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Special pedagogy students attitude towards various categories of disabled groups

The issue of attitudes towards disabled society members have long been a research focus for many authors, among others for H. Larkowa, A. Hulek, Z. Sękowska, A.E. Sękowski, A. Ostrowska, E. Gorczycka, J. Kossewska. Numerous research findings demonstrate that social attitudes toward individuals with disabilities vary, and are dependent on disability types. Moreover, these attitudes range from the most positive (of approval) to the most negative (of rejection).

In the theoretical studies of Special Education an attention is devoted to the fields corresponding to the issue of attitudes towards individuals with various disability groups. These include: visible disability, type of manifested disorders (organic, physical or social), as well as social ostracism¹.

Positive attitudes are observed more frequently with reference to people whose disability is hardly visible (e.g., chronic diseases: asthma, diabetes). Visible disability may arouse uncomfortable feelings (such as fear or aversion) and this, in turn, may reinforce a tendency to avoid any contacts with the designated group of disabled people.

Taking into consideration the manifested disorder type (organic, physical or social), it was proved that able-bodied people adopt the most positive attitudes toward chronically ill people (suffering from asthma or heart diseases), the physically disabled, or people with sensory disabilities. Next comes a category of mentally and psychiatrically disabled people. The most negative attitudes of the able-bodied are adopted toward people with disorders related to social functioning, that is to alcoholics, drug addicts and the socially maladjusted.

The process of the attitude formation toward different disability types is also influenced by the phenomenon of ostracism, arising from commonly accepted social norms. According to them, expressing sympathy for the physically disabled or chronically ill, rather than for the addicted or socially maladjusted, is better socially accepted.

Social attitudes are one of the most difficult barriers to overcome on the road to the integration with the disabled. Disapproval of emotional attitudes and social behaviour frequently stand in the way of a full participation of the disabled in the social life². Teachers are the people who, by virtue of their socio-vocational positions, can contribute to the formation of right social

¹ J. Kossewska, Uwarunkowania postaw. Nauczyciele i inne grupy zawodowe wobec integracji szkolnej dzieci niepełnosprawnych, Kraków 2000, WNAP, p. 90

² A. Ostrowska, Badania nad niepełnosprawnością w Polsce, Warszawa 1994, Wyd. IFiS PAN, pp. 93 - 97

attitudes toward the disabled³. Thus, it seems vital to form a positive attitude to people with different disability types with reference to students of pedagogy, who will occupy a suitable place in the local community in the future.

Taking that into consideration, the aim of this research is the analysis of pedagogy students' attitudes towards people with different disability groups. We made an attempt to determine which disability groups are the most, and which are the least acceptable by students of pedagogy and non-pedagogical fields of study. We also explored pedagogy and non-pedagogical fields of study students' attitudes toward individuals with various disability types, as well as the type of attitudes of first, third, and fifth- year pedagogy and non-pedagogical students.

Research Method

In order to determine pedagogy and non-pedagogical students' attitudes toward individuals with various disability types, the Bogardus Social Distance Scale (drawn up by E.Zasępa⁴) was adopted.

This scale consists of nine theorems describing different interpersonal situations. It measures two factors: the acceptance of people with disabilities across a variety of social situations (questions 1-8), and the willingness to help the disabled (question 9)⁵. In this research we resigned from question nine, since it does not measure a tendency to the closeness or the avoidance of the subject of the attitude.

We examined the social distance kept from individuals with the following disability types: the blind, deaf, chronically ill, mentally retarded, motor-skill impaired, socially maladjusted, intellectually disabled, with learning difficulties.

The respondent's task was to assess, on a 5-point scale, the acceptance level of individuals with different disability types across a variety of social situations.

These situations were rated from the closest people (e.g. spouse, family member, neighbour, co-worker) to the most distant ones (visitor of my town or village). The young people determined the scale of their willingness to interact with disabled individuals of the group in question. The maximum score was 40 points, the minimum was 8. The higher the score the respondents achieved, the lower social distance they keep from disabled people.

³ H. Ochoczenko, Postrzeżenie sytuacji osób niepełnosprawnych w społeczeństwie przez studentów pedagogiki. „Problemy Rehabilitacji Społecznej i Zawodowej” 1996, No. 1, pp. 43 - 50

⁴ E. Zasępa, Postawy społeczne wobec osób niepełnosprawnych. „Roczniki Pedagogiki Specjalnej”, t. 9, Warszawa 1998, WSPS, pp. 72 - 84

⁵ D. Majewska, Postawy uczniów szkół ponadpodstawowych wobec osób odbiegających od normy. „Zagadnienia Wychowawcze a Zdrowie Psychiczne”, No. 5-6, pp. 52 - 63

Set-up and research area

The research was conducted on the UMCS Lublin University students. We completed two research groups of 297 people each. The first, third and fifth-year students of pedagogy and Psychology constituted the basic group (A), while the comparative group (B) was made by first, third and fifth-year students, selected at random from ten other faculties of the UMCS Lublin University.

The basic (A) and the comparative (B) groups were equivalent to sex, age, residence place, family relationships, financial situation, school type, frequency contact with the disabled in the family environment, with co-workers and in the local environment, as well as to the knowledge gained through the mass media. Thus, the only difference between the selected and admitted to the research respondents was related to the study field (pedagogy and non-pedagogical faculties), and to the academic year (first, third, and fifth).

Research results analysis

The results of the statistical analysis, related to social distance kept from people with various disability types, displayed by pedagogy and non-pedagogical faculties students (groups A and B respectively) were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Social distance kept from 8 disability groups –comparison of groups A and B

Disability Groups	Pedagogy (A)		Non-pedagogical fields of study (B)		Students test result (t)		
	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i>
Blind	35,83	4,18	34,37	5,01	3,85	592	0,000
Deaf	36,15	5,38	34,66	4,76	3,58	592	0,000
Intellectually disabled	29,00	5,57	26,89	6,37	4,29	592	0,000
Chronically ill	34,63	4,55	32,52	5,49	5,10	592	0,000
Motor-skill impaired	36,11	3,88	33,95	4,87	5,99	592	0,000
With learning difficulties	36,61	3,57	34,31	4,93	6,52	592	0,000
Socially maladjusted	27,45	6,39	26,99	6,67	0,86	592	0,390 n.i.
Psychiatrically disabled	23,59	6,61	22,93	6,91	1,18	592	0,235 n.i.

The acquired data indicate that the respondents display a balanced level of acceptance toward individuals with various disability types.

Pedagogy students display the most favourable attitudes toward people with learning disabilities, the deaf, motor-skill impaired, blind and chronically ill. The lowest scores of acceptance, indicating the highest distance across a variety of social situations, the would-be

teachers showed with reference to the intellectually disabled, socially maladjusted and psychiatrically disabled.

Similar results were obtained in the comparative group (B). The analysis of average indicators of social distance from people with various disability groups demonstrated that non-pedagogical students are most favourable to people with: sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, or to the chronically ill. The least susceptible to positive response were people with psychiatric disabilities, the mentally disabilities, and socially maladjusted.

The average outcomes achieved by pedagogy students, with regard to every disability category, are higher than in the group of non-pedagogical students. These differences are fairly significant statistically in reference to six out of eight disability types ($p < 0,000$). That means that would-be teachers are distinguished by far less social distance from the people that are blind, deaf, mentally disabled, chronically ill, deaf impaired and have learning difficulties, as compared to non-pedagogical students. In addition, pedagogy students are more likely to accept individuals with the above-mentioned disabilities as their neighbours, co-workers, the same club goers or mates, as well as family members. However, with reference to the socially maladjusted and people with psychiatric disabilities, regardless of the field of study, students displayed a similar social distance level.

It seems interesting to analyse average indicators of social distance from people with various disability types, considering both the field of study (pedagogy, non-pedagogical faculties) and the academic year of the surveyed (first, third, fifth). The data regarding this issue were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. List of average results of first, third and fifth-year students of Pedagogy and non-pedagogical fields of study with regard to social distance from various disability groups

Disability groups	Academic year	Pedagogy (A)		Non-pedagogical fields of study (B)		ANOVA variance analysis results		NIR test results	
		<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	F	p	Porównywane grupy	p testu NIR
Blind	I	35,63	3,96	34,34	4,83	3,27	0,006	A _I – B _I	n.i.
	III	35,69	4,1	34,61	4,98			A _{III} - B _{III}	0,017
	V	36,19	4,49	34,66	5,24			A _V – B _V	0,020
Deaf	I	36,17	7,19	34,89	4,5	2,87	0,014	A _I – B _I	n.i.
	III	35,93	4,04	34,19	5,06			A _{III} - B _{III}	0,017
	V	36,36	3,38	34,89	4,72			A _V – B _V	0,043
Mentally disabled	I	28,81	5,49	27,64	6,77	5,84	0,000	A _I – B _I	n.i.
	III	27,89	5,59	26,42	6,48			A _{III} - B _{III}	n.i.
	V	30,29	5,43	26,60	5,8			A _V – B _V	0,000
Chronically ill	I	34,14	4,3	33,29	5,37	6,33	0,000	A _I – B _I	n.i.
	III	34,59	4,55	32,22	5,34			A _{III} - B _{III}	0,001
	V	35,16	4,77	32,05	5,73			A _V – B _V	0,000
Motor-skill impaired	I	35,83	3,81	34,05	4,89	7,67	0,000	A _I – B _I	0,005
	III	36,17	3,68	33,48	4,92			A _{III} - B _{III}	0,000
	V	36,34	4,15	34,3	4,82			A _V – B _V	0,001
With learning disabilities	I	36,28	3,44	34,74	5,18	9,26	0,000	A _I – B _I	0,012

	III	36,53	3,41	33,84	4,83			$A_{III} - B_{III}$	0,000
	V	37,04	3,84	34,36	4,76			$A_V - B_V$	0,000

Data analysis indicated that, with reference to all disability groups, there arose statistically significant differences between third-year pedagogy students and third-year non-pedagogical students, as well as fifth-year pedagogy students and fifth-year non-pedagogical students respectively. In addition to which, these are essential statistical differences. That means that third and fifth-year pedagogy students are more likely to accept the blind, deaf, mentally disabled, chronically ill, physically disabled and people with learning disabilities than third and fifth-year non-pedagogical students.

Furthermore, the data listed above reflect that, regardless of their study field, students that begin their academic education display a similar level of social acceptance across a variety of social situations towards people with sensory disabilities, the mentally disabled, and chronically ill. However, fifth-year students of Pedagogy are distinguished by less social distance from the blind ($p < 0,020$), the deaf ($p < 0,043$), mentally disabled ($p < 0,000$) and chronically ill ($p < 0,000$) than their university mates of non-pedagogical fields of study. That means that a positive attitude formation in the group of would-be teachers was developed during five years of their academic study, with regard to four disability groups. Perhaps the changes occurring in pedagogy students' attitudes are connected with the knowledge they acquire and their experience. It is worth highlighting that Pedagogy students, in the course of their study, cover subject areas related to disability issues, and go through their personal experience in their interactions with the disabled as part of both field trips and continuous practice.

No significant statistical differences were found within the basic group (A1, A3, A5) and the comparative group (B1, B3, B5). This notwithstanding, on the basis of average value analysis, it can be stated that third-year pedagogy students adopt more favourable attitudes toward all disability groups, as compared to first-year students. The fifth-year pedagogy students' attitudes turned out to be the most positive. Such a tendency was not revealed in the non-pedagogical students group.

Conclusions

Recapitulating on the acquired data with regard to research into pedagogy and non-pedagogical students' attitudes toward various disability groups, we can draw the following conclusions:

1. Academic youth reflect diversifying level of acceptance of various disability groups.
2. Among pedagogy students, the most positive attitudes emerged toward people with learning difficulties, the deaf, motor-skill impaired, blind and chronically ill. Non-pedagogical students

reflect the most positive attitudes toward the sensory disabled, individuals with learning difficulties, physically disabled and chronically ill.

3. Pedagogy and non-pedagogical students are distinguished by the lowest level of acceptance across social situations of individuals with psychiatric disabilities, the socially maladjusted, and mentally disabled.
4. The field of study diversifies the social distance from six out of eight disability groups. Pedagogy students, unlike non-pedagogical students, adopt less social distance from people with sensory disabilities, the mentally disabled, chronically ill, motor-skill impaired, as well as from individuals with learning difficulties.
5. With regard to the blind, deaf, mentally disabled, chronically ill, motor-skill impaired, and individuals with learning difficulties desirable changes in pedagogy students' attitudes were observed through their academic education. The most favourable attitudes toward the above-mentioned disability categories were adopted by fifth-year pedagogy students.

References:

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