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**Satisfaction with the school as an indicator of students' life quality –
– the context for special education of students with mild mental disability**

The experiential perspective in the studies on life quality

The article presents basic results of studies on life quality of the students who are mildly mentally disabled, with reference to one of the dimensions of life – life at school (considering various forms of special education). Life quality is regarded here as a subject- and experiential category, and is connected to a reflexive life evaluation. Assuming this perspective was a deliberate decision, however controversial this particular methodological orientation may seem.¹

The precursor in the subject-oriented, experiential studies was A. Campbell, who defined life quality as experiencing life as manifested in the level of life satisfaction and the feeling of happiness. For Campbell, the basic indicator of experiencing life is life satisfaction, because satisfaction, in his opinion, seems a quality of experience which is stable over time, as opposed to happiness which is more liable to daily mood fluctuations.² He confirmed this hypothesis with a longitudinal study, which he conducted on repeated samples by measuring their happiness and satisfaction. The correlations he received were 0.4 and 0.8, respectively.³

Evaluations of satisfaction with one's own life, expressed in self-reports, require the participant to reflect on his own life and to make numerous comparisons. Reflecting on life is equivalent to understanding it in a personal manner. Assuming a reflexive stance implies that one thinks about his or her life in ways which can be described as: thinking about life, trying to

¹ Zawisłak A., *Teoretyczne dylematy dotyczące uwzględniania subiektywnych aspektów jakości życia osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, [in:] C. Kosakowski, A. Krause, S. Przybyliński (Eds.), *Pomiędzy teorią a praktyką. Dyskursy pedagogiki specjalnej* 5, Olsztyn 2006, pp. 81-82.

² Dziurawicz-Kozłowska A., *Wokół pojęcia jakości życia*, „Psychologia Jakości Życia” 2002, nr 2, p. 81.

³ Derbis R., *Doświadczenie codzienności. Poczucie jakości życia. Swoboda działania. Odpowiedzialność. Wartości osób bezrobotnych*, Częstochowa 2000, p. 106.

understand it, trying to infuse it with deeper meaning and to draw conclusions. This is when one becomes an observer, attempting to seek meaning in the surrounding reality or in his dreams, fears and activities. Life satisfaction evaluation is done in the context of own desires, wishes, developmental possibilities and possibilities to self-realize. Life satisfaction changes in various life aspects over time, which reflects certain developmental regularities – children, teenagers, adults and the elderly attach different value to different aspects of life.⁴ Apart from own values and expectations, other people, what we think we deserve and our past are the criteria for evaluating one's own life.⁵ The significance of one's own past and future in the present life evaluation was underscored by W. Tatarkiewicz in his philosophical papers.⁶ Overall life satisfaction is, as he claimed, satisfaction not only with what there is, but also with the past and the future.

The relationships between the objective conditions and the subjective life quality are very complex and do not exhibit the simple transfer of the conditions onto the reported evaluations. So far, the research in this field has generated new questions rather than final answers. Looking for mechanisms in how life quality is shaped (especially considering life at school), I conducted a study on a group of students who were mildly mentally disabled (the experimental condition) and a group of students with full mental ability (the control condition). The research population, groups and sub-groups were homogenous with regard to life experience. The time factor was a significant element of the research design, since time is one of the most important factors modifying and shaping individual life space. With age, the organization of dynamisms responsible for the mainstream of children's and adolescents' life activeness changes.⁷ The overall comprehension of life space changes in relation to what is part of the psychological present. The time perspective is built up towards the psychological past and future.⁸ The conducted research considered the school type and the stage of education. The participants in the study were selected according to the formula: every three years in the educational cycle,

⁴ Schallock, R. L., *Three Decades of Quality of Life*, "Focus on Autism & Other Developmental Disabilities" 2000, Vol. 15, No. 2, s. 118-121.

⁵ cf.: Argyle M., *Psychologia szczęścia*, Wrocław 2004, p. 140.

Czapiński J., *Psychologiczne teorie szczęścia*, [in:] J. Czapiński (Ed.), *Psychologia pozytywna. Nauka o szczęściu, zdrowiu, sile i cnotach człowieka*, Warszawa 2004, p. 62-63.

⁶ Tatarkiewicz W., *O szczęściu*, Warszawa 1985, p. 241

⁷ Lewin K., *Behavior and development as a function of the total situation*, [in:] L. Carmichael (Ed.), *Manual of child Psychology*, New York 1954, p. 924-925

⁸ Chłopkiewicz M., *Osobowość dzieci i młodzieży. Rozwój i patologia*, Warszawa 1987.

therefore they were students of the penultimate classes of the three educational stages. Three age groups can be referred to three phases of growing up. The participants included: 313 students within the intellectual norm, 307 students mentally disabled from special education schools and 200 students mentally disabled from integrated schools (only primary and middle school students in the last group). Because life quality reflection is multi-leveled, the research aimed at activating various dimensions and levels of intra-psychological life space, which was depicted in self-prepared research tools.

The method

The study was conducted with the use of specially designed Scale for Life Quality and Scale for Student's Life Quality at School. The inspiration to the former was a scale prepared by Campbell, which measures satisfaction in fifteen life spheres.⁹ In the conducted study, the spheres were included which referred to children's and teenagers' every-day experiences. Thus certain irrelevant spheres were abandoned, while two new spheres were added: the school and Myself (self-satisfaction). The new Scale for Life Quality thus consists of nine dimensions 1) family life, 2) health, 3) friends and acquaintances, 4) school, 5) free time, 6) your home town, 7) living standard, 8) financial situation in the family, 9) Myself. considering the participants, who were children, including mentally disabled children, the question of simplicity and clarity of the scale was significant. The students evaluated their lives on the 5-degree-scale with schematic facial symbols (from very happy to an unhappy face, respectively smiling and the reverse). Similar schemas were used by F. Andrews and S. Withey¹⁰, and – in researching mentally disabled persons – by R.A. Cummins and L.D. Lau.¹¹

Satisfaction evaluations with the use of Scale for Student's Life Quality at School referred to partial dimensions of life at school and the components of these dimensions (each dimension embraced five detailed components). The question about satisfaction with a particular dimension was asked following detailed components questions. The scale embraces the following partial components of life at school: 1) conditions on the premises, 2) school

⁹ cf. Kowalik S., *Pomiar jakości życia - kontrowersje teoretyczne*, [in:] A. Bańka, R. Derbis (Ed.), *Pomiar i poczucie jakości życia u aktywnych zawodowo*, Poznań-Częstochowa 1995, p. 78

¹⁰ after: Argyle M., *Psychologia szczęścia*, Wrocław 2004, p. 18.

¹¹ Cummins R. A., Lau A. L. D., *Personal Wellbeing Index- Intellectual Disability (PWI-ID) 3rd Edition 2005*, retrieved 10 April 2005: www.acqol.deakin.edu.au/instruments/index

organization, 3) classes (in general) 3a) Polish language classes, 3b) mathematics classes, 3c) technical education classes (practical skills training in engineering schools), 3d) physical education classes, 4) relationships with the teachers, 5) relationships with female friends, 6) relationships with male friends, 7) extra-curricular classes at school, 8) school care.¹² Their satisfaction, as was also the case with the Scale for Life Quality, the participants were asked to express on a five-degree scale with schematic facial figures, circling an appropriate symbol on the paper.

Satisfaction with the school and detailed evaluations of the satisfaction – the results.

Considering the three types of schools in the analysis of the satisfaction with the school (the study with the use of the Scale for Life Quality) revealed statistically significant differences between the groups [$F(2,817)=5,148$; $p<0,05$]. Testing the inter-group differences with the Tukey's Test showed that the students from integrated schools are more satisfied than the students with full mental abilities (statistical significance $p<0.05$). No significant differences were found between special education and standard schools. However, the studies revealed that students from integrated schools are more satisfied with the school than those from special education schools ($p<0.05$).

Detailed evaluations of satisfaction with the school the students expressed on the Scale for Student's Life Quality at School. The first aspect of life under scrutiny was the infrastructural and organizational background. The satisfaction with the premises and the schedule was evaluated. The analysis of variance considering the evaluation of satisfaction of the students from the three school types in this dimension of premises revealed that significant statistical differences between students concern the overall satisfaction with the **premises** [$F(2,817)=7,970$, $p<0,001$] and satisfaction with its four components: spaciousness [$F(2,817)=14,816$, $p<0,001$], school breaks areas [$F(2,816)=6,458$, $p<0,05$], additional learning rooms [$F(2,817)=14,671$, $p<0,001$] and school cleanness [$F(2,817)=5,114$, $p<0,05$], but not with satisfaction with the classroom's decoration. Testing inter-group differences revealed that the students from integrated schools are more satisfied with the four components than are those with full mental abilities, as well as they express higher overall satisfaction with the premises,

¹² for a detailed tool description, please look: Sadowska S., *Jakość życia uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu lekkim*, Kraków 2006.

while the students from the special education schools are more satisfied with school breaks areas and reveal higher overall satisfaction with the premises than the students with full mental abilities ($p < 0.05$). The statistically significant differences between the groups of students from integrated and special education schools concern the overall evaluation as well as satisfaction with spaciousness and additional learning rooms – the children from the integrated schools expressed higher level of satisfaction than those from the special education schools ($p < 0.05$). It needs to be pointed out that the students from the integrated schools are the most satisfied with the premises, considering all the dimensions studied.

In the dimension of **school organization**, the statistically significant differences between the three studied groups concern overall satisfaction with the school organization [$F(2,817)=8,857$, $p < 0,001$] and its four components: satisfaction with the duration of classes per a day [$F(2,817)=19,328$, $p < 0,001$], satisfaction with the duration of breaks [$F(2,817)=14,854$, $p < 0,001$], satisfaction with how punctually they are finished [$F(2,817)=26,078$ $p < 0,001$] and with how information circulates at school [$F(2,817)=7,423$, $p < 0,05$], but not with the time at which regular and extra-curricular lessons start. Tukey's Test failed to reveal statistically significant differences in this dimension between the children from integrated and special education schools, but it did show differences between the evaluations by the students from integrated and special education students on one hand, and the students with full mental abilities on the other – the latter are less satisfied ($p < 0.05$). It needs to be remarked that, in comparison to other studied dimensions, the evaluations for the school organization and its components are relatively low (the satisfaction with the duration of classes per a day being the lowest).

The second sphere under consideration was the educational sphere. The students were evaluating their overall satisfaction with the classes and satisfaction with four specific subjects: Polish, mathematics, technical education and physical education). Making the overall evaluation, the student could refer to his or her extensive field experience (various subjects). Analysis of variance for satisfaction evaluation of the students from the three school types from the **classes** dimension points to significant differences between the groups in the overall satisfaction with the classes [$F(2,817)=12,122$, $p < 0,001$] and satisfaction with five components: tasks difficulty [$F(2,817)=5,165$, $p < 0,05$], grading fairness [$F(2,817)=36,919$, $p < 0,001$], attractiveness of tasks [$F(2,817)=9,280$, $p < 0,001$], pace of work [$F(2,817)=10,504$,

$p < 0,001$] and homework difficulty [$F(2,817)=6,651$, $p < 0,05$]. Tests on inter-group differences revealed that special education students are more satisfied with all five components, as well as they express higher overall satisfaction with classes. The students from integrated classes, in comparison with the students with full mental abilities, are more satisfied with two components: grading fairness and attractiveness of tasks ($p < 0,05$). The students from the integrated schools differ from those in the special education schools in two respects: they are less satisfied with the pace of work and tasks difficulty ($p < 0,05$). In the **specific classes** dimensions, the students from integrated schools are less satisfied than the students from the special education schools with tasks difficulty in Polish classes and technical education classes, pace of work in technical education classes, and with homework education in Polish and technical education classes. They also express higher overall satisfaction with technical education classes ($p < 0,05$). The evident lower satisfaction of the students from the integrated schools does not have to result from improper pedagogic activities of teachers, however, but rather from applied standards for comparison (the child is not expected to perform too difficult tasks, but can see that others receive different ones).

The third sphere under consideration was interpersonal relationships on the dimensions: relationships with the teachers, relationships with female friends and relationships with male friends. Analysis of variance for evaluations of satisfaction of the students from the three types of schools in the **relationships with the teachers** dimension revealed that the studied groups differ in the overall satisfaction with the relationships with the teachers [$F(2,817)=12,356$, $p < 0,001$] and in the satisfaction with five components of this dimension: teachers' friendly attitude [$F(2,817)=15,482$, $p < 0,001$], trust towards teachers [$F(2,817)=19,542$, $p < 0,001$], help received from teachers [$F(2,817)=11,993$, $p < 0,001$], obtaining the possibility to put forward and realize own ideas from the teachers [$F(2,817)=6,067$, $p < 0,05$] and partner-like attitude of teachers [$F(2,817)=10,383$, $p < 0,001$]. Tests on inter-group differences revealed that in all statistical significant dimensions, as presented above, the special education schools are more satisfied than those from general schools, while the students from the integrated schools, in comparison to those from regular schools, express higher satisfaction with trust towards teachers, help received from the teachers and with the overall relationships with the teachers. The results also show that the students from the integrated schools are far less satisfied with obtaining the possibility to put forward and realize own ideas from the teachers, in comparison

with the students from special education schools ($p < 0.05$). This dimension of contacts with adults is significant for self-efficiency, independence and autonomy. Middle-high school students from the integrated schools are less satisfied with trust towards teachers and partner-like attitude of teachers than are the middle-high school students from special education schools ($p < 0.05$). It is worth pointing out that the higher the stage of education, the lower the satisfaction with relationships with the teachers, yet this regularity is the weakest for special education schools students. Generally, however, the relationships with the teachers, independent of the stage of education, bring in a lot of satisfaction to the students, as well as relationships with female friends do. In the **relationships with female friends** component, the three studied groups differ in overall satisfaction with the relationships with female friends [$F(2,817)=6,147, p < 0,001$] and in satisfaction with four components: friendly attitude of female friends [$F(2,817)=4,620, p < 0,05$], help received from female friends [$F(2,817)=7,007, p < 0,05$], partner-like treatment by female friends [$F(2,817)=4,224, p < 0,05$] and number of female friends [$F(2,817)=4,314, p < 0,05$]. Testing inter-group differences revealed that in all listed categories the evaluations made by the students from special education schools differ from those made by students with full mental abilities – the latter are more satisfied. The students from integrated schools, in comparison with those from regular schools, express higher satisfaction with help received from female friends ($p < 0.05$). No significant differences were found in satisfaction evaluation with relationships with female friends between integrated schools students and special education schools students. The **relationships** with female friends are in all types of schools more satisfying than those **with male friends**. In the dimension of relationships with male friends, no statistically significant differences were found in evaluations of satisfaction between the students from the three school types. However, the difference between the students from integrated schools on the elementary level are less satisfied with trust towards male friends and partner-like treatment by male friends in comparison to those from special education schools ($p < 0.05$). In the study, the effect of sex on satisfaction evaluations emerges. Girls from integrated schools, in comparison to girls in special education schools and girls with full mental ability, are less satisfied with all listed components of the dimension of relationships with male friends.

The fourth sphere constitutes recreation and care, which embraces two dimensions: extracurricular classes and care. Analysis of variance considering students' evaluations of

satisfaction with the three types of schools in the **extra-curricular classes** dimension revealed statistically significant differences in overall satisfaction in this respect [$F(2,817)=11,538$, $p<0,001$] and in satisfaction with five components: attractiveness of extra-curricular academic classes [$F(2,817)=5,691$, $p<0,05$], attractiveness of sport classes [$F(2,817)=4,817$, $p<0,05$], attractiveness of school events [$F(2,817)=10,994$, $p<0,001$], attractiveness of school trips [$F(2,817)=17,772$, $p<0,001$] and attractiveness of school contests [$F(2,817)=7,972$, $p<0,001$]. Differences between the students from the integrated schools and special education schools show only on the elementary school level and concern the offer of extracurricular classes and sport classes (those from special education schools are more satisfied in this respect, $p<0,05$). In the **care** dimension, statistically significant differences between the students from the three types of schools concern overall satisfaction with school care [$F(2,817)=10,865$, $p<0,001$] and satisfaction with five components: help of the school pedagogue [$F(2,817)=27,454$, $p<0,001$], medical care [$F(2,817)=14,622$, $p<0,001$], food provisions at school [$F(2,817)=10,187$, $p<0,001$], safety at school [$F(2,817)=9,178$, $p<0,001$] and teachers' contacts with the parents [$F(2,817)=9,289$, $p<0,001$]. A significant difference in evaluating satisfaction between students with mild mental disability attending various schools (special education school – integrated school) shows only in the level of satisfaction with food provisions at school – the students from special education schools were more satisfied ($p<0,05$).

Conclusions

Pedagogically speaking, one cannot miss certain conclusions which the conducted research suggests. The idea of integrated learning seems to have failed, especially in the sphere of contacts among friends. The conducted study also points to some weaknesses of such schools in the sphere of care and education – the children from the integrated schools expressed relatively low satisfaction with extracurricular classes, sport classes and school food provisions. Further, these children were less satisfied with teaching standards (tasks difficulty and pace of work) and relationships with the teachers (possibility to obtaining the possibility to put forward and realize own ideas from the teachers).

A certain incongruence strikes in the results: the evaluations on the Scale for Life Quality and Scale for Student's Life Quality at School do differ. The students from the integrated schools are overall more satisfied with the school than those from the special education schools, while

analysis of their level of satisfaction by components tends to show reverse results (with the exception of the premises dimension). How can this paradox be explained? One of the explanations is that the social perception of integrated schools, both by direct and more distant environments, is very high.

Searching for explanations for the above discrepancy, analysis of regression was carried out, where partial satisfactions with life at school were introduced to the regression equation. The final set of variables explaining the satisfaction with the school among the students with full mental ability (general school) shows that the explanatory power carry: satisfaction with the premises, satisfaction with the relationships with the teacher and, less so, satisfaction with the relationships with female friends and satisfaction with school care ($R=0,61756073$; $R^2=0,38138126$; Corrected $R^2=0,37316041$). For the group of students with mental disability the explanatory power carry: satisfaction with the school premises, satisfaction with school care, satisfaction with classes organization and satisfaction with the relationships with the teachers ($R=0,60692092$; $R^2=0,36835300$; Corrected $R^2=0,35995902$). The regression analysis shows completely different results for the students from the integrated schools. The explanatory power carry: satisfaction with interaction in the sphere of teaching (satisfaction with classes and satisfaction with the relationships with the teachers) and the relationships with peers (relationships with female friends) ($R=0,55084014$; $R^2=0,30342486$; Corrected $R^2=0,29236812$).

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Satysfakcja ze szkoły jako wymiar jakości życia uczniów – kontekst form kształcenia specjalnego uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu lekkim

W artykule przedstawiono zasadnicze rezultaty badań nad jakością życia uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu lekkim odnoszące się do jednego z wymiarów życia – życia w szkole (z uwzględnieniem zróżnicowanych form kształcenia specjalnego: szkoły integracyjne – szkoły specjalne). Badania przeprowadzono z wykorzystaniem opracowanej na potrzeby projektu badawczego Skali Jakości Życia i Skali Jakości Życia Ucznia w Szkole. Uczniowie ze szkół integracyjnych są bardziej zadowoleni ze szkoły od uczniów szkół specjalnych, a w obszarze satysfakcji cząstkowych z życia w szkole ich oceny często są niższe niż oceny uczniów ze szkół specjalnych. Dotyczy to zwłaszcza zadowolenia z oferty kół zainteresowań, szkolnych zajęć sportowych, dbałości szkoły o wyżywienie, z trudności zadań na lekcjach, tempa pracy na lekcjach, możliwości zgłaszania i realizacji własnych pomysłów. Oceny zadowolenia ogólnego uczniów szkół specjalnych wyjaśniają satysfakcje z warunków lokalowych, z opieki, z organizacji zajęć i ze stosunków z nauczycielami. Oceny zadowolenia ze szkoły uczniów ze szkół integracyjnych wyjaśniają satysfakcje związane z procesem interakcji w sferze dydaktyki (satysfakcja z lekcji, zadowolenie ze stosunków z nauczycielami) oraz kontakty rówieśnicze (stosunki z koleżankami).