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Dilemmas and controversies surrounding the teleological categories in special needs education

The rank and complexity of teleology makes it difficult for the researcher to find an appropriate starting point for the analysis. Let us start, however, with the words of a classic of the pedagogic thought, Maria Grzegorzewska. In "Listy do młodego nauczyciela" (English: "Letters to a Young Teacher") (1983: 9), she wrote: "I would like to know whether you will be able to discern and to solve the puzzle standing ahead of you – where and why you are going; whether you will manage to look deeper, to understand the significance of the work in which you are to participate, to start living and working with the awareness of the aim?" Her words seem to express the concern for teacher responsibility. The author points to the importance of personal decisions of pedagogues, of "choosing between alternatives", which combines responsibility with axiological matters – the subject of values, between which man can and should choose.

The fact that dilemmas are solved by people who professionally, socially and in natural conditions deal with education design must give rise to a reflection on how science supports the subjects of education in teleological choices. In accordance with my academic interests, this is the special needs pedagogy that will be subject to an analysis. I pose several questions. How were and are the teleological questions approached in the Polish special needs education? Which convictions may grow in a reader in the field of special needs education concerning the aims of education? What is the relevance of Maria Grzegorzewska's thesis that "in Poland there seems to be too strong a conviction that the aims of special needs education go hand in hand with the aims of general education, since the former is an integral part of the latter" (as cited in: Hulek, 1979: 12).

From personalistic to ideological approach

First academic essays assumed the personalistic point of view in their teleological considerations. This approach, employed later also by E. Tomasik (1997), grant the highest value (dignity) to a disabled person, saving him or her – as states the author – from instrumental treatment. J. Doroszewska, who opened up the ideas of special needs pedagogy as seen by Grzegorzewska, underscored in her two-volume-masterpiece "Pedagogika specjalna" (1981: 32) that "it is of highest significance for the special needs education to aim at returning the human dignity in all its forms to these people". The author noted that this tends to be an uncontroversial aim (considering the range of philosophical and social viewpoints), and showed that special needs education, as opposed to other branches of pedagogy, is relatively independent of ideological or social conditions.

Contrary to what J. Doroszewska claimed, special needs education did not protect itself from the teleology of ideological nature. K. Kirejczyk, who may have played a most significant role in systematizing the field of special needs pedagogy and mental retardation pedagogy, also wrote:

The aims of education of people with intellectual disabilities must be framed within the aims of socialist education. (...) Education of people with intellectual disabilities should, considering the extent and type of deviation, aim at: (a) providing these people with optimal intellectual growth, and highest possible general knowledge accessible by them; (b) shaping the scientific viewpoint of the world, considering the disabilities and the body of knowledge possessed; (c) socialist moral upbringing; (d) cultural and aesthetic education which enables participation in the cultural life of society; (f) physical education guaranteeing health, fitness and strength needed to realize the aims above (K. Kirejczyk, 1981: 181).

This teleology, as well as any other ideological teleology, can be traced back to the political and ideological strivings of certain social groups. In the former political system, directions and aims of education were strictly connected to the domination of state power in their assumptions. Thus, the ideal man's qualities included those which contributed to supporting, strengthening and improving the socialist forms of social life (cf. H. Muszyński, 1979: 145-146).

Since the time of political transformation, we have been observing in Poland what can be called settling the accounts with the past, accompanied by searching for new identities, and opening up to the new, partly unfamiliar basic trends and pedagogic movements of open societies. However, as powerfully emphasized by Z. Kwieciński (1994: 16), many academics only changed their axiological preferences and categories of reference, while remaining in the field of the same linguistic game. B. Śliwerski comments on the strivings of knowledge creators, who exhibit merely formal adjustment and whose activities are apparent. He uses the supermarket analogy and states (2007: 109): "Just like supermarket employees stick new labels on goods after the expiry date, some pedagogues try to <sell> their de-actualized texts, just by removing certain outdated content out of them. They discard the adjective "socialist" and embrace vocabulary regarded as valid or politically correct".

The reading research into a series of works from the field of special needs education seems to confirm this sad observation. For example, in the book from the year 2006, the author confesses in the introduction that it was written to reflect on the role of the process of education and rehabilitation in enhancing child development. Yet, the catalogue of the aims presented is similar to that of K. Kirejczyk, with the omission of two, most strikingly referring to the teleology of the time past. And so, we read that educating disabled children should aim at: (a) providing these people with optimal intellectual growth, and highest possible general knowledge accessible by them; (b) moral upbringing; (c) preparing them for performing an accessible job which will be useful for them; (d) cultural education; (e) physical education guaranteeing health, fitness and strength needed to realize the aims above (J. Wyczęsany, 2006: 10). The works of this sort abound on the market. One also needs to note that the authors of special needs pedagogy textbooks fail to conduct in-depth teleological analyses – instead, the aims appear to be marginal to other questions discussed.

The sociological approach to aims

In the overwhelming majority of works it is generally stated that the aim of special needs education, as well as of general education, is a more complete development of personality. Moreover, the aims of education may also refer to the needs and the character of social life. The category of adapting the individual to the reality and to the social expectations is crucial in the formulation of these aims.

O. Lipkowski (1981: 34) defined the educational aim in a very direct way: "A disabled person needs to be widely educated and provided with optimal development conditions, in order for him or her to be able to fulfill their social task as fully as possible". Z. Sękowska (1982: 10) defined the aim of educating disabled children as "multifaceted and maximal development and adaptation to useful life in the society". 25 years later, in one of the textbooks, the task of organization and realization of help to the disabled was brought down to the following: "he or she should be able to realize himself / herself as a person and to become a productive member of the society, independent of his or her abilities (R. Szczepanik, 2007: 7).

The aims so formulated can be connected to the sociological concepts of establishing aims, according to which, as mentioned above, the source of aims are the needs and the character of social life. However, the aims so approached seem excessively simplified – they accentuate the adaptation of a person to the existing order and to the existing life conditions, rather than take into account the man's contribution to change. It needs to be noted that the analysis and interpretation of social life led the Authors of the Roman Club Report "Uczyć się – bez granic" (English: "Learn – Without Borders"), which was published in 1979, to point out the problem of the so-called human gap, i.e. the societies not following the changes into worse or into better that they themselves generate. The key to solving the "human gap" problem is, according to the authors, anticipatory and participatory education, that is education which prepares for change, which lets anticipate new phenomena and develop cooperation skills in overcoming crises as they arise. Underscoring the significance of participation, as well as anticipation, is an indication of civic society as a virtual subject of the proposed teleology of education (cf. J.W. Botkin, M. Elmadrjra & M. Malitza, 1982). Looking at the report from the perspective of almost 30 years, it seems that the position of preservative education is overemphasized in the field of special needs education. Yet, all those awaiting change can see the light in the tunnel – in his book "Człowiek niepełnosprawny wobec przeobrażeń społecznych" (English: "A disabled person in the light of social change"), A. Krause (2004) analyzes the change in which a disabled person takes part as a starting point for formulating a series of recommendations for the theory and practice in special needs pedagogy. One must also note with satisfaction that there exist other works, especially textbooks, whose authors resort to an in-depth analysis of the needs and the character of social life in formulating the aims for the field. For example, Š. Vašek and A. Stankowski (2006: 10) inform the reader that "the aim of special needs education is to prepare the disabled and the individuals of other specific needs to possibly wholesome life in the society as creators, consumers and people who accepted their psychological and physical characteristics".

The necessity for transforming the tasks and aims of special needs pedagogy was raised by the representatives of the social concepts as early as in the 1930s. It is worth reminding that a great cultural pedagogue Sergiusz Hessen recommended that the aims of education should be sought in the world of culture or "life". From this perspective, in his considerations about the connections between the special needs pedagogy and the general

pedagogy, he was critical of the aims of the former. He disapproved of the fact that they focus on the child itself, and are directly guided by his or her psycho-physical flaws, which channels the attention onto the fields which require immediate intervention of the teacher (cf. Wasik, 1991: 68). M. Grzegorzewska (1964: 28) noticed the weaknesses of the conservative approach, and postulated that the goal subordinate to that of leveling out the faults is to lead to the fullest possible social revalidation.

In the era of integrationist tendencies, the primary aim, next to regaining maximal physical, psychological and social capacity, is to prepare for possibly normal life and to provide inclusion into the society (cf. Hulek, 1988: 468). The last of the tasks entailed the extension of the aims. O. Lipkowski (1983: 23) recapitulates on the corresponding metamorphoses, visible in the 1980s.: “There have occurred changes in the aims of special needs pedagogy. First of all, the social aims are emphasized, with the consideration of two aspects: preparation of the disabled for social and professional requirements, and awakening and strengthening the sense of social responsibility in terms of helping the disabled and acknowledging their right to help and care”. In the light of the previous comments, one needs to especially critically address the aim of “preparation of the disabled for social requirements”.

It was an achievement of the end of the 20th century to delineate the two areas of the activity of a special needs pedagogue, i.e. direct work with the disabled combined with simultaneously modifying the environment. It does seem useful to approach the problems initiated in the 1980s. in a more detailed, academic manner. Indeed, it is often the case that considerations which are pompously labeled “a new approach on the issue of teleology in special needs education” (W. Gasik, 1991) do not fulfill the task satisfactorily. Once again, with all might, I wish to emphasize that numerous contemporary textbooks, which are a compendium of knowledge from the field of special needs education for many practitioners, can be traced back to the teleological ideologies of the 1950s. It is most astonishing that the source knowledge derived from different periods of time does not serve any in-depth interpretation but is rather a coincidental concoction of set concepts and ideas. Such readings all but enhance those subject to special needs education in their conscious choices. I wish to refer to M. Dudzikowa here (2007: 7), who introduced her book on the teleological potential of contemporary pedagogy, stating that the complex picture of reality, and the confusion of contradictory values, norms and patterns of behavior cause that the aims of education, its content and level of abstraction lend themselves to specific reflection and an incessant analysis.

In the field the new teleological debate

Critically evaluating the textbooks present on the market, I do not wish to state that the teleological debate in special needs pedagogy has been closed within the presented framework. On the contrary, it embraced new teleological categories: autonomy, responsibility, meaning of life, life quality and life satisfaction (W. Dykcik, 2005; M. Kościelska, 2007; Rzeźnicka-Krupa, 2008; A. Żywcok, 2006). The dilemmas include: should we cultivate the searching and experiencing of the meaning of life, or of developing life joy and satisfaction; should we cultivate acceptance, adaptation, secondary attitudes, and agreement to what culture and education offer, or rather should we promote search, creativity and openness to change?

Such reflection – even if still sporadic – may be activated if one becomes aware of the dangers resulting from the simplification of teleology among the people who design and organize education. I will merely mention that the research on educational orientation of contemporary teachers does point to dangers of that sort (cf. E. Putkiewicz, A. Wiłkomirska & A Zielińska, 1994). It appears that the aims of education selected by the teachers are moderated by the gender of the student. Boys are more likely to be prepared for professional life, girls – for cultivating family and emotional values. Thus, the boys are to a larger extent educated to become active change-makers, while the girls are informally attributed more passive roles. The research conducted by E. Putkiewicz, A. Wiłkomirska and A Zielińska resulted in distinguishing two pairs of opposing variables indicating relatively independent dimensions of educational orientations of the teachers. For boys, the dimensions are: *criticism vs. opportunism* and *education vs. family orientation*; for girls, they are: *independence vs. opportunism*, and *education vs. family life*. This means that the teachers who acknowledge the importance of the aim from one end of the dimension scale, do not value the aim from the other side of the scale.

It is difficult to guess how the creator of the Polish pedagogy would assess the selection made by the contemporary teachers, yet it does evoke reflection and points at potential research directions. The research into the patterns of collective consciousness of special needs education would be most interesting. A question arises whether and to what extent these patterns reflect new teleological categories, which appear in the field of the teleological debate. It would also be interesting to conduct comparative cross-cultural research, enabling the interpretation of shared and native pedagogies through the categories available. It is equally intriguing to what extent the aims of special needs pedagogy are similar for the parents and for the teachers. Would it be the case that the teachers are subject to the aims of administrators and bureaucrats, while the parents focus their attention on subjective-personal ways of managing and experiencing life? Let these questions remain an encouragement to ask own questions and to search for the answers.

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