

## University of Security in Poznań

### Essay

*Tutorial: Methods of developing of social skills*

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„Current issue of special education in Poland, included description of the historical development of the field and current topics or problems need to be solved in the department of special education”

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In this work, I would like to take a close look at the situation of special education in Poland at the present moment.

I would like to start from the general to the specific, and the first thing I want to describe is what exactly is special pedagogy and what it deals with.

Special pedagogy is a branch of pedagogy, the primary focus of which is a person who requires support and assistance in overcoming various difficulties that impede his development and social functioning. It deals with people of all ages, trying to respond to their special needs. Its primary task is to provide a theoretical and methodological basis for the processes of revalidation and rehabilitation. It is also important to note that in addition to people with disabilities, special pedagogy also deals with the exceptionally gifted. The main departments of special pedagogy include:

- Revalidation pedagogy, rehabilitation pedagogy, which include:

- oligophrenopedagogy, which deals with the upbringing and teaching of people with intellectual disabilities,
- surdopedagogy, which deals with the education and upbringing of deaf and hard of hearing people, as well as their families and environment,
- tyflopädagogik, whose activities include the upbringing, education, therapy and rehabilitation of blind and visually impaired people in educational institutions and specialized clinics,
- therapeutic pedagogy,
- pedagogy of the gifted and exceptionally gifted,
- corrective pedagogy,
- re-socialization pedagogy,

However, as is well known, the field did not come out of nowhere. Maria Grzegorzewska was very influential in its creation, because she was the one who created special pedagogy in Poland, but I will come to that a little later. To begin with, I would like to start by presenting the educational situation of people with disabilities in the years 1896-1921. During these years, the name "special pedagogy" was never used, but one could see clear efforts to educate and raise people with disabilities. In connection with the later development of special education in Poland, it is necessary to distinguish several dates that significantly contributed to this.

Important dates during the partition period include:

**1896** - the establishment of a school for the mildly handicapped in Poznan,

**1907** - the launch of an institution for the mentally handicapped by the Warsaw magistrate,

**1907** - establishment of the Polish Society for Research on Children on the initiative of Jan Wladyslaw Dawid and Aniela Szykowa,

**1912** - establishment of an institution for mentally retarded children in Cracow by Professor Jan Piltz,

On the other hand, important dates in the post-war period are:

**February 7, 1919** - the introduction of the "Decree on compulsory education" covering also mentally retarded children, if there is a special education institution in the locality,

**April 1919** - the All-Polish Teachers' Convention, where numerous speakers addressed the problem of education and upbringing of the disabled,

**March 17, 1921** - entry into force of the March Constitution, which in articles 102, 103, 118, 119, 120 protected

the rights to care and protection also of children with disabilities,

Also an important role for the development of special pedagogy in Poland, played Jozefa Joteyko, who during World War I, while in France, created the first drafts of the organization of a comprehensive system of upbringing and education of children with disabilities in free Poland.

As I mentioned earlier, an important figure who contributed greatly to the development of special education in Poland was Maria Grzegorzewska. Thanks to her efforts, in late 1919 and early 1920 the Ministry of Public Health launched a one-year seminar course for teachers of mentally handicapped children in Warsaw. A year later in 1921, the first academy was established, the State Seminar of Special Pedagogy, which, together with the State Phonetic Institute, formed the foundation of the **State Institute of Special Pedagogy**, established in 1922.

At the time, this was quite a breakthrough in thinking about, perceiving and helping people with intellectual disabilities. Thanks to Maria Grzegorzewska, the Institute developed many innovative methods for recognizing and diagnosing the needs of people with disabilities, specific forms and methods of teaching and upbringing, and effective strategies for working with their families. Among the most well-known, and among the forms developed by the Institute today, is the "work center" method, which is based on the "interest center" system developed in the early twentieth century by Belgian physician and educator Ovide Decroly.

The greatest development in the field of special pedagogy can be recorded in the years 1921-1939. On June 1, 1924, under the leadership of Maria Grzegorzewska, the Section of Special Education was established at the Polish Teachers Union, whose main tasks included the theoretical deepening of teachers knowledge of special pedagogy and

showing the care needs of handicapped children, improving methods of teaching and raising handicapped children, caring for the material and legal needs of special school teachers. Despite the intensive activities of the Institute and the many people involved in the development of this field, the number of special education institutions in Poland of the interwar period was insufficient. Many people disagreed that this period was of great importance for the development of special pedagogy, despite the fact that it was an important period for the development of postwar pedagogy in particular.

During this period, mentioned quite often in my work, Maria Grzegorzewska formulated the first clear goals and tasks of special pedagogy, among which she distinguishes:

- **the humanitarian goal**, which consists in providing assistance to the handicapped individual in the realization of his life tasks, as well as in indicating to society the right of each handicapped individual to participate in social life within the limits of his strength and abilities
- **the functional purpose**, which is the optimal development of the individual, the strengthening of his physical and mental strengths and the compensation of deficiencies
- **the social goal**, which is to integrate individuals into society and overcome, as far as possible, the isolation that threatens individuals with inhibitions and disorders
- **the economic goal**, preparing the handicapped for professional work and thereby relieving society of the burden of benefits for the care of the handicapped.

The World War II period was not a suitable time for the development of science. It was not the right time for most things, not even for love, friendship or respect. Therefore, during this time, the development of special pedagogy in Poland went off the rails and ceased to be of any importance. Also, Nazi Germany's policies spread hatred of people with disabilities. In all the territories occupied by Nazi Germany, there was a definite regression in special pedagogy and care activities. Special schools were abolished, psychiatric hospitals were closed, scientific and research work related to the development of special pedagogy was halted. In contrast, a secret system of teaching and education was established during this period. Unfortunately, however, it focused attention mainly on the teaching of non-disabled children. The only person trying to conduct secret teaching for children with disabilities was Maria Grzegorzewska, who also organized aid for children affected by the war throughout the occupation.

After World War II, the topic of educating people with disabilities returned to the attention of researchers and practitioners. Scientific work began to develop again, intensive research was conducted, and specialized journals and new institutions for the disabled were established. In the postwar period, special kindergartens were introduced

into the educational system, as well as "schools of life," or educational institutions for the more profoundly intellectually disabled. In 1995, there were more than 100 "Schools of Life" and 31 special kindergartens.

Further, however, this was not enough, looking at the demand at the time.

The breakthrough year for special pedagogy in Poland was 1970, when the State Institute of Special Pedagogy was transformed into a higher professional school called the Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Pedagogy. By the end of the twentieth century, special pedagogy was one of 92 fields of study established by the General Council of Higher Education. On September 1, 2000, the Higher School of Special Pedagogy was transformed into the Academy of Special Pedagogy, and it has remained so to this day. It is the oldest pedagogical university in Poland and is located in Warsaw. (Lidia Pawelec, 2008)?

From the history of special education in Poland, that would be enough, now I would like to focus on the education problems of students with disabilities and the forms of their education.

A student with a disability can be educated both in the traditional form of special education - segregated - such as a special school, and in special education of an inclusive nature. At this point in time, the most popular forms of education are: inclusive education, which is in the form of inclusive classrooms; inclusive education, which integrates individual students into the classroom structure of a mainstream school; and special classes in mass schools. It is also necessary to distinguish individual education for a student with a disability who, due to his life and health situation, is unable to acquire knowledge at school.

Through interviews conducted between 2010 and 2013 with teachers from a Polish city, it was possible to answer the specific problem question, which was: "What problems in the education of students with disabilities do their teachers face?"

The research revealed that teachers perceive numerous problems in the education of students with disabilities, and these problems include:

- 1) legal norms of education of students with disabilities,
- 2) ensuring appropriate conditions of a technical nature for the stay of students with disabilities at school,
- 3) organization of the teaching process and orthodidactic methodology,
- 4) the competence of the teacher of a student with disabilities and the possibility of supporting the teacher in his work,
- 5) cooperation of the school with parents of both non-disabled students and students with

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8 disabilities,

These were the answers most often encountered during the interviews, which means that they are relevant and there is a need to solve them.

These problems are present in the daily work of the teacher often hinder it and often also completely disrupt it. Undoubtedly, measures with the hallmarks of systemic, multifaceted, continuous and systematic actions are needed. To change these situations, it is important to get into the sources of problems. One of the also significant problems still encountered today is the perception of students with disabilities. Many people see them as "other," but it is also necessary to pay attention to how this otherness is perceived. "Others" perceived as "Strangers" cause hostility, encourage aggressive and often rejecting behavior, and this is only due to ignorance. Today's young people are not sufficiently educated about people with disabilities, how they can behave and often tout how they look a little different. This ignorance only causes them to behave aggressively and unpleasantly toward people with disabilities. I believe that this topic should be addressed more often in Polish schools, so that children do not look with surprise or hostility at a person who behaves and looks a little different from themselves. (Lipińska-Lokś, 2015)?

For many years, Poland was dominated by welfare thinking that specifically discriminated against parents of children with disabilities. It was believed that the parent of a child with a disability, by definition, could not cope, which often ended up effectively depriving them of the right to make key decisions about their children. In contrast, one of the most important rights of all parents is the right to choose a school for their child. In the case of parents of children with disabilities, they should have the right to choose a school special, integrated or mainstream school. Unfortunately, the education system makes parents and professionals, who support families in the realization of their rights, forced to choose the institution that the system deems right. The provisions of the ordinance on adjudication for the support of students with special educational needs point to 4 categories of adjudication issued by psychological-educational counseling centers. These include:

- adjudication of the need for special education,
- Assessment of the need for individual compulsory pre-school preparation,
- decision on the need for individual teaching,
- judgment on the need for remedial classes for children and adolescents with profound mental retardation. (

Abamowska, Białek and others, 2012)?

In society, there is often a transition from one extreme to another extreme. We encounter such a situation when it comes to the perception of people with disabilities. On the one

hand there is social desensitization, while on the other there is overprotectiveness and locking such a person "in a cage," thus taking away the opportunity to develop and educate them as much as possible.

In recent years, on the other hand, one can see a positive transformation of Polish society associated with the public appearance of the problems of people with disabilities, the adoption of Western standards of coexistence with these people, as well as an increase in tolerance with the disappearance of vulgar marginalization and exclusion. Particularly noteworthy is the widespread increase in natural empathy for this group of people manifested not only in response to institutional initiatives and organized activities, but also in civic reaction to phenomena that were previously tolerated in society. One such example may be the spontaneous reactions of sensitive people to the poor conditions and treatment of people with disabilities.

In 2007- 2009 in Poland, under the influence of reports from random citizens, disastrous conditions of people with disabilities or perceived forms of violence against them or mistreatment were repeatedly revealed. Such cases included, for example, the disclosure of the beating of a child by a nun in her care, or the disclosure of violence in a non-public welfare home.

Thanks to this breakthrough in understanding, as well as the equalization of the standards of existence of able-bodied and disabled people, the aforementioned situations saw the light of day.

Changes in education for people with disabilities are the most visible result of new thinking about this group of people. However, this does not change the fact that the way people with disabilities are educated in Poland still needs to be improved. On the plus side, the approach to this group of people has changed, and instead of isolating them from the group of fully able-bodied people, special classes for such people have begun to be created in state and public institutions, giving them the opportunity for greater integration. Here, however, another problem has been encountered, and it manifests itself in the lack of a sufficient number of specialized educators in such institutions to undertake the education of these people. The question arises as to why? Why don't the institutions in question, looking at the demand for the establishment of inclusive classes for people with various degrees of disabilities, hire pedagogues who are specialized in the given areas. To a large extent, this is due to the degrees of poverty in the regions concerned, thus saving money on the education of the disabled. In the absence of inclusive alternatives in a given region, the system of diagnosing educational needs, which would lead to the selection of an individualized form of education as intended, comes into question. The counseling center therefore suggests not what would be best for

the student, but what is available. For those with more severe disabilities, this option could even be detrimental to them. They do not have the optimal choice for them, but are left with the choice of the least bad. In this case, we have another installment of symbolic violence against a child with a disability, where the realization of the ideas and concepts of one social group, that is, mainly non-disabled officials and experts, dominates over the basic rights of the individual to happiness, self-determination, choices and also optimal education. Therefore, it is the duty of special educators both to oppose this, but also to propose alternatives that are better and expected by the disabled themselves.

The turn of the twentieth century, along with socio-cultural transformations, initiated a paradigm shift in special pedagogy. In special emancipatory pedagogy, overriding revalidation gives way to self-determination and respect for the actual subjectivity of the disabled person. The process of normalization became paramount, targeting the disabled person's environment, aiming to optimize the satisfaction of his needs rather than competence. The task of special pedagogy is to find a compromise between revalidation and normality in the life of a disabled person. In doing so, it is worth mentioning the topic of revalidation compulsion. An adult with a disability has the right to opt out of participation in integration processes and to choose the forms of interventions to which he or she is subjected, up to and including the possibility of complete abandonment.

Adulthood for people with disabilities is an issue analyzed with varying intensity in the various disciplines of special education.

One of the more frequently addressed topics is sexual life and having children by people with disabilities. Marriages between people without disabilities and people with physical disabilities, or people who are deaf or blind, are less and less surprising. Much greater problems are faced by adults with intellectual disabilities or autism. Although society greatly normalizes the living conditions of such people, acceptance ends when it comes

to motherhood, marriage, having children or sex life. There are stereotypes and beliefs about the sexual hyperactivity of this group of people and their inability to have lasting relationships. However, it turns out that it is not the disabled person who fails to cope with adulthood, but the system we have created to care for them. A system that lacks both the courage and imagination to promote the independence and autonomy of adulthood, and the resources for costly initiatives going into life, is inefficient. This is compounded by general problems with sexuality in Poland. One cannot expect social acceptance for widespread contraception for people with disabilities in a country where having sex before marriage for religious and ideological reasons is debatable. It is also difficult to give consent for these people to live independently in civil unions in the absence of social

housing and staff to support these relationships on a daily basis.

This is something that special educators should think about and try to solve step by step. One should strive step by step towards the autonomy of adulthood, towards a civilized world, where self-satisfaction is unencumbered by the stigma of sin, where kissing people with Down syndrome does not provoke outrage and suspicion of pathology, where the child from the union of these people does not automatically go up for adoption, where the natural needs of sex have to go underground in revalidation. (Krause, 2009)?

The topic of the problems of an adult with disabilities has come to an end, and now I would like to refocus and return to the education of children and young people with disabilities in Poland, or rather the problems of this education. The biggest problem at the moment is the education of people with intellectual disabilities. The current system of education, care and assistance does not provide adequate conditions for the development of children and young people with intellectual disabilities. Among the most frequently cited shortcomings in this situation are:

- Our country lacks an institutionally coordinated system of support for people with intellectual disabilities from birth to late adulthood,
- Lack of a system to reliably inform parents about the need and possibility of comprehensive support for the child and family from the moment the disability is detected,
- Lack of consistent offer and standards of support for the child and family in different regions of the country,
- Poor accessibility of support, especially for children from small towns and rural areas,
- Lack of monitoring of care and education of people with intellectual disabilities, lack of continuity of assistance especially in the transition to the next stages of the education system and future adult life. Adulthood for people with intellectual disabilities

Intellectual disabilities is a huge problem. Often these people end up in random institutions (where there is a vacancy) or sit at home after completing their education,

- Lack of cooperation between schools and places where people with disabilities may be employed in the future, or with such adult institutions as community self-help homes, occupational therapy workshops, day activity centers,
- Lack of assistance and support for teachers of kindergartens and schools that receive a child with intellectual disabilities,

The issue of the best possible qualifications of teachers working with students with special educational needs is raised all the time. Teachers are constantly receiving further training in this area, however, many of them are unwilling and afraid to work with this

group of students. There is a great deal of training, qualification courses in this area, but often of low educational quality. The system is based on the old standards for teacher training from 1991, despite the fact that new curricula for courses in oligophrenopedagogy, surdopedagogy, tyflopädagogik or pedagogical therapy were developed in 2005 by order of the Ministry of Education and Science. Unfortunately, some teachers do not want to improve their professional competence and thus demonstrate special assistance to students with disabilities.

One of the problems in this area is the need to prepare teachers to work with students with severe communication disorders. In working with these students, an indispensable tool is the use of either assistive or alternative forms to speech - AAC (augmentative and alternative communications). However, at present in the Polish education system, the competent use of AAC is still rare and teachers, when undertaking work with non-speaking students, still need support and consultation. (Abamowska, Białek and others, 2012)?

Moving towards the end of my paper, I would like to present 2, according to Polish special educators, unresolved issues. The first concerns the variation in the availability of forms and opportunities for support for people with disabilities depending on depending on their place of residence. A 2009 study in the region of the Warmian-Masurian province shows that

as the distance of disabled residents from large cities increases, the real chances of both providing and applying for assistance decreases. Taking the Warmian-Masurian province as an example, most specialized facilities are located in Olsztyn (i.e., the largest city in the province). Thus, often the lack of mobility, the difficulty and cost of commuting, and ignorance about remote forms of non-governmental assistance contribute to worsening the already disadvantaged situation of people with disabilities. There is also little mobility for those working in social assistance, which means they cannot go out to people and give them the help they need. Studies in the field of social pedagogy have repeatedly confirmed the situation, where people with an average state of poverty come to social welfare centers for support. Those, on the other hand, who have already crossed a certain threshold of it and at the same time are indigent, do not even come forward for such help anymore. The second problem to which special educators should pay special attention and seek solutions is the tragic situation of people with intellectual disabilities and their families, which is due to helplessness and indigentness. Here we often have a situation where, with sufficient income per family member, the household members are starving because they can't cope with everything. In addition to the pathology of alcoholism, which we all know well, there has been the spending of money on easily obtainable consumer goods. It has become more optimal and simpler for these people to spend money on phones, televisions, etc. rather than on

necessities of life. In such cases, social welfare centers are helpless. The high income per member in the family practically excludes these people from their circle of interest.

In order to prevent such situations to some extent, it is necessary to change the approach in educating a disabled person. After all, it is not enough to educate a disabled person under the supervision of special educators so that he or she will function on his or her own when he or she reaches maturity. In the case of such people, most of them will need this help and support from specialists throughout their lives. Unfortunately, the current social welfare system is unprepared for such tasks.

In Polish education, we can also encounter the problem of preparing special educators for the profession. We should ask ourselves whether in the course of 3 years of undergraduate studies, it is possible to prepare for the profession of special educator in the various sub-disciplines? Before changing the system of teacher preparation, it would be important to detail a number of qualifications that would have to be acquired in each degree program. Thus, the optimal solution would be to restore the master's degree in special education and supplement it with possible subject preparation. Achieving this, however, seems unlikely as of today. One could say that it is even impossible, since the increasing marginalization of special educators' qualifications in favor of subject teachers, with a reduction in the number of places in the field of study after which one can take up a job, mean that children with disabilities are increasingly being taken care of by non-specialists. (Krause, 2009)?

We can draw attention to the questionnaire prepared by Lukas Starek on The Motivation and Characteristic of Students Studying Helping Majors with Specialization on Special Pedagogic and Social Work. It was completed by 501 students, including 459 women and 41 men. The main point I would like to focus on was the students' motivation for studying this major and what they thought was most beneficial in their potential future work.

„Nowadays, placement is a more significant part of studies not only in employability but in the international perspective of improving educational quality mainly, by highlighting the need for practical training at diverse provisions. A placement helps with the creation and development of a professional identity. Therefore, the attention to professional identity was paid because single moments, experiences, abilities, feelings, reflections, and other aspects which students experience can help or harm one in their professional career and future employability.”(Stárek, 2022)?

Based on this, I believe that in Poland, the placement should also be one of the most important parts of special education studies, which would definitely help students find

their way in future work.

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