

The Social Formulation of Disability and the Conception of School as a Place of Upbringing, Education and Rehabilitation

The education system and school institution have always been subject to manifold influences. The analysis of the broad literature on the topic of conditioning of the school's functioning, its aims and the organization of the education system portrays the complexity of this problem (e.g., R. Schulz, 1993; T. Lewowicki, 1994; Z. Kwieciński, 1995; J. Szczepański, 1995). There is no doubt that every school should be considered as an element of the entire education system of a given country or region, and at the same time as a micro-system possessing a specified autonomy, proper for special needs and developmental possibilities of the environment (T. Wiloch, 1993, p. 781). Therefore, one should also remember that every school is treated as an individual environment, possesses certain possibilities of creating its own identity. The range of these possibilities is conditioned by a political context, an accepted education doctrine, and the applied model of education, as well as the parents' expectations and the pupils' needs. The school situation of the pupil with special educational needs is additionally conditioned by a general social attitude towards disabled people and the widely recognized models / conceptions of disability. Therefore, we can risk the statement that social formulations of disability determine an essential determinant of anticipated functions of the school institution as a place of upbringing, educating, and rehabilitating this group of pupils.

The main aim of the study is to present and investigate the chosen conceptions of disability in composition with the school's anticipated functions.

The notion of disability and the school's anticipated functions

In the second half of the XX century, one began to perceive the shortcomings of the medical approach towards disability. It was too univocally directed at the individual deficits, which led to a total ignorance of dependency from external conditions – environmental (O. Speck, 2005, p. 227). In consequence of paradigm change was the appearance of many conceptions of disability defined as the social models of disability. In dependence from the exit point in their defining, disability / impairment was defined in categories of social pathology, failure, marking, oppression, distance, dysfunction, and attribution (see O. Speck,

2005; C. Barnes, G. Mercer, 2008). All these conceptions portray disability in theoretical-social categories as a result of interacting with the fully able part of the society. Similarly – using the recalled conceptions – we can consider the school situation of the disabled child in an all-accessible institution. The consequence of such an approach can be the anticipation of social and educational functions of the school. I outline these functions by using a metaphor. This choice, as I assume, allows for the revelation of the matter of different functions without their detailed characterization, what, in some extent, is dictated by the limited frames of the study.

A metaphor in a dictionary, linguistic formulation usually refers to the stylistic figure, in which, at least, one word obtains a different, pictorial, but related meaning (*Słownik Wyrazów Obcych*, 2007, p.710). It depends on referring some phenomenon to another, that is, an attempt to understand one fragment of the reality with the help of another. Using metaphors later, I treat them rather as thought issues, with the help of which one can, in an unnecessarily exact way, define reality, emphasize features and proprieties (por. M. Kostyra, 200, p. 18-19; W.W Szczęsny, 2004, p.154-155). They are, therefore, a certain kind of track, determinant of realities expressed in an indirect way. I try with their help to express the matter of – generally outlined, leading and awaited in a concrete case – school functions towards the disabled pupil.

The first group of compositions 1-3 (see table 1) favors treating school as a place of interactions, it emphasizes, therefore, its communication functions. In this formulation, the school institution should, first of all, favor making contacts as well as level barriers. Surely, inspiration, in creating such a school, one can search for in the conceptions by Janusz Korczak, Janusz Tarnowski, or Jan Szczepański. It is especially important in the aspect of marginalizing and excluding disabled pupils.

In turn, positions 4-6 portray the school in the light of its tasks directed on the many-sided development of the disabled pupil himself. In the case of emphasizing the role of the stigma in the process of social construction of disability, the school becomes, first of all, a place of therapy. This model descends from a psychological orientation that undertakes the issue of human possibilities. Its basis are emotions, which receive a higher rank than cognitive effects (B. D. Gołębnik, 2006, p. 111-112).

Table 1. The notion of disability and the anticipated functions of the school (Z. Gajdzica, 2007)

PERSPECTIVE ON PERCEIVING	
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DISABILITY (based on: O. Speck, 2005; C. Barnes, G. Mercer, 2008)	METAPHOR OF SCHOOL
1. Social distance	Place of dialogue
2. Minority versus majority	Place of meeting
3. Effect of distorted adaptation	Community and society
4. Stigma	Place of therapy
5. Social incompetence, debility	Place of many-sided development
6. Difficulties in learning	Place of gaining competence
7. Dysfunction	Barracks
8. Role of the disabled	Theater
9. (Defective) product of social actions	Work institution, service corporation
10. Result of integration of many factors	Amalgamation of meanings

However, the conceptions of the school as a place of a many-sided development, space of gaining cognitive competence, can be associated with a traditional formulation of the school's function, grounded in the Polish literature from the domain of didactics from the 60-ties, 70-ties, and 80-ties of the previous century (see W. Okoń, 1995). This approach favors the perception of impairment in relation with the specified cognitive deficits. This remains in relation with, not only, social formulations, but also with a biological model of disability. The continuation of such an approach is the connection of disability with dysfunction. In the aspect of social order it becomes a threat, because every deviations become disturbing variables (O. Speck, 2005, p. 230). Therefore – in this conception – the social system is not interested in the acceptance of the disabled, but their adjustment. In the case of acknowledging this conception as a leading one, the school should direct its functions at inculcating the disabled pupil in the adjustment towards the ruling norms and regulations. Therefore, the orderly functions become the leading ones, what can be identified with barracks, being a symbol of law and order.

School functions, connected with the notion of the role of the disabled, can be considered in a double-track way. The first track connects the conception of rooting in the role of the disabled, similarly to rooting in the role of a ill person (por. M. Chodkowska, 1997). The second – valorization of the social roles of the disabled people, in a way for them to be attractive and favor the normalization of the disabled pupil's situation (W. Wolfensberger, 1983, in: M. Söder, 1997, p. 21). Therefore, the school becomes a theater, process of education with art (A. Janowski, 1995), and the pupil, in dependence from the conception of education, upbringing, and rehabilitation, plays specified roles.

The last but one perspective enters the school in a general current of consumerism and consumerism. I am aware that the perspective of the school as a corporation rendering marketing services is not easy to accept in the aspect of many tasks of this institution described on the grounds of sciences about upbringing. However, I assume that there exist also positive sides of such a formulation. As Zygmunt Baum notices (2005, p. 22), the history of consumerism is a tale about questioning and rejecting the next hard and “durable” barriers, which limited the freedom of imagination. Why, the sale of conception goods – as the further cited author writes – does not base on control (stimulation) of desire, but on freeing fantasies on the topic of whims (ibidem, p. 21). The consumer’s spirit “rebels” against regulations (Z. Bauman, 2006, p.64), therefore, it releases social strength that reorganize the existing system. In this formulation, consumptionism is a phenomenon favoring the reformation of the existing system.

Instead of ending - the school as an amalgamation of meanings

All of the presented perspectives of perceiving disability and connected with them the school’s anticipated functions are characterized by strong and weak sides. In the present complicated social situation, univocal direction on the realization of one, chosen function is not a favorable idea for the development of pupils. In this context, a last perspective appears – school as an alloy of many functions. Such an approach is an after-effect of treating disability as a complex, multidimensional state, usually requiring an individual approach. It should take into account in a bigger or smaller degree (depending on the matter and problem of needs) all of the above mentioned perspectives.

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