

Co-operation seen by disabled junior-high-school students

Co-operation is – beside rivalry and individualist behaviour – a type of man's activity which defines an individual's social orientation, understood as the preference for specific behaviour in social situations[J. Grzelak, 2000, p. 141]. According to Janusz Grzelak, man's conduct is to a certain extent conditioned by the habits developed in the process of socialisation[Ibid, p. 144]. Changes in the modern culture, connected with globalisation and the fast pace of living, are reflected in that the consciousness of the young generation is becoming ever more pragmatic, social behaviour is disappearing, and the new values are preferred: success at school and at work, high standard of living, and deriving pleasure from life[Z. Melosik, 2004, p. 11-27; M. Ziółkowski, 1994, p. 69-71]. One consequence of these changes is that among the young people rivalry is on the increase, while co-operative behaviour as taken a back seat. Experts on social problems point out that education needs to include the teaching of co-operation[J. Delors, 1998 p. 85-98; H. Czarniawski, 2002, p. 251-253]. This aspect is of special importance in the process of integrated education which aims at getting the disabled to co-operate with the non-disabled.

From the researcher's point of view, it is important to find out about the disabled junior-high-school students' views on such co-operation and their team-work experience they have acquired over the course of their education. This paper presents some of the findings of a project on the co-operative behaviour of junior-high-school students. The research involved a 60-strong population of disabled junior-high-school students (24 girls and 39 boys), aged 14-15, in mid-western Poland. Among them were the chronically ill, physically disabled, hard of hearing, and those with specific learning problems – excluding mentally disabled. The findings presented in this paper are meant to provide answers to the following questions from the point of view of the disabled students:

1. Does rivalry or co-operation provide better motivation to learn?
2. What is the disabled students' experience with co-operation, do they like team work?
3. What tasks are most often assigned to them as members of a team?
4. How often do teachers introduce team work in the classroom?
5. What is the disabled students' view on the importance of co-operation in modern times?

The research was based on a questionnaire. A weakness of such a survey is that in various situations the subjects may behave in a different way from what they say when surveyed. Yet their responses can be used to try and sketch a profile of a modern disabled junior-high-school student with regard to his attitude to co-operation and co-operative behaviour.

Co-operation in junior-high-school students' views: analysis and interpretation of the findings

As this research shows, the junior-high-school students understand co-operation chiefly as team work, involvement in a joint effort to create something, and helping each other. A sample responses read: *“Co-operation is something like a couple of people doing something together or taking decisions together. Co-operation consists in understanding the others in your team. Each member of a team should trust other members and solve problems together.”*

One of the aims of the research was to find out about the junior-high-school students' opinions on the co-operation and rivalry's learning motivation. Over a half (62%) of the subjects said that co-operation is more motivating than rivalry. However, 35 % of the subjects saw rivalry as the preferred learning motivation – but this might be because the majority of the subjects defined themselves as medium-scoring learners. Only 22% of the subjects were the ones with good and very good marks at school. There are reasons to think that good learning results increase the likelihood of the preference for rivalry[J. Bąbka p. 128-135].

The findings show that most of the disabled students (55%) feel that the school they attend is a place of both rivalry and co-operation, while 16% of them reckon that rivalry is on the increase at the junior high school - but a similar number point out that junior-high-school students are getting more co-operative. The school is a mirror in which various social problems are reflected. If our culture is one of rivalry and competition, it is important to learn about the disabled pupils' experience of classroom co-operation (Tab. 1).

Tab. 1 The disabled junior-high-school students' experience of classroom co-operation

	Experience	N = 63	%
1.	Wide	0	0
2.	Good	9	14.2
3.	Medium	41	65
4.	Little	11	17.4
5.	Very little	1	1.6
6.	no answer	1	1.6

The majority of the respondents (65%) said they had middling experience of classroom co-operation. It is arguable whether this is a satisfactory level of experience, given that the subjects had already finished their kindergarten and primary-school ed-

ucation. As few as 14.2% of the disabled students thought their experience good. One of the reasons for such a low level of experience might be the teachers' insufficient use of team work in the classroom. This can be verified by analysing the junior-high-school students' responses concerning the frequency of activities involving team work (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2 Frequency of classroom team-work activities

	Frequency	N = 63	%
1.	Very high	0	0
2.	High	4	6.3
3.	Medium	13	20.6
4.	Low	33	52.3
5.	Very low	13	20.6

The results are disquieting. In the view of as many as 52.3% of the disabled junior-high-school students, teachers rarely use team-work activities in the classroom – and 20.6% think that they employ them very rarely. From the point of view of integrated education this is a very unsatisfactory outcome. There is a body of scientific evidence confirming the effectiveness of co-operative learning for a wide range of 'other pupils', including disabled ones – with regard to the acquisition of knowledge and improvement of social relations between the pupils [R. Arends 1995; Johnson, 1989]. The findings of this research confirm the misgivings harboured by some researchers, like Olaf-Axel Burow, who claims that the school not only fails to develop pupils' co-operative skills, but it even obstructs their development [O. Axel-Burow, 1992, p. 120]. Little experience of co-operation in the researched population of the junior-high-school students may result in a number of negative consequences. Having limited possibilities of acquiring abilities required by effective co-operation, such as discussing possible ways in which a task could be performed, joint decision-taking, just assessment of one's own contribution, etc., young people cannot learn the principles of functioning in small groups. Each task group has its social structure, a leader or leaders, and is governed by certain rules. As a result, the ability to participate in a task group may determine the pupil's functioning in his class at school. Co-operative learning is not efficiently used in the classroom, which makes it difficult for the disabled pupils to find out about their weaknesses and strengths with regard to the roles they prefer to play in co-operative endeavours. This researched focused on gathering data on the disabled pupils' behaviour while involved in team work (Tab. 3). The table shows that the disabled pupils most often preferred the following: coming up with ideas (preferred by 33), organising work and getting involved in team work (14), settling disputes (13). The data ought to be viewed as declarations, they are not congruent with the experimental data which show that the disabled pupils very often assumed a passive role while involved in team work¹. Yet the responses, shown in Tab. 3, do not point to the preference of passive participation in team work.

¹The results of this author's research on pupil's behaviour in task groups – soon to be published.

Tab. 3 Disabled pupils' behaviour as declared by them with regard to team work

	Behaviour	N = 63
1.	I organise work of others and get involved in the joint effort	14
2.	I come up with ideas.	33
3.	I act as intermediary in order to settle disputes.	13
4.	I assess ideas proposed by others.	8
5.	I take decisions with the rest of the group.	2
6.	I wait for other to complete the task.	9
7.	I am not interested in the group task.	1

The disabled pupils differ from each other with regard to their attitude to task-based team work (Tab. 4). However, a vast majority (74.5%) declare their positive attitude to team work. They argue that allows pupils to get to know each other better, to express their opinions, to advise each other, and generally it is more fun. On the other hand, 22% of the disabled junior-high-school students say they do not like co-operation, but they give no reasons.

Tab. 4 Disabled pupils' attitude to team work in the classroom

	Attitude	N = 63	%
1.	Definitely positive	14	22.2
2.	Positive	17	27
3.	Fairly positive	16	25.3
4.	Fairly negative	9	14
5.	Negative	3	4.8
6.	Definitely negative	2	3.2
7.	no answer	2	3.2

Many authors, including Olaf Axel-Burow, Ewa M. Kwater, Zbyszko Melosik, depict young people as individualistically and competitively orientated [O. Axel-Burow, 2009, p. 123, Z. Melosik, 2004, p. 69-71]. The research shows that the disabled junior-high-school students understand the importance of co-operation in the modern world. As many as 87% say that co-operation is necessary. An important thing is that they give various reasons for that. Basically, there are two types of argument. One is connected with valuing co-operation more than one's own interests. Sample responses: *For generations people have formed groups and benefited from that. Because the world is full of unknown things and dangers. But for co-operation all the civilisations would have collapsed. It really pays off to co-operate while playing games, in the army, at missions.* The other type of argument involves a trace of egocentrism which – despite developmental changes – is retained in their way of thinking. They stress the value of co-operation with regard to the benefits for an individual. Sample responses: *When you're left without the others' help, you can't cope with problems. Co-operation allows one to achieve more, have new experience, and learn a lot. It really pays off to co-operate with others, because they will help you and advise you when you can't do something.* Negative views on co-operation are held by 13% of the disabled junior-high-school students. There, too, are two types of argument. One

is that at team work some exploit the others, e.g. *Co-operation is a bad idea because some people make use of the others' efforts.* Another line of reasoning stresses the individual aspirations in personal-success-orientated people, e.g. *It depends, but generally I'm against. Theoretically the people of the XXI century co-operate, but there are those who only say they do while in fact they think and act in quite a different way. First they sort of co-operate on a project, but then there are rows over how much some of them have done and how little the others have. Nowadays people want to succeed on their own – rather than in co-operation with somebody else. They like being praised and awarded.*

Conclusion

The findings of this research are meant to sketch a profile of the disabled junior-high-school student with regard to his attitude to co-operation and his hitherto experience of co-operation. The disabled junior-high-school students involved in this research perceive the school as both a co-operative and competitive place. Over a half of them believe that co-operation motivates them better to learn – rather than rivalry. Exploratory research on the subject shows that disabled persons avoid competitive situations [J. Bąbka]. The majority of them prefer team work. So do 75% of the researched students. They have varying views on their involvement in team work. Although they learn at school in integrated classes, they have not much experience of team work (65% assess their experience as middling). This is most likely caused by their teachers who do not put the principles of co-operative learning to full use. One could infer that in the modern school there is a climate of competitive learning in which individual successes are chiefly recognised. Besides, co-operative learning requires careful selection of tasks and a different-from-traditional lesson setup in order to provoke co-operative behaviour in pupils. The surveyed students do not see themselves as passive team members – which, however, is not confirmed by findings of the research based on the actual observation of the behaviour of disabled pupils while involved in performing tasks alongside their non-disabled counterparts. One can suppose that disabled pupils get no opportunity to experience the effectiveness of co-operation when all team members are equally involved. It so happens that in some task situations they are dominated by the non-disabled classmates whose purpose is to finish the task as quickly as possible, rather than to co-operate. The research subjects' views on co-operation fall into three categories. The least often expressed one is that there is no point in co-operating. Most likely its proponents have acquired experience of making use one's work while working in a team or they prefer individualist approach to task completion. Advocates of co-operation differed between themselves with regard to the reasons for co-operation. Some stressed the utilitarian benefits, which is connected with broadening one's assessment of social context. Others viewed co-operation from the perspective of an individual and recognised the practical benefits one can get from co-operation.

The research findings show that disabled pupils are co-operation-orientated. 70% of the researched population say they could co-operate with both disabled and non-disabled classmates. Despite their participation in integrated education, disabled junior-high-school students have limited possibilities of gaining experience necessary for

effective co-operation in various social environments. Therefore, more effort ought to be put into the development of co-operative abilities in pupils.

References:

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