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Philosophical approach towards rehabilitation of the deaf

Studying special pedagogy seems to be an obligatory task for every pedagogue, both because of the scientific and social reasons. Getting to know the causes, symptoms and results of disability helps the pedagogue to understand better the conditions of improper functioning of the human organism and the conditions of a handicapped person psycho - social adaptation. Special pedagogy surveys the education reality in different aspects: etiology, prevention, phenomenology and therapy. Pedagogy is then a comprehensive science. It is descriptive in its character and on the basis of observation, experience and pedagogical practice, analyses the phenomena of bringing up and education of the handicapped children. It should be noted that it not only describes the symptoms of their handicap, but also the children's skills, achievements and the peculiarity of their adaptation to living in society, in spite of their handicap. Pedagogy is also a theoretical science as it generalizes the experience in the form of concepts and ideas and it strives to work out the theory explaining the regularities of the process of education of children with special educational needs. Special pedagogy, apart from its practical, descriptive and theoretical functions has also normative functions. It formulates aims and principles of special education and formation, decides which organizational, conceptual and methodological forms create the most effective and desired way of rehabilitation of the handicapped.

These reasons makes special pedagogy, a science engaged in the subject matter of handicapped people, immensely in need of undertaking multiple approach towards this reality, on which its attention is concentrated. It means that achievements of other sciences, like biology, psychology, sociology and philosophy, should be taken into consideration. It is especially philosophy, a science of multi-century tradition and great representatives that is immensely significant in looking for the basis, sense and perspectives of the future development of pedagogy, of which special pedagogy is a sub-discipline. It brings a significant contribution especially as far as the aims of education and basic values are

formulated. Philosophy supports pedagogy in its normative aspect, helps to choose direction and perspectives of interest¹.

Undertaking the reflection about a handicapped person it must be stressed that it is philosophy that heads for searching the handicapped person's essence. Continuously asking the questions about: *Who a handicapped person is?*, tries to establish the sense of his or her accidentality. W. Chudy writes that the sense of the handicapped person's accidentality appears in its most direct and obvious form (in the street, in the crowd of passerbys) through a deformed physical appearance, attributes like a special white stick for the blind or a wheelchair. Disability and the emotions accompanying it evoke different reactions: beginning with sympathy, through fright and fear, to distaste. The author reminds that one of the most important dimensions of human culture is the dimension of moral culture. In this dimension objective sense of the handicapped person's life seems to be a specific criterion and test. A handicapped person, as each person in general, has to be affirmed by others. This may be expressed in the form of help, solidarity, consolation or ordinary interpersonal kindness and friendliness. Subjective aspect of this obligation is expressed as the need to affirm a handicapped person and do good for him or her. Objective aspect in this context is human nature that cannot be met with indifference².

During the centuries the situation and social attitudes towards the handicapped has been changing, depending on inter- and intraculture conditions. These changes have directed towards more and more positive attitudes towards the handicapped, i.e. beginning with the attitudes of discrimination, through isolation, care and segregation, towards the contemporary integrative approach.³ The most rudimentary needs of the handicapped people, like elimination of the urban and architectural barriers, better access to information about different forms of financial and material help, needs connected with transport and communication, medical care and rehabilitation, are satisfied⁴.

The most difficult thing, though, is *to overcome these barriers which are invisible, and destroys these walls that have been built in our minds. People with hearing impairment live*

¹ Nowak M., *Podstawy pedagogiki otwartej*, Lublin 2001, s. 161-166.

² Chudy W., *Wartości i świat ludzi niepełnosprawnych (Przyczynek do aksjologii osób niesłyszących)*. W: *Przekraczanie barier w wychowaniu osób z uszkodzeniami słuchu*. Red. K. Krakowiak, A. Dziurda-Multan. Lublin 2006, s. 32-34.

³ Zasepa E, Czabała Cz, Starzomska M., *Postawy wobec niepełnosprawności i osób niepełnosprawnych*. W: "Człowiek niepełnosprawność społeczeństwo" nr 1. Red. J. Głodkowska. Warszawa 2005, s. 26 i n.

*among us, but their problems are for the hearing society so unknown as if they concern aliens from a different planet, with whom we are unable to communicate. [...] Outwardly it seems as if it is enough for them to be cared by specialists - doctors, speech therapists, special pedagogues and translators, who in a professional way will overcome the difficulties connected with hearing impairment. However, in reality it is the lack of social openness, desire and skills of communication with people who do not hear the sounds of speech and the fact they cannot speak properly, that forms the main reason for the handicap that endangers them: the state of being deaf and dumb*⁵. Deaf people have disturbed dimension of language communication. In their life, apart from the ontological accidentality that is characteristic to every human being, the horizon of language accidentality appears⁶. That is why they are a group of handicapped that is most loosely integrated with society.

Children and adolescents with profound prelingual hearing impairment, who in their verbal communication do not use their hearing or use it in a minimal amount, are still condemned to get education and live in a separated society, separated by communication, verbal and cultural barriers

Better educational conditions are possessed by these children who were born in a family where the parents are deaf (about 10% of all the population of deaf children are born to deaf parents). Using natural sign language, they can establish a good contact inside their families. However, these deaf children whose parents are hearing people (90% of all deaf children) are deprived of a close, intimate contact even within their families. Reflection on this fact brings us back towards the philosophy field and philosophical reflection about a human being who happens to be a hearing impaired person. A fundamental question, *Who my deaf child is?*, formulates a problem of not a minor importance. Parents always ask this question, even if they do not put it in a verbal form. It is present in all parents' thoughts and emotions after they have been informed about the hearing impairment of their son or daughter⁷.

K. Krakowiak undertaking an attempt to answer this question, singled out and categorised fundamental philosophical assumptions that can be found in main conceptions of Polish

⁴ Ochonczenko H., *Problemy i potrzeby niepełnosprawnych studentów Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego*. W: *Osoba niepełnosprawna w społeczności akademickiej*. Red. H. Ochoneczko, G. Miłkowska. Kraków 2005, s. 116 i n.

⁵ Krakowiak K., Dziurda-Multan A., *Przekraczanie barier w wychowaniu osób z uszkodzeniami słuchu*, Lublin 2006, z wprowadzenia.

⁶ Chudy W., op. cit., s. 34-38.

⁷ Krakowiak K., *Szkice o wychowaniu dzieci z uszkodzeniami słuchu*, Stalowa Wola 2003, s. 69-77.

audiophonology and special pedagogy of the deaf⁸. On the basis of theoretical reading, observation of practice of deaf education and discussion concerning rehabilitation, upbringing and education of the deaf, she singled out three types of anthropological assumptions that form the bases of pedagogical conceptions that are both described and used in practice today. In order to categorise and characterise them she gave them conventional names: biologism, sociologism and personalism.

Biologism, according to K. Krakowiak: *has at its springs the notion of a human being as a living organism, in which an important organ has been damaged and because of that the whole organism functions improperly, it is not able spontaneously to get used to the environment and in its development plenty of dysfunction and deficits can be observed*⁹. Properly functioning hearing, especially as far as the perception of speech sounds is concerned, is (in these conceptions) regarded as the most important feature of the human organism. On these basis hearing impairment may be regarded as a loss of a constructive attribute of the *homo sapiens* species.

Biologism, that is a prevailing conception in contemporary special pedagogy of the deaf, the author continues, has its source in medical science. In this perspective a hearing impaired person is somebody who is incurably ill, who needs therapy, rehabilitation and other special educational and rehabilitation therapies, that aim, however, at reaching a state slightly only resembling the norm.

The conceptions based on the biologicistic approach open the fields of hope, pointing at different means of help, such as curative procedures (medical treatment, hearing aids, rehabilitation) and the revalidation procedures, strictly connected with them. The aim of these procedures is to streamline the whole organism and compensate for its deficiencies by different surrogate abilities so as to make it possible for a deaf person to function in a given way in a model that is supposed to be a model norm. For deaf children the most important element of this model norm is to possess the ability of hearing and speaking. Many of the conceptions that are based on this model stress the role of the "mother - therapist" and different specialists engaged in therapeutic, rehabilitation and educational procedures. Rehabilitation hyperactivity and constant search for the ultra modern technical aids comforts the parents' conscience, but at the same time condemns both the parents and their children to

⁸ Krakowiak K., *Kim jest moje niesłyszające dziecko. Rozważania o ukrytych założeniach antropologicznych współczesnych koncepcji surdopedagogiki i audiofonologii*, Lublin 2003, s. 3-18.

⁹ Ibidem, s. 5.

psychological overstress and experiencing disorders in psychological functioning that it causes. Mother - therapist, overworked too much above the human endurance by the duties imposed on her by this model, is incapacitated, reduced to an object whose main goal is to serve short- term child's needs, loses all the attributes of a mature motherhood. Her child, despite the mother's indisputable heroism, as the result, becomes psychologically orphaned and at the same time deprived of personal autonomy because of the mother's overprotective behaviour.

Contemporary conceptions of the special pedagogy of the deaf that tries to overcome the reductionism of biologism, are based on the principle that stresses the exceptional importance of the socialisation process in the development of a deaf child and they are named by K. Krakowiak sociologism conceptions. The representatives of this trend appeal to communities of big numbers of deaf and deaf - and - dumb people. Searching arguments that could justify the existence of such communities they put forward theoretical arguments and concentrate their attention on premises stemming from ethnological and ethno-linguistic research and discoveries. The theses arisen from these research is that one about the multiplicity and diversity of cultures and the second about using by these cultures different types of languages. On the basis of these principles: *a deaf person is not perceived as a handicapped one if he or she lives in a society of persons similar to his or her. It is assumed that a community consisting of deaf people creates independent culture, based on their own language image of the world and their own hierarchy of values. By analogy, to the group of deaf people the features of an ethnic group, so called language minorities, are attributed*¹⁰.

Supporters of this way of thinking assert that deaf people can by happy living in their own community, as they understand each other well there. They do not suffer from being handicapped when they live in a society in which they feel understood by others. Thanks to such communities deaf people recover their autonomy. K. Krakowiak thinks that according to the ideology (based on the principles of sociologism) a deaf child becomes a fully efficient member of the society of the deaf and he or she does not need the language of hearing people, their national language. Sign language makes it possible for deaf people to create their own culture and a dignified life in "the world of silence".

The third antropological approach as characterised by K. Krakowiak is personalism. On the basis of this approach a person should be treated as a subject and aim of all human activities,

¹⁰ Ibidem, s. 8.

not as an object or tool serving the realisation of a specified aim *The answer for the question "who my deaf child is?" based on the theory of personalism consists first of all of the thesis that a deaf child is a person worthy of care and unconditional affirmation despite the grade of the hearing loss, the level of his rehabilitation achievements, the lack of speech, speech retardation, or the way of communicating with other people. The child's dignity, not any other child's characteristics, or the aim of our activities, is a sufficient motivator for the parents' and pedagogues' care of the child's proper living condition, development and education. The personalistic theory neither enlarges the problem of the hearing impairment nor denies it. It allows avoiding reductionism and concentration on the handicap and its consequences only. Disability is treated as a natural characteristic of the human conditions*¹¹.

In the personalistic approach, hearing impairment, although seen as a source of the person's suffering, makes a special value in person's spiritual development. It makes visible higher values that are deciding in the search for the sense of human life. Encourages man to overcome the barriers, undertake efforts to overcome evil included in them and look for new good. In this conception all the activities for the handicapped people: medical, rehabilitation, revalidation, gain a new dimension - they are becoming works of love. They are directed towards the social affirmation of the dignity of each person - not excluding a deaf person, at finding a place in the society by a deaf person, at improving the quality of life and widening the educational chances. These activities in their essence are oriented towards creating the conditions supporting the integral development of a person: physical, psychological and spiritual. According to the personalistic approach parents have natural right to bring up their deaf children. Family is seen as the most proper community in which a deaf child can live and develop properly, having access to all the values created for men and by them.

Summing up the above philosophical approaches concerning the rehabilitation of the deaf persons it can be unambiguously stated that there does not exist one ready prescription and there cannot be established one direction in which the rehabilitation can lead. It is a commonly known thing that the needs of a deaf child and his or her family have to be diagnosed and considered individually, carefully and reliably. To conclude, it should be stressed that each parent, teacher, form tutor, therapist and specialist who undertakes the education, rehabilitation or bringing up deaf children, should be aware in which direction his or her activities lead the child. Choosing (biologism, sociologism, personalism) they should be convinced as far as the wisdom of their decision is concerned, they should be directed only

¹¹ Ibidem, s. 15.

by a real good of the deaf child, taking into account first of all his or her future life in the society. While choosing proper organisational solutions or methods of work the parent or the specialist should choose only these that are safe, proven, scientifically checked and having a clearly constructed philosophical foundation. They take responsibility and they will have to settle it both in front of themselves, the deaf child the whole society.

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Filozoficzne spojrzenie na rehabilitację niesłyszących

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest wzbudzenie świadomości i refleksyjnego podejścia do procesu rehabilitowania niesłyszących. Rodzice, wychowawcy, nauczycieli – specjaliści, dokonując wyboru środków i metod rehabilitacji niesłyszących określają przez nie kierunek drogi postępowania. Wybierając koncepcję opartą na założeniach: biologizmu, socjologizmu, czy personalizmu ponoszą odpowiedzialność, za przyszłe losy niesłyszącego wychowanka.

Philosophical approach towards rehabilitation of the deaf

Summary

The aim of this article is to arouse the awareness and reflective attitude to the process of rehabilitation of the deaf. The parents, the form tutors, the teachers and the specialists, by making a choice of means

and methods of the rehabilitation of deaf, they determine by them the ways of progressing. By choosing the conception based on the assumptions of the biological, sociological or personalistic approach, they hold responsibility for the future of the deaf pupils.