

The World of Dreams of Chronically Ill Children

The beautiful Grecian myth about Selene, the goddess of moon and sister of Helios, the god of sun, says that Selene travelled across heaven in her silvery chariot pulled by two white horses and gave each newborn child the ability to imagine. It was her who taught people to dream.

Dreams perform numerous functions in human life. Bronisława Dymara (1996) underlining the necessity and indispensability of dreams in proper development of a human being says that "a person without dreams is a person without goals, without joy and hope ...". The specific value of dreams consists in the fact that they often bring about initiative, encourage activity, which properly directed can make dreams come true. Thus dreams can inspire to act, show the direction of activities and influence the steps taken. Frequently, dreams are a way of defending oneself against boredom and frustrations of the everyday existence. Moreover, they can make the interpretation of reality. Thanks to them people learn to understand the world, build knowledge about themselves, about their inner needs. Singer (1980) declares that dreams are for a human being a kind of a preparation for the real life. Defining the function of dreams in human life, Bronisława Dymara (1996) claims that they are:

- a driving force for activities undertaken.
- a form of therapy,
- a way of obtaining self-knowledge and self-purification (catharsis),
- a category of intentional change,
- a way of developing intuition and contemplative attitude,
- a help in deciphering cultural symbols.

Numerous psychologists who carry out a thorough research on the beginnings of thinking in children believe that daydreaming originate from pretending and imitating games. Children play such games between the second and the seventh year of life. During their plays children often express their thoughts verbally. Careful, reflective observation and listening to a playing child often allows us to learn about its needs and aims. Different types of pretending

games go together with numerous spheres of child's internal life and difficult situations it experiences. As the child grows, it gives up officially played pretending games but this does not mean a complete resignation. Pretending plays are gradually internalized. They are moved to imagination and they are played there in separation. According to the conducted research (Singer 1980), people in late adolescence dream most often. At this time dreams take a form of a narration, they contain descriptions of people, states and they are stories to a greater degree than visualized experiences.

Dreams are a natural need of a man, but human beings differ as far as their tendency to escape in the world of dreams is concerned. The fact that some persons are more prone to dreaming than others can be conditioned with the richness of imagination, tendency to reflect on things, level of satisfaction, need to introduce changes.

Chronic illness, which introduces some limitations in human life and makes the person's functioning in numerous spheres hard, is a difficult, fear-triggering situation. In such a situation a young person activates defence mechanisms (defrustrating ones), which are considered by psychology as habitual methods of dealing with long-lasting conflicts and frustrations, aiming at reducing fear, the sense of guilt, and at reinforcing self-acceptance. Defrustration mechanisms play an adaptational role to some degree but they can also be hindering factors, or even factors which make adaptation impossible as they distort reality. Escape is one of defence mechanisms known, it can manifest itself in a physical or psychical form. The first form of escape is physical avoiding unpleasant people and places. Psychical escape is carried out by avoiding behaviour consisting in escape to one's inner life, escape in the world of imagination (Doroszevska 1989). Thus, dreams which are a kind of escape from reality, should be treated as a type of defence mechanism, triggered in difficult situations.

In order to learn about the dreams of chronically ill children, I conducted a research on a group of 40 children, 13 years of age, suffering from asthma and having medical treatment in a sanatorium. In the group subject to research there were 20 girls and 20 boys. The research material was collected with the use of individual talks conducted on the basis of a prepared plan. Moreover, the subjects of the research were asked to write an essay in which they were to provide their considerations about the following thought: „*People say that when you see a falling star you should think of a dream and this dream will come true. Imagine that a star is falling now... what would you think about?*” The subjects of the research had unlimited time to prepare their utterances.

All subjects expressed in their dreams most of all needs and wishes concerning themselves. They would like to have a better health, have particular material goods, travel,

find happiness in life. Every fourth person takes into consideration the welfare of other people as well in his or her dreams.

It is a known fact that material goods make it easier or even are necessary in order to realise some wishes. On the other hand, there are goods and values which cannot be bought for money. A human being often meets a dilemma: “to have” or “to be”. The dreams of persons under research considerably more often concern not material values. This holds true in case of subgroups divided with regard of gender as well as material status of the family of the person under research. It is, however, worth noticing that in the group of children growing up in well-to-do environments the advantage of non-material dreams over the material ones are slight. On the other hand, in the group of children whose families encounter smaller or bigger material difficulties, there are two times more non-material dreams, than the material ones.

I evaluated the dreams of my subjects also as far as the possibility of their realisation is concerned. Most of the subjects (77.5%) have dreams which could be realised. There are such dreams which can be the driving force, can encourage one to make an effort, thus, they can clearly influence the functioning of a human being. In the group in question, one can indicate persons (20%) who formulate only such dreams which cannot come true. Moreover, some subjects (22.5%) express both dreams which with more or less effort can become reality, as well as dreams for which there are no possibility of their realisation. There are more boys among those who have dreams with no chance of coming true.

Due to health problems of the subjects, one could expect that issues concerning health and illness would be noticeable in the dreams discussed. The majority of subjects (67.5%) referred to the issue of illness in their dreams. It is worth noticing that the subjects expressed not only the wish concerning the improvement of their own health, but they also spoke about their wishes concerning the health of other people. Most often this concerned members of their families: “...*I would think about my parents’ health,...my parents are ill and I would like them to be healthy*” (Natalia), “...*I would like my grandma to recover, to recover...*” (Gosia), „*I would think about the health of my whole family and about my health. So we could be all together healthy and happy until we are very old*” (Renata). Except of the dreams concerning their own health and the health of the closest persons, the subjects expressed also thoughts in which they called for health for wide circles of people: “*My dream is that no child should suffer from chronic diseases*” (Dawid) or for the humanity in general: „...*I want to be healthy and I would like no illnesses in the world*” (Paweł).

The group of subjects underwent sanatorium treatment so they had to be separated from their family houses, separated from their familiar peer environment. Most of the subjects (60%) expressed in their dreams longing for their family environment. Girls encountered this problem more often than boys.

It is optimistic that more than a half of the subjects (57.5%) confirm that they experienced a dream come true in their life so far. Most often realised dreams were connected with the wish to have particular material goods (computer, skis, bicycle, one's own room). Some utterances about dreams which came true draw our attention to how important self-fulfilment, possibility to succeed are to young people. And here I would like to present fragments of chosen utterances which testify this: *„I wanted to be a good student very much and to receive good characters. As I often go away for treatment, I had troubles with learning. I was lucky to meet a wonderful teacher who understood me. I like to talk to her. She helps me a lot. Today I can say that my dream came true”* (Patryk); *“I wanted to learn how to dance breakdance and I succeeded. Today I am one of the best dancers in my estate”* (Oktawian); *„I like to draw very much. I take part in various contests. There was a drawing contest which I wanted to win. And I succeeded, I came first.”* (Renata). The subjects spoke of fulfilled dreams in which there is a call for love, the sense of safety: *„I wanted my dad to stop drinking vodka. And my dream came true. My dad has not drunk for a year”* (Paweł); *„I had a father who was a drunkard. He used to beat me and my mum. We ran away when I was 10 years old. This was my dream.”* (Patryk); *„I had always wanted to be loved by someone. As I come from a broken family, it often seemed to me that no one needed me and I wondered why I existed at all. Now it has all changed as there is someone for whom I am the most important person in the world. I have a wonderful friend, Krzyś”* (Iza).

Fulfilled dreams can encourage other dreams. As Bronisława Dymara¹ puts it: *„Dreams are there to be fulfilled and the fulfilled ones to make an impulse for other dreams”*.

The research on children's dreams was accompanied by a thought which can be formulated as an educational postulate. A teacher, tutor should take adequate steps in order to learn about the world of dreams of children he or she takes care of. Obviously, tactful behaviour of the teacher and human being's right to privacy is an important thing here. Not everyone can and wants to talk about his or her dreams. It is, however, worth remembering that a properly conducted conversation is just one of many ways of collecting information about students.

¹ B. Dymara, *ibid.*

Knowledge about the dreams of the children one teaches should allow a reflective teacher to undertake appropriate actions which can make it easier for the child to achieve its goals or which can protect the child from possible dangers and minimise the influence of hardships the child encounters.

References:

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3. Singer J. L. (1980), Marzenia dzienne, PWN, Warszawa
4. Słownik Języka Polskiego (2005), PWN, Warszawa