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**Special Pedagogy as Multicultural Pedagogy – Multicultural Pedagogy as Special  
Pedagogy**

*‘To speak about upbringing, first one needs to have a good understanding of cultural reality in which the process of upbringing takes place’*

*Kasperek, A. (2000)*

When analysing the complex modern social reality from the educationalist point of view, particularly special educationalist, one should not miss the cultural context in which the upbringing process takes place<sup>1</sup>. Without including the cultural background it is hard to foresee any influence on others, especially when we talk about long-term influence that molds the personality of others. Cultural context can be convergent with tutor’s expectations – then we witness the beneficial synergism of upbringing and socialization, but we can also see situations where these two areas do not affect each other, or even affect each other unfavourably. The discrepancy between standards and behaviour and personality models can cause education to impede social adaptation instead of facilitating it. Also, the cultural background in which children are raised can reduce their educational chances when compared to their peers. Special educationalist working with children whose possibilities are already limited should take into account both strengths and weaknesses of their environment, which have to be included in each individual plan of influence.

According to the cultural context in this article, the most significant idea is multiculturalism. It is not a new social phenomenon but its range and importance are rapidly increasing in the era of globalization. The notion of globalization should not be understood

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<sup>1</sup> In the wide meaning, containing all the conscious, purposeful and directed influence on a student, thus education as well.

only as the problems of immigrants and language minorities, though the first association definitely points to those social groups. There are, of course, countries (like the USA, to take an obvious example) where those problems are particularly important but the dynamics of demographic changes is most visible in other countries. As the Canadian statistics show there was a percentage rise in the number of language minorities from 6.3% in 1986 to 11.6% in 1996 with 20% predicted for the year 2016 (Winzer, W. A., Mazurek, K., 2000). There is a growing number of immigrants from areas like China, southern Asia and Africa. Military conflicts (the war in the former Yugoslavia, for instance) or processes like the opening of the borders (European integration) are stimulating transcultural activity which also concerns our Polish reality although we do not commonly perceive Poland as a typical multicultural society. The fact is, however, that on a global scale, we face a great worldwide migration wave, language mixing, culture fusion and an increasing importance of subcultures and microsocieties.

Apart from demographic processes, it must be noted that the whole modern culture is defined as the culture of transgression: when growing into it, man is destroying the existing order and crossing both natural and social borders. The setting of new borders (category borders) and transgression remain in the circular relationship which may be called the basic culture-creating mechanism. A. Kasperek believes that the disturbance of this process, which happens through border confusion, is the main upbringing problem in the postmodern era (2000). Worryingly, this might create difficulty for special pedagogy as far as keeping the old categorization, for instance the categorization of disabilities. A. Krause (2004) points the appearance of new areas of social heterogeneity in the process of social transition from differentiation to globalization. The context of individual experiences is not only connected with the process of rehabilitation (the diagnosis in different periods of advancement of secondary consequences of disability, the different quality of preventive-corrective-compensatory influences, etc.) but also with cultural factors such as attitudes towards disability, tolerance level, or commonly accepted values. Altogether it might be said that the similar kind of the damage of biological structures does not have to be the common denominator of a group of disabled people. This can be illustrated by showing the difference between people with the same hearing defect (for example 90 dB, acquired at the same age in both cases, in the interlingual period) one of whom learnt the Polish language, graduated from university, works as a teacher, and conducts researches while the other remains a functional illiterate. The creation of intellectual elites of disabled people is an undeniable cultural fact and the sign of our times. On the other hand, it is a warning signal that an individual case of a

person with certain disability cannot schematically serve as the grounds for explaining the problems of all the rest of them. Putting the discussed cases in one category of people with hearing disorder neither proves nor explains anything.

Obviously, the categorization of disabled students and the high level of segregation as a remedy for any kind of learning difficulties was the idea of the modern overweening reason. Unfortunately, that did not resolve the problem but exacerbated it by adverse consequences resulting from social isolation (the results of segregational education). More importantly, it is more and more difficult to find a clear boundary between 'abnormality' and 'normality': long years of attempts at setting the boundaries of norm have led to the conclusion that it is a dichotomy not only impossible to define but having no meaningful practical implication either. The blurring of the boundaries between normality and abnormality, which are fundamental for special pedagogy, might result in the paradox of self-limiting process of this science (Dykcik, W., 2000): self-declared as liberating pedagogy which is chasing its runaway subject. Educational inclusion in practise means the abolition of special schools although it is widely believed that that does not solve the problem of the education of disabled children. The question is: what is the role of special pedagogy and special educationalist? These are only some of the consequences of multiplying the numerous divisions and the desegregation process, finally – the disappearance of their distinctive features.

Analyzing from another angle, it might be said that the boundaries of different scientific disciplines are also becoming increasingly difficult to draw, which is explained with ideas similar to the ones contained in this article. Therefore, special pedagogy can be compared not only to multicultural pedagogy but also to social pedagogy, alternative pedagogy, or emancipation pedagogy, etc. However, considerable doubt exists as to whether it is better for the scientific autonomy of special pedagogy to search for differences rather than similarities in other pedagogical subdisciplines. **I believe that there** is nothing needed to be worry about, because the sufficient guarantee of the autonomy of special pedagogy is its clear mission, namely to help people with development threats or disabilities by means of all the interdisciplinary inspirations. Not only does the highly interdisciplinary character of special pedagogy justify but it also recommends the search for guidelines and inspiration in the theoretical conceptions of other scientific subdisciplines. This time the inspiration comes from multicultural pedagogy. W. A. Winzer and K. Mazurek (2000) claim that multicultural education describes the perspective and the process of creating the same success opportunities for all students irrespective of their ethnic and socio-cultural roots, their language and dialect, geographical location, sex, and disability. The authors state that multicultural education

covers the areas such as: aiming for equality, cultural pluralism, intergroup harmony, creation of the international basis for intercultural education, fighting against discrimination, educating teachers, students and their parents. The two-way relation between special and multicultural pedagogy which is contained in the article title can be summarized as follows:

1. modern special pedagogy has to make allowances for and promote the processes of the meeting of the cultures, multiculturalism brings a great number of problems which can be solved by the methods developed by special pedagogy;
2. the social complexity of the area, which is occupied by special educationalist has characteristics of multiculturalism and that is why special pedagogy should adopt the solutions developed for building the multicultural community.

The need to adopt special methods in multicultural pedagogy is related to the lower education level of immigrants' children and language minorities. It is particularly noticeable in those countries where the intensity of migration resulted in the appearance of the whole schools for minorities, usually in the so-called worse areas of towns. That problem was illustrated in a popular 1995 movie 'Dangerous Minds' which shows a vicious circle of degradation of coloured young people from American ghetto-districts. This vicious circle cannot be stopped by education at lower level, with no chance of higher education or a good job. Yet, we do not have to establish segregational schools to be able to see the problem of language barriers in limiting access to education; about 80% of immigrants' children who start school do not have language skills which could guarantee them equal educational chances. To make matters worse, many of them will never learn the language well enough to be successfully culturally assimilated and socially integrated. Although bilingualism has a lot of benefits like developing sensitivity to other people and cultures (immersion), it can also be disadvantageous (subtractive bilingualism or submersion) when learners do not acquire a high level of competency in either of the two languages (Cieszyńska, J., 1997, Podgórska-Jachnik, D., 2004). One should also bear in mind the environment aspirations or behaviour models which do not promote education. For instance, in Poland (and other countries) it is common for Roma young people to drop out of school, especially for Roma girls whose main duty is to get married early. Another common thing worth mentioning is that there were whole Roma families whose children (from several to a dozen or so) went to special schools for mentally disabled. Some of the behaviours which are typical of a given culture limit or prevent effective educational work and communication with students. Why talk about language barriers for example if cultural aspects make it impossible for a woman to maintain eye contact with a man, or a child with an adult? How can a child's development be supported if

working with a body is forbidden because touch is a cultural taboo? How can parents whom W. Estabrooks<sup>2</sup> calls ‘culturally silent’ be involved in facilitating a child’s speech development in the so-called ‘word bath’? And finally, what has to be done to change students’ negative attitude towards school and study as secondary consequences of intolerance, alienation, xenophobia and discrimination? It turns out that there might be more problems which result from cultural otherness than those resulting from the early diagnosed disability, which are best shown in American-Canadian experience.

Interestingly, in the book presenting the resources of special pedagogy at the beginning of a new century, namely the above-quoted work by W. A. Winzer and K. Mazurek (2000): *Special Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Issues of Inclusion and Reform*, among the distinguished groups of students (defined by the authors as special populations) there is no mention – in contrast to Polish textbooks – of mentally disabled or blind students. The authors hold a belief that when working with those students, relatively simple (but not easy) techniques of didactic process are applied, supported by modern technologies, according to the most widely understood didactics of individualized work. Instead, the aforementioned book deals with exceptionally gifted students, students with behaviour disorders, interconnected disorders, small children with disability (who require early broad quality improvement), deaf students, immigrants’ children and children from language minorities. The last two groups, presented as special populations, support the thesis that it is necessary to include multicultural issues in special pedagogy. From the American perspective, however, the community of deaf people is treated as a language minority and the education of deaf children is both bilingual (with the English language and American sign language) and bicultural. Biculturalism is not just an empty word. It involves, for example the introduction of the knowledge of history and culture of the deaf into school curriculum<sup>3</sup>. Children of immigrants and language minorities in special pedagogy are definitely a new subject matter but it is well justified by the abovementioned arguments.

The important thing to consider is whether the sign-board of special pedagogy over multicultural pedagogy might additionally carry a stigmatizing meaning. It must be noted that it is crucial not to enforce the expansion of the scope of special pedagogy but preserve its interventional character: special pedagogy is used when standard educational methods fail to work effectively. In other words, the scope of special pedagogy is flexible and limited by the

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<sup>2</sup> From the lecture given by W. Estabrooks at the seminar on auditory – verbal approach in Wrocław, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> These issues are discussed in the article about the educational possibilities of the deaf (Podgórska-Jachnik, D., 2006) with reference to the words of Marshaerck, M. (1997) about the so-called culturally deaf people: ‘Being Deaf and Being Deaf are not the same thing’.

maturity degree of educational problems, and consequently the actual social situation in a given country should determine the interest of special pedagogy in multiculturalism. Thus, a question arises: can we talk about the acute problem of multiculturalism in our country where mature educational projects are realized at the crossroads of four cultures<sup>4</sup>? Experts give a positive reply to this question and ‘multiculturalism in Poland is concerned with the coexistence of different old and newly-created cultural minorities connected not only with language, nationality and ethnicity, but also religion, regionalism, the attitude to history, the status of a disabled person, sexual orientation, etc.; democratization activates the process of the appearance of various values, interests and cultural identities’ (M. Kempy et al. 1997; re. Chromiec, E., 2004).

The common denominator of special pedagogy and multicultural pedagogy is undoubtedly the challenge of finding a place in education for otherness: otherness which can be a stigma and burden or otherness which can serve as an enriching factor. In the latter case, the word *otherness* from the connotation of *strangeness* changes into the connotation of *variety* which is definitely a desired meaning in integrated education, and that is why it is worth looking closely at the inspiring theory of Annedore Prengel’s **pedagogy of variety (1995)**. The theory of A. Prengel was a conception basis for the intercultural education project *Poland – Switzerland*<sup>5</sup>. It must be mentioned here, because it corresponds exactly to the needs of special pedagogy, in the activity area within the range of real social integration. The purpose of pedagogy of variety is to create for all students an equal access to both material and personal resources of school so that the particular, numerous possibilities of learning and living can be developed. The theory takes a great interest in the variety of people of different geographical and ethnic origin, differences resulting from disability, sex, etc. in pedagogical environment and their coexistence (which does not have to mean equality). How can that be achieved? When summarizing the author’s conception, it must be noted that in this long process the point of departure is not - contrary to what one might expect - another person but the own person: the enhancement of one’s own sense of dignity, the recognition of one’s own feelings and emotions together with the acceptance of one’s own intrapsychic heterogeneity. On the basis of one’s own dignity and getting to know oneself, one creates the conditions for meeting others, getting to know and recognize them. The development is the consequence of

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<sup>4</sup> Chromiec, E., Nikitorowicz, J. or the Lodz cycle of artistic activities ‘Four Cultures Dialogue’.

<sup>5</sup> The programme for teachers was realized in Lucerne by The Centre of Continuous Education. The coordinator from the Swiss side was B. Achermann whereas from the Polish side – B. Śliwerski.

meeting different people. The main principles of pedagogy of variety contain three dimensions of recognizing the rights of another person, namely:

- Different is different so I have the right to be what I am.
- Although everybody is different I give them the same rights, which I give to myself.
- The recognition of the fact that I belong to a definite group and that I have the right to promote solidarity with it. (ref. Achermann, B., 2000).

It seems as if A. Prengel's beliefs correspond closely to the reality of an integrated class in Polish school. Unfortunately, it is not very common to show the problem of integration from the perspective of a disabled child from such class. We usually concentrate on didactic tasks without paying attention to the psychological problem of difficulties resulting from the meeting with otherness. The results of the research done into intercultural integration point to the fact that being together is not enough to break the walls of fear and unwillingness. Therefore, it might be advisable to make use of the abovementioned reflections and experiences in special pedagogy. The example of the adopting of genuinely bilingual and bicultural strategy in the education of deaf people indicates that there are new tasks to perform. It is not enough to declare the acceptance of multiculturalism. There is a need for new social programmes which can shape the educational community in the multicultural climate of school, the programmes which educate social sensitivity and intercultural competencies such as the ones put forward by E. Lynch and M. Hanson (1992):

- Develop a clear understanding of your own beliefs, values, and practices, and how they are influenced by culture.
- Gather information about the cultures of individuals and groups represented among the populations you serve.
- Recruit help from bicultural individuals as guides to specific customs and practices.
- Participate in the activities of members of other cultural groups.
- At a minimum, learn a few common phrases in the languages of families with whom you work.
- Recognize differences in the communication styles of various cultures; learn to communicate in culturally appropriate ways.
- When disagreements occur, show respect and make a sincere effort to understand other perspectives (ref. Sass-Lehrer, M., Gerner de Garcia, B., Rovins, M., 1997).

Hitherto the present article has focussed on several problems, that appear on the crossroads of special pedagogy and multicultural pedagogy. It seems that a deep analysis of those issues can bring new solutions both for theory and practice of the two subdisciplines.

After the recapitulation of the presented material several general conclusions can definitely be drawn. Modern Polish special pedagogy ought to:

- take into consideration the place of cultural minorities which have limited educational chances;
- look at the education of deaf children as bilingual and bicultural education;
- develop intercultural competencies when training special educationalists;
- make use of the experience of multicultural pedagogy and pedagogy of variety in order to build genuine basis for the coexistence of different students in integrated groups.

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