, CZ)
- I have a cooking blog, and I have many friends who first only wrote with me, and then we met and are still friends, and with one individual, I am going to his prom (girl, age 17, PL)

The results of the quantitative survey show that girls (174 – 63.27% ) more often make new contacts on the Internet than boys (212 – 55.78%). Based on the analysis of the survey results, it can be concluded that despite the relatively high awareness and significant level of knowledge about media education among parents and teachers, media education in Poland is downplayed and almost wholly ignored in family upbringing and school education. There is a lack of formal organization of classes in this area in schools.

The study described here provided insight into this diversity and attempted to identify the complex processes shaping an individual's Internet use. Most young people can find information, but it should be remembered that they do not have a fully developed media awareness and culture. A large proportion declares knowledge of online safety, but this is not enough to use the Internet consciously, to distinguish true from false content, or to choose the valuable ones in a flood of useless information.

The Internet and the Computer are undoubtedly helpful in searching for information and collecting, storing, and processing it like no other tool. In addition, they enable cheap or free communication, which in today's society, where hundreds of kilometres of distance often separate family members or friends, can be invaluable. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that young people would not want to give up access to computers and the Internet, which does not mean how they use them is correct (Morbiter, 2006, p. 411).

Unfortunately, the respondents do not realize what further consequences their current abuse of Internet time may cause in adulthood. The most appropriate way to solve this problematic situation seems to be to organize compulsory media education as part of an already functioning school subject, such as computer science, or as part of parenting hours. Nevertheless, the programs for these classes would have to be formalized and standardized for all schools.

Attempts could also be made to educate parents, for example, during school meetings between teachers and parents, i.e. the so-called "interview sessions," or by providing parents with professional studies.

Within the framework of the topic undertaken, there are still many issues to be considered and explored in empirical research when investigating topics in other settings – such as elementary schools and even Universities (Wysocka-



Narewska, 2022, p.78; Skvortsova, M. Haran, 2018, p. 54-55). The collation of these data would make it possible to obtain a complete picture. It seems that addressing the topic of media education is extremely important. Technological and informational development means that introducing media education classes will soon become a positive, additional issue of school education and a fundamental necessity.

## **Conclusions**

Analysis from our research shows that Polish and Czech youth spend too much time on the Internet. They use the Internet as entertainment, not just as a study aid. They do not see the dangers of improper use of new technologies despite the health problems that they experience.

The Internet has become part of the everyday culture of today's youth. Young people who use the Internet intensively exhibit different behavioural patterns, and there is a possibility of losing control over the intensity of Internet use. Young people most often communicate through social media. The Internet has also become a platform for young people to realize the need for self-expression. Users are often forced to construct an identity by building their profile. The other person is judged by how they construct their identity on the portal. The Internet has become one of the most essential tools for learning and communication. The widespread use of the Internet by children and adolescents has many advantages, but, like any tool, it brings risks to which young people are particularly vulnerable (Szpunar, 2005, p. 379). The phenomena brought by the expansion of the media and access to modern technology into areas of life previously reserved for traditional broadcasting were reflected upon. Furthermore, attention was also paid to the level of understanding of the digital world.

For the young, the Internet has also become a platform on which they can realize the need for self-expression. The other person is judged by how they construct their identity on the portal (Tapscott, 2010, p. 23).

Globalization creates opportunities to learn about the world, including education of different nations. The opportunities to raise awareness of the benefits and risks of mass communication are becoming almost limitless. It must become increasingly crucial for future generations to strive to equip themselves with the skills to use the Internet properly. Despite a different culture, the young experience the same dilemmas and problems, often due to under-information and lack of equipment with technological competence.

The authors realize that this article only contributes to further analysis, which will be deepened to include indicators such as Internet access at home or parental education. It would certainly be appropriate to look at the cultural dif-

ferences between the two countries and the relationship of these elements to technology education. This article is meant to inspire further research, which we should extend to other countries.

## Future lines of research

Given these results, it is necessary to develop further and implement measures to make youth and their parents aware of the dangers emanating from the Internet. If this recommendation is followed, young people will be protected from the negative consequences of cyberbullying. This approach will consider parents' expectations of online safety during difficult times.

## Limitation

The article presents the main areas of youth safety risks, where it is essential to educate them. The results of a survey on the risks associated with using the Internet by adolescents are presented to show adolescents' awareness regarding the safe use of the Internet and the ability to select valuable content accurately.

The Internet is an essential part of every teenager's daily life, so it is crucial to monitor the risks associated with it and educate young people about it so that they learn the secrets of looking critically reflectively at the content available online.

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## **Zagrożenia młodzieży wynikające z użytkowania Internetu. Refleksja na przykładzie dwóch szkół ponadpodstawowych: w Pszczynie i w Czeskim Cieszynie**

### **Streszczenie**

Internet w obecnych czasach ma nieskończenie wiele możliwości. Używany jest praktycznie w każdej działalności człowieka. Celem niniejszego artykułu nie jest demonizowanie Internetu, ale zbadanie różnych wymiarów funkcjonowania młodzieży w wirtualnym świecie. Celem jest również określenie, z jakimi negatywnymi skutkami spotykają się uczniowie i jakie pozytywne zjawiska wynikają z korzystania z tej technologii.

Pierwsza część stanowić będzie prezentację najważniejszych wiadomości z zakresu nowych mediów, a w szczególności charakterystykę Internetu. Poruszona zostanie problematyka związana z różnymi aspektami korzystania z Internetu – począwszy od psychologicznych mechanizmów użytkowania sieci przez młodzież, poprzez edukację medialną oraz zagrożenia wynikające z różnego rodzaju działalności w sieci, na społeczno-praktycznych zjawiskach zachodzących w cyfrowym świecie kończąc.

Wiedza pozyskana dzięki części teoretycznej stanowić będzie bazę dla przeprowadzenia badań empirycznych. Celem badań będzie określenie, jakie znaczenie w życiu młodzieży w wieku ponadpodstawowym ma korzystanie z komputera i Internetu. Omówione wyniki tychże badań, wraz z ich opracowaniem oraz przedstawieniem sposobów przeciwdziałania zagrożeniom oraz metod pozytywnego wykorzystania Internetu, może stanowić wartościowe źródło wiedzy przydatnej zarówno w pracy pedagogicznej osób związanych z oświatą, jak i użytecznej dla rodziców, gdyż to oni w największym stopniu odpowiadają za edukację swoich dzieci w zakresie użytkowania mediów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Internet, korzystanie z komputera, cyberprzemoc, użytkowanie mediów przez młodzież.

## Zasady przygotowywania publikacji

### I. Wymagania podstawowe

1. Dokument powinien zostać dostarczony w postaci elektronicznej (adres mailowy: pe@ujd.edu.pl) w pliku typu „doc” lub „docx” (program Word).
2. Format: A4 standardowego maszynopisu (marginesy: 25 mm), czcionka Times New Roman, 12 punktów, odstęp 1,5 wiersza.
3. Stopień pisma w materiałach uzupełniających (tabele, przypisy, podpisy) powinien być o 2 punkty mniejszy od stopnia pisma tekstu głównego (10 pkt). Maksymalna szerokość tabel i rysunków to 12,5 cm przy układzie pionowym i 18 cm przy układzie poziomym.
4. Imię i nazwisko autora w lewym górnym rogu, poniżej afiliacja; tytuł tekstu wyśrodkowany i wytłuszczony.
5. Do artykułu należy dołączyć: jego streszczenie w języku polskim i angielskim oraz słowa kluczowe (maksymalnie 5 terminów) w języku polskim i angielskim.
6. Streszczenia w języku polskim i w języku angielskim autor przygotowuje we własnym zakresie. Powinny one stanowić skróconą wersję artykułu. Objętość tekstu każdego z załączonych streszczeń nie powinna przekraczać 200 wyrazów. Nad tekstem streszczeń należy umieścić tytuł artykułu (w przypadku streszczenia w języku angielskim tytuł powinien również być przetłumaczony na język angielski).
7. Przy wykorzystaniu jakichkolwiek materiałów pochodzących z innych publikacji należy stosować się do przepisów wynikających z prawa autorskiego.

### II. Tekst główny

1. Akapity należy rozpoczynać wcięciem ustawionym jednakowo dla całego dokumentu (za pomocą linijki górnej bądź w oknie formatowania akapitu).
2. Dokładne **cytaty** wprowadza się za pomocą cudzysłowów „drukarskich”. Cytat w cytacie oznacza się cudzysłowem «francuskim». Cudzysłów francuski należy wstawiać z tabeli znaków (polecenie: wstaw symbol). Można też stosować oddzielny akapit o mniejszym stopniu pisma.
3. Omawianą leksykę zapisuje się pochyłą odmianą czcionki (*kursywą*).
4. Odmianą pochyłą (*kursywą*) zapisuje się ponadto: tytuły dzieł drukowanych (*O dobrej i złej polszczyźnie, Hamlet*), wtrącenia obcojęzyczne (*à propos, ex lege*), łacińskie nazwy systematyczne (*Corvus corvus*), włoskie terminy muzyczne (*legato*).
5. Partie tekstu można wyróżniać przez **pogrubienie** lub r o z s t r z e l e n i e. Nie stosuje się wyróżnienia poprzez podkreślenie. Należy również unikać łączenia **kilku rodzajów** wyróżnień. Wyróżnienia powinny być stosowane jednolicie i konsekwentnie w obrębie danej pracy.

### III. Zasady podawania informacji bibliograficznej

1. Obowiązuje styl APA. W tekście umieszcza się odsyłacze bibliograficzne, na końcu artykułu – bibliografię.
2. Odsyłacz bibliograficzny w tekście składa się z umieszczonego w nawiasie okrągłym nazwiska autora i daty wydania źródła, oddzielonych przecinkiem, np. (Łukaszewicz, 2005).

W przypadku dokładnych cytatów podaje się też numer strony oddzielony od roku wydania przecinkiem, np. (Łukaszewicz, 2005, s. 74). Jeśli kilka prac tego samego autora opublikowano w tym samym roku, należy po dacie dodać litery „a”, „b”, „c” (bez spacji).

3. Nie stosuje się formy tamże/ibidem. Nazwisko autora podaje się za każdym razem. Prace dwóch autorów zapisuje się z przywołaniem obu nazwisk (Prigogine, Stenger, 1990). Prace 3–5 autorów: w pierwszym przywołaniu podaje się wszystkie nazwiska, w kolejnych tylko pierwsze i formułę „i in.” Prace sześciu i więcej autorów: zarówno w pierwszym, jak i kolejnych przywołaniach podaje się tylko nazwisko pierwszego autora i formułę „i in.”.

## IV. Przykłady opisu bibliograficznego

### 1. Monografia

Klus-Stańska, D. (2010). *Dydaktyka wobec chaosu pojęć i zdarzeń*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie ŻAK.

Bandura, A. (1973). *Aggression: A social learning analysis*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

### 2. Artykuł w pracy zbiorowej lub wydawnictwie nieperiodycznym

Bakuła, K. (2006). Efekt motyla, swobodnie mówiąc. W: K. Bakuła, D. Heck (red.), *Efekt motyla: humaniści wobec teorii chaosu* (s. 24–78). Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.

Smetana, J. (1991). Adolescents' and mothers' evaluations of justifications for conflicts. W: R. Paikoff (red.), *Shared views in the family during adolescence: New directions for child development* (s. 252–273). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

### 3. Praca pod redakcją

Bakuła, K., Heck, D. (red.). (2006). *Efekt motyla. Humanisci wobec teorii chaosu*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.

Paikoff, R. (red.), *Shared views in the family during adolescence: New directions for child development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

### 4. Artykuł w czasopiśmie

Serafin, K. (2013). Aksjologiczny wymiar tożsamości podmiotu osobowego w ujęciu Marii Gołaszewskiej. *Świdnickie Studia Teologiczne*, 10, 319–331.

De Wied, M., Branje, S., Meeus, W. (2007). Empathy and conflict resolution in friendship relations among adolescents. *Aggressive Behavior*, 33(1), 48–55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ab.20166>.

Jeśli artykuł posiada numer DOI, należy podać go na końcu opisu bibliograficznego (po kropce), w formie aktywnego hiperlinku.



## Rules for preparing publications

### I. Basic requirements

1. The document should be delivered in electronic form (e-mail address: pe@ujd.edu.pl) in a “doc” or “docx” file (Word program).
2. Format: A4 standard typescript (margins: 25 mm), Times New Roman, 12 points, 1.5 line spacing.
3. The font size in supplementary materials (tables, footnotes, captions) should be 2 points lower than the font size of the main text (10 points). The maximum width of tables and figures is 12.5 cm vertically and 18 cm horizontally.
4. Author’s name in the upper left corner, affiliation below; the text’s title is centred and bold.
5. The article should be accompanied by: its summary in Polish and English and keywords (maximum 5 (five) terms) in Polish and English.
6. The author himself prepares summaries in Polish and English. The outlines should be a shortened version of the article. Each attached abstract should not be longer than 200 words. The article’s title should be placed above the text of the abstract (if the abstract is in English, the title should also be translated into English).
7. When using any materials from other publications, the provisions of copyright law must be observed.

### II. Main text

1. Paragraphs should be started with indentation set the same for the entire document (using the top ruler or in the paragraph formatting window).
2. Exact quotations are entered using “print” quotation marks. In addition, a reference within a quote is marked with «French» quotation marks. French quotation marks should be inserted from the character table (command: insert symbol). You can also use a separate paragraph with a smaller font size.
3. The lexicon in question is written in italics (*italics*).
4. The following items are also written in *italics*: titles of printed works (*O dobrej i złej polszczyźnie, Hamlet*), foreign-language insertions (*à propos, ex lege*), systematic Latin names (*Corvus corvus*), Italian musical terms (*legato*).
5. Parts of the text may be distinguished by making them **bold** or s p a c e d o u t . Emphasis by underlining is not used. You should also avoid combining **several types** of distinctions. Instead, distinctions should be applied uniformly and consistently within a given work.

### III. Rules for providing bibliographic information

1. APA style applies. Bibliographic references are placed in the text, and a bibliography is at the end of the article.
2. A bibliographic reference in the text consists of the author’s surname and the date of publication of the source in round brackets, separated by a comma, e.g. (Łukaszewicz, 2005). In

the case of exact quotations, the page number is also given, separated from the year of publication by a comma, e.g. (Łukaszewicz, 2005, p. 74). If several works by the same author were published in the same year, add the letters "a", "b", and "c" (without spaces) after the date.

3. The form *ibidem*/*ibidem* is not used. Instead, the name of the author is given each time. Works by two authors are listed with both names mentioned (Prigogine, Stenger, 1990). Works by 3–5 authors: in the first citation, all names are given; in subsequent citations, only the first and the formula "et al." Works by six or more authors: in both the first and following citations, only the name of the first author and the formula "et al." are given.

## IV. Examples of bibliographic description

### 1. Monograph

Klus-Stańska, D. (2010). *Dydaktyka wobec chaosu pojęć i zdarzeń*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie ŻAK.

Bandura, A. (1973). *Aggression: A social learning analysis*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

### 2. An article in a collective work or non-periodical publication

Bakuła, K. (2006). Efekt motyla, swobodnie mówiąc. In: K. Bakuła, D. Heck (eds.), *Efekt motyla: humaniści wobec teorii chaosu* (pp. 24–78). Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.

Smetana, J. (1991). Adolescents' and mothers' evaluations of justifications for conflicts. In: R. Paikoff (ed.), *Shared views in the family during adolescence: New directions for child development* (pp. 252–273). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

### 3. Edited work

Bakuła, K., Heck, D. (eds.). (2006). *Efekt motyla: humaniści wobec teorii chaosu*. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.

Paikoff, R., (ed.), *Shared views in the family during adolescence: New directions for child development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

### 4. Journal article

Serafin, K. (2013). Aksjologiczny wymiar tożsamości podmiotu osobowego w ujęciu Marii Gołaszewskiej. *Świdnickie Studia Teologiczne*, 10, 319–331.

De Wied, M., Branje, S., Meeus, W. (2007). Empathy and conflict resolution in friendship relations among adolescents. *Aggressive Behavior*, 33(1), 48–55. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/ab.20166>.

If the article has a DOI number, it should be given at the end of the bibliographic description (after a period) in the form of an active hyperlink.