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## Self-Understanding as a Condition for Self-Education

### Poznanie siebie jako warunek samowychowania

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**Abstract:** This article aims to conceptualise self-understanding as a fundamental condition for effective self-education, with particular emphasis on the period of adolescence. The author invokes the Socratic maxim “Know thyself,” noting that self-understanding is not merely an intellectual act but also an existential practice that underpins personality development and moral maturity. The main contribution of the study is the presentation of an original typology of six complementary perspectives on self-understanding: introspection, alterospection, retrospection, propection, extrospection, and transpection. Organised along subjective, temporal, and transcendent axes, this typology integrates previously fragmented insights and provides a more comprehensive model of the dynamic processes of knowing oneself. During adolescence, self-understanding enables a realistic assessment of one’s own situation and facilitates the formulation of life goals. In conclusion, the author emphasises that effective self-education is possible only when a young person integrates diverse ways of reflecting on the self and the world. This creates conditions for the development of a mature, autonomous personality capable of consciously directing its own development.

**Keywords:** self-understanding, self-education, youth, personal development, autonomous attitude, mature personality

**Abstrakt:** Celem artykułu jest teoretyczne ujęcie samopoznania jako podstawowego warunku skutecznego samowychowania, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem okresu dorastania. Autor odwołuje się do maksymy sokratejskiej „Poznaj samego siebie”, wskazując, że samopoznanie nie jest wyłącznie aktem intelektualnym, lecz praktyką egzystencjalną, warunkującą rozwój osobowości i dojrzałość moralną. Głównym wkładem opracowania jest przedstawienie autorskiej typologii sześciu komplementarnych perspektyw samopoznania: introspekcji, alterospekcji, retrospekcji, prospekcji, ekstrospekcji i transspekcji. Typologia ta, uporządkowana wzdłuż osi podmiotowej, czasowej i transcendentnej, integruje dotychczas rozproszone podejścia, oferując bardziej wszechstronny model dynamicznych procesów poznawania siebie. W okresie młodzieńczym samopoznanie umożliwia realistyczną ocenę własnej sytuacji i ułatwia formułowanie celów życiowych. We wnioskach autor podkreśla, że skuteczne samowychowanie możliwe jest jedynie wtedy, gdy młody człowiek integruje różnorodne sposoby refleksji nad sobą i światem. Stwarza to warunki do kształtowania dojrzałej, autonomicznej osobowości, zdolnej do świadomego kierowania własnym rozwojem.

**Słowa kluczowe:** samopoznanie, samowychowanie, młodzież, rozwój osobniczy, postawa autonomiczna, dojrzała osobowość



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## INTRODUCTION

The maxim “Know thyself” (Gr. *gnōthi seauton*), commonly associated with the philosophy of Socrates – though also attributed to the Seven Sages of ancient Greece and inscribed on the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi (Wilkins 1929) – can be regarded as a starting point for reflection on self-understanding as a prerequisite of self-education. In the Socratic tradition, knowing oneself was not merely an intellectual act but also an existential practice – a process leading to a better life and moral improvement (Szwejka 2024, 120). It acquires particular significance during adolescence, when young people must define their identity, values, and life goals. Today, however, the process of self-education seems to unfold along different paths than in the past, when the boundaries of a stable and coherent identity were more clearly defined, and there was a commonly shared understanding of what kind of person one ought to be – and what kind one ought not to be. Nowadays, individuals are confronted with a broader range of possibilities and multiple criteria for evaluating both themselves and the surrounding world (Marmola 2023, 62). This situation encourages researchers to develop new theoretical models of self-understanding that can also demonstrate their practical value in self-education.

### 1. THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL NATURE OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING

The essence of self-education does not lie in action *per se*, but in taking responsibility for one’s own development. Otherwise, one may fail to develop as a person or simply succumb to external influences, such as fashion or social pressure (Łobacz 2023, 223). Every individual is capable of self-education, as the sources of growth lie within oneself, while the influence of educators can only support or limit this process (Śliwerski 2024, 17). Although every human activity has a personality-shaping dimension, even when not directed towards specific outcomes, self-education is not a random process but a deliberate one, for without active and realistic self-recognition, one cannot properly guide one’s own life.

Self-understanding begins with awareness of one’s intellectual abilities, talents, and predispositions. This knowledge is the starting point for further development. Research shows that identifying one’s strengths enhances both a sense of efficacy and motivation to learn (Linley et al. 2010, 8–17; García-Álvarez, Cobo-Rendón and Lobos 2024, 1490095). It is just equally important to recognise limitations and obstacles that hinder self-improvement, for knowing yourself means seeing both your good points and the things you need to work on. That is the only way to take conscious corrective actions (Polak 2023, 62; Rembierz 2023, 67–69). What is more, the process of self-education involves reflection on values and life goals. Self-awareness, therefore, not only entails knowing one’s own skills but also requires coherence between one’s decisions and sense of personal identity (Salovey and Mayer 1990, 185–211; Sheldon and Houser-Marko 2001, 152–165). Finally, self-understanding has a dynamic and communal dimension. It does not occur

solely through isolated introspection but also in relationships with others, through feedback, and by confronting one's attitudes with the experiences of the community. This means that self-education, while personal, develops through dialogue with others and learning from one's cultural tradition (Milcarek 2023b, 231).

One could say that the role of self-understanding in self-education is analogous to that of a pedagogical diagnosis in educational practice. Therefore, self-understanding appears as the starting point for authentic self-work, which allows a young person to realistically assess their situation in the process of finding their own path of growth (Mikiewicz 2024, 137–158; Tałaj 2024, 150). Over the long term, neglecting this dimension may return years later as the burden of unfulfilled potential and the awareness of missed opportunities. In this context, Socrates' maxim "the unexamined life is not worth living" (*Apology*, 38a) remains relevant as a firm call to self-knowledge. The process of self-education is best fostered through a multidimensional self-understanding, which progresses from introspection (looking inward) and alterospection (seeing oneself through others' eyes), through retrospection (looking back into the past) and prospection (looking ahead into the future), to extrospection (looking outward toward the world and its context) and transpection (looking beyond present experience and individual biography).

While this typology resonates with existing theoretical approaches to self-understanding, it goes beyond their scope by integrating their partial insights into a coherent framework. As such, it represents a novel perspective that clearly differs from concepts well established in the literature. For instance, Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 2000) focuses on human motivation and the fulfilment of universal psychological needs (competence, autonomy, and relatedness), which influence well-being and engagement. In other words, it explains why we act and develop. McAdams' (2015) approach frames personality development as a narrative and identity-based process, involving traits, characteristic adaptations, and the life story, thereby addressing how personality and identity are formed over time. Likewise, Mezirow (1991) discusses the process of critical reflection, perspective transformation, and changes in meaning schemes that lead to profound shifts in understanding oneself and the world. On the other hand, Goleman's (1995) model of emotional intelligence emphasises emotional and social competencies, such as recognising, regulating, and using emotions effectively in one's own experience and in interpersonal interactions. In contrast, the typology proposed in this article maps the range perspectives available for self-understanding and thereby offers a pedagogically relevant model that better captures the multi-layered nature of personal development, particularly during adolescence.

This approach is grounded in a personalistic-constructivist theoretical perspective, which assumes that the developing subject is both an autonomous agent and a being-in-relation, constructing meaning through interactions with oneself, others, time, and the surrounding world. The typology operationalises these assumptions by transforming abstract theoretical premises into a coherent analytical framework. The study is primarily conceptual, aiming to interpret, integrate, and systematise existing

insights on self-understanding into a comprehensive model. Consequently, the analysis is not empirical in the conventional sense but analytical, drawing on literature, philosophical reflection, and pedagogical theory to construct a framework that can inform future empirical research and guide educational practice. Although some of the terms used reflect concepts already present in psychological and pedagogical literature, the overall structure and integration of these dimensions constitute the author's original contribution, providing a novel perspective on the multidimensional nature of self-understanding. This typology is organized along three axes: (1) the subjective axis (self/others), which includes introspection and alterospection; (2) the temporal axis (time), encompassing retrospection and propection; and (3) the transcendent axis (outward/beyond), which includes extrospection and transspection. For clarity, the typology is presented in Table 1, with the following paragraphs providing a more detailed discussion of its components.

Table 1. Typology of Approaches to the Process of Self-Understanding

Axe	Term	Direction of view	Characteristics
Subjective	Introspection	Inward, toward the self	Self-knowledge, awareness of one's inner states
	Alterospection	Inward, through the perspective of others	Reflected self, one's image as perceived by others
Temporal	Retrospection	Backward, toward the past	Memories, analysis of experiences, personal biography
	Propection	Forward, toward the future	Anticipation, imagining scenarios, goal-setting and planning
Transcendent	Extrospection	Outward, toward the world and its context	Perceiving oneself through social and cultural frameworks
	Transspection	Beyond present experience and individual biography	Perceiving oneself through an axiological or spiritual lens

## 2. THE SUBJECTIVE AXIS

The subjective dimension of self-understanding includes introspection and alterospection. Introspection (Lat. *intro*, "inward" + *specere*, "to look") covers a wide range of mental phenomena that a person can observe and reflect upon consciously. It primarily concerns emotions, allowing individuals to recognise their own feelings, moods, and typical affective responses (Łukasik 2023, 11–28). It also encompasses cognitive processes, in which a person examines thoughts, beliefs, attention patterns, and decision-making strategies (Nichols and Stich 2004, 297–339). Equally important is the motivational and volitional dimension, which involves exploring the sources of one's actions, the hierarchy of goals and

values, and the degree of perseverance and self-control (Smółka 2023, 39). Yet, it is important to acknowledge that introspection has limitations – much of mental life remains inaccessible to consciousness, and individuals may suppress or repress certain internal contents, consciously or unconsciously, potentially leading to a distorted self-image (Wilson and Dunn 2004, 493–518). Therefore, introspection does not always guarantee full insight, although it can still facilitate constructing a personal narrative, integrating experiences, and fostering a sense of coherence.

Through introspection, adolescents can examine their self-image, sense of identity, and life purpose – elements that underpin self-education. Daily behaviours, habitual responses in social interactions, and patterns of action can also be analysed (Hixon and Swann 1993, 35–43). To overcome the limits of introspection alone, it is beneficial to complement it with other forms of self-understanding. This combination allows for a deeper comprehension of both conscious and partially hidden motives and mechanisms guiding behaviour. When introspection is supported by such complementary reflections, it becomes a tool for holistic self-understanding – encompassing both transient experiences and stable personality traits – and facilitates conscious shaping of attitudes, decisions, and personal development.

Alterospection (Lat. *alter*, “other” + *specere*, “to look”) refers to knowing oneself through the perspective of others – understanding how we are perceived, evaluated, and interpreted in social interactions (Yue et al. 2020, 553585). It involves both direct feedback (such as praise, criticism, or emotional reactions) and subtle social cues that reveal how we appear in the eyes of those around us (Wallace and Tice 2012, 124–140). Alterospection is particularly valuable when introspection is insufficient, as it uncovers aspects of personality and behaviour that may be inaccessible to consciousness – for example, how we affect others, the roles we play in a group, or the emotions we elicit. In this sense, alterospection not only complements introspection but also serves as a corrective, reducing the risk of a one-sided or distorted self-image (Sokołowska 2023, 200–201).

In the context of self-education, alterospection helps adolescents compare their self-perceptions with how others see them (Wakulska 2014, 25–26). This process allows for the refinement of subjective self-evaluations, the development of empathy, and a deepening of social awareness. However, it does not mean unquestioningly accepting others’ judgments – meaningful alterospection involves reflecting on others’ perspectives and treating them as material for further work on oneself (Milcarek 2023a, 65). It is precisely this interplay between internal reflection and external feedback that allows a more complete understanding of oneself to emerge, fostering an authentic process of self-education.

### 3. THE TEMPORAL AXIS

The temporal dimension of self-understanding is revealed through retrospection and propection. Retrospection (Lat. *retro*, “backward” + *specere*, “to look”) refers to the way individuals come to know themselves by deliberately reflecting on their

past. It is grounded in the interpretation of events, experiences, and memories that have left lasting traces and shaped identity in different ways. This includes both ordinary, everyday situations and pivotal life moments that later come to be seen as turning points in a personal biography (Łukasik 2023, 22; Krok 2023, 109; Horowski 2023, 227–240). Through retrospection, people can perceive the continuity of their development, trace the origins of present attitudes, and recognise patterns of behaviour that tend to reappear in similar circumstances (Conway and Pleydell-Pearce 2000, 261–288). In this sense, it is not merely a “review of past events” but also a critical tool for understanding oneself in the present.

Within the process of self-education, retrospection plays a significant role, as adolescents learn to interpret earlier choices, acknowledge mistakes and successes, and assess the consequences of their actions. This reflective work supports the development of responsibility and strengthens the capacity for self-examination, which is essential for conscious self-formation. Retrospection also protects against the uncritical repetition of past errors, while at the same time allowing individuals to recognise their achievements and consolidate a sense of agency. For this reason, it becomes not only an exercise of memory, but above all a key instrument of self-education (Nowakowski 2024, 85–92).

Prospection (Lat. *pro*, “forward” + *specere*, “to look”) refers to directing one’s attention toward the future: imagining possible scenarios, planning actions, and anticipating outcomes. Through prospection, individuals formulate short- and long-term goals and confront them with their own capacities and limitations. This process combines a realistic dimension (planning concrete steps) with an ideal dimension (articulating hopes and aspirations), making it a powerful source of motivation and life direction (Szpunar, Spreng, and Schacter, 2014, 18414–18421). It allows people to guide their actions, transforming the future from an unknown space into a domain that can be actively shaped. A significant challenge arises when adolescents adopt a predominantly “here and now” orientation, restricting their perspective to the present and avoiding both reflective engagement with the past and anticipatory thinking about the future. The absence of this temporal dimension often leads to a fragmented sense of self and hinders the development of a coherent identity (Sztalt 2023, 113–128).

Prospection strengthens a sense of responsibility for one’s own development and enhances the capacity to make deliberate choices. By asking themselves who they want to become and which values they wish to pursue, adolescents lay the foundations of their identity and autonomy (Gałkowski 2023, 27–40). In this way, prospection is not only an act of imagination, but also a formative practice that supports the process of self-education and prepares young people for responsible participation in adult life (Domeracki 2023, 87–106; Wojtkowiak 2023, 247–249).

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#### 4. THE TRANSCENDENT AXIS

The transcendent dimension of self-understanding comprises extrospection and transsppection. Extrospection (Lat. *extra*, “outside” + *specere*, “to look”) involves understanding oneself in relation to the external world – including social situations, cultural contexts, roles one assumes, and institutional conditions (Chrost 2023, 140). In this way, a person can identify their traits, abilities, and limitations not merely through internal reflection or the perspectives of others, but also by observing how they operate within specific environments such as family, school, peer groups, or cultural communities (Daszykowska-Tobiasz 2023, 153–154; Gątarek 2023, 99; Botwina 2023, 155–156). Extrospection allows one to understand that the “self” does not exist in a vacuum but is always shaped by dynamic interaction with the surrounding world.

Through this perspective, adolescents gain insight into their position in the social sphere and how cultural factors influence their choices. Analysing one’s roles and life situations becomes a starting point for consciously accepting or rejecting certain patterns, which strengthens the sense of agency and autonomy (Smolka 2023, 42). In this sense, extrospection complements the previously discussed perspectives, extending the process of self-understanding and guiding individual development. Still, a notable challenge is that some adolescents focus solely on direct experiences, neglecting historical and cultural connections, which can limit the developmental potential of extrospection (Sztalt 2023, 116).

Transsppection (Lat. *trans*, “beyond, over” + *specere*, “to look”) moves beyond the individual, addressing questions about life’s meaning, transcendence, and universal spiritual values. It entails reflection that goes beyond immediate experience and personal biography, directing attention toward what is absolute, eternal, or shared by all humanity (Dłubacz 2023, 15). Transsppection combines elements of philosophical contemplation and spiritual inquiry: individuals explore the ultimate sources of existence and seek what gives life direction and purpose (Kuncewicz 2023, 16–20). As such, transsppection represents the deepest level of self-understanding.

In the context of self-education, transsppection encourages adolescents to look beyond short-term goals and fleeting desires, opening up an axiological and spiritual dimension. By engaging with questions of meaning, moral responsibility, and goodness, young people lay the groundwork for their own value system and identity formation. Transsppection does not necessarily imply religiosity in the strict sense: it may take the form of ethical, philosophical, or existential reflection, but it always serves an orienting and stabilising function (Reed 2015, 411–420). Through transsppection, self-education acquires a truly holistic dimension: adolescents not only learn to manage themselves in daily life (introspection, retrospection, propection) and interact with others and the world (alterospection, extrospection), but also explore the deeper significance of their own existence.

## 5. METHODS OF SELF-UNDERSTANDING

Although self-understanding takes place against the backdrop of exploring the world and remains closely connected to it (Dłubacz 2023, 15), it differs from the knowledge of external reality. In this process, a person assumes a dual role – being both the knowing subject and the object of knowledge (Smółka 2023, 39). Knowing oneself is neither a spontaneous nor an obvious process – it requires the use of appropriate methods and tools that enable the deepening of self-awareness. In psychological and pedagogical literature, several paths are distinguished that lead to a better understanding of one's abilities, limitations, values, and motivations:

1. **Self-reflection.** The primary method of self-understanding is systematic contemplation of one's thoughts, emotions, and actions. Self-reflection allows the examination of one's successes and failures and the drawing of conclusions from them (Duda-Machejek 2023, 90). It leads to the identification of behavioural patterns and the conscious adjustment of actions in the process of self-education (Zimmerman 2002, 64–70).
2. **Keeping a journal.** This practice helps organise thoughts, emotions, and goals. Research shows that regularly recording experiences increases self-awareness and helps individuals better understand their own reactions (Smyth and Pennebaker 2008, 1–7). Examples include a “journal of positive events” (Sokołowska 2023, 208–209) or a “gratitude journal” (Duda-Machejek 2023, 100).
3. **Feedback from others.** Self-understanding is often limited by the so-called blind spot – the areas of our personality and behaviour that are visible to others but inaccessible through introspection, as illustrated by the Johari Window model (Luft 1961, 6–7). Therefore, an invaluable method of self-understanding is seeking and utilising constructive feedback from family, friends, teachers, or colleagues (Duda-Machejek 2023, 90–91; Szast 2023, 104).
4. **Dialogue and interpersonal relationships.** The development of self-awareness and self-education occurs in a communal context – through dialogue, collaboration, and the confrontation of one's own attitudes with those of others (Herzig and Kowalczyk 2010, 91–100). This is, among other things, one of the functions of friendship, through which deep interpersonal bonds are formed (Mendelson and Aboud, 1999, 130–132).
5. **Psychological tests and tools.** Contemporary psychology offers various instruments for self-understanding (Szcukiewicz 2024, 55–56). For example, Stefan Pacek (1977) developed an interview questionnaire concerning ways of self-improvement and experiences related to personal work. Andrzej Januszewski (1988) published a standardized tool for studying the capacity to understand oneself and others. Meanwhile, Violetta Rodek (2014) proposed a scale that enables the analysis of goals formulated and pursued by an individual in the process of independent work on oneself. Such instruments can complement personal observation.

6. Engagement with philosophy, literature, and art. This practice fosters self-reflection, as encountering cultural texts allows one to shape oneself in relation to universal questions about the meaning of life, values, and the limits of human experience (Gadamer 2004, 102–130). However, a significant challenge is the visible estrangement from the written and spoken word observed in some members of the younger generation (Tałaj 2023, 95–112).

The methods of self-understanding mentioned above can be understood as supporting the process of self-education. Each of them – from self-reflection to engagement with literature and art – reveals different aspects of the “self” and fosters more integrated personal growth. However, a prudent combination of these methods and their alignment toward the harmonious development of personality are crucial.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we have demonstrated that self-understanding is the foundation of self-education; it enables realistic goal-setting, harmonious personal development, and the formation of a mature, autonomous attitude toward life. The typology discussed, in turn, shows that self-understanding is a dynamic, multifaceted process that cannot be reduced to a single perspective. It combines elements of internal, interpersonal, social, cultural, spiritual, and temporal reflection. In the pedagogical context, this means that conscious and responsible self-education is possible only when a young person integrates diverse ways of “looking at oneself.” Only such comprehensive self-reflection creates conditions for shaping a mature personality capable of authentic self-formation.

The proposed typology carries significant pedagogical implications, emphasising its practical relevance. Each dimension of self-understanding corresponds to competencies valued in contemporary education: introspection strengthens the individual’s ability to recognise their strengths and supports self-regulation in the learning process; alterospection develops social awareness and communication skills based on interaction and feedback; retrospection involves critical analysis of past experiences to shape future actions consciously; prospection motivates the setting of life goals and future-oriented thinking; extrospection enables the contextualization of knowledge within social and cultural frameworks; while transpection opens the individual to axiological and spiritual dimensions.

Implementing these perspectives in the school environment can transform education from a transmission-based model into an approach that engages learners in actively taking responsibility for their own development. This typology, therefore, serves as a valuable tool supporting pedagogical strategies that foster autonomy, critical reflection, and identity formation.

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## To Meet the Other to (co)exist – Towards the Reflexive Becoming in a Relation: the Theoretical and Research Perspective

Spotkać Innego, aby (współ)być – w stronę refleksyjnego stawania się w relacji.  
Perspektywa teoretyczno-badawcza

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**Abstract:** This article contributes to a growing trend of reflection on the educational dimension of encounters with the Other as a space where personal stories intertwine with questions about choices, values, and existential orientation. It presents the theoretical framework for the topic, the methodological foundations of the research, the results, and the conclusions. The main goal of the described research was to explore and understand the meanings and significance attributed by pedagogy students at Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa to encounters with the Other in the context of their own development. In this study, I used a hermeneutic method based on descriptive-interpretive text analysis. I used the students' essays as a source of insight and understanding, which allowed me to recognize that encounters with the Other are seen as a formative experience – an impulse that triggers processes of self-discovery, self-shaping, and self-fulfillment, the source of which is (self)-reflection.

**Keywords:** encounter with the Other, philosophy of encounter and

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł wpisuje się w nurt refleksji nad edukacyjnym wymiarem spotkania z Innym jako przestrzeni, w której osobiste historie splatają się z pytaniami o wybory, wartości i egzystencjalne ukierunkowanie. Prezentuje teoretyczne ramy podejmowanego zagadnienia, metodologiczne podstawy badań, wyniki oraz wnioski. Głównym celem opisywanych badań było poznanie i rozumienie sensów i znaczeń nadawanych przez studentów pedagogiki Uniwersytetu Jana Długosza w Częstochowie spotkaniom z Innym w kontekście ich własnego rozwoju. W badaniu wykorzystałam metodę hermeneutyczną, opartą na opisowo-interpretacyjnej analizie tekstów. Źródłem poznania i rozumienia uczyniłam eseje studentów, które pozwoliły dostrzec, że spotkanie z Innym jawi się jako doświadczenie o charakterze formacyjnym – impuls uruchamiający procesy samopoznania, samokształtowania i samorealizacji, których źródłem jest (auto)refleksja.

**Słowa kluczowe:** spotkanie z Innym, filozofia spotkania i dialogu, edukacja akademicka, współbycie, hermeneutyka



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## INTRODUCTION

If education is to lead to full humanity, it cannot be limited to the transfer of knowledge – it should be rooted in encounter (Śliwerski 2012, 198-203). Not in the technical exchange of messages, but in authentic presence. In a relationship that moves, engages, and transforms – becoming a source of development. It is about encounter – an event in the deepest sense of the word, inspired by the philosophy of encounter and dialogue (see Tischner 2008; 2017; Levinas 2002; 1999; Buber 1968; 1992; Heidegger 1994, 1996). As a “flash of the unique oneness of Being,” an event is what “gives itself to man” (Walczak 2011, 145; cf. Heidegger 1996, 214). This gift is the revealing-concealing of the (non)sense of human existence – “and it is a gift to the one to whom this revelation pertains” (Walczak, 2011 145; cf. Heidegger 1996, 221). In educational practice, the encounter between the “I” of the educator and the “You” of the student arises, takes shape, and is revealed in their mutual way of being with and for each other. As a gift, it exists both for each of them individually and, above all, for their shared existence in a specific time and space (cf. Walczak 2011, 145; Śliwerski 2012, 198-203).

In this context, it is an existential event – an awakening. It touches on emotions, values, and identity. It confronts a person with their own existence: loneliness, freedom, fear, and hope (see Levinas 2002; 2005; Heidegger 1994). It is not a superficial or intellectually neutral experience. It reaches deep into a person, raising fundamental questions: Who am I? What is important to me? What path do I want to follow? (cf. Heidegger 1994). In education, such an awakening can take place in seemingly ordinary moments – during a conversation, a gesture, a shared silence. These are moments that cannot be planned, they “just happen” – in extreme situations, in crises, in moments of joy. As Kierkegaard emphasized, a “moment” can be a turning point in existence – a time when a person faces themselves with full responsibility (see Kierkegaard 1976, 179).

Such a meeting is formative in nature (Śliwerski 2012, 198-203). It leaves a mark, initiates the process of maturation, and can be a decisive moment in life. Tischner, analysing the dynamics of the encounter and its consequences, was one of the first to point to “a change in the meaning of the space in which the encounter takes place. The space begins to resemble a crossroads. The other person I encounter is in motion, which awakens in me an awareness of possible movement. (...). The previously indifferent space becomes a space crisscrossed by possible paths” (Tischner 2017, 5-6). To meet – “is to experience Transcendence” (Tischner 2012, 25). In education, this means that an encounter, in its deepest form, transforms not only the student but also the educator. It makes education a shared path towards meaning. In this space, the meaning of the pedagogy of encounter as the art of accompanying, listening, and responsibly being with another in their uniqueness is revealed (Śliwerski 2012, 198-203; Tarnowski 1992; 2005).

An encounter is not neutral – it carries values. Goodness, truth, respect, beauty, emotion, stirring of conscience – these are not abstract ideas, but real

experiences that manifest themselves in relationships (see Levinas 2002; 1999; Tischner 2008; 2017; Gadacz 2008; 2009; Ablewicz 2003; Dymara 2014). They can lead to the discovery of what is truly important, but they can also reveal tensions, internal conflicts, and choices. Values here are not something imposed from outside, but something that “happens” in the space “between” Me-You/Me-Other. The encounter becomes an ethical challenge that does not allow one to remain indifferent, pointing to the primacy of responsibility towards the other (Levinas 2002; 1999). In education, this means that values are not just curriculum content, but a living experience that can contribute to the internal transformation of both the student and the teacher, the pupil and the educator (Śliwerski 2012, 198-203; Tarnowski 1992; 2005).

It cannot be predicted, directed, or “mentally enforced” (Walczak 2011; Buber 1992; Gadacz 2009; Tischner 1998). However, one can tune into it – open oneself to the ““crack in Being” that emerges in our existence as “the place of the moment Somewhere and Sometime.” It is not so much an event of Being – its truth – as Being that happens and unfolds in revealing-concealing – in glimpsing and at the same time concealing (Walczak 2011, 145; cf. Heidegger 1996, 221). It is the moment which – if we have matured to it – only awakens us to thinking. In human history, Heidegger emphasized, there are moments (very rare) when existence can “for a moment” take over everydayness, though it can never erase it (Heidegger 1994, 520). These are moments – “flashes” – that are extremely important for understanding oneself. In education, they can take the form of a question that stays with a person for a long time, a gesture that opens them up, or a word that moves them and prevents them from returning to the state they were in before the encounter. Maturing to such an event requires courage, readiness for uncertainty, and sometimes also loneliness. Philosophy is the art of awakening – not through communication, but through presence, questions, or silence (see Gadacz 2008).

Here, the meeting as a pedagogical category defines the horizon of thinking about education (upbringing and teaching) – not as a process of transmission, but as a path towards meaning, transcendence, towards an existential space: authenticity, dialogue, engagement. It emerges as a special kind of relationship with another person – as education in the course of encounters, education in dialogue (see Śliwerski 2012, 198-201; cf. Bukowski 1987). Here, the relationship is not a means to an end, but a space in which a person can truly exist as a person, not as a function – it is a place of self-reflection, of discovering oneself in a relationship, of confronting one’s own biography. In this form, it fits into the interpretative paradigm (see paradigms of pedagogy – Rubacha 2005, 59-67).

The phenomenon of encounter – as a philosophical and pedagogical category – has been the subject of in-depth analysis by many prominent thinkers, researchers, and theorists. Among them, it is worth mentioning Emmanuel Levinas (2002; 1999), Martin Buber (1968; 1992), Józef Tischner (1978; 2008; 2017), Martin Heidegger (1994; 1996), as well as Søren Kierkegaard (1976), Stefan Tarnowski (1992; 2005), Andrzej Nowicki (1991), Jerzy Bukowski (1987), Tadeusz Gadacz (1993; 2008;

2009), Jerzy Nikitorowicz (1997; 2017; 2019; Nikitorowicz and Guciuk-Tkacz 2021), Krystyna Ablewicz (2003), Bronisława Dymara (2014), and Urszula Ostrowska (2000; 2004). In addition, it is worth reading the reflections and research results recently published by Jolanta Rzeźnicka-Krupa (2013), Tadeusz Lewowicki (2017), Jolanta Suchodolska (2017), Barbara Chojnacka-Synaszko (2017), Agata Cudowska (2017), Hanna Rugała (2021), and Katarzyna Smoter (2020). Despite differences in philosophical, pedagogical, and anthropological approaches, the encounter in the researchers' reflections is not merely a philosophical category – it is an event, a complex educational experience with an existential, axiological-ethical, and formative dimension. It is a moment, a turning point/space for transcending oneself, going beyond one's own limitations (even in deterministic terms, see Nowicki 1991). These positions are united by the belief in relationality as a source of becoming through the presence of the Other, and the encounter itself appears as an existential moment – an event that has the power to transform.

The idea of encounter and dialogue, which has its roots in the philosophy of the aforementioned thinkers, inspires many researchers, including myself, to be part of the world of education, science, and the world in general. It has also become a subject of reflection for the students of pedagogy at Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa (UJD), who shared their thoughts on the phenomenon of encountering the Other in an essay entitled “Who is the Other? Encountering the Other as an educational situation.” In the context of the research, which I presented in detail in a separate article, the encounter with the Other emerges as a multidimensional educational situation – an educational experience involving cognition, action, coexistence, and reflective being. Otherness, from the perspective of the respondents, does not appear as a barrier, but as an invitation to a creative act that flows from relationships and promotes personal development. The encounter “happens” not only in interpersonal dialogue – referring to the Other – but also intrapersonally – reflectively turning toward oneself.

In this article, I will focus on the latter aspect of encountering the Other – on the intrapersonal dimension, in which not only the other person is revealed, but also one's own “I” – fragile, searching, (un)ready for change, reflecting on oneself, questioning sense, value, choice. The research develops the theme of encountering the Other as an impulse leading to a deeper awareness of one's own “I” in the space of tension between the I-Other, initiating the process of becoming in a relationship. I would like to emphasize that the research material used in the present study also served as a starting point for the analyses and interpretations in the previously mentioned text, in which I focused on the educational meanings given by the respondents to their encounters with the Other.

The article is part of a trend of reflection on the educational dimension of encountering the Other as a space where personal stories intertwine with questions about choices, values, and existential orientation. It presents the theoretical framework of the issue, the methodological basis of the research, its results, and conclusions. The open, understated, or unresolved issues left in the

text are intended to encourage thinking about the encounter with the Other as an event that not only initiates a process of deep self-reflection, self-discovery, and self-formation, but it also opens up space for further questions about the meaning of being in the world, presence in relationships, and responsibility for other people. The encounter with the Other remains an open-ended event – the one that continues to demand thought, experience, and pedagogical engagement.

## 1. METHODOLOGICAL BASIS OF THE RESEARCH

The issue I have taken up appears to be multidimensional, diverse, and full of dilemmas, antinomies, and controversies. In my research, I focused on its selected aspect: learning and understanding the meanings and significance attributed by students of pedagogy at Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa to encounters with the Other in the context of their own development – the main objective of the research. The subject of the research was the meanings and significance attributed to this experience by the respondents. As a result, the main research question emerged: What meanings and significance do students of pedagogy at Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa attribute to encounters with the Other in the context of their own development?

The achievement of the objective and the search for the answers to the research question were possible thanks to the use of the hermeneutic method, rooted in descriptive and interpretative text analysis. The nature of my research therefore falls within the scope of qualitative research, which allows for in-depth reflection on the meaning and significance of human experience. In this space, the researcher asks questions about the meaning and significance of what is happening – striving to understand the world of man, the world of culture, and within it, the world of education.

Uncovering the meanings and significance hidden in cultural texts – creations, encounters, behaviours, situations, and people – determines the direction of most of my research journeys. I am particularly interested in revealing the meanings and values that build the world of education. Hence my involvement in pedagogical hermeneutics, defined as the pedagogical theory of understanding and interpretation (general meaning) and as a methodological orientation (narrow meaning) (Milerski 2011, 12). At a general level, it takes into account “the importance of understanding and interpretation in education and pedagogical research, as well as the influence of pedagogical experiences on understanding and interpretation” (Milerski 2011, 12), while in a narrower sense, it takes into account understanding and interpretation as methodological categories relating to “the process of identifying the meanings and values that organize educational reality and its interpretation” (Milerski 2011, 13).

In my approach, understanding is fundamentally an act of interpretation embedded in a cultural, historical, and personal context. Understanding is not merely a cognitive method, but a way of being in relation to the world – open, reflective, dialogical (see Ricoeur 1989, 206).

The multitude of meanings hidden under the concept of “understanding” is reflected in various trends in hermeneutics, from the psychological and historical reflection of Wilhelm Dilthey (2004), through Martin Heidegger’s ontological hermeneutics (1994), to Hans-Georg Gadamer’s dialogical concept (1979; 1993) and Paul Ricoeur’s existential-narrative approach (1989). The common denominator of these positions is the circular structure of the process of understanding: “individual elements of a text can only be deduced from the whole, and conversely, the whole text can only be understood on the basis of its constituent elements. Thus, for example, individual important concepts can often only be deduced after reading the entire text, while a full understanding of the text presupposes the understanding of these concepts. The hermeneutic circle therefore also consists in the fact that we understand, modify, and expand on the part, starting from the whole, and vice versa – the whole is defined by its parts. Hermeneutic understanding therefore never ends completely, but is a process, and the goal of hermeneutic efforts is not to produce some kind of finished product” (Krüger 2005, 145).

Understanding occurs within a specific context – space, time, culture – which not only gives meaning but can itself become the subject of interpretation. The interpreter, as a participant in this process, brings their own perspective, which is socially and individually conditioned. Therefore, they cannot completely “enter” the world of the author of a cultural text, because their understanding is based on personal experience, language, and the horizon of meanings in which they operate (cf. Sawicki 2012). Pre-understanding is a prerequisite for understanding, which constitutes the starting point for the interpretative process (Heidegger, Gadamer – see Sawicki 2012, 81; Sawicki 1996, 18-19) and underlies the hermeneutic circle, which I have adopted as the interpretative framework for the collected research material (Krüger 2005, 145; Sawicki 1996, 18-19). Movement around the circle follows the specific rules:

- understanding the whole comes after understanding the details and vice versa – in order to understand the details, one must know the broader context – the first hermeneutic rule,
- understanding requires participation, not distance; in order to understand the linguistic medium that is the human world, one must immerse oneself in it, live in it, co-create it – the second hermeneutic rule,
- understanding is not a one-sided reading of meanings, but a mutual unveiling of both the interpreter and that which is interpreted: a text, an experience, an encounter; by discovering the truth about ourselves, we reveal the fullness of the world of which we are a part – the third hermeneutic rule (see Sawicki 1996, 18-19; cf. Krüger 2005, 145).

Meaning is contained in human expressions, e.g., musical, cinematic, artistic, in a meeting, an event, or a situation. However, it is the recipient who attempts to interpret them, to discover the meanings assigned to them, to search for their significance. Meaning is what a text, a meeting, or an event “says”; the reference object has meaning in relation to what the text “says”; it goes beyond extra-

linguistic reality, touches upon it, and refers to it (Sawicki 1996, 18-19). According to Ricoeur, “to understand is more than to repeat an event of speech, to reproduce it in a similar event; it is also to produce a new event, starting from the text in which the original event has been objectified” (Ricoeur 1989, 161). Ricoeur emphasized that discovering the meaning of a text is not enough for the revealer. From what the text “says” (the general meaning of the text), one must move on to what it “talks about,” what it refers to (the meaning of the text). One must therefore move from meaning to significance. This can only be achieved through critical understanding, which complements structural analysis (Ricoeur 1989, 178).

Understanding in this sense is not an individual act, but a process that is open, infinite, existential, complex, and dynamic, rooted in the human way of being in the world (Heidegger’s approach, see Sawicki 2012, 81; see Ricoeur 1989, 206). The interpretation of a text grows out of prior understanding and leads to its deepening. Each subsequent attempt brings the interpreter closer to the interpreted, although it never completely eliminates the distance between them. This distance, resulting from the historicity, contextuality, and uniqueness of human existence, constitutes the essence of hermeneutic difference (Krüger 2005, 144-145; Adamska-Staroń and Łukasik 2012, 119-138).

Understanding appears here as a dialogue with another person, with their experience, with their works – cultural texts that demand to be revealed.

I understand text not only as a record, but as a complex form of presence – an educational event, a meeting, or another cultural entity that carries traces of imagination, experiences, and events. Text is not a neutral entity here; it speaks – it becomes a “You” that addresses us, invites us to conversation, and provokes interpretation. Understanding text here consists in discovering its meaning, i.e., what the text “says,” and in searching for its significance, i.e., what it “says about” (Ricoeur 1989, 178). When engaging in dialogue with a text, the researcher not only listens to it, but also reconstructs the question to which the text is the answer (Folkierska 1995, 172). In this process, their own pre-understandings create a horizon of understanding within which various questions are revealed, which in turn reveal various answers. Such an understanding of the text makes it possible to grasp the meanings hidden in gestures, encounters, or narratives that go beyond literalness and open up a space for dialogue with the world that is being discovered.

In the context of the research, it was about a dialogue with the students’ essays – symbolic and cultural entities: carriers of educational meanings and significance, and at the same time a space revealing new ways of being in the world, including the world of education. I understand them as signs of symbolic culture (Kmita 1977, 211) – traces of experiences that are actualized through various forms of expression and communication. From this perspective, the students’ essays, as cultural stories about the world (Kmita 1977, 211), became research material, a source of knowledge and understanding, a point of analysis and interpretation. They provided a space for learning not only what was said, but also what was hidden, implied, and symbolic. The process of analysis and interpretation proceeded in

accordance with the principles of the hermeneutic circle, fitting into a multi-stage narrative analysis (see Sawicki 1996, 18-19; cf. Krüger 2005, 145).

During the study, I collected 87 essays written by students entitled “Who is the Other? Encountering the Other as an educational situation.” The next stage of the work was data reduction. As Krüger (2005) notes, qualitative research, as a form of theory building, is processual in nature – this means that “data collection, interpretation, and the resulting knowledge are closely intertwined, and the search for further data ends only when theoretical saturation of knowledge about a given field of research is achieved” (Krüger 2005, 161). Guided by this approach, I ultimately selected 25 works for the in-depth interpretation, the content of which not only confirmed but also reinforced the categories of meaning identified in the analysed essays. To maintain the transparency of the research process and the compliance with the principles of qualitative research ethics, the essays were coded as E1, E2, E3, etc., where “E” stands for essay and the number is the sequential number. This method of coding ensured the anonymity of the participants and the consistency of the analysis and the interpretation.

The research group consisted of the first-year students of pedagogy – both bachelor’s and master’s degree programs, full-time and extramural, at Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa. I conducted the research between 2021 and 2024. The participants came from various locations, mainly from the voivodships of Silesia, Łódź, and Opole. The age range of the participants was 20 to 24 years. The choice of this group was not accidental. First-year students, standing at the beginning of their academic and thus professional path, are at a particularly sensitive moment in the formation of their pedagogical identity. Reflecting on their encounter with the Other provided them with an important impulse to think about themselves, their relationships with other people, and their way of being in the educational space – imagining themselves as present, responsible educators who are open to the Other. That is why I invited pedagogy students to reflect on this experience, to realize its significance, treating this activity as an important moment in the process of shaping pedagogical awareness.

In the research approach I adopted, thinking about education meant above all reflecting on the conditions of its possibilities – on what knowledge and what experience have educational potential: the ability to open up the space for development for the educated. This approach implies a specific attitude on the part of the researcher as a participant in the process, who reflects on the preconceptions of pedagogical thinking “in order to discover the real meaning of knowledge, making it at the same time problematic and unnecessary” (Śliwerski 1998, 21).

The research undertaken, together with the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions adopted, fits into the scope of idealistic-subjectivist orientations, in the interpretative paradigm.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Entering this area involves adopting a position of ontological and methodological anti-naturalism and recognizing the subjective nature of the subject of research. The acceptance of the beliefs characteristic of the adopted methodological perspective is the result of ontological

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## 2. RESEARCH FINDINGS

This part of the article attempts to answer the main research question: What meanings and significance do students of pedagogy at Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa attribute to encounters with the Other in the context of their own development?

The hermeneutic method enabled me to achieve the research objective and find answers to the research question. The analyses and interpretations were carried out in accordance with the rules of the hermeneutic circle (see Krüger 2005 Milerski 2011; Rubacha 2008; Sawicki 1996; methodological part). The adopted hermeneutic interpretation strategy had its origins in the hermeneutics of Heidegger (1994), Gadamer (1979; 1993), Ricoeur (1989) and was based on a scientifically defined scheme: author – text – interpreter – interpretations, highlighting the text and the interpreter (Szahaj1994). This approach allowed me to go beyond the author's intentions, without ignoring them (Tischner 1989). As Gadamer (1979) emphasized, it is impossible to translate a text from one language to another without speaking oneself.

Given the methodological assumptions adopted, the attempt to reveal the meanings and significance attributed by the students to encounters with the Other began with becoming aware of my own approach to the issue, my own preconceptions on the subject. Next, my research activity consisted in searching

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and epistemological assumptions that I recognize. I recognize the thesis that there are differences between beings that exist in nature and cultural beings. Consequently, I believe that the beings that make up the socio-cultural world can be studied, among other things, by means of: the method of hypothesis formulation and criticism, or the hypothetical-deductive method, an empirical method that refers to facts; reductionist methods, also empirical in nature (inductive enumerative or eliminative method, method of idealization and gradual concretization), and methods characteristic only of the social sciences and humanities: the method of humanistic interpretation, the historical-comparative method, the hermeneutic method (see Such and Szcześniak 1999). I assume that knowledge can be created in relation, meanings are subjective and contextual, and understanding requires immersion in the experience of the subjects. Knowledge is understood here as the result of the researcher's personal experiences (Jankowska 2021, 188), his "substitute experience" (Hałas 1991, 26-27), as well as the analysis of data from participants in socio-cultural life in various forms of expression: verbal (interviews, essays, autobiographies, drama, screenplays), visual (works of art, illustrations, sculptures), musical (instrumental, symphonic, rock compositions), behavioural (e.g., dance), as well as from observations of social experiences recorded, among other things, in art. Knowledge here is not an objective reflection of reality, but arises in the process of individuals assigning meanings in a specific social and cultural context. In social sciences and humanities, therefore, both a "scientific" research approach, which values quantitative research more, and a humanistic approach, which emphasizes qualitative research, are acceptable. An example of this can be found in two opposing traditions: Durkheimian and Weberian, which, despite setting different research goals (see Buchowski 1990), do not abandon the "scientific" approach in the practice of social sciences (Buchowski 1990, 66; Adamska-Staroń, Piasecka and Łukasik 2007, 71-72).

for the general meaning of the essay, revealing its constituent elements – categories of meaning, according to the rule: in order to understand the details, one must know the broader context and vice versa, indicating the meaning of the entire text.

The analysis and the interpretation revealed the general meaning of the respondents' statements, which can be summarized as follows: an encounter with the Other appears to be a formative experience – an impulse that triggers processes of self-knowledge, self-development, and self-realization, which begin with (self) reflection. They also allowed me to identify interrelated categories of meaning: (self-)reflection, existential questions, relationships, values and emotional experiences, transcendence as going beyond oneself towards a fuller (co-)existence with another person. The general meaning of the analysed statements allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the categories that constitute it, and vice versa.

Meeting the Other on your path, opening up to them and to other cultures is constantly desirable, it is even a duty of modern man, the students note. In the encounter, the Other appears to the respondents as a mirror in which they can see themselves (cf. Gadamer 1992; Levinas 2002). For future educators, the space of encounter is an opportunity to build identity (cf. Nikitorowicz 2019, 6-17; 2017, 13-24; 1997, 168-175). Identity is not given, it is constantly updated, precisely thanks to the Other, both individually and collectively (cf. Nikitorowicz 2019, 6-17; Tischner 1978, 2012). The Other, as they emphasize, is an important figure in human development.

The respondents' statements describing their encounters with the Other reveal a diversity of perspectives. What they have in common is the belief that an encounter with the Other can be a moment that initiates reflection on oneself, on one's life path, which in turn can trigger a range of processes, including self-discovery and self-development. The following statements illustrate this view: "An encounter with the Other can cause us to reflect on the world of another person, on another culture, but also to reflect (...) on our own path in life (...)" (E6), "(...) it can prompt us to reflect on ourselves (...), to think about what kind of person I am, where I am going, what I want (...)" (E4), "(...) it allows us to understand the meaning of human existence. Going beyond what we know, going beyond our own circle allows us to coexist with others, to reflect on ourselves, to develop ourselves (...)" (E10). These statements can be complemented by the following reflection: "(...) Encountering the Other is undoubtedly a constitutive experience for reflection" (E20).

Reflection, so important in human life, when undertaken systematically, promotes personal development. It constitutes contemplation of the world – people, events, values, or ideas – promoting understanding. Essential in the teaching profession, it refers to both thinking and acting, enabling changes in everyday behaviour. "it is understanding meaning, entering and functioning cognitively at the 'meta' level, returning to what is the consequence of attempts to explain specific events (situations), reflecting on one's own thinking" (Szymczak 2009, 53; cf. Bruner 2006, 128). Reflection promotes becoming a conscious participant in the socio-cultural world, including the world of education – in this sense, it is

a reflection on the process of education and one's attitude towards it (cf. Łukasik and Janukowicz 2013, 131-166; Zacharuk 2011, 7). When it is directed towards oneself, one's own thoughts and emotions, it is referred to as self-reflection. It has an existential, axiological and ethical dimension. It is not only an awareness of "who I am," but also a question about the meaning of one's own existence. For Kierkegaard (1976), self-reflection was a condition for authentic existence – a person becomes themselves only when they begin to understand themselves and confront their own existence. Heidegger saw it as a way of "being-in-the-world" (1994), while Tischner emphasized that self-reflection arises from dialogue with the Other (2012; 2017). In education, it means reflecting on oneself as an educator, a teacher, a tutor, a human being, and a participant in relationships. A pedagogue, a teacher, or an educator who does not understand themselves, who is not in constant dialogue with themselves, is unable to accompany others in their development. Hence, (self-)reflection in the pedagogical space is treated as a condition for authentic upbringing, a fundamental dimension of the educational process (see Ablewicz 2003), and a key element of the professional and moral development of self-knowledge and self-education of teachers and educators (cf. Śliwerski 2012). It is essential for building an open and conscious identity, and thus one capable of (co)existing with the Other, of being in a world of cultural diversity (cf. Nikitorowicz 2019).

The importance of (self-)reflection in human life and in the formation of pedagogical identity is also recognized by the respondents. They point out that it is a prerequisite for being in the world, including the educational space, that it arises in relationships – in encounters with the Other, in dialogue, in the space "in between," promoting self-understanding. Thus, the image of an encounter as an existential event emerges here – a moment of confrontation with one's own identity, one's own possibilities and limitations, values, and the search for the meaning of existence. The respondents emphasized that "(...) The Other can allow us to find the courage to be a fully individual and autonomous entity, a free entity that has the right to make its own choices without fear of rejection (...)" (E19). Freedom is indicated by future educators as one of the fundamental values, as a condition for experiencing other values – it gives the opportunity to be oneself. Freedom is revealed here as a way of being in the world, connected with choice, intellectual independence, and truth. This approach is in line with the philosophy of Tischner, who wrote about freedom: "it is a unique ethical value, on the realization of which the realization of all other personal values depends. You cannot improve yourself without freely accepting the proposed values (...), the first good of freedom is truth. (...) The more truth there is between us, the more freedom there is between us" (Tischner 2005, 17-18). Freedom that develops, brings out the best in people, their strength and potential, and also directs them towards being together, as the respondents note.

Being together – in an encounter – is the kind of experience that triggers a series of existential questions concerning the meaning of life, interpersonal relationships, authenticity. Who am I? Where am I going? What do I want? Which path do I want to follow? What values are important to me? Does what I do bring me joy?

Am I happy? Who am I to other people? What is the meaning of my life? These are questions of an initiatory nature which – according to the students – awaken them from mental lethargy and internal stagnation, opening up space for reflection on their own “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 1994) and “being-for-others” (Levinas 2002). In the opinion of the respondents, they lead to conscious work on oneself, “to better self-knowledge, to being in harmony and balance with oneself” (E6), to thinking that the attitude of a pedagogue, a teacher, or an educator requires not only knowledge, but also the ability to understand one’s own existence and its meaning. They constitute a moment of reflective awakening, in which, as they emphasize, the process of understanding education (upbringing and schooling) as a phenomenon that only makes sense when rooted in the experience of one’s own subjectivity begins (cf. Ablewicz 2003). The emergence of questions of an existential nature also reveals the hermeneutic dimension of encounter – they serve to interpret one’s own experience of encountering the Other. Students note that the Other not only “provokes” questions but also helps them to formulate and experience them. In an encounter with the Other, one may be shaken out of complacency, invited to think, to become – in Tischner’s sense – more fully oneself, “for the good.” Biographical thinking, according to the students, is important for at least two reasons. First, it helps them deepen their understanding of their own lives, its conditions and possibilities of shaping it themselves. Second, it serves to prepare, undertake and facilitate the implementation of actions/steps related to leading one’s own life and developing towards oneself and the Other.

In this context, encountering the Other is not a confrontation with otherness, but a relational space. “It is an event that brings many benefits” (E20), allowing us to see ourselves as beings capable of empathy, openness, self-reflection, and development: “It awakens empathy. (...) it allows us to become better people” (E19), “It teaches humility, understanding, and mutual respect” (E25), “(...) it teaches openness and tolerance” (E2), “it gives joy of being, evoking positive experiences and feelings, but it can also cause anxiety” (E9). What emerges here is an image of the Other as a person who reminds us of the human need for community, dialogue, and presence: “(...) People are social beings, they want to surround themselves with others, to be in constant contact with one another” (E4). The concern for community is evident here. Being together can be interpreted as a genuine encounter with another person, understood as one of the most valuable experiences “a person can have in their life. Those who have not met another person on their path have, one might say, wasted their lives” (Tischner 2012, 25). To meet the Other is to explore their history, to free oneself from immediate criticism, to discover their hierarchy of values, to “go beyond certain patterns of thinking that we are not aware of” (E18), to come out of our “hiding places,” out of the corset of our values, to open ourselves to a new situation. Coming out of “hiding,” crossing one’s own boundaries is “the beginning of some kind of community, perhaps the beginning of a home. How many obstacles sometimes need to be overcome in order to start a dialogue! How much patience is needed to continue it! Not only must fear be overcome and prejudices removed, but

a language must also be found that means the same thing to both sides” (Tischner 2012, 8). This way of thinking reveals the connection between I and You, reaching out to each other, but also beyond ourselves, seeing ourselves from the perspective of the Other within ourselves, but also seeing ourselves from the point of view of another person. “By experiencing the presence of You, “I” becomes capable – as if by resonance – of a deep feeling of oneself, of own self; a full and real experience of own life becomes possible only when entering into a relationship with You” (Buber 1992, 93). A similar position can be found in Jerzy Nikitorowicz, according to whom “the basic feature of human existence is the creation of interpersonal bonds and being in relationship with others” (Nikitorowicz 2019, 6). In this perspective, what is important is “the desire and need to notice and discover differences, to be open, to get closer and to learn, as well as to understand, exchange and cooperate, thanks to which a person achieves understanding of themselves and, at the same time, of others” (Nikitorowicz 2019, 6-7). An encounter is therefore an event “that causes a person to search for themselves-the Other” (E12).

The meeting also appears to be a creative challenge – “inspiration to take up one’s own activity” (E15), “(...) to realize personal plans, intentions, or desires” (E6), “to discover (...) oneself – new character traits, the level of tolerance and acceptance of the unknown world” (E21), “making our goals a reality or opening us up to completely new horizons that we were previously blocked from or not ready for” (E13), “making changes in thinking, attitude, changing bad behaviours” (E17), or “bringing about a complete change in one’s life path or changing goals and dreams” (E20). Otherness is not a barrier here, but an invitation to “become more sensitive, open your mind. (...), stepping out of your comfort zone and learning from each other” (E14). It is like a gateway that opens up to independence in thinking and acting, searching for the truth about oneself and the world. Such statements lead us to think of an encounter with the Other as a moment that encourages the initiation of various activities, has the power to awaken certain forces in a person that can help them face various adversities, encourage them to engage in a creative activity, help revive their desire to explore the world in their own way, and encourage intellectual independence and reflective (co)existence in the world. Therefore, encountering the Other can stimulate actions aimed at personal development, focused on values, goals, attitudes, character traits, beliefs, and motivation. It appears as an experience conducive to transcending oneself – one’s limitations, thought patterns, existing roles, and identity boundaries – toward development, meaning, and goodness, the realization of personal values, and the pursuit of what transcends everyday life.

The respondents indicate that the tension between the Self and the Other conceals a special space for development – a place where it becomes possible to transcend cognitive, emotional, and cultural limitations. It is in this tension, understood not as conflict but as a field of encounter and difference, that the potential for deconstructing entrenched stereotypes and prejudices, which often determine how we perceive other people, is born. As the students emphasize, contact with the Other “can awaken in a person sensitivity to social and cultural differences and the

differences of other people” (E8), which is the first step towards understanding that difference is not a threat, but an opportunity for learning and development.

In this sense, encountering the Other is transformative – it triggers a process of change in the way we think about ourselves and the world. The study participants note that “we can learn many interesting things about culture, traditions, and customs from someone from another country (...), and we can then look at our own from a different perspective” (E9). Such an experience can be interpreted in the spirit of hermeneutics of difference – as a moment when the Self is knocked out of its self-referential circle and the world is seen through the eyes of the Other. It is an act of transcending one’s own horizon (cf. Gadamer 1993), in which two perspectives meet and, as a consequence, understanding is broadened. The respondents’ statements point towards learning diversity through co-presence and dialogue (cf. Nikitorowicz 2019). The Other is not perceived here as a “stranger,” but as a co-participant in the educational experience, thanks to which it becomes possible to perceive and appreciate the multitude of ways of being in the world. As one of the respondents notes, such an encounter develops “the ability to perceive and appreciate cultural diversity” (E4). Thus, the tension between the Self and the Other can be interpreted as a space of educational meaning: a place where, when confronted with difference, a person comes to know themselves through the other. In the spirit of Levinas (2002), the face of the Other becomes a call to responsibility, and the encounter becomes a moment of ethical awakening. In Buber’s view (1992), the I-You relationship transforms into a dialogical experience in which the presence of the Other allows for authentic (co)existence. Understood in this way, an encounter with the Other, based on openness, attentiveness, and empathy, not only counterbalances stereotypes and discrimination, but also forms the foundation of reflective education, in which diversity becomes a value and dialogue becomes a path to mutual understanding.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis and the interpretation of the essays written by the students of pedagogy at Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa revealed that encountering the Other appears to be a formative experience. The reflections of the respondents reveal the belief that the Other is not just someone “from outside” – a representative of a different culture, worldview, or way of life – but they become a mirror in which a person can see themselves, their limitations, and their potential for development. The relationship with the Other is treated as a space for negotiating meanings, breaking patterns, and co-creating a world based on the recognition of diversity. Otherness is seen as a value – uniqueness, inspiration, a source of (self)reflection, but also as a challenge – bringing distance, anxiety, and fear. This ambivalence reveals the need for an individual approach, empathy, and respect, and recognition of the dignity of another person.

Distinct categories of meaning – (self-)reflection, existential questions, relationships, values and emotional experiences, and transcendence – reveal the

dynamics of the encounter and draw attention to the fact that this experience initiates a movement towards oneself through the other: it leads from emotional stirring, through reflection and questions about meaning, to a deeper understanding of oneself and the world. Self-reflection, awareness of values, and openness to diversity become the basis for becoming a reflective, empathetic, and responsible person in this process. The respondents perceive the encounter with the Other not as a confrontation, but as a space of (co)existence – a place where dialogue, understanding, and mutual becoming become possible. The encounter does not end with dialogue – it continues as an internal echo, as a question that demands an answer. It is therefore not only an event in the interpersonal space, but also an event in the space of existence. Man is a being on a journey, as Gadacz (1993) emphasized, and his development takes place in the rhythm of questions and encounters.

The conclusions drawn from the research are significant not only for interpreting the experience of encountering the Other, but also for pedagogical and social practice. In the pedagogical dimension, they draw attention to the need to build an educational space in which authentic encounters are possible – understood not as formal interaction, but as an experience of mutual presence, attentiveness, and dialogue. Education then becomes not only a place for the transfer of knowledge, but also a space for shaping attitudes of sensitivity, openness, and attentiveness to other people. The research results also draw attention to the importance of relationship-based pedagogy. The relationship with the Other – in its ambivalence – reveals the need for individualization, an empathetic approach, and recognition of human dignity. Pedagogy understood in this way requires the creation of situations in which students and pupils can experience diversity not as a threat, but as a source of development and inspiration. This means the need to stimulate a dialogical attitude, ethical sensitivity, and intercultural communication skills.

In social terms, the research findings highlight the importance of education as a space for overcoming indifference, polarization, and exclusion. Reflection on Otherness allows us to break down stereotypes, familiarize ourselves with differences, and build relationships based on dialogue and mutual trust. In this context, encountering the Other becomes an expression of readiness to co-create a world based on respect, empathy, and a shared search for meaning. Pedagogical practice should therefore promote learning to understand oneself in the context of diversity and develop the ability to participate responsibly in social relations.

Encountering the Other is a special experience – a unique moment, an impression that is not without significance for both the present and the future, revealing a person's openness to transcendence. To encounter – “is to experience Transcendence” (Tischner 2012, 25).

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## The Realization of Educational Dialogue as the Key to the Education of Children and Youth. Inspiration of the Pedagogy of Fr. Janusz Tarnowski

### Realizacja dialogu edukacyjnego jako klucz do wychowania dzieci i młodzieży. Inspiracja pedagogiką ks. Janusza Tarnowskiego

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**Abstract:** This text addresses the issue of education in the spirit of educational dialogue. The aim of the study was to recall and introduce the richness of dialogue according to the concept of Fr. Janusz Tarnowski, which is an expansion of his concept of Christian personal-existential pedagogy, and to demonstrate that such a dialogue can be an inspiration for contemporary educators. Educational dialogue understood by Fr. Janusz Tarnowski as a method, process, and attitude supports other pedagogical methods, as long as they focus on the pupil, without overly emphasizing his individualism, where the common good disappears and personal life is threatened. The study contains an analysis of selected factors influencing the implementation of dialogue by the educator, such as: the educator's attitude towards education, the educator's approach to dialogue, the educator's communicative culture/communicative competences, and the emotional climate preferred by the educator. This analysis was conducted against the backdrop of the concept of Fr. Tarnowski, because his views on education and the educator are appropriate to the chosen factors. Based on this, it was concluded that despite the passage of time and the changes that have taken place in the Polish school in recent years, the pedagogy of dialogue of Fr. Janusz Tarnowski's work can still be a valuable source of inspiration for contemporary teachers and educators in implementing dialogue in the school environment. Currently, with the end of pedagogy that uncritically emphasizes the leading role of the educator, fulfilling the principle that education is primarily about the human-to-human relationship becomes the meaning of "human-face" pedagogy, rooted in Christian foundations and expressed in authentic dialogue.

**Keywords:** peace, upbringing for peace, dialogue, pedagogy, educational dialogue, educator, pupil

**Abstrakt:** W niniejszym tekście podjęto problem wychowania w duchu dialogu wychowawczego. Celem opracowania było przypomnienie i przybliżenie bogactwa dialogu według koncepcji ks. Janusza Tarnowskiego, będącej rozwinięciem jego koncepcji chrześcijańskiej pedagogiki personalno-egzystencjalnej oraz wykazanie, że taki dialog może być inspiracją dla współczesnych wychowawców. Dialog wychowawczy rozumiany przez ks. Janusza Tarnowskiego jako metoda, proces i postawa wspiera inne metody pedagogiczne, o ile te skupiają się na wychowanku, bez nadmiernego eksponowania jego indywidualizmu, gdzie zanika dobro wspólne i zagrożone jest życie osobowe. Opracowanie zawiera analizę wybranych czynników wpływających na realizację dialogu przez wychowawcę, takich jak: postawa wychowawcy wobec wychowania, podejście wychowawcy do dialogu, kultura komunikacyjna/kompetencje komunikacyjne wychowawcy oraz klimat emocjonalny preferowany



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przez wychowawcę. Analizy tej dokonano na tle koncepcji ks. Tarnowskiego, gdyż jego poglądy na wychowanie i wychowawcę są adekwatne do wybranych czynników. Na tej podstawie sformułowano wnioski, że pomimo upływu czasu oraz zmian, jakie w ostatnich latach dokonały się w polskiej szkole, pedagogika dialogu ks. Janusza Tarnowskiego nadal może stanowić cenne źródło inspiracji dla współczesnych nauczycieli i wychowawców w urzeczywistnianiu dialogu w szkolnym środowisku wychowawczym. Obecnie, kiedy mamy do czynienia z końcem pedagogiki bezkrytycznie eksponującej przywódczą rolę wychowawcy, spełnienie zasady, że wychowanie polega przede wszystkim na relacji człowiek – człowiek, staje się sensem pedagogiki „o ludzkim obliczu”, zakorzenionej w chrześcijańskich podstawach i wyrażającej się w autentycznym dialogu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pokój, wychowanie do pokoju, dialog, pedagogika dialogu, dialog wychowawczy, wychowawca, wychowanek

## INTRODUCTION

Modern pedagogy defines the role of the educator as supporting the child in his independent explorations and choices. In the relationship between the educator and the pupil, the basis of interaction is mutual respect and trust, providing a climate of security (without fear, pressure), open communication, refraining from expressing judgments, providing feedback, stimulating creativity, independence, and sovereignty. The educator, being a man of dialogue, takes into account that the educator and his “I” is the center of educational interactions. As a person, he has his own value, which means that he cannot be treated as an object. Such an educator is an active partner, seeking genuine contact and open communication. He cares about the freedom of the individual, facilitates the creation of individuality, and the use of one’s own developmental potential. Educational interactions become “encounters” – deep personality relationships. The educator should accept himself, not be afraid of novelty, recognize different personalities, have imagination, help through communication and dialogue, inspire trust, respect own and others’ needs, be sincere, creative.

Dialogue in education, however, is hindered by a number of phenomena, such as the demanding attitude of one of the parties to the meeting, or the disregard for the dialogue partner evident in the inability to listen to his reasons and in undermining his motivations. One of the most common pitfalls of dialogue is its conversion into a duet of monologues, as well as the educator’s excessive adaptation to the level and expectations of the young person. Dialogue at all costs leads to the destruction of the educator’s identity of conviction and results in the annihilation of his authority at his own request.

Undoubtedly, these obstacles can be an expression of the differences between the educator – parent, teacher and the educator – child, student. They result from both developmental conditions and discrepancies related to specific cultural experiences or rapid civilization changes that alter an individual’s attitude to knowledge and the training of various skills.

And so the educator is perceived by the educator as the Other. Perhaps even as an enemy, but certainly as an expression or exotic representative of another world order and values. The educator is a representative of the world of symbolic culture, unknown to the educator and different from his previous experience.

He is a representative of a generation, still raised in the era of the printed word, often oriented in opposition to the image, especially that which has its origins in pop culture. He is also an exponent of a particular axiological order, an ideal that is difficult to realize for himself as well. He is someone using a distinct language that has reference to contexts foreign to the educator.

The alumni, on the other hand, are primarily representatives of a new mentality, a different way of perceiving and categorizing reality. First of all, his primary cultural experience is immersion in visual messages in the broader pop culture. It carries with it the baggage of disparate experiences and is a vivid example of the increasing dominance of so-called prefigurative culture or co-figurative<sup>1</sup>.

He emerges as a subject from an axiologically unsettled reality, derived from the clash of different concepts of values, propagated in the mass media of various *modus vivendi* (way of life) that document pluralism of worldview and liberalism of attitudes. Thus, it is a representative of qualities rejected from the perspective of high culture, most often negated by adults. It is also a user of an already foreign language, a code, simplifying communication to forms of Internet communication.

In conclusion, the existence of educator-educator relations is an expression of all sorts of differences. They result both from developmental conditions and discrepancies related to cultural experiences or are conditioned by civilization changes. Nevertheless, the distinctiveness of the two subjects does not have to be exclusively differentiating. The value of each subject can be realized precisely in the possibilities of opening to dialogue, and these differences can be an element that builds it, but only if in the space of interpersonal relations both the educator and the educated try to follow a common path. Then it may turn out that dissimilarity (otherness) can be an asset on the path of discovering oneself and the world together. It can also provide an opportunity to exchange experiences and allow for multi-faceted cognition.

This text aims to recall and introduce the richness of dialogue according to the concept of Fr. Janusz Tarnowski. Despite the passage of time and the changes that have taken place in Polish schools in recent years, Fr. Janusz Tarnowski's pedagogy of dialogue, which is a development of his concept of Christian personal-existential pedagogy, should still be a valuable source of inspiration for contemporary teachers

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<sup>1</sup> According to anthropologist Margaret Mead: prefigurative culture, the so-called culture of *puzzled children* - is a type of culture in which younger generations transmit technical knowledge to older generations, the direction of transmission of values changes, adults do not keep up with changes, the world is understandable only to children; co-figurative culture, the so-called culture of *"found peers"* - is a type of culture in which the cultural patterns of younger and older generations coexist. In this model, younger and older generations coexist, but are unable to introduce children to the changing conditions of reality on their own. The significant persons are peers. This type of culture is transitional between post-figurative and pre-figurative culture and characteristic of the developmental stages of modern, industrial society; post-figurative culture, the culture of *unappreciated ancestors* - is a type of culture in which younger generations assimilate cultural patterns from older generations, adolescence entails taking on adult roles. This type of culture is dominant and characteristic of traditional societies in which, due to high illiteracy rates and the confinement of individuals to small communities, horizontal transmission of information, that is, within culturally distinct groups, is negligible.

in making dialogue a reality in the school environment. For, as Fr. Tarnowski emphasizes, education is primarily about the human-to-human relationship, it is an interaction “with a human face.” Thus, education in the spirit of educational dialogue aims to help develop the humanity of the pupil. Therefore, the modern teacher, being a teacher of dialogue, takes into account that the pupil and his “I” is the center of educational interactions. As a person, he has his own value, which means that he cannot be treated as an object for a purpose. Upbringing, therefore, is to be a support and help in the formation of the “being myself” of the pupil.

This paper contains an attempt to analyze the factors influencing the realization of dialogue by the educator in contemporary educational reality. This analysis is made against the background of the concept of Fr. Janusz Tarnowski, as his views on upbringing and the educator are relevant to such aspects of educational work as:

- the attitude of the educator toward upbringing,
- the educator’s approach to dialogue,
- the communication culture (communicative competence) of the educator,
- the emotional climate preferred by the educator.

## 1. EDUCATIONAL DIALOGUE IN CHRISTIAN PERSONAL-EXISTENTIAL PEDAGOGY

The word *dialogue* for most people has an obvious meaning. In the colloquial sense, it means a conversation aimed at agreeing on positions, views, it is a way of bringing one’s points of view closer together and working out a common understanding of them. Dialogue, however, is not just talk. The UN and the Norwegian think-tank Nansen Center for Peace and Dialogue, which has been nominated several times for the Nobel Peace Prize, see dialogue as a process of “real interaction, during which people listen carefully enough to each other to change under the influence of what they learn. Each participant in the dialogue makes an effort to consider the other person’s point of view even when contradictions persist. No participant in the dialogue abandons his or her own identity, but each recognizes the other person’s position enough to change his or her way of dealing with it” (Ciesiołkiewicz 2022).

The problematic of dialogue was introduced into pedagogy and contributed to its consolidation by the Jewish philosopher, theologian and pedagogue Martin Buber. It was in connection with his person that the issue of dialogue deepened in the early 20th century. The ethical necessity of approaching, opening to the other person was also postulated by Emmanuel Levinas, Jozef Tischner. The idea of dialogue, which has its origins in the philosophy of these thinkers, captures human existence in the category of encounter – “Man becomes Self in contact with You” (Buber 1992, 56). The encounter in this view reveals the metaphysical dimension of human existence, the realm of the “in-between,” is the starting point for understanding man, the diversity of the world and oneself, and causes man to experience the very other (the Other). On the Polish ground, the issue of dialogue is noted in the concept, related to the philosophical personal-existential thinking, of the pedagogy of dialogue by Father Janusz Tarnowski.

The essence of Fr. Tarnowski's concept of Christian personal-existential pedagogy is contained in the following formula:

1. Pedagogical priority: person to person interaction, person to person. The role of the educator and the educator on the secondary plane.
2. Upbringing: to become more and more human, arriving again and again at its existential depth, and moving toward the same existence of the educated person.
3. The pupil is not an object, but is the subject of pedagogical radiation on the educator.
4. Master: Jesus Christ living in the Church, the Son of Man, God Incarnate.
5. Through authentic dialogue, education becomes an aid to the existential encounter with God and people, which should result in the full involvement of the educator and the pupil" (Tarnowski 1993,180).

According to this concept, pedagogical action is not built on the principle: subject – object, but has a two-subject character. The peculiarity of this pedagogy lies in the tendency, without in any way infringing on the freedom of the pupil, to reach his deepest self, preparing him to meet Christ living in the Church. Thus, whenever we talk about the pedagogical process and its Christian character, the basis, goal and way is Jesus Christ. The concept of personal-existential pedagogy refers to the person as the central value, both of the educator and the educated, taken concretely, and rooted in a dual reality: sacred and earthly (Tarnowski 2000b, 85).

From the personalistic view of man in the process of his socialization and upbringing comes the affirmation of him as a fundamental and autotelic value, the primacy of spiritual life, the irreducibility of the person to things, the body, the senses and biological needs, the inalienability of the rights inherent in human nature, the awareness of duty to others based on the principles of justice, and the rejection of the anarchic concept of the freedom of the human person. However, it should be emphasized that Fr. Prof. Tarnowski, standing firmly on the ground of Christian personalism, also uses elements of existentialism, because he believes that only then does the human being become more concrete, situationally conditioned, "multidimensional." For this very purpose, the contents of existentialism are helpful: relying on the "core" of the human being, that is, on his deepest self, and on the application of pedagogical goals of categories of the existential type: authenticity, dialogue, encounter, commitment" (Tarnowski 1993, 89-90).

J. Tarnowski defines upbringing as "the totality of ways and processes that help a human being, especially through interaction, to realize and develop his or her humanity" (Tarnowski 1991, 71-73) and emphasizes that on both sides of this process stand first and foremost not so much the educator and the pupil, but rather the human being in relation to the human being. There is no room for domination by either the educator or the pupil. The most important pedagogical moment is the two-way human contact. Thanks to this approach, the process of upbringing is not one-sided, but multifaceted – the educator and the pupil educate each other.

Thus, upbringing is primarily about the human-to-human relationship. It is an interaction “with a human face.” Each person carries the unique mystery of his own destiny. What should particularly characterize the educator is an attitude of respect towards the specific “mystery” (secret) of the person of the educator. Thus, every educational activity should focus on the “protection” of the young person, seen as a “peculiar value” with a specific developmental potential, which should be brought out and developed for both individual and social use.

Thus understood, education is characterized by: humanity, permanence, inter- and intra-activity, indeterminacy and transgressiveness. Humanity is the basis of all upbringing, eliminating the asymmetrical nature of mutual interaction. Permanence is that upbringing is not limited to a specific phase of a person’s life, but continues throughout his life; the need for it never disappears. Inter- and intra-activity is the reciprocal interaction of subjects – the educator with the educator and the educator with the educator, but also entering into action with oneself, i.e. self-education; mutual opening to one another’s values. Another property is the indeterminacy of situations, events, consequences that occur in educational situations, requiring constant openness to novelty, while knowing things and being aware of one’s own value system or aspirations. Transgressiveness, in turn, is the constant ability to transcend oneself and overcome the paradox between the superficial self and the deep self (Śliwerski 2005, 68-69).

Fr. Tarnowski warns, however: “For if the pedagogue desires to ‘humanize’ the pupil with the conviction that he himself has already achieved proper humanity, the situation becomes dangerous. For education is about discovering and developing humanity on both sides of the pedagogical process. Of course, the responsibility is disproportionately greater and the demands are on the person of the educator. However, the awareness that he is not yet a perfect human being should constantly accompany him. Then and only then, if (...) he is aware of his imperfection, he can also help imperfect students” (Tarnowski 2007, 78).

K. Chałas noted that when we accept the definition of upbringing understood as a personal meeting and dialogue between the educator (master) and the student, supporting the pupil in the realization of a wide spectrum of values leading to the fullness of humanity, the question of the identity of the educator becomes important. The level of educational competence of the teacher, how he perceives the complex problems of upbringing, how he intends to solve them, determines to a large extent the course of the educational process and educational achievements (Chałas 2006).

Christian personal-existential pedagogy puts forward, as a condition of the educator’s influence, the cognition, understanding and approach to the educator in his concrete situation. In this way, the basic condition of the attitude of dialogue in personal-existential pedagogy is fulfilled: to listen to the alumni in order to understand them, to get closer to them and to interact with them.

Rev. Janusz Tarnowski claimed that the call for a master is one of the characteristic needs of modern times, and therefore he repeatedly presented

examples of masters of dialogue. One of the champions of dialogue cited by Fr. Tarnowski – Fr. Bernard Kryszkiewicz<sup>2</sup> understood these conditions as follows:

- Dialogical understanding is “To show the maximum possible appreciation of the beliefs, views of the pupil, to reckon with him as much as possible;” “To try to put myself in the place of the pupil. What would I think, how would I feel, how would I react to it.”
- Emotional rapprochement is “Radiate warmth, love, service, joy as much as possible. Let the alumni feel, clearly feel, that you love them, that you have their best interests at heart. With words say as little as possible – with deeds as much as possible.” “Paying attention is the greatest stone of offense; what tact is needed here. Handle the pupil as gently as with the pupil of the eye. Try to imbue attention as much as possible with kindness, sweetness, gentleness and – as privately as possible – emphasize the positives.”
- Dialogic interaction is “To undertake work on others first of all like work on one’s own grooming. In educating others, to bear in mind first and foremost my own education.” “To regard sorrows, which will never be in short supply, as treasures for my character and to repay them in the spirit of the Gospel. Those who cause them – they are my greatest friends” (Tarnowski 2000a, 93).

Rev. Janusz Tarnowski, on a personal-existential level, sees dialogue as: a method, a process, an attitude. “Thus, the method of dialogue is a way of communication, the subjects of which strive to understand each other, come closer and cooperate (as much as possible). The dialogue process, on the other hand, occurs when at least one of the elements contained in the method has been realized. (...) Thus, the dialogue process can begin with any of the elements: cognitive, emotional or praxeological, and gradually aim (or not) to achieve the zones of the others. On the other hand, the attitude of dialogue is a readiness to open up to understanding, approaching and interacting (as much as possible) with the environment” (Tarnowski 1992, 149).

Dialogue can take the form of factual, personal and existential dialogue. Substantive dialogue is the pursuit of the value of truth by the subjects of dialogue and occurs in a situation of learning about reality. Personal dialogue is based on the value of freedom and goodness, and is the disclosure of one’s spirituality, experiences, emotions, and the opening of the subjects to their inner self. Existential dialogue, on the other hand, is based on the value of love. “It is expressed not only with words, but with the whole person, putting one’s self at the disposal of the partner, up to the point of sacrificing one’s own life” (Tarnowski 1992, 149).

In an authentic dialogue, a person gets rid of his or her own selfishness, thus recognizing another person with whom he or she wants to meet and engage in conversation. People who produce a dialogic relationship treat each other

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<sup>2</sup> Fr. Bernard Kryszkiewicz (1915-1945), a member of the Passionist order; served as spiritual father of seminarians for 5 years. From this time comes his “Pedagogikum” contained in a notebook found after the author’s death. It consists of 44 notes written during his educational work (Tarnowski 2000a, 92).

subjectively, because “Dialogue is meant to acquaint people with each other. On the one hand, we have the right to be ourselves, just as the dialogue partner has the right to be himself, but on the other hand, in dialogue, one person wants to be for the other, opens up to him (...). In dialogue, we not only try to understand the other person, but we also want to communicate with him about what we have in common, what we have in common, what is important” (Grün 2016, 160-161).

According to Father John Tarnowski, there are three basic conditions for its occurrence and success, namely: two-sided authenticity, meeting in a personal sense, and commitment (Tarnowski 2000b, 86-88).

The first condition, namely two-sided authenticity, is to free oneself from the mask, to act in accordance with one’s own self, to be sincere and true to oneself. Such authenticity is conditioned by the individual’s inner depth, intensive spiritual training and life consistency (Tarnowski 1993, 79-80). An encounter in the personal sense is an event of contact with a concrete or transcendent person, during which the core of existence, the deepest self, is touched and a profound inner transformation takes place. Commitment, on the other hand, which should come from a free choice to devote oneself to a certain cause or person, is a process in which the individual, without ceasing to be himself, develops a higher emotionality and selfless benevolence. Dialogue conditioned by authenticity leads to an encounter, resulting in commitment. The existential authenticity of which Fr. Tarnowski speaks is an authenticity untainted by infantilism and subjectivism. It consists of inner depth, intensive training and life consistency. Inner depth is rooted in a person’s inner self, which contains the image of God Himself. It develops in a person when he frees himself from externally influencing information and sensations and begins to search for his deep Self, remains true to himself, quiets himself, and opens his heart to God’s grace. However, the search for one’s deep Self, which is the center of one’s physical, mental and spiritual life, does not take place only under the influence of our firm decision. It is a journey to one’s inner self, the author says, which lasts throughout a person’s life, and should be reinforced by intensive prayerful training. An educator must not be afraid to be himself. He should grant himself the right to make mistakes, since a mistake is information for him about what to avoid in the future. He should also think positively, as it promotes well-being – sympathy for his own person and affection for his students. Thus, such a teacher, according to the principle of reciprocity, has a chance to be liked by those around him. It is also necessary to respect others regardless of age group. It manifests itself in honesty and fairness, keeping commitments, granting the right to be wrong, tolerance and openness to different points of view. A positive attitude toward people also involves reducing distance, which should be seen as a potential threat to the authority of the educator.

The second condition for dialogue is an encounter in the personal sense. This is an event of contact with a concrete or transcendent person, during which the core of existence, the deepest self, is touched and a profound inner transformation takes place (Tarnowski 2000b, 87). Every person is a person endowed with autonomy. Relationships established by individuals should protect this autonomy. If this

happens, we are dealing with personal relations. A personal relationship is at the same time a dialogical relationship, a relationship of the type: I speak to you, you listen to me, and vice versa – you speak to me, I listen to you. The establishment and continuance of a personal dialogical relationship is served primarily by trust: You to Me and loyalty of Me to You. The effect of misappropriating these values is the disintegration of the personal relationship or its transformation into an object relationship. In such an object relationship, at least one member of the relationship becomes bewitched and becomes an instrument for the Self.

The third condition, in turn, is commitment, which should come from a free choice to devote oneself to a certain cause or person. It is a process in which the individual, without ceasing to be himself, develops a higher emotionality and selfless benevolence. For this to happen, an educator should also be courageous. A courageous educator knows how to defend the right of the aggrieved or wrongly accused, knows how to admit a mistake or weakness himself, show emotion, take up difficult topics in conversation, and does not avoid confrontation. The educator must work on the ability to express his opinions and views directly and clearly. He can persuade, but must not impose his opinion, should intervene decisively when the situation requires, but must not use his position to dominate or intimidate alumni.

Essential to the engagement is mutual trust, without which dialogue is impossible. It presupposes respect for the dignity of the educator and objective truth. Adults do not always know how to communicate with children or adolescents, because they fail to listen to them and enter their world. Listening is necessary to encourage them to confide and get closer to the reality in which he lives. The ability to listen demonstrates acceptance of the educator and genuine interest in him. It expresses a sincere desire to learn about him and his existence. For dialogue to be effective, goodwill must also be demonstrated. It should come from the educator, who must reckon with the fact that the alumnus may also have his reasons. These rationales should be justified by the congruence of the proclaimed words or ideas with his own actions.

The realization of dialogue as an idea that fills the entire educational space is based on the conviction that in the educator-educator relationship they are identical in their humanity, thus it is expressed in the mutual pursuit of mutual knowledge, in the pursuit of mutual understanding, in showing the educator help in discovering his potential, in the willingness to recognize that you are always a little right. The dialogue educator sees his pupils not only as recipients, but also as givers, and not only of knowledge, but also of feelings, feelings, emotions, beliefs, ideas, values. He is for him, but also vice versa – the educator is for his educator precisely that Other whom he meets on his way and is ready to be at his disposal.

The responsibility for this process falls on both subjects of the dialogue, with the burden not being equal. The archetypal master-disciple arrangement makes the former bear the burden of responsibility for the other as an educator, but also as a human being. This responsibility is limited only by the category of freedom ascribed to everyone, which opens perspectives you may or may not have. Even, if the educator has greater knowledge and richer experience than the educator, he also

bears a greater responsibility (Tarnowski 2003a). Responsibility is a characteristic directly inherent in the profession of master teacher. The educator is responsible for education and upbringing in the spirit of socially defined values. An indispensable condition for the existence of responsibility is wisdom, which unquestionably sets the direction towards justice and freedom (Cieśleńska 2020,132-133).

T. A. Gadacz argues that for education to become a full reality, it must be realized in dialogue (Gadacz 1993). This is because education demands a living testimony of humanity, because it will only achieve lasting results if it results in a real commitment to the values shown by the educator.

## 2. CIRCUMSTANCES AND CONDITIONS FOR REALIZATION OF EDUCATIONAL DIALOGUE IN THE LIGHT OF FR. TARNOWSKI'S PEDAGOGY OF DIALOGUE

In such educational environments as the family and school, is there room for dialogue and cohabitation in dialogue between educators and educators? Certainly yes. Undoubtedly, however, educators play a key role in this process, because they are the ones who enter into a relationship with another person (child, student) and consciously influence his attitude, views, thinking, and world of values.

There are several elements in the functioning of educators that are important for the occurrence and success of dialogue in the family and school environment. These include:

- beliefs about the nature of the educational process,
- preferred parenting strategy and related approaches to parenting dialogue,
- communication culture,
- the created climate of upbringing.

There is no doubt that every educator adopts a certain strategy for communicating and cooperating with his pupils in the educational process. We can distinguish two models of this cooperation: in the first, the educator places exceptional emphasis on the importance of dialogue with the alumni; in the second, the educator is the clearly dominant party, has power and authority. The educator who prefers the first model treats the alumni as partners in conversation, during which everyone can ask questions, have doubts and express their own point of view. Importantly, he adopts a non-judgmental attitude, listens carefully to what they say, refrains from making remarks and watches for similar behavior from the alumni. The manifestation of concern for the alumni is an expression on his part of an attitude of kindness, acceptance, openness to the problems of the student, which, as a consequence, in educational work can be very effective. The dialogue between the two evokes a kind of participation, presence and involvement of the educator in the alumni's affairs. The educator does not aim to capture, confuse and defeat the alumni. He allows him to feel that he does not leave him alone both in moments of doubt and difficulty and in his successes. He does not hide that he can rely on him. Such an educator accompanies the mentee and supports him, helps him, but does not bail him out and does not take the responsibility off the mentee. He does not limit his independence. At the opposite pole is the second attitude of the educator,

which is certainly not conducive to dialogue with the pupil. The educator who prefers it is the clearly dominant party, has power and authority. He is usually convinced of the rightness of his position. Submission to discussion of the information he provides is very limited or impossible. Consequently, this leads to a decrease in the creativity and aspirations of alumni.

Another factor in the realization of dialogue in upbringing is the course of communication processes in the practice of upbringing, which is mainly a reflection of the educator's beliefs about the essence of the process of upbringing. And in this case we can speak of two opposing attitudes of the educator. He can adopt a dialogical or transmissive attitude (Barnes 1988, 174-199). The dialogic educator creates communicative situations and two-subject educator-educator interactions. He uses a cooperative communication pattern, i.e., as a sender, he does not present precise requirements to the educator in a directive manner, or his own judgments hidden under arguments. The communication is two-way – the sender agrees to let the recipient's behavior run its course independently of his expectations. Thus, he supports the alumnus in his development, creates him to meet contemporary existential needs and his creative abilities, respecting his rights. The "transmission" educator represents an attitude towards communication that is absolutely opposite and therefore unacceptable in the spirit of dialogue. Most often he uses an authoritarian pattern of one-sided communication of a directive nature. The dialogue with the pupil is mostly disharmonious (destructive) in character, for it is accompanied by criticism, a commanding tone or moralizing. Intolerance and lack of kindness also seem to be characteristic. In descriptions of behavior indicative of mistreatment of the pupil we find: harshness and ruthlessness, deprivation of the opportunity to express one's own opinion, lurking for stumbling blocks, threats, blackmail.

Undoubtedly, the educator's communicative competence, also known as communicative culture, plays an important role in creating dialogue with the educator (Koć-Seniuch 2000, 137). Nowadays, the educator rather loses the role of a manager in favor of an intermediary in the process of cultural communication, or simply a participant – a partner in the educational dialogue. He loses his position as a preacher, and is needed as a conversation partner, as a participant in inter- and intra-generational exchange. As a participant and organizer of dialogues – he has no chance in them as an arbiter; however, he can have a significant place as one who listens, co-creates, puts forward arguments, speaks from himself.

An important component of educators' communication culture is the ability to listen. However human beings are dialogical beings, they are not always able to realize this also by listening to each other's speech. He can't because in a dialogue where there is always I AM and YOU the leading one is usually I AM. Half of the success of a dialogue depends on how well we can listen. When we listen to an educator, we communicate with him not only verbally, but also non-verbally. However, one cannot be a pretend listener, who only pretends to follow the statements of the alumni, or a passive listener, focused only on reception, but an active listener. The value of dialogue is therefore also measured by the quality of the attitude of silence. To be silent does not mean

to stop talking, but to forget for the time of listening one's own judgments, not to impose one's own image of the world on the student, to get rid of all prejudices and premature judgments in order to give the interlocutor a chance to hear himself as well. True dialogue can only be very fruitful where the subjects of the dialogue support and respect each other. Without this climate, dialogue will become a monologue, or so-called dialogue among the deaf. Such a term recognizes a discussion in which everyone remains encamped in their own position incapable of any understanding of others. This very deafness, in that modern man is unwilling to listen and is not curious about the thinking of others, is one of the basic sins of modern man.

Considering the form of contemporary dialogue, especially in the school environment, it can be seen that a dialogue of low linguistic value prevails. Many linguists say that in modern we are dealing with vulgarization and commodification of language. Unfortunately, it also affects adults – parents and teachers. However, the word is a powerful weapon, but this weapon must be able to use. In the process of upbringing, the word has creative power. For with the help of the word the formation of the person of the educated person takes place, the formation of his spiritual shape and the realization of the person in all dimensions, with all abilities. “Through language we speak to and about other people. And in the way we formulate speech, it reveals whether we like people or despise them, whether we want to give them good or bad words. To speak good words means to bless (*benedicere* in Latin). To speak bad words means to curse (in Latin *maledicere*)” (Grün 2016, 26).

An appropriate educational climate also plays a key role in building a space for dialogue. This term refers to the climate that educators create through their methods and forms of work. Relationships between educators and their students can be friendly or hostile. Educators who cause irritation must be aware that they will be treated with hidden hostility. On the other hand, those who constantly help children in their efforts, encourage them every day in the face of various difficulties, and rejoice in their successes together will be liked and may even be loved. True dialogue requires mutual respect and trust, a friendly and comprehensively stimulating environment. A friendly emotional climate makes dialogue meet the requirements placed on it from a pedagogical point of view, and makes it possible: sincere exchange of thoughts and feelings of the educator and the student, mutual sharing of experiences and life experiences, mutual cognition and understanding, providing support in moments of doubt and difficulties, helping to solve problems (Lobocki 2007, 148). The key in creating an appropriate and friendly educational climate is the subjective treatment of the alumni. Then the educator in dealing with alumni does not use his own advantage, but remembers that each alumni:

- is a free, but also a unique person;
- has an inalienable right to harmonious and comprehensive development;
- has the right to make mistakes;
- carries within himself a lot of good;
- is a thinking but also a feeling being;
- has the right to dignity and intimacy;
- has the right to speak freely (Sniezynski 2005, 132).

Respect for the subjectivity of the educator by the educator is a necessary condition for optimal development. Without respecting the subjectivity of the other, one cannot be a good educator. Z. Włodarski emphasizes: “to see in the other person not only the object of actual or possible interactions, but an individual with certain needs and aspirations, who is entitled (like all people) to autonomy, the right to self-determination” (Włodarski 1992, 128-129).

There is still too little awareness of this truth, that the disappearance or insufficiency of dialogue can lead to severe mental disorders, is the cause of emotional immaturity. In extreme cases, helplessness develops into reactive depression. The thesis that unspoken feelings and thoughts harm and that they are the cause of the inability to make decisions, plan new tasks, a source of constant emotional tension and inadequate perception of threats is confirmed. Lack of understanding in people close to and key to an individual can cause passivity, helplessness, lack of a sense of agency and avoidance of responsibility for self-induced behavior. Overcoming the above is undoubtedly helped by conversation, which is, on the whole, one of the most important tools for people to communicate, for which the very expression “dialogue” is used.

However, it is not easy to possess the art of dialogue, as many conditions must be met. Is it even possible? Of course it is, but it is only feasible if society is brought up from an early age to an attitude – the virtue of dialogue. Key in this is the role of educators and leaning into the pedagogical credo of Fr. Janusz Tarnowski, in which the author gives five principles to be applied in education:

1. Starting point. In the first contact with an educator or a group, as the author states, the most important thing is to enter his (their) world, with not feigned, but genuine interest. The point is to make them feel our respect and understanding, and to ensure that we do not take the wrong first step.
2. The educator. He is not someone inferior or less valuable than the educator, but on the contrary, he can tower over him in many respects. We are not his judges. We must recognize possible flaws, but we must not identify the educator with them. One must always find in him the image of God, who loves and forgives him.
3. The educator-alumni relationship. Move steadfastly toward friendship, expecting neither gratitude nor attachment. To let the educator feel love, but without obscuring the one who loves him far more: Christ. The bonding link is to be prayer.
4. The process of upbringing. Listening to the pupil. Mutual learning and education. Not imposing or coercing, but gently helping to awaken interest in values and to seek them until encountering God in Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Not so much expecting immediate results, but rather hoping for the distant future. Constant patience and an atmosphere of joy.
5. Goal. To help the pupil “find his place in life and personal vocation in a gradual approach to human and Christian maturity. At the same time, along with the process of educating others, to strive for self-education; to live Christ” (Tarnowski 2003b, 84).

The educational potential inherent in personal-existential upbringing gives the modern educator and the educated the opportunity to achieve human maturity and Christian maturity on an individual and social level. Upbringing becomes a special form of encounter and dialogue between the educator and the one being educated, a process that supports his development and shapes his personality, and the personal relationship should be at the same time a dialogical relationship (Wisniewska 2020, 149). Such upbringing captures the person realistically and integrally, the fruit of which is authentic upbringing through self-education and permanent formation. It is important that the relationships that occur between the educator and the educated have the character of a symmetrical interaction with a “human face.” This condition is fulfilled by educational dialogue, which involves a human-to-human relationship. In this relationship, differences related to age and roles are blurred, while sympathy and interest, mutual communication and willingness to take into account the words and perspective of the other into account, up to the ability to see things from the other’s position. This dialogue of a spiritual nature, related to contact and mutual understanding, seems to be fundamental to the didactic and educational process. It also has the surprising effect of bringing both the subject – in relation to the educator – and that subject – which is the educator – to a new understanding of himself and the surrounding world.

## CONCLUSION

The pedagogy of the future must be a pedagogy of being near the other person, rather than maintaining a distance from him. Meeting this principle becomes the nerve of the life of another pedagogy “a pedagogy with a human face, rooted on Christian grounds and expressed in authentic dialogue” (Tarnowski 1993, 38). Therefore, it is necessary to seek and discover the truth about man, promote his dignity as a person and help him develop his humanity, threatened today by various theories, moral relativism or the negation of all values. Educational dialogue, understood by Fr. Janusz Tarnowski as a method, process and attitude, supports other pedagogical methods, insofar as these focus on the pupil, without overemphasizing his individualism, where the common good disappears and personal life is threatened. Therefore, every educator should remember that being interested in how to talk and come to an agreement with alumni having a different opinion – not to attack, not to criticize and not to force the interlocutor to change his views. Only then can one find meaning and value in the concept of Fr. Janusz Tarnowski.

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## The Role of the Father and Mother in Religious Upbringing within the Family in the Context of Fulfilling Security Needs

### Rola ojca i matki w wychowaniu religijnym w rodzinie w kontekście realizacji potrzeby bezpieczeństwa

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**Abstract:** This article examines the role of parents in religious education in the context of meeting the need for security. This is a significant pedagogical challenge, and the situation is further complicated by contemporary social and cultural changes. This reflection is the result of research primarily in the field of family studies, based on pedagogical, psychological, sociological, and theological assumptions. The research goal of this study is to demonstrate the relationship between the role of the father and mother in religious education in the family and the fulfillment of the need for security. This goal was achieved by characterizing the sociocultural context of the family, describing the need for security in the child's life, presenting the results of the study, and developing conclusions useful in the parenting process. The analysis of research and scientific texts allowed us to formulate recommendations for parents to remember the proper approach to prayer, to avoid coercion, to respect the child's religious desires, to speak positively about God, and to care for their own development. The final conclusion emphasizes the need for the involvement of both parents as a source of security and a model of faith. The key is building faith based

**Keywords:** religious education, parents, safety, faith

**Abstrakt:** Prezentowany artykuł podejmuje problem dotyczący roli rodziców w wychowaniu religijnym w kontekście realizowania potrzeby bezpieczeństwa. Jest to istotne wyzwanie pedagogiczne, a sytuację dodatkowo utrudniają współcześnie zachodzące przemiany społeczne i kulturowe. Refleksja jest owocem badań głównie z zakresu nauk o rodzinie. Opierają się one na przesłankach pedagogicznych, psychologicznych, socjologicznych i teologicznych. Celem badawczym opracowania jest ukazanie zależności zachodzącej pomiędzy rolą ojca i matki w wychowaniu religijnym w rodzinie a realizacją potrzeby bezpieczeństwa. Cel ten został zrealizowany poprzez: charakterystykę kontekstu społeczno-kulturowego rodziny, opis potrzeby bezpieczeństwa w życiu dziecka, prezentację wyników badań własnych oraz opracowanie wniosków przydatnych w procesie wychowania. Analiza badań i tekstów naukowych pozwoliła na sformułowanie postulatów, aby rodzice pamiętali o właściwym podejściu do modlitwy, aby nie stosowali przymusu, aby szanowali pragnienia religijne dziecka, aby pozytywnie mówili o Bogu, aby troszczyli się o własny rozwój. Wniosek końcowy podkreśla potrzebę zaangażowania obojga rodziców jako źródła bezpieczeństwa i wzoru wiary. Kluczowe jest budowanie wiary opartej na miłości, autentyczność rodziców.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wychowanie religijne, rodzice, bezpieczeństwo, wiara



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## INTRODUCTION

The religious upbringing of children is a process that, in the modern socio-cultural context, is influenced by many factors. The apostolic exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, issued in 1979, states that the role of parents in religious upbringing is “in no way replaceable” (Jan Paweł II 1979a, 68). Despite the passage of time, this statement still seems true but difficult to implement.

Looking back, one can only recall the early centuries of Christianity or the Middle Ages with longing and appreciation, as it was the parents who had the decisive influence on the religious upbringing of their children (cf. Murawski 2011, 371ff). The Enlightenment period, which permanently connected religious education with the school environment, thereby somewhat weakened the role of family catechesis. Currently, religious upbringing in the family seems to be based on creating a stable and predictable environment for the development of faith.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate the relationship that, according to the author, exists between the role of the father and mother in religious upbringing within the family and the fulfilment of the need for security. This objective will be achieved through four main points: a brief characterization of the contemporary socio-cultural context of the family, an exploration of the fundamental elements of the need for security in the process of child upbringing, a presentation of research findings, and an attempt to formulate specific conclusions and recommendations aimed at parents. The presented reflection is the result of research and inquiries primarily in the field of family studies. They are based on pedagogical, psychological, sociological, and theological premises.

### 1. THE NEW SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT

The last decades, especially in the context of Poland, have brought relatively significant social and cultural changes. This has been reflected in the roles of the father and mother in the religious upbringing of children. From the perspective of the past years of the new century, it is evident that social changes in family functioning have a broad structure. They result from almost evolutionary social transformations while also expressing the effects of tensions and conflicts brought about in Polish reality by the recent years of social, cultural, and economic transformation. Families have undergone changes caused by both external and internal factors (cf. Janke 2009, 9-21; Mazur 2022, 23-31; Janik-Skowrońska 2023, 411-426; Regulska 2015, 232-239).

As a result of these transformations, parental roles have been redefined. This means that the traditional division of responsibilities—where the father was the head of the family and the mother was the primary caregiver—has undergone changes. The modern concept of fatherhood increasingly involves active participation in child-rearing, which influences the mother’s role and the way children perceive religious values. After a period of the “absence of the father,” there has been a “return of the father.” This absence was either physical (due to war or work-related migration) or

emotional (the father was physically present but not involved in raising the child), a phenomenon observed in Europe until the 1970s and in Poland until the 1990s. Biological fatherhood is evolving into a more mature, psychological, educational, and moral fatherhood (cf. Lewicka 2020, 201-212). As J. Wróblewska-Skrzek points out, men's awareness is changing, and they are increasingly engaging in their children's lives in an active way (Wróblewska-Skrzek 2017, 33-40). The fatherhood model is shifting towards one that emphasizes interaction both with the child and with the mother in the upbringing process. This means that fathers are not only concerned with providing material security but also want to participate in their children's cultural, social, and religious development (Włodarczyk 2014, 94-138).

In this context, it is also important to note that the role of the mother has changed. Women are increasingly engaging in professional work and, just like fathers, taking responsibility for the material support of their children. At the same time, expectations placed on women are evolving. The pressure and demands no longer concern only relationships with their husband or partner, family, or in-laws but now extend to employers, professional competition, and even active presence in the media and social communication. As E. Krause points out, the traditional stereotype of the devoted Polish mother is gradually being replaced by the image of a working mother. The perception of the stay-at-home mother is giving way to that of a multitasking mother (cf. Krause 2020, 31-56). However, the unique bond between mother and child remains exceptional due to its intrinsic nature (cf. Szymaniak 2021, 233-245). As a result, there is a growing recognition that parenting responsibilities are increasingly being shared between both parents.

A key factor influencing the changing social roles and the experience of fatherhood and motherhood is—broadly speaking—new technologies and social media. They have a noticeable impact on how parental functions are carried out and how religious upbringing is approached. It is hard to ignore the impression that media, operating within the framework of the modern order, shape not only social and cultural life but also influence the upbringing of children. Globalization, based on the compression of time and space, permeates many aspects of reality, including family life. In an era of information overload, discovering the truth about human identity and authentic vocation becomes increasingly difficult. Universal principles of family life are being widely rejected, leading to the sidelining of traditional values and authorities, as well as the rapid transformation of intergenerational relationships. As a result, the family becomes a fragmented educational environment where parents and children seem to live in two separate worlds of digital culture. This often leads to weakened relationships and even conflicts. Moreover, it undermines the traditional role of the family as a unit centred around the “sacred”—the highest value of faith and God. The affirmation of the person has been replaced by the affirmation of new technologies (cf. Łuczyński 2018, 63-73; Kopiczko 2021, 57-74).

The intersection of postmodern culture with the reality of the media world, globalization, and migration creates yet another challenge—religious pluralism. Parents tasked with the religious upbringing of their children face an increasing

diversity of religious beliefs within society. In practice, this means that families must confront various religious convictions and practices or even different forms of secularization and atheism. As J. Mariański points out, this requires parents to be fully aware of their own beliefs and practices that they wish to pass on to their children (Mariański 2001, 9-31).

It may seem that in recent decades, as noted by P. Mazurkiewicz, a certain shift has occurred in Polish reality, where the ideology of socialism has been replaced by liberal ideology. This introduces a kind of “noise” in the process of shaping the identity of men and women, as well as in defining the roles of fathers and mothers and their responsibilities in the context of religious upbringing. The reduction of upbringing to the sphere of corporeality makes it more difficult to ensure proper religious education, which belongs to the spiritual dimension of human life (cf. Mazurkiewicz 2023, 152-168; Mąkosa et al. 2024, 113-138).

As M. Żmudziński observes, this has led to a transformation in which a culture where belief in God was once taken for granted has evolved to the point where, even for deeply religious people, it has become just one of many axiological options. In this context, the family has become “the most essential environment for a mature choice of religious faith” (Żmudziński 2023, 611-624). On a practical level, these cultural changes have increased the social significance of women, opened up the labour market for them, significantly altered the role of the father, and drawn both parents and children into the digital world. As a result, this has also led to postponing marriage decisions, a greater focus on financial stability, increased attention to various forms of entertainment, and a continuously rising number of divorces.

Given statistics indicating a rising number of divorces in Poland (cf. Pawłowska 2024), this phenomenon can be seen as one of the significant factors hindering proper religious upbringing, particularly in the context of the roles of the father and mother, who are meant to provide a sense of security for the child. The family is built on unique bonds based on love, voluntariness, and a shared pursuit of common goals. It is widely acknowledged that the family provides the best conditions for a child’s development, ensuring a sense of security and stability. However, the breakdown of the bond between parents creates a major challenge for the child’s integral religious upbringing. The family structure is disrupted, leaving the child without the close support of both parents.

Children often experience emotional burdens due to their parents’ divorce, which affects their ability to engage in religious life, as this requires openness and trust. A child growing in faith needs support, yet in such circumstances, they are deprived of it (cf. Miernik 2015, 135-151; Lewicka 2021, 93-108). It can therefore be stated that the socio-cultural context largely determines the effectiveness of religious upbringing. Most phenomena occurring on a global or national scale are reflected on a micro level in the way families function. Changes related to globalization, the development of digital technologies, cultural diversity, shifts in the labour market, and the revolution in concepts of family and gender shape the paradigms of religious upbringing within the family.

## 2. FULFILLING THE NEED FOR SECURITY

One of the key needs for human development and life is the guarantee of a sense of security. It stems from natural, fundamental needs and is closely linked to the biological existence of a person. This need includes the awareness of being cared for, a sense of stability in one's existential situation, and the feeling of being protected. Fulfilling this need, in turn, translates into self-confidence, the ability to form relationships courageously and freely, and trust-based interactions. As A. Maslow argued, humans naturally seek security, and almost everything else can be considered less important, especially in the process of family upbringing (cf. Maslow 2013, 66).

From the perspective of faith-based upbringing, the sense of security is more than just the absence of threats perceived by an individual. It is rather related to relationships and functioning within the family environment. Ideally, the need for security should be fulfilled without any tensions or conflicts. According to A. Maslow's theory, meeting this need is a prerequisite for fully satisfying the need for belonging and recognition (cf. Maslow 2013, 85).

It can be said that fulfilling the need for security is a key factor in a child's proper emotional and spiritual development. A fundamental sense of existential security directly contributes to emotional stability, which serves as the foundation for developing healthy relationships with others and with God. A stable and secure family environment significantly supports the building of trust and a sense of belonging. The sense of security also involves a consistent reference to clear moral principles, which help in making the right decisions (cf. Chałupniak 2007, 3-13).

Individuals who grow up in an environment of security tend to participate more confidently in the religious life of the Church community. This is also reflected in the quality of their spiritual development. A safe environment in everyday life contributes to a sense of security in the religious sphere as well. This enables children to grow spiritually, build their own identity, and ask bold questions without fear of judgment. It is important for a child to be able to rely on parental support in times of doubt or crisis. This not only protects them from negative social influences but also strengthens their sense of self-worth (cf. Oleszak and Czajkowski 2019, 193-204).

When reflecting on the role of the father and mother in a child's religious upbringing, it is important to emphasize that this task requires cooperation. Despite certain differences in their roles, their efforts should be complementary. The mother's primary role can be seen as being a "source" of emotional support. She is responsible for ensuring a sense of closeness, both physically and spiritually, which is particularly crucial in the first weeks and months of life. In the upbringing process, the mother often introduces stability and routine into family and child life, significantly strengthening the sense of constancy and security (cf. Szymianiak 2021, 236; Tataj-Puzyna 2015, 158-170). On the other hand, the father's role in fostering a child's sense of security lies in introducing structure and norms. This helps the child understand the surrounding world and reinforces their sense of security within

it. The father also plays a crucial role in shaping a child's behaviour. As a role model, he provides an example to follow, demonstrating how to handle difficult challenges and navigate unfamiliar situations. Building a child's sense of security involves the father's active participation in the upbringing process—being present, spending time together, engaging in play, completing tasks together, and having meaningful conversations. Additionally, the father can support the child in discovering the world and embracing new experiences. The courage of an adult man can inspire a child to take on new challenges, which in turn fosters self-confidence and strengthens their sense of security (cf. Żernik 2018, 13-28; Walesa 2001, 291-320).

The complementarity of the father's and mother's roles is reflected in their joint efforts in raising their child. This not only strengthens family bonds but also develops social and emotional skills while fostering trust and a sense of security. The stability of the parents' relationship, their presence, and their cooperation—especially in the context of religious upbringing—reinforce the child's awareness that they are growing up in a safe environment. Together, parents create an atmosphere of support and a willingness to help (Więclawska 2018, 46-55). It is worth noting that a lack of a sense of security in a child's development can lead to consequences such as stress and anxiety, difficulties in relationships, low self-esteem, aggressive behaviour, and trouble making decisions. This, in turn, directly affects challenges in the development of faith, understood as a personal relationship with God (cf. Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization 2020 124, 226-231).

### 3. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH

To verify the initial assumptions, namely the correlation between the educational efforts of fathers and mothers in religious upbringing, empirical research was conducted.<sup>1</sup> Over four hundred people responded to the survey. The vast majority of respondents came from intact families—nearly 90%. Only 16% of participants were from single-parent families. This may provide a relatively solid basis for the assumption that respondents had a relatively high level of security during their upbringing.

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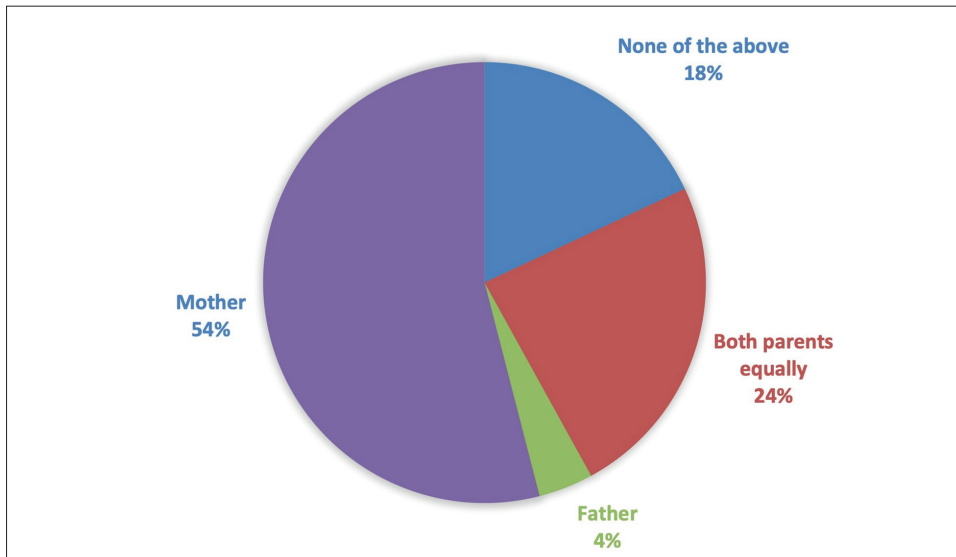
<sup>1</sup> The research was conducted in collaboration with students from the Faculty of Law and Administration at UKSW (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University): Angelika Miszkurka and Julia Oliszewska. The study utilized the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interview) technique, where respondents were asked to complete an electronic survey available on a website. A part of the quantitative research, a questionnaire was designed containing nine questions, including two open-ended ones. This total enabled the collection of empirical data. The data collection process lasted approximately one month (from October 5, 2024 to November 12, 2024). A total of 411 responses were gathered, with nearly 400 being fully completed. Due to the random sampling method and the limited scope of the study, the results cannot be considered representative of the entire country. The primary objective was to obtain preliminary data that could potentially serve as a foundation for broader empirical research in the future. However, the collected data allow the author of this article to draw conclusions that reflect social trends regarding the role of fathers and mothers in religious upbringing within families. The research sample was selected based on the snowball sampling. The survey contained seven closed questions and two open questions. The results of the research were analyzed, which allowed for their description and presentation.

One of the key questions in the study was identifying which parent provided a greater sense of security. In response to the question: Who provided a greater sense of security? (Own research. N=406) around 41% of respondents answered that both parents did. Slightly over 37% indicated that their mother was the primary source of security, while only 12% pointed to their father as the one who provided the greatest sense of security. Nearly 10% of respondents stated that neither parent ensured a sense of security. Interestingly, among those who felt that neither parent provided security, the vast majority came from intact families. Additionally, a noticeable trend emerged: among those who lacked a sense of security in their family, the majority identified their mother as the primary decision-maker in organizing daily life.

An interesting correlation also emerges between the responses to the questions about who provided a sense of security and who was (or is) the primary decision-maker in the respondent's family home (Own research. N=407). About 44% of respondents indicated that both parents shared decision-making equally, while 41% pointed to the mother and 15% to the father. A clear pattern can be observed: in families where a "partnership" model dominates—meaning parents equally share parenting responsibilities—children tend to feel a similar level of care and security from both their mother and father.

Although this trend persists, it is less pronounced when it comes to the question of who taught prayer and other religious practices.

#### Teaching of Prayers



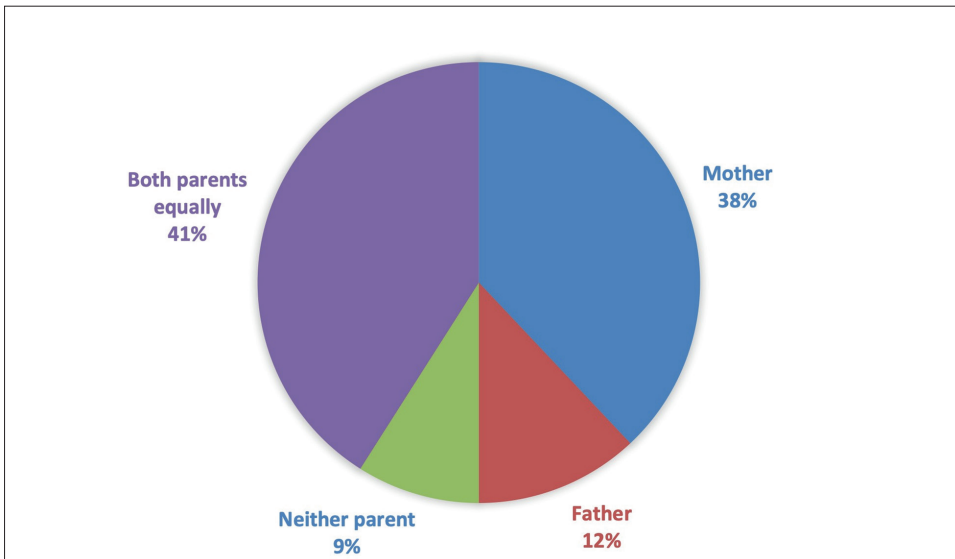
Who taught you prayers and other religious practices?

Source: Own research (N=406).

Nearly one-fourth of respondents indicated that both parents were equally responsible for introducing them to religious practices and teaching them prayers. The majority—54%—pointed to the mother as the primary figure in this role. Only 4% of respondents identified the father, while nearly one in five did not attribute this responsibility to either parent. These findings reflect the traditional approach to religious upbringing in families, where the mother (or women in general) is assigned the role of introducing children to the religious world (CBOS 2025; Osenko-Mizerska 2025, 151-163).

Another important aspect is the question of religious role models in childhood. About 41% of respondents indicated that both parents equally served as role models in religious upbringing. Similar to previous questions, the mother was the second most frequently mentioned figure, with 38% of respondents selecting her—more than three times the number who identified the father (12%). Nearly 10% stated that neither parent was a religious role model.

A odel of religious devotion in the family



Who in your childhood was a model of religious devotion in your family? (Who spoke about God more often and practiced faith-related rituals?)

Source: Own research (N=405).

It can be observed that, despite minimal deviations, a certain trend persists. The percentage distributions of responses to the question of who was the guarantor of security closely align with the responses to the question of who served as a model of religious devotion. Based on this, it seems reasonable to conclude that the sense of security significantly correlates with being a role model in religious upbringing.

	Guarantee of security	Model of religious devotion
Both parents	41%	41%
Mother	37%	38%
Father	12%	12%
Neither parent	10%	9%

Source: Own research.

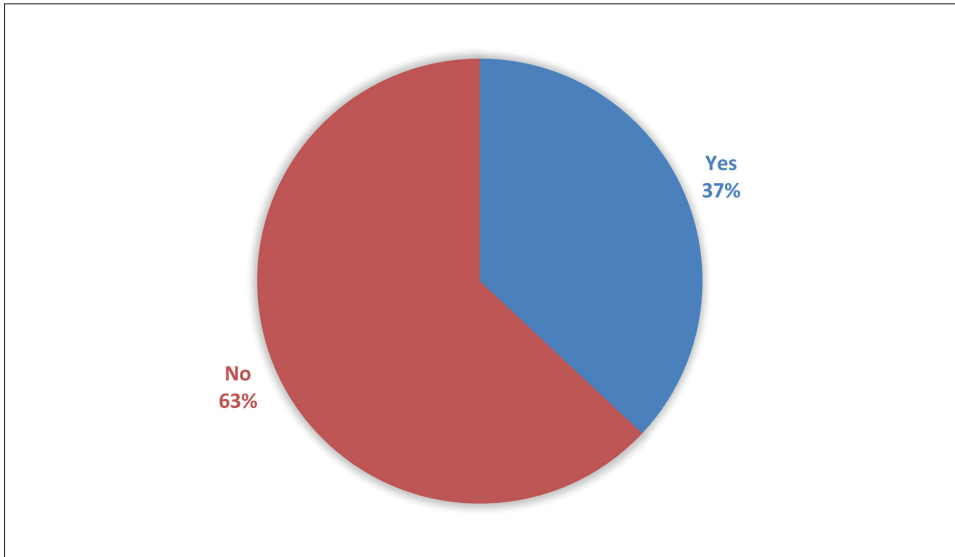
It seems that the above relationship can be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, a sense of security within the family provides a solid foundation for religious upbringing to take place. On the other hand, one could also conclude that a focus on religious upbringing—through a proper model of religious devotion or the introduction of prayer and religious practices—fosters a sense of security for the child within the family. Without a doubt, the most ideal model is one in which both parents—sharing parenting responsibilities equally—provide a sense of security and serve as role models of religious devotion. This creates an environment of educational consistency and emotional stability. It is evident that two engaged parents ensure consistent support in both spiritual and moral dimensions, which directly contributes to a child's sense of security.

The strong role of the mother in ensuring a sense of security and passing on a model of religious devotion may, in turn, be attributed to the deep emotional bond between her and the child. Traditionally, a woman's role has been to accompany the child in growth and development from the very first moments of life. However, the significantly weaker role of the father may be a cause for concern. This could stem from the fact that, in many families, fathers are less involved in child-rearing, including religious upbringing. It is also important to remember that this research focused on adults who were raised in families that operated in previous decades.

In light of the above comparisons, it is also important to consider the situation in which neither parent provides a sense of security nor serves as a model of religious devotion. This may suggest, first, that a lack of security does not foster religious development, and second, that religion itself provides structure, principles, and rituals that contribute to a sense of security.

As a kind of supplement, the study also included questions about the experience of being forced to engage in religious practices. Around 37% of respondents recalled feeling pressured by their parents to participate in religious practices during their childhood and adolescence. Notably, respondents were significantly more likely to identify their mother as the one enforcing these practices—28% pointed to their mother, compared to 8% who indicated their father »Own research. Questions: Have you ever been forced by a parent to engage in religious practices? (N=407); If so, who was the person forcing? (N=398)«.

## Coercion in religious practices



Have you ever been forced by a parent to engage in religious practices?

Source: Own research (N=407).

Forcing children to engage in religious practices can negatively impact their sense of security and significantly influence their religious beliefs in the future. As a result, children may feel a lack of control over their own lives and decisions. A sense of autonomy is crucial for a child's emotional development and overall sense of security.

The classic pedagogical approach to religious development assumes three phases: awakening, development, and fulfilment. At none of these stages is fear or anxiety considered appropriate. Moreover, sensitive and caring parental support can serve as a foundation for a healthy religious attitude in the future. A parallel educational effort by parents can contribute to a sense of security while strengthening both self-identification and identification with a religious group (cf. Walesa 1997, 109-132; Oleśkiewicz 2012, 99-106).

In the final part of this paragraph, it is also worth addressing the role of the father in religious upbringing. Although statistically less emphasized, an analysis of responses to open-ended questions suggests that participants remembered their father's actions more vividly. The dominant responses indicate that the father had little or no influence. The mother's role was overwhelmingly rated positively. However, it is important to note that positive statements about the father often carried a relatively strong emotional charge, which was less apparent in positive statements about mothers. Therefore, it is worth citing a few examples of participants' statements regarding the father's role, where they highlight specific life situations:

- “I believe he had a significant influence, but I only realized it as an older person when I understood that my father didn’t say much, but he always set an example of an honest and righteous life.” (Person’s statement no. 15)
- “My father and I rarely talked about religion, but observing how he regularly went to church and prayed in solitude subconsciously reinforced my belief that faith is important.” (Person’s statement no. 38)
- “My father also had a great influence on the development of my religiosity. He didn’t teach me the words of prayers—that was my mother and grandmother—but I saw how, after each long day of hard work, he would kneel and say a short prayer.” (Person’s statement no. 62)
- “Significant. I will always have the image of my father kneeling by the bed in the evening before my eyes. It was Dad who took us to church every Sunday. He spoke openly about God, and even now, at over 80 years old, he reminds my sister and me that life is easier with God. He tells us to pray for our deceased family members and for good health. He can openly thank God and ask for His help on our behalf. Today, I see how much I owe him. Mom always went to church with us and stood by Dad’s side, but it was he who never left us a choice—in the best sense of the word” (Person’s statement no. 135).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In the survey, two open-ended questions were asked: “What influence do you think your mother had on the development of your religiosity?” (N=358) and “What influence do you think your father had on the development of your religiosity?” (N=353). The collected and analysed responses led to the formulation of five recommendations, which serve both as a summary and as a basis for further research.

##### 4.1. Prayer is not a Recitation Exercise

The primary aspect of religious upbringing can be the way a child is introduced to the world of prayer. At this point, it is worth quoting a few statements from the respondents:

- “My dad taught me prayers and prayed with me. He always spoke well of God and the role of the Church in the world. That was a solid foundation for the later development of my faith.” (Person’s statement no. 300)
- “My mother taught me the basics of religiosity: prayers, and in the evenings, she read me the children’s Bible.” (Person’s statement no. 380)
- “A very strong, absolute one. Our mom instilled religiosity in us from a young age; she was the one who taught us prayers and other rituals. We went to Holy Mass, visited graves, and did other religious practices with her.” (Person’s statement no. 14)
- “Dad demonstrated the practice of personal prayer (I often saw him with the Bible), took care of family prayer, and emphasized the priority of the Eucharist.” (Person’s statement no. 42).

Nearly 50 years ago, Janusz Tarnowski wrote about the danger of parents becoming either “caretakers” or “taskmasters” (cf. Tarnowski 1977, 127-135). Therefore, it is important to ensure that teaching prayer is connected to fostering a personal relationship with God. The process of learning to pray should not be reduced to mere memorization but should instead lead to the development of a prayerful attitude. Another crucial aspect is making prayer a shared experience between parents and children. Praying together, reading the Bible as a family, and participating in Holy Mass together can significantly strengthen family bonds and create a sense of security. However, it is essential that these practices are carried out regularly rather than just occasionally. Consistency and parental closeness play a major role in encouraging a child to seek a relationship with God with confidence, drawing from their experience of family relationships. This connection can be nurtured in the realm of prayer and spiritual life.

The respondents’ answers also highlight a fairly common phenomenon: parents often have differing attitudes toward prayer and religious upbringing. One example is a statement from a participant who expressed radically different opinions about each parent: “Not much, because she forced me to pray” (mother); “A lot. He was and still is a model of perseverance in prayer for me. I always saw him kneeling with a rosary in his hand” (father) (Person’s statement no. 162). Such responses reinforce the idea that leading by example is a far more effective educational method than coercion.

#### 4.2. Upbringing Without Coercion – A Stress-Free Atmosphere

Another important aspect that parents should consider when aiming to foster religious upbringing in an atmosphere of security is the absence of coercion and tension. As respondents’ statements indicate, coercion may be effective in the short term, but in the long run, it tends to have the opposite effect. Here are some examples of responses assessing the influence of the mother or father on the respondents’ religious upbringing:

- “My mom was more involved in making sure I prayed, received the sacraments, etc. During childhood, at the beginning of my faith journey, her involvement was somewhat important. However, over time, despite her good intentions, it sometimes felt too intrusive and discouraging.” (Person’s statement no. 38)
- “Good, although the beginning wasn’t easy because it happened in an atmosphere of mild coercion.” (Person’s statement no. 396)
- “Bad, because she portrayed God as neither merciful nor understanding. She forced us to go to church, saying that God would be angry.” (Person’s statement no. 237)
- “She made sure that I attended Holy Mass and services. She was more like a guard.” (Person’s statement no. 252)
- “Being forced to practice had the opposite effect. For example, I don’t pray the rosary or other ‘seasonal’ prayers. To this day, I don’t go to confession because I was forced into it.” (Person’s statement no. 253).

These statements indicate that forcing a child to engage in religious practices can lead to a negative attitude toward religion and faith. When coercion is used, the child may experience emotions and feelings that, over time, turn into rebellion in adulthood. As emphasized by pedagogy and psychology, coercion can also lead to the breakdown or weakening of family bonds. Children may feel misunderstood and rejected (cf. Kubanek 2015, 107-121).

Stress and pressure can significantly limit a child's or young person's engagement in nurturing their relationship with God or the Church community. Parents' efforts in religious upbringing should focus on creating an atmosphere of respect. While setting expectations is necessary, it should not come from a place of coercion but rather from guidance, support, and a response to the need for growth and security. It is also important to provide space for conversations that build motivation for taking specific actions. This idea is confirmed by positive statements highlighting parents who, instead of using force, acted with care and led by example: "My father taught me respect for Tradition and shared his reverence for clergy and rituals (traditional Catholicism). I wrote that 'no one forced me to practice'—we all practiced together, and my father set a good example and 'inspired' the rest of us." (Person's statement no. 226)

#### 4.3. Respecting a Child's Religious Desires

Another important principle emerging from the research is respecting a child's desires, both in the realm of religious life and in everyday relationships. This is a key element in building mutual trust within the family and in the child's relationship with God. This principle is reflected in statements like the following:

- "He sets an example for me, doesn't force me into anything—which I respect—and creates space for me to express my own thoughts and feelings about religion." (Person's statement no. 48)
- "For him, actions matter more than words. He allows me to follow my own path, although I feel that he would prefer me to stay in the faith that has been passed down in our family for generations." (Person's statement no. 48)
- "None, because luckily she didn't encourage me to do anything." (Person's statement no. 17)
- "A significant one—she was very opposed to the fact that I found faith as a teenager. My relationship with God was so important to me that, despite previously being very obedient to my mother's demands, I started defending my faith against her." (Person's statement no. 34)
- "Just like Dad—I went to church with them, and whenever I didn't want to go, I immediately felt their rejection and resentment towards me." (Person's statement no. 216)
- "He discouraged me by not accepting any objections. He didn't let me find my own path to the church but instead tried to impose his own as the only right one." (Person's statement no. 201).

Commenting on the above statements, one can refer to the words of John Paul II spoken in Wrocław in 1983: “A family is truly itself if it is built on such relationships, on mutual trust, on mutual commitment. Only on such a foundation can the process of upbringing be built, which is the fundamental goal of the family and its primary task. In fulfilling this task, parents cannot be replaced by anyone—nor should anyone take this primary responsibility away from them” (Jan Paweł II 1983). John Paul II expresses a view derived from the Church’s teachings as well as pedagogical principles, which state that mutual respect for each other and one’s needs increases the sense of mutual trust. This is particularly significant in the context of the formation of conscience and the sense of personal dignity (cf. Jan Paweł II 1981, 12; Czajowski 1983, 81).

As J. Zimny notes, the family atmosphere should be built on an attitude of dialogue, trust, decisiveness, and respect for emerging freedom. Parents should show respect not only for the child’s needs but also for their secrets and individuality (cf. Zimny 2020, 13-33). As the analysis of the statements shows, a lack of respect for the child and their views not only harms their sensitivity but also creates a sense of rejection and isolation. It can also lead to discouragement from making efforts related to faith and religious practice. This is far from guiding a child toward a personal experience of faith in a sense of security.

#### 4.4. Speaking Positively About God

Another important element is building a positive image of God. A child who grows up with a positive vision of God more easily develops a loving relationship with Him. This, in turn, strengthens their personal bond with God and removes fear. Among the statements of the study participants who spoke about the influence of their parents on their religious upbringing, the following are worth highlighting:

- “Negative – she conveyed a toxic vision of a ‘punishing God.’” (Person’s statement no. 166)
- “My mom answered most of my questions and doubts about religion and the Church. She made me see religiosity for a long time as an obligation to participate in practices I didn’t understand.” (Person’s statement no. 201)
- “My mother’s relationship with me as a child shaped my image of God as punitive and strict, someone I had to earn everything from—yet never fully satisfy. For many years, my relationship with God was accompanied by fear and a constant feeling that He was always disappointed in me.” (Person’s statement no. 122)

Among the statements, it is also worth mentioning those that reflect positive experiences of parents’ educational efforts:

- “My mom familiarized me with religion and helped me understand the deeper meaning of parables.” (Person’s statement no. 4)
- “Positive – during my crises of faith as a teenager, he showed me that faith could be combined with rational understanding, which undoubtedly influenced the fact that I am a believer today.” (Person’s statement no. 11)

- “Very significant (...) In later years, when I started taking care of my own spiritual growth and joined a youth community, my mom’s role in my development changed. From that moment on, we shared our experiences, and she became a companion in my spiritual journey.” (Person’s statement no. 40).

The statements above suggest that speaking about God in a positive way and explaining the truths of faith to children contribute to strengthening spiritual bonds in one’s personal relationship with God and the Church community. It also fosters a positive outlook on life. A child who knows that God is good does not fear relationships or reactions to their potential mistakes. On the other hand, fear of a punitive God may lead a person to close themselves off from moral growth.

Moral action is then based solely on avoiding sin out of fear of punishment. In this context, it is worth emphasizing the unique role of the father in shaping a proper image of God. A crucial condition is that the father in the family recognizes the authority of God the Father above himself (cf. Bukalski i Cyrny 2009, 57-78). Through his behaviour, he should embody an attitude of mercy rather than that of a lawgiver. Otherwise, this may significantly limit a child’s sense of security in their relationship with God and hinder the development of the virtues of love and trust (cf. Król 2002,74-75; Szewczyk 2000, 76ff).

#### 4.5. Parents’ work on themselves

The final postulate, though no less important and essentially summarizing the previous four, is the concern that parents continuously work on developing their faith and relationship with God. This ensures that parents themselves experience a personal relationship with God, which they seek to nurture in their children. Here are some selected statements from the survey respondents:

- “She initiated it but did not help it develop, and during adolescence, it became one of the causes of a faith crisis.” (Person’s statement no. 22)
- “My mother is a believer, but she never had a significant influence on the development of my religiousness. She is not a practicing believer, so she had no opportunity to directly shape my growth in this area.” (Person’s statement no. 84)
- “I think my issue with anxiety-based religiosity may stem from my father imposing and expecting specific religious practices from me while I did not see those behaviours in him.” (Person’s statement no. 274).

It is also important to highlight statements that appreciate the care shown by parents:

- “My father was always a believer, but he did not practice his faith, so his influence was minor. However, he instilled patriotism in us and strengthened our understanding of history and the idea of faith. In later years, after his conversion, he became an active participant in our family’s religious practices.” (Person’s statement no. 41)

- “She instilled the desire to deepen my faith and set a good example of how a truly faithful person should behave.” (Person’s statement no. 46)
- “Positive! Although it was mainly my grandmother who taught me prayers and a relationship with God, my mother had a huge influence on the development of my religiosity. She took me to church, introduced me to the church community, and I always met many people there. I saw how strong her faith was in everyday life, and that inspired me a lot.” (Person’s statement no. 46)
- “I believe that my father had a significant influence on the development of my religious faith because he was always a true Catholic. I saw many examples of how he lived by Catholic values in his daily life, not just talked about them. I think this strengthened my faith, as I learned from his example.” ( Person’s statement no. 66).

The statements above can be summarized by saying that the key to effective religious upbringing is the authenticity of parents in practicing their relationship with God. This authenticity is understood as faithfulness, originality, and sincerity—ensuring that the expectations set for the child align with the parents’ own actions. When this is lacking, the child perceives a kind of inconsistency: on one hand, there are rules and expectations, but on the other, there is no visible effort from the parents in developing their own faith. In this way, parents unintentionally convey that a relationship with God, faith, morality, and religious practices are not truly important. Authenticity in this context is closely tied to responsibility, honesty, and self-expression.

A child who observes the authenticity of their parents, expressed through their care for their own faith, recognizes that matters of faith are important or even the most important. When considering authenticity in parenting within the context of a child’s need for security, it becomes clear that when parents are authentic and set expectations for themselves as well, the child does not feel deceived or forced into actions that the parents themselves do not follow. Instead of focusing solely on their own “self,” the child learns to prioritize relationships with others, which ultimately leads to a deeper connection with God (cf. Rola and Rola 2024, 231-248; Taylor 1996).

## CONCLUSION

In summary, while Church documents and pedagogical guidelines emphasize the undeniable role of both mother and father in religious upbringing, this task remains quite demanding. The key to success may lie in fostering an atmosphere of security. A family where a sense of safety and mutual trust create a nurturing environment is far more likely to support the proper development of faith experienced in a personal and meaningful way. The research findings clearly indicate that the presence of both parents is perceived as an important source of a sense of security. However, it should be added that from a pastoral and theological perspective, what is decisive is not solely the structure of the family but above all the quality

of the relationships within it. Harmonious, trustworthy, and stable relationships can create a secure environment even in families that are incomplete or marked by difficulties. In the spirit of the exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, it can therefore be said that every family has the potential to become a place of transmitting faith and experiencing security, provided it is rooted in love, respect, and authentic witness. Such an expanded perspective allows the conclusions of the study to more fully reflect the diversity of today's family situations and enhances both its scholarly and pastoral relevance (cf. Francis 2016, 221)

However, it is important to recognize the factors that hinder or disrupt the proper religious development of families and children. The most significant among them include economic changes in the job market, the transfer of educational responsibilities to institutions, the excessive promotion of individual autonomy and self-fulfilment, the negative influence of the media, and a general societal crisis of religiosity. In conclusion, the religious role of the family today largely depends on the level of religious awareness among parents and the specific environmental conditions in which they live.

Nevertheless, research shows that with the proper involvement of both mother and father, raising a child in faith is possible. Studies also indicate a strong correlation between the parents' role in religious upbringing and their efforts to ensure a sense of security. However, a crucial condition for this is the close cooperation of both parents in pursuing this goal, as well as an educational approach that respects both themselves and their children as individuals. Other key elements include: fostering good family relationships based on dialogue and trust rather than coercion, nurturing a genuine personal relationship with God instead of merely reciting prayers as a task or obligation, and respecting the child's needs and desires. Additionally, speaking positively about God and bearing witness to faith play an essential role. At the core of all these principles is the parents' commitment to their own personal growth in faith. When faith becomes the driving force of upbringing, it radiates outward and serves as a testimony rooted in love rather than fear.

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## Spiritual Culture of the Contemporary Child in the Family Environment: Experiential Perspective of Three Generations of Families from the Eastern Borderlands

Kultura duchowa współczesnego dziecka w środowisku rodzinnym. W perspektywie doświadczeń trzech pokoleń rodzin pochodzących z Kresów Wschodnich

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**Abstract:** The article focuses on characterising the elements of the spiritual culture of a contemporary child growing up in a family whose members were resettled from the Eastern Borderlands to Poland after 1945. The phenomenon of intangible culture is introduced from a theoretical standpoint, following which the elements involved in shaping spiritual culture in the family environment are discussed. The research presented here employed a qualitative method of data collection, consisting of individual interviews that were partially guided and issue-oriented. The interviews were conducted with representatives of five families, spanning three generations. Based on the research, it has been established that children develop a specific spiritual culture by receiving verbal transmissions, experiencing rituals in the family environment, as well as through exposure to symbols and being made aware of the essence of particular values. This culture appears to perpetuate multi-generational traditions arising from the collective memory and experiences of families from the Eastern Borderlands. In such a framework, the intensity and interpretation of individual elements depend on the choices of the parents and grandparents, while family represents the highest value. The research indicates that culture is the primary source of identity formation and individual development, preparing individuals to live and coexist with others.

**Keywords:** culture, spiritual culture, Eastern Borderlands, family, upbringing

**Abstrakt:** W artykule skupiono się na scharakteryzowaniu elementów kultury duchowej współczesnego dziecka wychowującego się w rodzinie, której członkowie zostali po 1945 r. przesiedleni z Kresów Wschodnich na teren Polski. Dokonano teoretycznego wprowadzenia w zakresie problematyki zjawiska kultury niematerialnej oraz elementów konstytuujących proces kształtowania się kultury duchowej w środowisku rodzinnym. W prezentowanych badaniach wykorzystano jakościową metodę zbierania danych w postaci wywiadów indywidualnych, częściowo kierowanych skoncentrowanych na problemach. Wywiady przeprowadzono z przedstawicielami 5 rodzin w trzech pokoleniach. Na podstawie badań ustalono, iż dzieci poprzez doświadczanie w środowisku rodzinnym przekazów słownych, rytuałów oraz odbieranie symboli i uświadamianie istoty okre-



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ślonych wartości tworzą specyficzną kulturę duchową. Kulturę, w której należy doszukiwać się implementacji wielopokoleniowych tradycji, wynikających ze zbiorowej pamięci i przeżyć rodzin pochodzących z Kresów Wschodnich, gdzie intensyfikacja i sposób interpretacji poszczególnych elementów zależy od wyborów rodziców i dziadków, a najwyższą wartością jest rodzina. Przeprowadzone badania wskazują, że kultura stanowi źródło kreowania tożsamości, formowania jednostki oraz przygotowuje ją do życia i współegzystowania z innymi.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kultura, kultura duchowa, Kresy Wschodnie, rodzina, wychowanie

## INTRODUCTION

The family is the primary and most important educational environment in which one should seek the existential sources and moral values of each individual, as well as the psycho-pedagogical factors that translate into a characteristic system of relationships between family members (Kawula, Brągiel and Janke 2009, 336). One of its essential tasks is to provide a culture-forming space where the growing child can look within themselves, find answers to their questions, and discover the meaning of life. Functioning within the family system, the young person is equipped with the necessary elements of culture that introduce them to the material and immaterial world of human activity. They acquire virtues, develop their personality and intellect (Parzyszek 2012, 57), and participate in and contribute to the culture of their family environment.

The research considered the multi-generational implementation of a folk tradition which is deeply ingrained in a community originating from the Eastern Borderlands, with specific values attributed to the Christian cultural community (Chałas 2000, 556). In terms of theoretical underpinning, this research is informed by the finding that culture has a material, spiritual and pedagogical dimension, and that symbols, words and rituals should be considered its intangible elements (Wilk and Bieleń 2006, 445).

### 1. RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS

The aim of the study was to characterise the spiritual culture of contemporary children raised in families whose members were resettled from the Eastern Borderlands to Poland after 1945. It focused primarily on answering the following question: What elements constitute the spiritual culture of contemporary children in the family environment, from the experiential perspective of three generations of a family (grandparents, parents, children) from the Eastern Borderlands, and what are their unique characteristics? Detailed issues included: How does language influence the spiritual culture of a child in the family environment? What symbols determine the formation of the spiritual culture of a contemporary child? What role do values and religious roots play in shaping the spiritual culture of a contemporary child? What role do rituals play in building the spiritual culture of a child?

The research relied on the qualitative method of data collection, i.e. individual, partially guided, and issue-oriented interviews (Rubacha 2016, 289).

They were conducted with members of five families whose lives became connected with the Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury. Family representatives were selected in an intergenerational arrangement: grandfather and/or grandmother—mother and/or father—child aged 7-10. The sample was selected deliberately (Rubacha 2016, 120), based on the following criteria: origin from the Eastern Borderlands and resettlement of its members after 1945 to the present-day Voivodeship of Warmia and Mazury; sustained generational continuity between grandparents, parents, and children aged 7-10. The respondents were reached through third-age universities operating in the Warmia and Mazury region. The interviews were conducted between September and December 2024 on the university premises.

Tab. 1. Characteristics of the study group

Family	Generation		
	Grandparents	Parents	Children
I.	grandfather, aged 89	mother, aged 45	female respondent, aged 10
II.	grandmother, aged 70 grandfather, aged 70	mother, aged 40 father, aged 44	male respondent, aged 9
III.	grandmother, aged 71 grandfather, aged 70	mother, aged 48	male respondent, aged 10 l.
IV.	grandmother, aged 90	father, aged 46	female respondent, aged 8
V.	grandfather, aged 88 grandmother, aged 89	mother, aged 46 father, aged 47	male respondent, aged 7

Source: own elaboration.

Data reduction, representation and verification were employed for the analysis. The obtained research material was condensed to isolate analytical categories and assign meanings to them. Stratified selection of units incorporated variables that allowed for the detection of information which made up the context of the data. Data verification was conducted through analytical induction, in which hypotheses were tested against all cases in the study area.

The research was analysed using theoretical analytical categories (Rubacha 2016, 292) based on the following statements (hypotheses):

- the spiritual culture of a contemporary child in the family environment is formed by words, symbols, values, together with the roots of faith and rituals;
- prayer, religious songs and stories—inclusive of their frequency and content—occupy a prominent place among the words that influence the spiritual culture of children;

- in the spiritual culture of contemporary children, symbols such as the cross, the Holy Scripture, the table and holy water play a significant role;
- the values and faith are rooted in the family environment that remains attached to the traditions of the people from the Eastern Borderlands;
- rituals are an important factor in shaping the spiritual culture of contemporary children within a dynamically changing culture-building space where the traditions of past generations are still present.

A coding system was used to collect and analyse the data: a number assigned to family /first letter of the generation, i.e. I/D – I/grandfather; II/M – II/mother; V/Dz – V/child.

## 2. SPIRITUAL CULTURE

Culture plays a substantial role in the life of every individual and connects groups and communities. It develops in the spaces of human interaction, where it determines how an individual perceives the world, makes decisions, organises their private life, and shapes value systems and mindsets (Żuk 2016, 90; Błasiak 2022, 25).

The Pastoral Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council states that culture is defined by all human actions that lead to the improvement of the manifold talents of the spirit and the body. Culture enables the progress of mores and institutions, while also promoting social and family development. Thanks to culture, spiritual experiences are transmitted and preserved in multigenerational social structures, which benefits the existence of every human being, community and nation (Wilk and Bieleń 2006, 445).

According to Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, the personalistic vision of Christian culture promotes openness to seeking personal fulfilment in both the earthly and supernatural dimensions. The human individual is “the principle subject, goal and meaning of all creative endeavour, both cultural and culture-building” (Ficek 2020, 43-44). Cardinal Wyszyński stresses that “above all, it is the human person who creates culture. Although communities such as the state or nation may provide more favourable conditions for its development, the ultimate creator, originator and inspiration is the human themselves” (Wyszyński 1966, 119-120). Culture may be regarded as a reality originating with the human, which represents the outcome of their individual actions and is identified with their experiences in the personal and collective dimension. “By creating culture—leaving an imprint of their spirituality on life and works, on relationships with God, people and nature—humans give it an idea, a theme and a motif” (Ficek 2020, 51).

In the broader cultural domain, we can discern both material and intangible culture. The former is related to the entirety human activities and products that arise in the course of satisfying the needs of species survival and safety. Intangible culture, often referred to as spiritual culture, is perceived as a set of “objectivised products of human consciousness, such as language, beliefs, customs, knowledge, mores, and ideas which perform utilitarian functions and/or manifest a selfless

pursuit to know and reify the ideals of beauty, goodness and truth” (Sakowicz 2022, 39). It is one of the essential dimensions in building a family space, which consists of words, symbols, values, and the roots of faith, as well as rituals. It enables the individual to become anchored in the family sphere and thus shape their identity based on knowledge about themselves, the world (both near and far), and God (Wilk and Bieleń 2006, 464).

Culture, being a specific type of communication, uses words, which are the most common factor in the interactions between individuals. These interactions occur at various levels and encompass all aspects of family life. At the same time, the ideas and works underlying the development of the family, its individual members and the quality of their existence are conveyed and remembered in the words that are uttered (Leszczyńska-Rejchert and Lisowska 2020, 273). Parents, as the vehicle of the words, create a family that should rely on ethical modes of communication. In this manner, the child has the opportunity to maintain mental balance while also acquiring a sense of meaning and value in their actions. They develop a positive self-image while simultaneously perceiving the world and constructing an inner order in a reflective manner (Cegieła 2020, 81).

Young persons discover spiritual culture through the atmosphere and “images” that allow them to perceive the world, internalise a specific configuration of values and define themselves—their aspirations, goals and sensitivities. Symbols are inextricably linked to the familial dimension of faith and the rules which govern the functioning of a society. With Catholic families, they attest in a sense to following the path of Jesus Christ and fulfilling God’s intentions (Wilk and Bieleń 2006, 484).

Rituals are a major culture-forming element in the life of a child and their family, as they enable spiritual structures of the community to be passed on. Rituals enable individuals to become rooted in their home environment, create their own identity, and integrate and develop a “We” identity. They are contingent on the social background, domains of life and experiences (Piwowarski 1996, 208). They may be identified as unreflective and reflective acts, which encompass aesthetic, religious and secular activities, as well as rituals of crises and life cycles. Given the focus on spiritual culture in children, religious rituals are particularly relevant. They are situated within spiritual worship and oriented towards sacramentals, sacraments and the church year (Leszczyńska-Rejchert and Lisowska 2020, 274). Sacramentals may be observed in daily life, in direct or silent demonstrations of faith in God (Nowakowski 2010, 226). Religious rituals introduce children to the community of faith, define its significance and teach them religious practices that bind them to a social group. In the life of a young person, they provide support and a point of reference rooted in the Christian tradition, while also contributing to their formation and upbringing (Piwowarski 1996, 8).

Spiritual culture depends on the moral values instilled in the home environment, as they are responsible for creating a clear, definite hierarchy of goals, ideals, and needs for each family member. They are involved in the process in which an individual acquires freedom as well as comprehends and accepts the

consequences of their actions. Here, one may discern Christian freedom, moral freedom and freedom of choice. As regards the Catholic Church, each believer makes choices guided by the Ten Commandments and examples from the life of Jesus Christ. In the moral context, the individual must struggle between good and evil from birth. Freedom of choice, on the other hand, depends on the social group and the level of responsibility it accepts for the individual's actions. A person cannot decide on their own which aspects of life, choices and actions they should deem good or bad. This is determined by society as a whole through legal and cultural norms (Pilarczyk 2014, 55).

From the standpoint of this study, Christian values represent the ultimate choice, as they guide an individual's pursuit of the spiritual dimension and, at the same time, enable one to defend oneself against any temptations encountered in the course of human life. Christian moral values may develop most fully in the family environment, where normative systems are established and the multifaceted transmission of formative principles occurs. The successive generations are the guarantors of progress and dynamism of the experiences, traditions and familial transmissions. Christian morality is the fundamental pillar of the spiritual culture of the family (Pilarczyk 2014, 57).

### 3. ELEMENTS OF THE SPIRITUAL CULTURE OF CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT—ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH

#### 3.1. The word

##### a. Prayer

All generations surveyed recognise prayer as a verbal transmission that is entirely or partly involved in the spiritual culture of children. Grandparents perceive teaching the Lord's Prayer, other acclamations and prayers to children as a duty of the parents, who should shape young persons in such a way that they are attached to tradition, their native roots and the Catholic faith from an early age. Christian values and daily prayer helped them and their ancestors survive the most difficult times of displacement and war. "Just as we were taught and we taught them, we repeated the text together and said the rosary, so they must do the same. Consumed by work, they rely on us to do it" (I/D). The grandparents emphasise that they would repeatedly help their grandchildren prepare for their First Holy Communion, reviewing the required prayers and church acclamations together. "It has stayed with them, when they go to church, they remember. They don't think about the fact that they know the Commandments of the Church, but when necessary, they can recite them from memory" (V/D).

The generation of parents offers varied assessments of the role of textual transmissions that become instilled in the spiritual culture of their children. In families III and V, learning prayers is seen as a duty of every parent and their concern for the moral upbringing of their children. According to the respondents, talking to God gives the younger generation an opportunity to obtain support and

reflect on how a problem may be solved. It is also a continuation of family traditions and Christian culture—the foundation of the cultural heritage of the population originating from the Eastern Borderlands, to whom faith was a means to improve their lot and forge a memory of the events they had experienced. “Thanks to my having taught my daughter to pray in the morning and in the evening, she now knows that she can always turn to God with her problems and calm down after what’s happened to her” (V/M). On the other hand, the parents from families I, II and IV believe that prayer as an element of their children’s spiritual culture takes the form of needs and obligations associated with religious education classes and preparations for the First Holy Communion. “Maja doesn’t think about those prayers. She learned what she had to do for the Communion, and now she doesn’t really remember” (I/M).

The generation of children and their perception of spiritual culture through prayer and church acclamations reflect the behaviour adopted by their parents. In families III and IV, children find prayer—as a word—to be part of their daily reality. Morning and evening prayers are not said regularly, but they constitute an intangible perspective on talking to God, responding to difficulties and problems, or examining one’s conscience. “I’m glad that in the evening or in the morning I can sometimes tell someone what is bothering me. Sometimes it seems to me that this good advice just comes straight from Heaven, obviously” (III/Dz). In families I, II and IV, where the parents spoke of “occasional contact with prayer” or “compelled by the needs of the situation at school or the church environment”, the children consider it an element which: appeared in their lives at the time of their First Holy Communion; occurs during Mass; represents infrequent contact with God that. “I don’t think about praying. When I’m overwhelmed by problems, then, of course, I pray. If I really want to pass a test, I ask God for help” (IV/Dz).

#### b. Religious songs

The grandparents’ generation considers religious songs to be a vehicle of Polishness, a source of spiritual and material culture. According to the respondents, contemporary children rarely know any church songs by heart. In the case of Christmas carols, the younger generation learns to sing the most popular ones, such as *Lulaj, że Jezuniu*, *Gdy śliczna Panna*, or *Dzisiaj w Betlejem*. “It has always been part of Polish culture, and it’s a good thing that young people know it” (II/B). Grandparents stress that during the festive season, when sitting at the Christmas Eve table, children sing carols together with the whole family.

Parents note that their children enjoy English versions of traditional carols performed by popular artists, with contemporary cadences and unconventional delivery. The younger generation pays attention to the visual style of music videos, concert aesthetics and the performers’ outfits. “My child will notice and even stop for a moment to watch when a new version of a carol comes on. One he thinks is great” (II/T). According to the parents’ generation, carols are present at the Christmas Eve table, and children try to sing them along with the rest of the family.

Children observe that they remember typical church songs when attending Mass. They do not think about their lyrics or message. This is not the case with Christmas carols, which they believe are an expression of Polish tradition; singing them shows that one is Polish and Christian. For them, the joint singing of Christmas carols connotes a home filled with family, friendship and a sense of togetherness. "It's nice when everyone sings together. Dad plays the guitar. Mum sings a bit out of tune, but it's still lovely because we're together" (II/Dz). "You can feel the spirit of Christmas, a closeness to God. It's awesome when everyone starts singing in their own way" (III/Dz).

### c. Stories

The spiritual culture of children encompasses narratives that blend the folk culture of the Eastern Borderlands with Christian teachings. Regardless of the generation or family, respondents mentioned oral accounts they had heard during holidays and special family gatherings. They had been known to the great-grandparents, grandparents and parents, and now their children know them too. The statements of the younger generation indicate that they feel a powerful bond with the narratives, and they know most of them by heart. They emphasise that the stories enabled them to learn about their roots and appreciate how important the values of the Catholic faith were to their ancestors. "I love it when my grandfather tells us at dinner how he used to walk around the village on Easter Sunday and beat his girlfriends with willow osiers. It's so funny" (IV/Dz).

Parents emphasise that children are most readily drawn to stories about regional celebrations of church holidays, especially if the older generation is the protagonist and has experienced an interesting adventure in the course of the story. "Grandmother tells a story about the 'Maying' of cows, which involved feeding the cows and bringing them to the church, for which the children received money" (V/B). Members of families I and IV note that children make use of the information they have heard about peculiar dishes that appear on festive tables or during daily meals. "My daughter asks me for sour milk pancakes with honey. Just like at Grans" (I/M). "This Christmas, my child came up with the idea that we'd make the same dishes that my grandparents used to eat on Christmas Eve back in the Eastern Borderlands" (V/M).

Grandparents remark that their grandchildren are surprised when the stories they tell do not always correspond to contemporary realities. This applies, for example, to the scattering of sweet flag in the countryside during Pentecost or to Jesus bringing gifts. " 'Hold on,' our Michał would say, 'it's not Santa Claus who brings gifts, but Jesus?'" (V/B). Among oral accounts, there are also narratives in which the younger generation sees a continuation of tradition, such as "humorous stories" about decorating houses at Christmas and looking for sweets at Easter. "Once, my grandson turned my story into a poster and sent it to a school competition on Easter traditions, and then the whole family had to look for sweets in the garden" (III/D).

### 3.2. Symbol

#### a. The cross

The cross is a symbol of Christian culture for the younger generation. Its tradition is strongly embedded in the reality of children, who stress that it occupies a central place in every home. “It hangs above the front door” (V/Dz); “At my place, it hangs in the large room above the entrance” (III/Dz); “All Catholics have one. We have one, my grandmother and grandfather have one, my friends have one at home too. It’s a tradition” (I/Dz).

The generation of parents believes that their children consider the cross a symbol of the suffering of Jesus Christ, who reified faith in God and created the path for the sins of every human to be redeemed. Parents and grandparents emphasise that children are aware of the role that the symbol played in the lives of their families during World War II. It was considered a sign of God’s protection over the Polish nation.

#### b. The Holy Bible

The Holy Bible is accepted by the younger generation as a symbol of the Christian faith. Children from families III and V, where parents read the Scripture, state that it requires interpretation and analysis (to the best of their ability). For them, it is a “*księga* [a book of substantial gravity and significance]” that should have a prominent place at home. “When I grow up and have my own home, I will have a special place for the Holy Scripture, just like my mother and grandmother” (III/Dz).

Parents and grandparents from families I, II, and IV emphasise that contemporary children are not very interested in interpreting Scripture. Naturally, they recognise that it is a significant symbol of Christian culture, a tradition passed down from one generation to the next. It becomes obvious to them that every family belonging to the Catholic Church should have the Holy Scripture.

#### c. Table

The table, as a symbol of a bond, of belonging to a specific community, being part of a group and responsibility for one’s own actions, is identified in the spiritual culture of all surveyed children. “The table is the central place. We sit there together and eat and talk and play various games” (V/Dz); “Well, my grandfather always says so, and it’s true, that the table brings us together. Sometimes, when I do something wrong, I sit down with my mum at the table and have to explain myself” (I/Dz); “Well, every house has a big table for the entire family” (III/Dz).

Parents and grandparents from families III and V emphasise that their children perceive the table as: the place where Jesus would meet his disciples; a symbol of the Last Supper. In the life of the family—understood as a community—the table plays a special role, particularly where children are concerned, and remains an important element in shaping their morality and hierarchy of values. Respondents from the parents’ and grandparents’ generations observe that the children see the

table to be a symbol of a place where everyone can meet their loved ones and express their feelings; it is the “centre of the family”.

#### d. Holy water

To the children, holy water is one of the symbols of their spiritual culture. Its identification stems from family traditions that go back many generations and the adopted social norms. All respondents indicated that the presence of holy water at home is associated with the custom of receiving pastoral visits from the local priest each year.

The respondents from the generations of parents and grandparents state the same. They claim that children do not attribute any deeper significance to holy water. Representatives of families III and V emphasise that the younger generation does not perceive it as a symbol which protects the home and its inhabitants or as a manifestation of the Church’s presence in everyday life.

### 3.3 Rituals

An analysis of the material collected during interviews with three generations of the surveyed families demonstrates that, with respect to the spiritual culture of children, the following rituals are observed in the family environment:

- a. hanging of the cross – according to the younger generation, this is a symbol of belonging to the Christian culture that characterises the functioning of their families. Parents and grandparents underline that regardless of the extent to which children identify with the Catholic community, the cross will accompany them as a symbol of faith throughout their lives, as a tradition passed down from generation to generation;
- b. family participation in the Sunday Mass—for the children, this is a form of attachment to Christian culture, i.e. traditions cultivated by their families. In families III and V, this is an expression of attitudes and values instilled in three generations;
- c. shared meal at the table—in every home, the table occupies a central place and, for the younger generation, the object is associated with a sense of belonging to a community, with building bonds and closeness. It symbolises compliance with and application of norms and rules in daily life, as well as support, providing a possibility for turning to the family with any problem; it also constitutes a living space where children do not feel alienated or lonely.
- d. prayer—recited together with the entire family at the Christmas Eve table and during Easter breakfast, it is a tradition for children and an expression of being part of the Christian community. The grandparents’ generation believes that by cultivating shared prayer, young people develop a sense of growing up in a milieu where the values of the Catholic Church are present and thus acquire appropriate patterns of conduct.

- e. tradition of Christian holidays combined with the native culture of the Eastern Borderlands—children emulate behaviours which were developed and established in the generations of their grandparents and parents. They adopt a particular manner of decorating the house as well as the sequence and type of dishes prepared for the occasion, etc. They uphold (in families III and V) the family tradition of attending the midnight service together. Parents and grandparents emphasise that Christian tradition equips young people with values that will help them confront life's challenges.
- f. joint singing of Christmas carols—this integrates family members, unites and brings different generations closer together. Children note that during that time, the entire family “speaks the same language”. Grandparents stress that this is a time when the younger generation is more willing to ask for advice, talk about their expectations and hopes, and more readily listen to older, more experienced family members;
- g. passing on folk stories about past generations and native traditions during church holidays—parents state that such stories foster children's attachment to both their family and Christian culture. They instil young people with values that are passed down from generation to generation, such as goodness, respect, courage, and sacrifice. Children emphasise that the narratives are the history of their great-grandparents and grandparents, persons whom the children consider very important since they can “be in the world” thanks to them. In the opinion of the parents' generation, their children understand the courage and the actions of their ancestors, which have enabled them to live in a democratic society today.

### 3.4. Values

The supreme value identified by children is family: the source of love, security and happiness. “I love my mum. I like doing lots of interesting things with her and I know that she's always waiting for me at home” (I/Dz). The young generation believes it is essential to spend time together with parents and grandparents. “I am glad that we're all together. We do stuff together, and it's cool when my grandfather tells us stories about our family” (III/Dz). The grandparents' generation emphasises that family and faith were the elements that kept people alive during the war and displacement. They helped them move forward so that today they can pass on this legacy to their children and grandchildren. Grandparents believe that children are aware of the role that home and family ties play in a person's life. Parents note that this nurtures their sense of belonging to a cultural community where they learn to live in tolerance and respect for others. Families III and V indicate that their children understand the need to coexist with others in love for God and through God.

Among the values most frequently mentioned by children is friendship, which manifests in caring for one's loved ones, their sense of happiness, as well as in kindness towards one's friends and readiness to help them. Young people seek

friendship both among their peers and family members. "I have friends and that's important for me" (V/Dz); "Actually, I have one best friend. One, but a good one" (I/Dz). "I'm friends with my mum" (III/Dz).

The generation of grandparents stresses that their grandchildren learn respect for the culture of the Eastern Borderlands from a very early age. "Our children have it in the back of their minds that their

came from the Eastern Borderlands, that the Catholic faith was important there" (V/B). The younger generation understands that Catholic values were at the heart of the canon of social norms which governed the life of their ancestors.

## CONCLUSIONS

The spiritual culture of a contemporary child raised in a family whose members were resettled from the Eastern Borderlands to Poland after 1945 encompasses various dimensions, including words, rituals, values, and symbols. These analytical categories were taken into account in the analytical induction and served to verify the adopted assumptions, which remained unchanged throughout the qualitative research. Given the tradition of the three generations of the studied families, it is essential to highlight the varied intensity, significance, and specificity of the individual components that make up the aforementioned spaces.

Rituals play the most prominent role in shaping culture. According to the grandparents and parents, they are a powerful vehicle for values, native traditions and the roots of the Christian faith inscribed in the history of families from the Eastern Borderlands. The young respondents identify rituals that enable them to enter the world of social norms, specify ways of solving problems and acquiring correct patterns of conduct. They emphasise that by cultivating holiday traditions, attending church, and eating meals together, they have a sense of belonging to a specific group. They do not feel alienated or lonely, but experience being with others, being part of the Catholic community, the family of God.

Another important dimension that contributes to spiritual culture in children is language. The research demonstrates that it is recognised as such by the generations of grandparents and parents. Young people focus primarily on the transmissions concerned with family rituals in the form of stories and mention upholding the tradition of singing Christmas carols, which gives them a sense of happiness and teaches them what friendship and love for other people are.

Symbols feature less prominently in the spiritual culture of children. One of the well-entrenched symbols is the cross, which epitomises belonging to the Christian community, as well as the table located in the central place of one's home, a token of active coexistence in the family space, shared decision-making and conscious choices.

The dimensions of words, symbols and rituals determine the formation of values within the spiritual culture of the studied children. The intensity of individual elements, the interpretation of transmission, participation and co-

creation of intangible space translate into the values that emerge as a result, the most important of which is the family. The family is equated with happiness, respect, tolerance, friendship, love and tradition. Children are aware that they are part of the family of God and bear responsibility for its co-creation and functioning.

The importance of elements of a child's spiritual culture for the family space is underlined by Anna Błasiak (2022), who draws particular attention to the culture of speech as a marker of intra-family relationships and a model of how a child should interact with the world and people around them. In turn, Rev. Ryszard Ficek (2020) notes that, in the family environment, Christian involvement for the benefit of culture, including spiritual culture, enables one to shape all complex levels of social life. Thus, as Magdalena Parzyszek (2012) and Anna Leszczyńska-Rejchert (2020) observe, the characteristic elements of spiritual reality include words, symbols, rituals, and values, which are expressed through knowledge, science, religiosity, and morality. Often enough, they also reflect the complex norms of Polish culture, which is deeply rooted in folk traditions. (Chąłas 2000, 556).

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## The Image of School in the Experiences of Malagasy Senior Secondary School Students and Graduates

### Obraz szkoły w doświadczeniach malgaskich uczniów i absolwentów liceów

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**Abstract:** In this article, the author presents the results of a qualitative study conducted among Malagasy senior secondary school students and graduates of the senior secondary school last year. The purpose of the individual in-depth interviews conducted was to reconstruct their educational history. During the analysis of the collected data using Atlas.ti software, a new theme emerged alongside the main one, namely, the image of school in the respondents' statements. This theme was classified as a separate family of codes, within which three subgroups were distinguished: teachers, peer relationships and students. The respondents' statements indicate that discipline plays a vital role in Malagasy schools, enabling students, in their view, to achieve educational success. The school is also an essential catalyst for social integration with peers in the surrounding area. In addition to individual successes, respondents valued the collective celebration of school events. Both final-year senior secondary school students and senior secondary school graduates expressed their disapproval of school dropouts and of teachers with low pedagogical competence.

**Keywords:** education system, social world of school, students, teachers, peer relationships, Madagascar

**Abstrakt:** W artykule autorka prezentuje wyniki badań jakościowych, przeprowadzonych wśród uczniów ostatnich klas oraz absolwentów liceów. Celem przeprowadzonych indywidualnych wywiadów pogłębionych było odtworzenie ich historii edukacji. W trakcie analizy zgromadzonych danych przy użyciu oprogramowania Atlas.ti obok głównego wątku wyłonił się nowy – obraz szkoły w wypowiedziach badanych. Temat ten został zakwalifikowany jako odrębna rodzina kodów, w której wyróżniono trzy podgrupy kodów: nauczyciele, relacje z rówieśnikami oraz uczniowie. Z wypowiedzi badanych wynika, że w malgaskiej szkole istotną rolę pełni dyscyplina, dzięki której w opinii badanych uczniowie mogą osiągnąć sukces edukacyjny. Szkoła stanowi też ważne miejsce jako katalizator integracji społecznej z rówieśnikami z okolicznych miejscowości. Oprócz indywidualnych sukcesów badani cenili wspólne celebrowanie wydarzeń szkolnych. Uczniowie, jak i absolwenci z dezaprobatą wypowiadali się na temat osób, które porzuciły szkołę oraz nauczycieli o niskich kompetencjach pedagogicznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** system edukacji, społeczny świat szkoły, uczniowie, nauczyciele, relacje rówieśnicze, Madagaskar



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## INTRODUCTION

Christian missionaries initiated the formal school system in African countries and later took over and were regulated by the colonial administration. In Madagascar, the first school was established in 1820 in the royal palace in Antananarivo at the behest of King Radama I (1810-1828) by British missionaries David Jones and David Griffiths of the London Missionary Society. It is worth noting that after initial instruction in English, within just a few years, thanks to the codification and standardisation of the Malagasy language, instruction was conducted in the native language. In subsequent years, thanks to the king's support, some 12,000 children studied in schools established by Christian missionaries, and by 1826, approximately 4,000 of them could read and write in Malagasy. The development of Malagasy education was halted in 1895 with the French conquest of Madagascar and the subsequent imposition of a colonial regime in 1905 (Lendzion 2019, 87-90; Dahl 2011, 53-54).

During the colonial period, the aim of schooling – consistent with France's active policy of assimilation – was to educate “good” craftsmen or lower-level functionaries within the colonial system. By promoting Eurocentric values, including materialism and individualism, schools uprooted students from their native culture (Randriamanantena 2009, 5; Lendzion 2015, 220). After regaining independence in 1960, Madagascar, like many other Sub-Saharan African countries, adopted the language of the former coloniser as its official language. This decision meant that education at all levels continued to be delivered in French. The choice was driven, on the one hand, by the absence of textbooks and curricula prepared in Malagasy, and on the other, by the conviction among decision-makers of the time that the native language was of little value and that education conducted in a Western language was superior. It was also significant that the Malagasy elites who assumed power in the country had been educated in colonial schools, which had instilled in them a “colonial mentality” (Ralibera 2006, 144-154; Lendzion 2020, 381-394).

After independence, education in the Malagasy language at all levels was offered only during the period of the Second Malagasy Republic (1975-1992) and the policy of so-called “Malagasisation” of the country. Unfortunately, this was an unsuccessful attempt, which led to a dramatic decline in the quality of education in public schools; one of its consequences is the high rate of illiteracy among today's 40- to 50-year-olds.<sup>1</sup> During the Third Democratic Republic of Madagascar, the 1992 education reform introduced the so-called early exit transitional bilingual programmes, which entailed instruction in French from the fourth grade of primary

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<sup>1</sup> Malagasisation – in the sphere of education – meant the introduction of instruction in the Malagasy language at all levels of schooling. The absence of curricula in Malagasy, the lack of textbooks, and insufficient financial resources for this purpose had disastrous consequences for the education of the generation of students affected by this policy. It is estimated that approximately 54% of the population was illiterate, and only 35% of school-age children attended school. Moreover, only one in a thousand students who began their education during this period successfully completed the upper-secondary school-leaving examination (see also: Lendzion 2019, 95-100; Dahl 2011, 51-80).

school. A subsequent reform in 2008 extended education in the native Malagasy language throughout the entire first stage of schooling, introducing French as the language of instruction only from the lower secondary level – the so-called late exit transitional bilingual programmes (Randriamarotsimba 2014, 136-137).

Today, the education system in Madagascar comprises three years of preschool preparation, five years of primary education (grades 1-5), and secondary education – four years of junior secondary school (grades 6-9) and three years of senior secondary school (grades 10-12 and the terminale class) or four-year vocational schools. At the primary and junior secondary school level, instruction is described as bilingual, while in senior secondary school, instruction is conducted only in French. Each stage of education concludes with an examination and, upon successful completion, the award of a certificate for the respective level of education: the CEPE (Primary School Leaving Certificate), the BEPC (Lower Secondary School Leaving Certificate), and either the upper-secondary school-leaving examination or the BEP (Vocational Education Certificate).

Unfortunately, the quality of education in Malagasy schools is very low. According to 2019 data, the gross school enrolment rate for primary school was 134%, the net enrolment rate was 94.9%, while the completion rate was 63.3%. For junior secondary school, the rates are even poorer, with gross and net enrolment rates of 34.6% and 27.5%, respectively. One in five primary school pupil (22.2%) repeats a year. Only a negligible proportion of young people continue to higher education; in 2020, the gross enrolment rate was a mere 5.5% (Gouëdard 2023, 13-15). The low rates of primary school completion and transition to junior secondary school stem from poor-quality education. According to a 2019 assessment of educational quality conducted in the Francophone Sub-Saharan African countries by the PASEC research team, in Madagascar only 17.5% of pupils in the final year of primary school achieved a sufficient level of reading competence (the average across participating countries was 48%), and 26.5% achieved a sufficient level of competence in mathematics (the average across participating countries was 38%) (PASEC 2020, 80).

One of the contributing factors to the low quality of education in Malagasy schools, alongside curricula that are poorly adapted to socio-cultural realities and the use of French as the language of instruction from the lower secondary level onward (see also: Lendzion 2019, 63-118), is the low level of teacher competence, both pedagogical and subject-specific, in the areas they teach (Gouëdard 2023, 141). It is worth noting that Madagascar, like other African countries, suffers from a shortage of qualified teachers. Faced with staffing shortages, the Malagasy government adopted several measures that have impacted the quality of education. Most importantly, the minimum qualification required for teaching in schools is completion of secondary school education. Another measure, first introduced as early as 1975, permits teachers to be hired and remunerated by schools' Parents' Associations operating within schools. These so-called FRAM teachers constituted

60% of all teachers in 2021.<sup>2</sup> Often, the only condition for their employment is their agreement to work at school<sup>3</sup> (IIPÉ-UNESCO 2020, 11-22; Gouédard 2023, 16). According to data from the Ministry of National Education, in 2020, as many as 83% of teachers lacked pedagogical education. Most qualified teachers work in urban areas in the central part of the island, and they are more frequently employed in junior and senior secondary schools than in primary schools. Consequently, in the poorest rural regions of the country, the proportion of teachers holding a teaching diploma does not exceed 3% (Safin 2024, 7-10).

The low level of education among Malagasy teachers is further evidenced by the PASEC findings mentioned above. Compared with other sub-Saharan African countries participating in the study, only 11.2% of Malagasy primary school teachers achieved the highest level of competence in reading comprehension, and 24% in mathematical competence. Moreover, in both assessed domains, teachers in Madagascar obtained didactic competence scores below the average of teachers from the participating countries, which may translate into difficulties in analysing pupils' behaviour and selecting appropriate teaching methods. These results indicate that many Malagasy teachers lack both the basic pedagogical skills and the didactic competences necessary to ensure an adequate quality of education (PASEC 2020, 175-190; Gouédard 2023, 13-15).

Despite the low quality of education provided by schools in Madagascar, many Malagasy parents regard their children's schooling as the only opportunity for them to escape poverty.<sup>4</sup> Research findings confirm this perception. In 2022, the poverty rate among illiterate individuals was 97%, compared with 83.5% among those who had completed primary education. Among those who had completed secondary education, the poverty rate was twice as low, at 46%, and among those with higher education, it fell to just 17% (Oviedo and Mulangu 2024). It is worth noting that in Sub-Saharan African countries, education has been viewed since colonial times as a key mechanism of social mobility. The level of education achieved determines an individual's life chances (Akyeampong and Adzahlie-Mensah 2018, 197).

## 1. THEORETICAL CONTEXT – THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE SCHOOL

Within the interactionist paradigm, the school is defined as a space of interaction and of situational definition, in which students and teachers reflectively adjust their actions both to the formal institutional requirements and to their own expectations. Piotr Mikiewicz distinguishes three social realities within the world of the school. The first is the world of students, within which they develop shared definitions of school

<sup>2</sup> The name derives from the name of the association Fikambanan'ny ray aman-drenin'ny mpianatra.

<sup>3</sup> There are cases in which FRAM teachers working in rural primary schools have completed only lower-secondary education, having passed the BEPC examination.

<sup>4</sup> Madagascar is among the poorest countries in the world. According to the *Madagascar Poverty Assessment Report*, in 2022, 72.9% of the population lived in poverty (with the rate reaching 80.6% in rural areas and 42.2% in urban areas), including 51.8% living in extreme poverty (56.7% in rural areas and 42.2% in urban areas) (World Bank 2024, 4-5).

situations, interpret the behavioural rules and school duties imposed upon them by the institution, and negotiate their meaning. The second is the sphere of teachers, in which, through informal interaction, educators construct definitions of their professional reality in three dimensions: their perceptions of students and their social background, their attitudes towards the school and its ethos, as well as the approaches they adopt in their work with students. The third is the world of the classroom, a space where the first two spheres – the world of students and the world of teachers – intersect, and where each side, through different strategies, seeks to impose its own vision of the school and thus its own rules (Mikiewicz 2008, 88-90).

By adopting the definition of the school as a “social world,” we assume that although its participants are not passive actors and negotiate definitions of situations in their everyday interactions within the school environment, they nevertheless operate within specific institutional and territorial frameworks. The school as an institution forms part of a broader social system which, from a functionalist-structural perspective, imposes certain functional requirements upon it. Both students and teachers have defined social roles and fulfil the responsibilities associated with them. Conceptualising the school as a “social world” therefore offers a holistic view of its daily functioning in its formal, social, and cultural dimensions. It allows us to reveal the interweaving of structural requirements with the definitions of situations constructed by students and teachers, and to connect positivist and constructivist approaches (Mikiewicz 2008, 91).

At this point, it is also worth referring to Margaret Archer and her critical realist perspective, which analyses the education system from both macro- and micro-level standpoints. According to Archer, understanding the origins and explaining the principles governing an education system in a given country requires drawing upon her morphogenetic approach, within which she identifies four phases: structural conditioning (phase T1), social interaction (phases T2–T3), and structural elaboration (phase T4). A detailed analysis and description of the initial structural context (T1) are essential for understanding and explaining the motives behind the actions undertaken by social actors in phase T2. “This step back provides the source of motives, ‘taken-for-granted positions,’ ideological commitments, adopted strategies, and above all it reveals what the actors wanted (and often more importantly, what they did not want) strongly enough to motivate them to engage in (educational) interaction. This cannot be understood without introducing the prior structural context which ‘conditioned’ the interaction between phases T1 and T2” (Archer 2015, 21). From this perspective, the past and the future are at work in the present, shaping the actions of social actors. It must therefore be assumed that student–teacher relations are conditioned by the historical context of the development of a country’s education system. What we observe is a series of feedback loops, the result of which is the presence of the past within the present (phase T4) (Archer 1981, 280-281).

The shape and functioning of the contemporary education system in Madagascar, as in other Sub-Saharan African countries, have been significantly

influenced by colonial policy and the education system introduced during the colonial period, which subsequently shaped the political elites responsible for developing educational policy in independent states. The devaluation of indigenous culture within the colonial education system fostered in African societies the belief that education modelled on European systems possessed greater value. Consequently, contemporary education systems in Sub-Saharan Africa are, in most cases, formal school systems inherited from colonial administrations, which, aside from minor adjustments, have not undergone comprehensive reforms that would align them with the socio-cultural contexts of developing states. Curricular content, social relations, and structural vectors of power continue to be preserved, meaning that schools maintain colonial modes of regulation, discipline, and the marginalisation of local knowledge and languages. As a result, for many young Africans, schooling does not necessarily constitute a positive experience, and the days spent within school walls have not always been – and are still not – “the happiest” of their lives (Akyeampong and Adzahlie-Mensah 2018, 198-199).

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sub-Saharan Africa has one of the youngest populations in the world. Approximately 70% of its inhabitants are children and young people under the age of 30 (Ichikowitz Family Foundation 2020). According to estimates, nearly 60% of Madagascar’s population is under the age of 25, and the median age is 21.3 years (The World Factbook 2024). Although young people constitute the majority of Africa’s population, there is still a notable shortage of studies that focus specifically on this age group. In particular, there is a lack of qualitative research which, by giving voice to young people, allows the reconstruction of the world as seen and experienced from their perspective. Listening to young people through the use of qualitative methods – ethnographic research or in-depth individual interviews – makes it possible to discern the “subtle dimensions of their experiences” that cannot be captured by quantitative datasets (Kurian and Singal 2021, 3-6; Carter et al. 2023, 519).

In order to reconstruct the educational histories of Malagasy students and to examine school experiences from their perspective, I conducted in-depth individual interviews with 15 final-year senior secondary school students and senior secondary school graduates who had completed school and passed the upper-secondary school-leaving examination not earlier than one year before they participated in the study. The interviews were carried out in two locations: the town of Miandrivazo, the administrative centre of a district in the central-western part of the island (10 interviews, including 5 with final-year senior secondary school students and 5 with senior secondary school graduates), and the large city of Fianarantsoa, the capital of a province located in the central part of the island (5 interviews with final-year senior secondary school students). The participants were between 17 and 25 years of age. The selection of research sites stemmed from the fact that I had previously conducted studies in both locations and was

already recognised there, which enabled me to gain access to the selected schools and to find individuals willing to participate in interviews. In Miandrivazo, I had conducted several rounds of field research in local schools – including both survey studies and focus group interviews with senior secondary school students and teachers. My contact with students and graduates in Fianarantsoa had been more indirect: through an acquaintance, I had previously asked them to write essays about their educational histories. In total, I received 56 essays. The findings from the content analysis of those essays inspired me to undertake further field research, the results of which are presented in this article.

The material collected during the interviews is exceptionally rich and deepens the data obtained in my earlier research. The transcripts of individual interviews were processed using Atlas.ti software. During the analysis of the collected data, alongside the primary theme – the reconstruction of the educational histories of the participating students and graduates – a new and compelling theme emerged: the image of the school in the participants' accounts, which forms the focus of the subsequent part of this article. In narrating their educational histories, the young people spoke about teachers, relationships with school peers, and both positive and negative school experiences. This theme was classified as a separate code family, within which three subgroups of codes were distinguished: teachers, peer relations, and students.

### 3. DISCIPLINE AND PERSEVERANCE AS SYNONYMS OF MALAGASY EDUCATION – ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

#### a. Teachers

It is understandable that, when recounting their educational histories, students spoke extensively about teachers. The theme of teachers emerged spontaneously during the interviews, most often when participants described the difficulties they had encountered in learning. The primary criticism voiced by the interviewees concerned the teachers' low pedagogical competence and their limited ability to convey knowledge effectively – an assessment consistent with the earlier cited PASEC findings regarding the competencies of Malagasy teachers. Respondents complained that teachers were unable to explain subject matter clearly. As a result, students did not acquire the necessary knowledge and made mistakes. “There was a problem at school because the teachers – even in a non-public senior secondary school – did not explain anything, they did not write lessons on the board, they only dictated. So, the children often made mistakes because they did not understand anything; they wrote things down incorrectly... and, as children do, many of them simply gave up when teachers only dictated and did not explain” (Lalina, graduate, Miandrivazo). “This teacher explained things badly, he didn't know how to explain, and we didn't understand anything. Then he expected us to solve tasks, but we couldn't do them” (Francis, final-year student, Miandrivazo).

According to the students, many Malagasy teachers, in addition to lacking pedagogical and subject-specific competence, also demonstrate a lack of

professional diligence. The most frequently cited descriptions of teachers' attitudes included: "they do not take their work seriously," "they do not make an effort," and "they do not care about teaching us anything." One interviewee recounted that his teacher in a rural school attended classes only at the beginning of the school year and was absent for most of the remaining time. Moreover, teachers regularly employed various "disciplinary" measures – shouting, physical punishment, or expelling entire classes from lessons. "When he entered the classroom and noticed that even one person was talking, he threw all of us out of the classroom, and we did not return to the lesson" (Josephin, graduate, Miandrivazo).

– "I didn't like our teacher (in primary school)..."

- Why?

- She was mean.

- What do you mean by 'mean'?

- She often beat the pupils..." (Richard, graduate, Miandrivazo).

Unfortunately, the use of violent disciplinary practices is characteristic of the education systems of many postcolonial Sub-Saharan African countries (Akyeampong and Adzahlie-Mensah 2018).

According to respondents, the problem of low teacher competence affects both public and non-public schools, although complaints more frequently concerned teachers in public schools. Students also emphasised clear differences in teachers' working methods in primary schools, junior secondary schools and senior secondary schools. They often highlighted the higher qualifications and greater professional experience of teachers working at higher levels of education, which corresponds with the research findings cited earlier. In the respondents' view, teachers at the senior secondary level treat students more seriously and place significantly higher demands on them: "Teachers in senior secondary school are different from those in primary school; teachers in primary school, junior secondary, and senior secondary school are really not the same... they have different diplomas. Teachers are no longer so close to the students, they are not 'with' the students the way they are in primary school, and that is the difference" (Onzu, final-year student, Fianarantsoa).

What, then, characterises a good or bad teacher according to the interviewed final-year senior secondary school students and senior secondary school graduates? A good teacher is, above all, someone who can explain subject matter clearly and spark students' interest in the subject. After the lesson, the student understands the material and can repeat it. Moreover, a good teacher is "close to the students"; supportive, understanding, and able to establish positive relationships with them. By contrast, a bad teacher is someone who cannot convey knowledge effectively, shows no interest in students' well-being, behaves maliciously, and uses punitive measures. "In primary school, the teachers I liked were mainly those who knew how to pass on their knowledge to the students, who were not too strict (...), so I liked teachers with experience in education, who knew how to convey the knowledge they had" (Onzu, final-year student, Fianarantsoa). "A bad teacher is

someone who does not know how to teach, who is not interested in the students' future, who is malicious" (Alfred, graduate, Miandrivazo).

It is important to emphasise, however, that a good and supportive teacher does not mean an indulgent one. In the respondents' view, a good teacher is demanding and, when necessary, even strict. Such a teacher is capable of disciplining students and motivating them to study. As a result of their work, students have no difficulty progressing to the next grade or passing examinations, and they feel encouraged to acquire knowledge. Furthermore, the subjects taught by good teachers tend to be liked by students, whereas poor, incompetent teachers discourage learning and, in the African context, contribute to students' dropping out of school. Research conducted among Rwandan secondary school students shows that, similarly to Malagasy students, they value teachers who are committed to the teaching process, are experts in their subject, can convey knowledge effectively, are disciplined, and punctual. Students expect teachers to be approachable and understanding – to embody a "culture of care." A "good teacher" positively influences students' engagement in learning, raises their sense of self-worth, offers hope for a "better future," and makes students "work hard and succeed academically" (Carter et al. 2023, 528-529).

#### b) Peer Relationships at School

The school is a site of intensive peer interaction, both during learning activities and recreational time. In interviews with final-year senior secondary school students and senior secondary school graduates, both positive and negative experiences related to peer relationships within the school environment were reported. Positive accounts referred primarily to cooperation among students, mutual help, and academic support. Respondents emphasised that, in many cases, classmates were the only individuals who supported them in their studies: Interviewees emphasised that, often, the only people who helped them with their studies were their classmates. "I didn't mention it earlier, but here we help each other. I am good at physics, so I help him, and he helps me. We help each other. And that is why I appreciate it; I like our cooperation" (Nancy, final-year student, Fianarantsoa).

Some interviewees spoke not only about collaboration in learning and supporting one another in difficult moments, but also about shared adolescent "misbehaviour," particularly during their teenage years: "Almost all of us did stupid, bad things. We were drawn to them... we skipped classes, and some also smoked and drank" (Alfred, graduate, Miandrivazo).

From the participants' accounts, it may be inferred that the school serves as an important space that catalyses social integration with peers from neighbouring villages. In the interviews, students and graduates mentioned, in addition to individual achievements, shared class experiences as their most positive school memories. They described school celebrations, the enjoyment of participating in them, sporting competitions, and the collective joy when everyone successfully passed examinations or advanced to the next grade. The joy derived from these shared accomplishments stems not only from individual satisfaction in

contributing to a collective achievement but also from the deeply rooted Malagasy concept of *fihavanana*, which denotes group solidarity. Like many other Africans, Malagasy people derive fulfilment from living within a community (Egbekpalu 2023). “And in the final year (of lower secondary school ed.), in the third grade, 5 we achieved 100% on the BEPC examination for the first time. We were the first in our school to reach 100% – everyone passed. Our headmistress and all the teachers were astonished; everyone was astonished that we had managed it, that we passed. I do not know if it was a miracle or what, I really do not know, but all of us succeeded in our school, and everyone passed. It was just amazing” (Nancy, final-year student, Fianarantsoa). “There were no problems; I have many good memories from school. From junior secondary school I have many memories, good memories. We played football, we had a team, and we almost always won, and we won a trophy; that trophy and the photo are still displayed in my house as a keepsake” (Josephin, graduate, Miandrivazo).

Although most participants perceived school as a place of positive peer relationships, some unfortunately experienced exclusion from the class group and instances of public humiliation. These experiences primarily affected students from very poor families. Similar negative peer dynamics in schools were reported by working adolescent students (aged 10-14) in studies conducted, for example, in Ethiopia (Woodhead 1998, 68). It is important to note that the respondents encountered negative peer relations in both public and non-public schools. “Apart from that, the hardest thing for me in Grade 7 was... because the children made me suffer, I felt hurt. They laughed at me, joked about me, and often humiliated me because I was poor; they laughed at my situation” (Charline, graduate, Miandrivazo).

In one interview, the respondent mentioned being perceived as “alien” or “different.” Referring to Malagasy culture and the persistent caste and ethnic divisions within Malagasy society, it may be inferred that the source of his exclusion was not poverty alone but also belonging to a different ethnic group from the majority of students in the class:<sup>6</sup> “As for my classmates, they were just like the teachers. Their parents could afford to pay the school fees and so on. The students said, ‘You are nobody, you are worthless.’ They made fun of me and humiliated me. ‘You are poor; you are not like us’” (Lalaina, graduate, Miandrivazo).

### c) Students

From the participants’ accounts of their educational histories, there also emerges an image of the “student”. According to the interviewees, a good student is, above all, someone focused on learning. Such a student is disciplined, complies with

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<sup>5</sup> The grade structure in the Malagasy education system is as follows: primary school – Grades 11 to 7; junior secondary school – Grades 6 to 3; senior secondary school – Grades 2 to 1, followed by the final-year, the *terminale* class.

<sup>6</sup> There are 18 ethnic groups in Madagascar. During the colonial period, the authorities, applying a “divide and rule” strategy, forced the migration of particular groups – a process that continues to this day (See also: Lendzion 2019).

school regulations, and pursues their goals with perseverance. Through sustained effort, good students achieve educational success – they progress to subsequent grades and pass final examinations. “Our headmistress really wants to have the best results. And I can see what she does, and it is really good – her methods are very logical. If students really concentrate on learning, I am sure that our school will definitely achieve good results, the best results. We just need a bit of time, a bit of concentration, and that’s all” (Nancy, final-year student, Fianarantsoa).

In the interviewees’ narratives, the term most frequently used to describe a good student was “mature.” In their view, one does not become a “mature student” immediately. Primary school – especially the early grades (or preschool in the case of the few who attended) – is a period during which children are introduced to formal learning and gradually begin to understand that the primary purpose of attending school is not play, but the acquisition of knowledge. This requires students to adapt to the rules governing school life. “I remember when my mother took me to school, and everyone, all my classmates, were crying. However, I did not cry. However, when I saw that everyone was crying, I also began to cry. I remember, I really remember what it was like, and I still remember how I told my mum, ‘Go to work now, because I’m going to learn. The teacher is here already.’ Suddenly, I was ready. I was ready to work, ready to learn” (Nancy, final-year student, Fianarantsoa). “In primary school, my classmates... generally, students in primary school are still a bit stubborn, but over time they become more mature (...) Unfortunately, some students left school because they broke the rules... they were too stubborn...” (Onzu, final-year student, Fianarantsoa).

According to the respondents, a “bad student” is undisciplined, unfocused on learning, and preoccupied with activities other than acquiring knowledge. While a relaxed attitude toward learning may still be tolerated in primary school, it is viewed negatively in junior secondary and senior secondary schools. Adolescence is considered a challenging period, when students begin experimenting with alcohol or other substances. “In Grades 4 and 3 (of lower secondary school ed.) there were problems in the class. Students were undisciplined during lessons, they talked, some left the school grounds to drink alcohol” (Francis, final-year student, Miandrivazo).

It is important to emphasise that both the interviewed final-year senior secondary school students and senior secondary school graduates offered a very harsh self-assessment. They did not attribute their educational failures to educational conditions – such as unqualified teachers, overcrowded classrooms, or the use of French as the language of instruction. Instead, they openly stated that they performed poorly because they were insufficiently focused on their studies, had problems with concentration or memory, or considered themselves not intelligent enough. “I started in a public school, but at the beginning I had problems. I had problems with remembering things, with perception, with understanding, with intelligence in general, so my parents changed my school to the Sisters’ school. And the Sisters moved me back one grade, to a lower grade...” (Lalina, graduate, Miandrivazo).

The interviewees attributed their educational successes primarily to their own engagement in learning. In their view, they progressed through the education system successfully above all thanks to their perseverance and consistent pursuit of their goal, namely, completing school and obtaining an education. For Malagasy students, “hard work” is synonymous with “gaining education,” much as it is for many other African students. This stems above all from a perceived lack of support in the educational process and from uncertainty regarding their future. Not knowing what opportunities may be available to them after completing successive educational stages, students regard the single certain course of action as studying, “working hard,” in the hope that it may yield tangible benefits in the future (Andriariniaina 2017). As research indicates, poor educational outcomes in African schools cannot be explained by a lack of motivation or effort on the part of students (Camfield 2011). Most African students pursue their goals with determination: “But I made an important decision, because I had my goal: to fulfil my dreams. My family is very poor, so I want to save them, to help them. I want to save them, because I decided to make an effort in my life to improve our situation. That is why I continued my studies” (Alfred, graduate, Miandrivazo).

According to the respondents, children and young people who did not attend school or who dropped out were, in most cases, themselves to blame – due to a lack of prudence, laziness, or an aversion to the school discipline discussed earlier. “My brothers were too lazy to go to school, but I, I wanted to go to school... they didn’t want to go. I live in a small village... in Tandila, and there were many pupils there” (Josephin, graduate, Miandrivazo).

It should be emphasised that all my interviewees spoke from the standpoint of students who had achieved educational success – success that is by no means self-evident given the low quality of education in Malagasy schools. Attending the final year of senior secondary school – and even more so, being a senior secondary school graduate – constitutes a significant accomplishment. It seems that, in their view, entering and continuing education at successive stages, despite the many difficulties they faced, is something obvious and expected. The respondents spoke critically of peers who did not start school at all or discontinued their education for various reasons: “In Grade 2 (of senior secondary school ed.) there were a few friends who left school and decided to get married and meet other people. And I was, and all my other friends were, surprised. What did she do? What did they do? There were also others who were already in Grade 1, who were supposed to take the final exams the following year... and they decided to get married. As a result, one of my classmates is already pregnant, others already have two children, while we do not have any yet. Many of those who moved up from Grade 7 all the way to the terminale class (from the last year of junior secondary school to the last year of senior secondary school ed.) are already married; they left school, and some already have children. Many live here, but others live in different regions. We were very surprised. What a surprise! What did they – what did she – do? There is one person, one classmate, who was a sensible person, who did something like this, and it was really surprising, it was astonishing...” (Nancy, final-year student, Fianarantsoa).

## CONCLUSIONS

The formal education system in Madagascar – established with the founding of the first school in the royal palace in the nineteenth century and later promoted by the colonial administration – has remained, up to the present day, an important mechanism of social mobility. The possibility of upward mobility through education motivates students to work diligently, thereby legitimising the strict discipline characteristic of Malagasy schools. Students do not question this discipline, even when they are afraid of certain teachers. In their view, discipline helps them focus more effectively on learning and thus achieve better educational outcomes. Those who, in the eyes of the respondents, failed to “mature” into the role of a student due to inappropriate behaviour and were expelled, or who gave up, discontinued their education, and chose an alternative path – such as starting a family early – are perceived negatively. According to the interviewees, such individuals forfeited their chance to improve their living conditions. Also evaluated negatively are undisciplined students and teachers who do not perform their duties conscientiously and who lack pedagogical competence.

From the accounts of the final-year senior secondary school students and senior secondary school graduates, there emerges a certain image of the Malagasy school. Discipline occupies an important place, and in the respondents’ view, it functions as an effective educational strategy because it eliminates undesirable behaviours at school – such as talking during lessons or engaging in “teenage mischief.” The school’s task is to transmit knowledge and to educate the younger generation, teaching them the norms of proper conduct. As the interviews show, young people expect to acquire in school the basic competencies of good citizenship. “Education is important in my life; firstly, because it develops me intellectually, my intellectual abilities. It is important that I am studying in a Catholic school – and that matters, because this school not only develop us intellectually but also shapes our behaviour. The school teaches behaviour, teaches what is good and what is bad; it is not only intellectual education but also learning how to be a good citizen... now and when we are adults” (Onzu, final-year student, Fianarantsoa).

The school is also a key site of student integration. Students enjoy spending time together, particularly organising shared class events, sports competitions, and school celebrations. It is important to emphasise that students support one another in their learning. In the context of teachers’ low pedagogical competence and the limited educational attainment of parents (some of whom are illiterate), students often have no one to rely on but themselves. In Malagasy schools, competition among students is largely absent; instead – consistent with the previously mentioned notion of *fiavanana* – cooperation and a shared pursuit of the goal of completing school predominate. Naturally, alongside collaboration, instances of exclusion also occur. As noted earlier, it is therefore worth examining the roots of such discrimination among students – whether it stems from extreme poverty or from deeply entrenched inter-ethnic divisions.

The quality of education in schools in Madagascar, as in other Sub-Saharan African countries, leaves much to be desired. Despite the numerous difficulties African students encounter throughout their educational journeys, some persevere and successfully complete successive stages of schooling. Their determination is driven by the belief that through their own hard work they will achieve success that will compensate for the effort invested. Qualitative research – including, among other methods, individual interviews – makes it possible to view the education system from the perspective of its participants, young people, thereby offering valuable insights for policymakers responsible for shaping national curricula in particular countries.

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## Homeschooling as a Chance for the Student's Mental Well-being?

### Homeschooling szansą na dobrostan psychiczny ucznia?

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**Abstract:** Homeschooling in Poland is a relatively recent phenomenon that elicits strong and often polarised reactions across different social groups. Proponents emphasise, above all, the individualisation of instruction, which is a defining feature of home education. Opponents, on the other hand, focus primarily on concerns about the potential for social maladjustment among homeschooled children. This context gives rise to a fundamental question about the nature and necessity of homeschooling—more specifically, about its potential benefits and limitations in supporting the mental well-being of students. The aim of this article is to address this issue. Some of the doubts surrounding this topic are clarified through a review of the relevant literature, which serves as a foundation for the analysis of the research problem. The conclusions presented herein are further supported by the results of original, objective qualitative research. In particular, the analysis draws on those aspects of the empirical findings that relate to the mental well-being of homeschooled students. As a result, the study presents an image of homeschooling as a practice that can foster students' psychological well-being, especially in cases where this well-being was compromised during their time in the traditional school system. While the article does not exhaust the complexity of the issue, it offers a valuable starting point for further exploration of the mental well-being of students in the context of home education.

**Keywords:** pupil, homeschooling, home education, well-being, subjective well-being, children outside formal schooling

**Abstrakt:** Homeschooling (edukacja domowa) w Polsce jest stosunkowo nowym zjawiskiem. W różnych grupach społecznych budzi skrajne emocje. Zwolennicy podkreślają przede wszystkim indywidualizację nauczania, która jest cechą konstytutywną edukacji domowej. Przeciwnicy zaś koncentrują się na obawie niedostosowania społecznego wychowanków. W takiej sytuacji rodzi się pytanie o istotę i potrzebę edukacji domowej, a dokładniej o jej możliwości i ograniczenia dla dobrostanu psychicznego podopiecznych. Cel artykułu sprowadza się do uzyskania odpowiedzi na tę kwestię. Pewne wątpliwości na ten temat rozwiewa literatura przedmiotu, z której korzystałam w opracowywaniu postawionego problemu. Sformułowane wnioski wsparłam również wynikami autorskich obiektywistycznych badań jakościowych. Szczególnie zaś wykorzystałam w niniejszej analizie te wątki badań własnych, które odnoszą się do dobrostanu uczniów w edukacji domowej. W rezultacie otrzymałam obraz edukacji domowej jako wspierającej dobrostan psychiczny ucznia, zwłaszcza tego, który poczucie tego dobrostanu utracił w trakcie trwania nauki szkolnej. Tekst nie wyczerpuje podjętego zagadnienia, stanowi jednak pewien punkt wyjścia w pogłębieniu problemu poczucia dobrostanu psychicznego ucznia w edukacji domowej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** uczeń, homeschooling, edukacja domowa, dobrostan subiektywny, dobrostan psychiczny, dziecko poza środowiskiem szkolnym



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## INTRODUCTION

Each year, the number of children and adolescents experiencing mental health crises in Poland continues to rise. UNICEF statistical data on the well-being of Polish children compared to that of peers in EU and OECD countries are discouraging. Poland ranks 31st out of 38 countries surveyed in terms of quality of life and 30th with respect to child well-being (UNICEF 2020). Furthermore, as many as 60% of Polish students report frequent bullying within educational institutions (UNICEF 2020). Scholarly research in pedagogy provides studies that describe schools as places unfriendly to children (e.g., Nowotniak 2002) and as environments where they experience violence (e.g., Cudak 2023). Barely half of Polish pupils (53.3%) report being satisfied with their school environment (Rzecznik Praw Dziecka 2021). The sharp growth in the number of children participating in homeschooling in Poland provides an interesting context for this problem. Currently, approximately 54,000 children pursue compulsory education through this form of instruction (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej 2025). One reason for the choice of homeschooling is the growing awareness among children and parents of the determinants of, and strategies for, preventing, the deterioration of mental well-being arising from the negative impact of the school environment. Consequently, some families deliberately adopt homeschooling as a means of safeguarding or enhancing their child's well-being.

This article considers homeschooling as one method for maintaining the mental well-being of children—students, focusing, among other aspects, on fulfilling compulsory schooling through an alternative mode of education. It presents data from Polish research on the motives and sources of decisions to undertake homeschooling, the process of homeschooling within the family, and the consequences of such a choice. The analysis of homeschooling as a means of maintaining or restoring children's well-being, draws primarily on Kaczmarek's (2016) findings regarding psychological well-being. Some of these findings are supplemented by the author's own research, which focused on the concept of education as perceived by homeschoolers. Research material was collected using qualitative interviews. The issues examined concerned the sources and goals of homeschooling concepts, the methods, forms, and teaching resources used in homeschooling, the strategies for developing educational concepts, and the consequences of adopted educational concepts (Mazurek 2022). Through the analysis and interpretation of the research results, the article presents themes linked to the concept of well-being in the context of homeschooling.

It should be emphasised at the outset that homeschooling (home education) is a practice in which parents choose not to send their children to school in order to assume control and responsibility for the process of raising and educating their own children (Tłuściak-Deliowska & Krawiec 2020, 194). This approach promotes family cohesion, mutual connections between its members, and enables action in accordance with the family's worldview.

## 1. IMPORTANCE OF MENTAL WELL-BEING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Well-being is widely recognized as one of the key determinants of healthy development and a fulfilling life. The concept itself admits of multiple definitions. The conventional understanding of the term “well-being” suggests that it is synonymous with life satisfaction, a subjective sense of happiness, or overall welfare (Dobrostan 2025). The concept of “well-being” is particularly elaborated within psychology, especially in the context of the positive psychology movement. Positive psychology, which emerged in 2000 under the influence of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, draws upon the principles of humanistic psychology while simultaneously distancing itself from its later developments (Strelau & Doliński 2008).

In psychology textbooks, well-being is commonly associated with “subjective (or psychological) feelings of happiness and life satisfaction” (Strelau & Doliński 2008, 684). This term also appears in *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku* (Pedagogical Encyclopaedia of the 21st Century), where Agnieszka Zych (2003) defines it in accordance with a psychological framework as “psychological well-being.” Psychological well-being has also been incorporated into the analyses of Polish educational scholars, including Nikiel (2024), Gierczyk & Renzulli (2023), and Farnicka & Liberska (2015). However, the themes investigated by these authors pertain almost exclusively to pupils in formal schooling. This article seeks to broaden that perspective by extending the discussion to students fulfilling compulsory education through homeschooling.

According to Diener (1984), well-being—defined by the author as “subjective well-being”—consists of two principal components: the cognitive and the affective. Subjective well-being may be assessed through instruments such as the Satisfaction with Life Scale, the Scale of Positive and Negative Experiences, or the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Kaczmarek 2016). Niškiewicz (2016, 140) conceptualises well-being as “the effect of a cognitive and emotional assessment of one’s life, which consists of a high level of fulfilment and life satisfaction,” emphasizing that it constitutes a state, a specific type of “feeling,” or the outcome of a process that precedes a positive evaluation of one’s existence. Accordingly, key correlates of well-being are the values of happiness and satisfaction. The experience of well-being is undoubtedly desirable and inherently rewarding. Given the pronounced subjectivity of well-being, each individual is the sole authority in evaluating their own state. Consequently, self-awareness is a critical factor in the determination of well-being. Self-report is also important from the perspective of self-knowledge of one’s well-being. In view of the above, the role of both family and educators seems to consist in: (1) providing conditions and opportunities enabling the child to experience well-being, (2) supporting the child in cultivating self-awareness and in adequately assessing the situations, events, and processes they encounter, and (3) intervening when the child’s well-being is at risk, bearing in mind that well-being is neither permanent nor irrevocably secured (Niškiewicz 2016).

In the early 2000s, research demonstrated the significance of children's well-being on their academic achievement (Mok & Flynn 2002). High levels of well-being were also found to correlate with elevated altruism, satisfaction with social relationships, and good mental health (Lyubomirsky, King & Diener 2005). More recent research such as that conducted by Aulia (2018), likewise points the importance of school-related well-being in the life of the child. In its absence, children may engage in risky behaviours, exhibit apathy, become victims or perpetrators of violence, develop inadequate or diminished self-esteem, or face suicidal crises. Farnicka & Liberska (2015) highlight that the well-being of a child—particularly one at the threshold of school education—constitutes a crucial resource in the process of adaptation. Accordingly, prior educational experiences are of considerable importance for sustaining the continuity of a child's well-being.

## 2. SCHOOL AS A SOURCE AND PLACE OF EXPERIENCING MENTAL CRISES

Phenomena associated with school functioning can be broadly divided into those that are constructive and beneficial, and those that are detrimental and can be classified as pathologies. The desirable and positive dimensions undoubtedly include education understood as “the totality of influences on individuals and human groups that promote their development, enabling them to become conscious and creative members of the social, cultural, and national community to the highest degree, and to be capable of active self-fulfilment of their own identity and self by undertaking supra-personal tasks (...) it is guiding others towards higher levels of development and their own activity in achieving their full and unique potential. It is the totality of activities and processes that promote development and the state of their effects, that is, the achieved level of competence, identity, and subjectivity” (Kwieciński 1991, 89). Kwieciński's definition aligns closely with the notion of well-being. First, it underscores the development of personal awareness and agency. Second, it points to positive aspects—self-fulfilment, self-development, a sense of identity, and activity—as potential constituents of well-being. Third, Kwieciński emphasizes the interpersonal dimension of the educational process. Well-being is likewise experienced in situations where individuals engage in frequent and satisfying relationships with others (Growiec 2015). In conclusion, education can provide a child with a sense of well-being insofar as it encompasses all these essential elements. Nevertheless, the quality of education significantly conditions this potential, and the everyday reality of schools is interwoven with numerous large-scale pathologies, as demonstrated by research conducted by UNICEF (2020) and Pyżalski (2022).

Social pathologies—defined as behaviours dependent on social judgment, widely condemned (though often culturally relative), and causing harm (Pospiszyl 2008)—are endemic to human groups, and it is difficult to identify environments that are free of them. Such pathologies include corruption, stereotyping, prejudice, terrorism, aggression, addiction, sexual misconduct (e.g., incest), human trafficking, suicide, social exclusion, and scapegoating (Pospiszyl 2008). Each of these phenomena

is extremely complex, both in terms of conceptualisation, causal explanation, prevention, and intervention. Researchers investigating school-related pathologies typically focus on violence and aggression among children and adolescents (e.g., Orłowski 2022). Manifestations of such violence include physical, verbal, relational aggression, as well as the increasingly prevalent phenomenon of cyberbullying (Czemierowska-Koruba 2015). All of these forms constitute grave violations of school regulations and of the principles of social coexistence. The enumerated pathologies observable within school environments may be understood as both anti-socializing and anti-educational in nature. Perpetrators may include teachers (individually or collectively) or students (acting alone or in groups), the latter typically directing aggression either towards peers or teachers. Olweus, one of the leading researchers of bullying, extended his analysis to the concept of mobbing, which he defined as “exposure to negative actions by another person or persons,” characterized by an imbalance of power, and identified as a fundamental and growing problem within schools (1998, 16). Strategies for addressing aggression and violence in schools vary considerably. School support tasks include a range of activities involving prevention, diagnosis of existing pathologies, and intervention, with particular emphasis on victim protection and perpetrator accountability (Olweus 1998). Nevertheless, despite these measures, schools and teachers are sometimes accused of insufficient responsiveness, failure to protect victims, or tacit acceptance of sporadic or ongoing abuse (Mróz, Wójcik & Pyżalski 2022).

Consequently, many parents—especially when their child’s mental well-being is seriously compromised—decide either to transfer the child to another institution or to opt for homeschooling. However, it would be unfair to suggest that schools and the governing ministry are not working towards positive changes. One of the most recent initiatives, designed with student safety in mind, is the enactment of so-called Kamil’s Law (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2022), which provides for a range of preventive programmes and the expansion of psychological and educational specialist staff. Equally important are interventions undertaken in individual cases by teachers, psychologists, parents, or parent councils, and, finally, by students themselves. For example, student communities regularly organize marches, such as the Stop Violence March (Marsz Stop Przemocy). Such attempts to “heal” Polish schools—particularly through grassroots initiatives—are invaluable, especially when considered in the context of the slogan “schools for all,” which aspires to go beyond the discourse of mere inclusion.

### 3. WELL-BEING IN THE CONTEXT OF HOME EDUCATION

Providing optimal conditions for a child’s development is among the primary responsibilities of the family. It is parents who are responsible for their children’s socialisation, for ensuring care at the mental, physical, social, moral, and aesthetic levels (Winiarski 2017). The creation of an appropriate educational environment, however, does not end within the family unit. From the perspective of a broader

understanding of the educational process, parents are also expected to consider the child's future developmental environments, such as preschool or school, which include teachers and educators. Ultimately, the decision whether to send a child to a formal educational institution rests with the parents or legal guardians. When parents decide to homeschool their children, they cite numerous reasons for this decision. The literature identifies, among others, religious motivations (particularly opposition to perceived indoctrination in schools), dissatisfaction with the education system and the quality of instruction, concerns regarding the prevalence of violence in schools, the preservation of family values, and health-related considerations (Neuman & Oz 2020). Additional factors include the desire to strengthen family bonds, the flexibility of the educational process (learning at convenient times and locations), logistical advantages for large families, and, in some cases, the geographical distance of the school (Kunzman & Gaither 2020). The motivations for parental decisions are difficult to exhaust in a few sentences; the article will present only a few of them. Although the reasons for homeschooling are frequently comparable across families, it is important to recognise the specific cultural and national contexts in which such decisions are made, as emphasised by researchers such as Ray (e.g., Ray 2020; Mazama & Musumunu 2014; Thomas 2019).

Homeschooling in Poland is not subject to particularly restrictive regulations. In order to homeschool a child, it suffices to obtain the consent of the school principal for the fulfilment of compulsory schooling outside the school, preceded by a parental application and a declaration that the child will be provided with conditions enabling adherence to the core curriculum applicable at a given educational level. Parents must also undertake to ensure that the child passes annual qualifying examinations in each school year (Prawo Oświatowe, art. 37, 1-2). Given these relatively moderate formal requirements, homeschooling may appear as an accessible means of withdrawing from the school system. To continue homeschooling, the student must pass examinations in the required subjects, thereby demonstrating mastery of the curriculum at the relevant educational level. Parents and children are not obliged to provide extensive justification for the initiation or continuation of homeschooling. However, "homeschoolers"—as both parents and students are referred to (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, online)—are guided by a number of reasons, including those mentioned earlier, for their decision not to send their children to school.

At first glance, homeschooling may appear to be a viable means of individualising both the upbringing and the educational process. Indeed, a recent Polish study (Lendzion & Wołk 2023) examined the motivations of parents who opted for homeschooling. According to these authors, parents frequently emphasised educational concerns such as the limited possibilities for individualised instruction, excessive competition among pupils, the overload of tests and examinations, and the perceived benefits of independent learning. However, other findings are more troubling, as they point to motives grounded in school-related difficulties, including school phobia, parental perceptions of the

school environment as unsafe (violence, drugs, alcohol), and relational problems experienced by children with their peers. Parents additionally report that these are not the only issues affecting a child's well-being. Other contributing factors include excessive time spent at school, inconvenient transport (e.g. due to distance), and the child's heightened sensitivity (Lendzion & Wołk 2023). These findings are consistent with those reported by Gierczarz-Borkowska (2019), Frasunkiewicz (2022), and with the author's own research (Mazurek 2022).

Beyond these specific events prompting families to withdraw children from schools, it is important to examine the deeper sources of parental decisions to homeschool. Based on the author's typology (Mazurek 2022), these may be classified into three categories: (1) external sources, (2) internal sources, and (3) indirect sources. External sources comprise the legal framework of education and unforeseen events; indirect sources refer, for instance, to children's or parents' earlier school experiences; and internal sources encompass the circumstances, traits, and difficulties specific to each family (Mazurek 2022, 115). When considering children's physical or psychological well-being (or well-being in general), such factors are most appropriately classified as indirect or internal. Among indirect sources, the most salient are prior negative school or preschool experiences (e.g. exposure to violence). Internal sources, by contrast, are those related directly to the child, such as pre-existing mental health conditions or current crisis experiences (Mazurek 2022). The examples of motives provided by homeschooling families consistently highlight threats to children's well-being. In many cases, homeschooling is perceived by parents as a strategy to preserve or restore their children's well-being and happiness. Parents interviewed in the author's research frequently underscored this motivation, particularly when reflecting on what they considered important in homeschooling and what they aimed to achieve through it. Moreover, as a result of adopting homeschooling, parents observed a regression in negative symptoms associated with previous school experiences, such as school phobia, nervous tics, and emotional exhaustion caused by bullying (Mazurek 2022, 117). At the same time, homeschoolers identified a range of positive outcomes, including more satisfying peer relationships, opportunities to pursue personal passions, adequate sleep, and stronger family bonds. Taken together, these findings reinforce the view that homeschooling may contribute positively to the well-being of children and adolescents. Building on the author's own research, this article highlights several fundamental dimensions of children's well-being in the homeschooling context. Drawing on Kaczmarek's (2016) conceptualisation of happiness, the analysis assumes that well-being comprises four interrelated domains: psychological, social, eudaimonic, and socio-psychological functioning. Homeschooling, as a context conducive to psychological well-being may be interpreted through the eudaimonic framework proposed by Ryff (1989). Within this perspective, it is oriented towards autonomy (expressed in the subjective conceptions of education developed by homeschoolers, where independence functions as a core value underpinning educational aims), personal growth

(homeschooled children are afforded greater time to cultivate and realise their talents), positive relationships (the development of more satisfying peer and family bonds, often reinforced through participation in educational cooperatives), and self-acceptance (manifested in the continuation of homeschooling as a lifestyle, the discontinuation of medication previously prescribed for stress or low mood, visible improvements in emotional state, and children's articulation of homeschooling as "better" than their prior school experience). Parents of homeschooled children frequently describe this process as a kind of metamorphosis, noting the acquisition of qualities such as assertiveness, responsibility, and resilience in the face of learning challenges that had previously gone unnoticed when the child was enrolled in conventional schooling.

With respect to social well-being, adopting Keyes' (1998) classification, and drawing on the author's own research (Mazurek 2022), it emerges that homeschoolers often display heightened openness to others (the dimension of social acceptance), active involvement in educational cooperatives (the dimension of social integration), and engagement in volunteering or community service (an expression of social contribution). The social well-being of homeschooled children also derives from the families' deliberate choices of community. Homeschoolers frequently establish their own networks, often in the form of educational cooperatives (Mazurek 2022, 116). These are not necessarily based on shared worldview or religious affiliation but rather on cooperation for the sake of children's well-being, collective participation in education, and the sharing of skills and time. Older children sometimes form cooperatives independently, according to their own rules. Those not involved in such groups typically sustain friendships outside school, thus maintaining social connections through family, neighbourhoods, playgrounds, and extracurricular activities (Topp 2008).

Homeschooling has also been shown to foster eudaimonic well-being in the sense described by Waterman et al. (2010), particularly through processes of self-discovery. Children explore their abilities and talents via an individualised learning trajectory, supported by parental approaches such as child-led education. Parents, by means of ongoing quasi-assessment, seek to respond to their children's evolving needs and interests. This responsiveness is closely linked to further aspects of eudaimonic well-being, such as high engagement in meaningful activities and the intrinsic satisfaction of self-expression (e.g. through homeschooling projects). In terms of socio-psychological well-being, as conceptualised by Diener et al. (2010)—encompassing competence, optimism, purpose, meaning, and respect—homeschooling families emphasise the importance of children understanding both why and what they are learning. Particular attention is given to practical "life skills," such as cooking, caregiving, household maintenance, and gardening. Parents also encourage participation in activities that bring joy and satisfaction. In addition, annual examinations conducted within the formal school framework are generally experienced positively, as occasions of accomplishment rather than fear. Nonetheless, some studies present homeschooling in more critical terms: as

a countercultural movement (Kunzman & Gaither 2013), an escape from the system (Frasunkiewicz 2022), as a response to existing problems, or a potential threat to the children's proper socialisation or the broader social good (Lubienski 2000). This raises the question of whether, in particular cases, schools as institutions and environments of children's lives are capable of addressing difficulties in ways that restore or safeguard children's well-being in the face of problems. Where this is not the case, a cautious, evidence-based approach to homeschooling appears justified (Budajczak 2010). Yet, the very existence of homeschooling continues to elicit legitimate concerns regarding socialisation and academic outcomes. Given the relatively recent expansion of this phenomenon, definitive conclusions about its shortcomings should be withheld until more comprehensive empirical evidence becomes available.

## CONCLUSION

The subjective mental well-being of students may be regarded as dependent on a wide range of interrelated factors. Among these, the school and broader extracurricular environment in which the pupil is embedded plays a particularly significant role. When this well-being is compromised, some families opt for homeschooling. Although the motivations underlying such decisions are varied, one recurring rationale is the perception of homeschooling as both an intervention in a child's difficult circumstances—enabling them to continue their education without interruption while maintaining their well-being—and as a preventive measure for sustaining the child's current state of balance and fulfilment. Equally important are the aspects of homeschooling that appear to facilitate the restoration of children's and youth's well-being lost during their prior school experiences. The increasing interest in homeschooling in Poland highlights the urgency of undertaking systematic and critical analysis of this phenomenon, particularly with respect to “dropping out” of school as a strategy for regaining or preserving both mental and physical well-being. Based on the analysis of scientific literature on the well-being of children and young people, complemented by empirical findings concerning the functioning of children in home education—including the author's own research—it may be concluded that homeschooling demonstrates significant associations with students' subjective well-being.

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# Pedagogical Translanguaging as a Strategy of Overcoming Monolingual Foreign Language Teaching Model in Poland

## Translanguaging pedagogiczny jako strategia przezwycięzenia modelu monolingwalnego nauczania języka obcego w Polsce

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**Abstract:** The article explores the potential of pedagogical translanguaging as a theoretical and practical framework for overcoming the monolingual model of foreign language teaching and learning prevailing in the Polish educational system. Drawing on recent developments in translanguaging theory, the study examines how this approach redefines the concept of language competence, emphasizing its dynamic, processual, and integrated nature rather than its traditional lexical-grammatical understanding. The paper also discusses limitations of both monolingual and plurilingual classroom models, proposing instead the concept of a translingual classroom, in which learners consciously construct new linguistic codes through reflective engagement with their native language. Based on this perspective, five theses are formulated that outline the fundamental transformations required in Polish foreign language education. These theses emphasize the irreplaceable role of native language in acquiring additional languages, learner's agency in meaning-making, and the necessity of developing translingual pedagogical practices. The study concludes that pedagogical translanguaging offers a promising path toward reconceptualizing foreign language education in Poland in line with the principles of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR).

**Keywords:** pedagogical translanguaging, trans-sphere, translingual classroom model

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł bada potencjał pedagogicznego translanguingu jako ramy teoretycznej i praktycznej umożliwiającej przezwycięzenie monolingwalnego modelu nauczania języków obcych dominującego w polskim systemie edukacji. Odnosząc się do współczesnych badań nad translanguagingiem, analiza wskazuje, jak podejście to redefiniuje pojęcie kompetencji językowej, traktując ją jako dynamiczną, procesualną i zintegrowaną, w odróżnieniu od tradycyjnego rozumienia ograniczonego do wiedzy leksykalno-gramatycznej. W artykule omówiono również ograniczenia zarówno monolingwalnej, jak i plurilingwalnej klasy, proponując koncepcję klasy translingwalnej, w której uczniowie świadomie konstruują nowe kody językowe poprzez refleksyjne wykorzystanie języka ojczystego. Na tej podstawie sformułowano pięć tez wskazujących fundamentalne zmiany konieczne w polskiej edukacji językowej. Tezy te podkreślają niezastąpioną rolę języka ojczystego w przyswajaniu kolejnych języków, aktywną rolę ucznia w procesie tworzenia znaczeń oraz potrzebę rozwijania translingwalnych praktyk pedagogicznych. Artykuł konkluduje, że pedagogiczny translanguaging może stanowić efektywną drogę do rekonceptualizacji nauczania języków obcych w Polsce, zgodnie z zasadami *Europejskiego Systemu Opisu Kształcenia Językowego* (CEFR).

**Słowa kluczowe:** translanguaging pedagogiczny, sfera trans, model klasy translingwalnej

## INTRODUCTION

Translanguaging is one of current approaches in language acquisition, broadly discussed by linguists and pedagogues (García & Li 2014; Cenoz & Gorter 2022; Canagarajah 2011; Li 2018; Prilutskaya 2021). Including its pedagogical application, it represents a shift in how language use is conceptualized in education. Unlike monolingual or even bilingual approaches that diminish the importance of the native language in favour of the foreign language, translanguaging views language learning as dynamic, fluid, and integrated. In its pedagogical form, translanguaging refers to instructional strategies that leverage the full linguistic repertoire of learners – encouraging the flexible use of native language to support understanding, communication, and learning foreign language. This approach moves beyond traditional distinctions between native language and foreign language, emphasizing meaning-making and cognitive engagement over strict language separation.

The notion of *pedagogical translanguaging* (Cenoz & Gorter 2022) has emerged against the background of the previous considerations. At its core, this concept seeks to apply the theoretical framework of translanguaging to the domain of foreign language education. In particular, it addresses both evolving approaches to language instruction in formal educational settings and shifting understandings of foreign language acquisition which increasingly emphasize learners' dynamic use of their full linguistic repertoires rather than the isolated mastery of a single target language system. These two aspects are closely interrelated and will be central to the considerations developed in this paper.

While terms *translanguaging* and *pedagogical translanguaging* have begun to appear in the Polish academic and educational discourse, their presence remains limited. Theoretical foundations of translanguaging are discussed in selected publications by authors such as Piotr Romanowski (2018), Teresa Maria Włosowicz (2020), and Hadrian Lankiewicz (2020). The concept has also been adopted in educational research conducted in multilingual or linguistically diverse school environments (Blackledge & Creese 2010; García & Li 2014; Lewis, Jones & Baker 2012). In these studies, the existence of a multilingual setting is often treated as a necessary precondition for the implementation of translanguaging-based pedagogy.

In Poland, however, despite the increasing number of individuals who speak languages other than Polish in public spaces and schools, it remains difficult – if not impossible – to ensure the presence of genuinely multilingual environments across the educational system. This challenge has also been acknowledged by international scholars exploring pedagogical translanguaging in various countries and regions around the world (Baker 2011; Blackledge & Creese 2010; Canagarajah 2011; García 2009; García & Li 2014; Li 2011).

In this context, the presented study explores the possible application of pedagogical translanguaging theory to foreign language acquisition in the Polish educational system to overcome the monolingual classroom model. The following research questions

guide our inquiry: (1) How is foreign language acquisition conceptualized within pedagogical translanguaging frameworks? (2) How does translanguaging overcome the model of monolingual classroom in the foreign language acquisition? and (3) What changes does pedagogical translanguaging prompt in the current way of acquiring a foreign language in the Polish educational system?

This article is structured into four main sections. The first section provides a general overview of the concept of translanguaging and its pedagogical variant, discussing its origins, etymology, and a brief review of related theoretical and empirical studies. The second section addresses the process of language competence acquisition through the lens of pedagogical translanguaging. The third section explores how to overcome the monolingual classroom model with the help of pedagogical translanguaging in two variants: the plurilingual classroom and the translingual classroom. Finally, in the third section, we formulated in five theses the changes that are necessary to be introduced in foreign language acquisition in the Polish educational system from the perspective of pedagogical translanguaging.

## 1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF TRANSLANGUAGING

The concept of *translanguaging* originates from the Welsh term *trawsieithu* and was first introduced by Cen Williams at Bangor University in Wales in 1994. Initially, the term was used to describe pedagogical practices in which learners alternated between languages based on the communicative mode – receptive or productive. A typical example of this would be reading in English and writing in Welsh, or *vice versa* (Baker 2011).

Over time, translanguaging practices extended beyond these initial educational applications. They have been observed in classroom contexts where instruction was delivered in Welsh while students responded in English, or where learning materials were available in Welsh, but classroom interactions occurred in English. These observations have led researchers to extend the spectrum of the use of translanguaging to multifaceted linguistic behaviors of multilingual individuals and communities. In addition, translanguaging has become a framework for developing pedagogical approaches that reflect the linguistic complexity of classroom interactions (Blackledge & Creese 2010; García 2009; Li 2011). While these scholars offer distinct interpretations of the term, their discussions converge around the themes of bilingualism and multilingualism, particularly within the context of globalization.

Colin Baker (2011, 288), who played a central role in introducing the term into English-language academic discourse, defined translanguaging as a cognitive and experiential process through which individuals create meaning, build understanding, and acquire knowledge using two or more languages. Lewis, Jones, and Baker (2012) further emphasized that translanguaging entails a dynamic, integrated use of languages to facilitate various cognitive and communicative processes, including thinking, speaking, writing, and learning. Rather than

emphasizing grammatical correctness, this approach prioritizes the functional role of language in meaning-making and communication.

Importantly, pedagogical translanguaging goes beyond the simple use of multiple languages in one classroom. The prefix *trans-* denotes a movement across linguistic boundaries that results in the formation of a novel and complex semiotic reality – one that constitutes a distinct phenomenon in its own right. It also implies a transdisciplinary orientation, challenging conventional definitions of language and language learning (Li 2011). The second part of the term – *linguaging* – as described by Mignolo (2000, 226), refers to the act of “thinking and writing between languages”. This shift from the noun *language* to the verb-like *linguaging* underscores the inherently dynamic and emergent nature of human linguistic activity. Rather than viewing language as a static system or finite resource, this perspective sees it as a form of social action – something we *do* rather than something we *possess*, underscoring that language is a practice, not a possession. In this view, language is not isolated from its context but is constantly shaped by and embedded in specific social, cultural, historical, and political realities (Blommaert 2010; Pennycook 2010).

As previous explanations have indicated, the concept of translanguaging developed in countries where foreign language acquisition corresponded to the requirements of the bilingual classroom model. This assumption could be regarded as a limitation. It seems evident that the potential of pedagogical translanguaging also extends to contexts in which the foreign language learner operates within a monolingual environment, with formal schooling providing the sole source of contact with the foreign language.

It is therefore unsurprising that discussions of pedagogical translanguaging have increasingly addressed three issues typical of foreign language acquisition in monolingual settings: (1) the relationship between the native language and the foreign language, (2) the interplay between teaching and learning within institutional education, and (3) the content of instruction. These issues are explicitly discussed by Piotr Romanowski (2018), who also presents findings from his own empirical research showing that learners’ flexible use of both languages in classroom interaction supports comprehension and communicative competence, underscoring the pedagogical potential of translanguaging beyond bilingual education.

Pedagogical translanguaging transforms teacher-learner relations: the teacher supports learner-led linguistic development rather than transmitting knowledge. Based on Romanowski’s analysis (2018), pedagogical translanguaging introduces modes of pedagogical practice that differ significantly from those found in traditional models of language acquisition. In this approach, the teacher does not occupy a dominant role but instead fosters the development of learner-led linguistic practices and competencies. As a pedagogical strategy, translanguaging aims to promote deeper and more comprehensive understanding of subject matter, support critical thinking, and enhance linguistic flexibility.

As for the content of instruction, Romanowski (2018) does not refer to conventional English language lessons, but rather to the teaching of non-language subjects – such as geography or physics – through a foreign language. This scenario aligns with educational settings characterized by bilingualism, which are distinct from the monolingual conditions that constitute the focus of this article. Here, we are concerned specifically with language learning in monolingual contexts, where the learners' exposure to the foreign language is largely limited to formal classroom instruction, and where the dominant societal language – usually the learners' native tongue – remains the sole medium of communication in most educational and everyday settings. This creates a unique set of pedagogical challenges and requires alternative approaches, such as pedagogical translanguaging, to support the development of communicative competence in the absence of immersive linguistic environments (Canagarajah 2011; Cook 2008).

## 2. LANGUAGE COMPETENCE ACQUISITION IN THE PRISM OF TRANSLANGUAGING

In this section, we address the question: How is the acquisition of foreign language competence conceptualized within pedagogical translanguaging? At the outset, we acknowledge that our analyses refer to the concept of language competence as it functions within the Polish educational system. According to the *National Core Curriculum* (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły podstawowej, Dz. U. 2017, poz. 356, as amended; Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 30 stycznia 2018 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla liceum ogólnokształcącego, technikum oraz branżowej szkoły I stopnia, Dz. U. 2018, poz. 467, as amended) language competence is defined as the sum of three sub-competences: lexical, grammatical, and communicative, and involves the use of linguistic knowledge (lexical and grammatical) in communicative situations. In the process of acquisition, the native language is considered an inhibitor and is therefore deliberately excluded from foreign language lessons (Cummins 1992; García 2009). García (2009) compared this to “boxes” representing separate linguistic codes, where learners switch between languages as isolated systems.

In contrast to the traditional view, in which each language is associated with a separate set of linguistic competences, the concept of pedagogical translanguaging assumes a single, integrated linguistic competence that encompasses the learner's entire linguistic repertoire. Ofelia García presents it as a transition from a native language to a foreign language (García & Li 2014). In pedagogical translanguaging, the acquisition of a foreign language does not focus on reaching the “other shore”, but rather on the process of acquiring it. Contrary to the common understanding of the process as a set of activities aimed at a specific goal, from which they derive their meaning, translanguaging views the process as “being on the move” (processing) (Cenoz & Gorter 2022). In the context of school foreign language acquisition, this

means that language competence is not limited to the final product of teaching and learning but is understood as ongoing production. This production is neither a one-time event nor unconscious (magic secret). The learner is the agent of this process, supported by the teacher (Blackledge & Creese 2010; Li 2011). The learner becomes an active agent, supported by the teacher in the *trans-space*, where meaning emerges dynamically (Canagarajah 2011).

As presented above, language competence in pedagogical translanguaging is unrelated to full mastery of the foreign language but concerns the use of already possessed linguistic knowledge in communicative situations. It should be noted that without activities aimed at raising awareness of this knowledge and eliciting it by the learners themselves, foreign language acquisition is impossible (Lewis, Jones & Baker 2012, 666). This indicates that language competence, as an entry into the space between ignorance and knowledge, presupposes lingual-educational competence on the part of both the teacher and the learner (Rittel 1993; 1994).

Thus, the language competence implied in pedagogical translanguaging differs from the language competence underlying foreign language education in Poland. This competence is a property of every human being by virtue of being a linguistic entity and possessing a native language (Mignolo 2000, 110). It constitutes a whole in which the acquisition of a foreign (second and subsequent) language takes place processually (processing). This acquisition proceeds with conscious awareness and involves producing a new linguistic code based on the already possessed natural code of the native language.

As the above considerations indicate, in pedagogical translanguaging one cannot speak of acquiring language competence in the sense that the learner initially lacks language competence but gains it after completing school-based foreign language learning. As we have shown previously, acquisition involves conscious and creative transformation of linguistic resources in contact with an unknown language (Cenoz & Gorter 2022; García & Li 2014). While not all translanguaging practices are fully conscious, pedagogical translanguaging aims to raise learners' awareness of their linguistic choices and to foster deliberate reflection on how their existing linguistic knowledge can support the acquisition of a new language.

### 3. HOW TO OVERCOME MONOLINGUAL CLASSROOM MODEL

In this section, we consider the possibility of overcoming the monolingual concept of foreign language acquisition, which (still) remains the dominant practice in the Polish educational system and the dominant idea of educational legal norms concerning teaching and learning of a foreign language in Poland. The point of reference of our considerations are the indications included in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): Learning, Teaching, Assessment – Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2020), which provides a comprehensive framework for language policy and assessment across Europe. Although the EU member countries have full autonomy in terms of education

policy, the aforementioned document provides criteria for assessing the quality of this policy in relation to school language education. Before discussing the basic trend that emerges from comparison of the three versions of the CEFR that have been published so far (2001, 2018 and 2020), we will explain what we believe the monolingual classroom model consists of as a practical application of the previously mentioned monolingual concept of foreign language school acquisition.

A fairly widespread belief is that a monolingual classroom gathers foreign language learners who come from the same culture and speak the same native language. From the perspective of pedagogical translanguaging, this belief must be considered oversimplified and completely wrong. In our opinion, teaching and learning a foreign language in a monolingual classroom model is characterised by a situation in which – figuratively speaking – crossing the threshold of the classroom means automatically entering the sphere of foreign language influence. We distinguished three consequences of such an “entry” as quite senseless. The first involves possible complete abandonment of the use of native language during lessons which supposedly facilitates learners’ acquisition of the foreign language. The second consequence relates to the way the teacher works. The teacher’s job is to provide learners with as much philological knowledge of the foreign language as possible. It is tacitly assumed that this knowledge is indispensable in linguistic competence (lexical and grammatical) formation, which will later develop into communicative competence. As we pointed out in the previous section, communicative competence is understood as the use of linguistic competence in more or less fictional communicative classroom situations. Finally, the third consequence concerns the learners’ role in foreign language acquisition. The teacher tries to involve them in the course of the lesson and in the acquisition of language content with the use of a variety of teaching methods, including activity-based methods. It is believed that the attractiveness and novelty of these methods determine the effectiveness of a teacher’s educational work.

We consider learners’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds largely marginal in the monolingual classroom. They may come from the same or different cultures and speak the same or different languages. What truly characterises the monolingual classroom is the central role of the native language in teaching and learning. In pedagogical translanguaging, the native language serves as the irreducible foundation for producing a code specific to the foreign language.

In our view, the CEFR (2001; 2018 and 2020) indications can be seen as a proposal to overcome the monolingual classroom model. The latest version states that “plurilingual competence refers to the ability to call flexibly upon an inter-related, uneven, plurilingual repertoire to make sense of and shape a complex and dynamic world” (Council of Europe 2020, 28). The aim is to broaden perspectives on foreign language acquisition and consider learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Hadrian Lankiewicz (2020) further explains what plurilingual competence entails and how to foster it in the classroom.

Lankiewicz (2020) sees plurilingual competence as the outcome of plurilingualism and a way to overcome the monolingual classroom model. In

a plurilingual classroom, learners from different cultures and languages interact, creating a space that fosters communication and plurilingual competence. Lankiewicz argues that such interaction constitutes foreign language learning, even though it involves simultaneous communication in multiple languages, which he considers the greatest benefit of this model.

The unspoken premise of the plurilingual classroom, where students communicate freely and seemingly acquire plurilingual competence, is immersive language acquisition (Genesee 1987; Swain & Lapkin 2005; Lyster 2019; Lightbown & Spada 2013; Baker 2011). Immersion assumes that direct contact with a foreign language leads to learning, but from a translanguaging perspective, where learners actively produce the new language code, this assumption is rejected. The plurilingual classroom thus resembles a monolingual model, differing only in learners' cultural and linguistic diversity. What both models lack is the *trans-space*, where learners produce a foreign language code grounded in their native language.

Higher accessibility of a foreign language can support learning but is insufficient. Entering the trans-space initiates the process but does not ensure mastery. Pedagogical work is necessary, with the native language serving as an irreplaceable foundation. Learners transform meanings from their native language and relate them to the new code, so pedagogical translanguaging neither promises effortless learning nor renders the native language redundant.

It is worth noting what Lankiewicz pointed out in the second version of the CEFR: the term *language* (present in the first version) was replaced by term *linguaging*. This maneuver, in his opinion, indicates the indirect presence of the idea of pedagogical translanguaging in the document. Such assumption seems to be unjustified, since in our opinion the concept of a plurilingual classroom, constructed by the author in question, does not meet the basic condition of pedagogical translanguaging, which is the conscious acquisition of a foreign language through the reflexive processing of the native language. To express that, we propose the phrase *translingual classroom*, in which translingual practices will be developed for such processing.

#### 4. TRANSLANGUAGING AS AN INSPIRATION FOR THE RECONCEPTUALISATION OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN POLAND

Contemporary foreign language education in the monolingual classroom model, which dominates in most Polish schools, benefits from the immersion-like *only-in-L2* approach, originally promoted within bilingual education. This approach, explicitly recommended in the *National Core Curriculum* (Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 r., Dz. U. 2017, poz. 356; Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 30 stycznia 2018 r., Dz. U. 2018, poz. 467), encourages teachers to conduct classes almost exclusively in the target language, limiting the use of Polish to a minimum. Such practice reflects the persistence of the monolingual teaching paradigm (Romanowski 2018; Włosowicz 2020; Lankiewicz

2020) and stands in contrast to translanguaging-based pedagogies that view the native language as an indispensable learning resource (Butzkamm & Caldwell 2009). In order to really successfully apply the concept of pedagogical translanguaging in Polish education, and therefore to reach the plurilingual competence indicated by the CEFR, it is necessary to act to, firstly, promote the translanguaging classroom model and, secondly, develop and promote good translanguaging practices among foreign language teachers. Both actions require changes in many of the existing philosophies towards foreign language acquisition by both teachers and glottodidactic theorists. Overcoming long-standing beliefs will certainly not be easy or immediate. However, only in this way can an educational practice grounded in the concept of pedagogical translanguaging be developed.

Below, we propose five theses inspired by the concept of pedagogical translanguaging. Their aim is to transform the prevailing understanding of foreign language learning within foreign language education in Poland. They are as follows:

(1) The native language is an irreducible foundation for the acquisition of any subsequent language as a foreign language. Classroom-based foreign language teaching and learning conducted within a monolingual classroom model and using immersion methods hinders – and in some cases even prevents – the meaningful and experiential acquisition of a foreign language.

(2) Learning a foreign language involves the learner's personal effort to construct a new linguistic code based on his or her language competence and knowledge derived from his or her native language. Teaching that transmits ready-made, primarily philological knowledge without actively engaging the learner in the process of discovery and acquisition leaves no lasting imprint in the form of expanded language skills.

(3) The acquisition of a foreign language – and any additional language – occurs through informed and conscious actions undertaken by the learner. A widely held belief in foreign language learning is that knowledge and skills are acquired automatically. This, we believe, reflects a kind of magical thinking – a persistent belief, still rooted in monolingual teaching traditions, that language learning occurs naturally through exposure alone, without metalinguistic awareness or deliberate pedagogical guidance (Lightbown & Spada 2013; Ellis 1997).

(4) Foreign language lessons should be shaped around problematizing content in response to the questions that learners “bring with them” into the classroom. Leaving the problematization of content solely to the top-down structure of the curriculum or textbook suppresses learners' personal responsibility for their own learning and limits their participation in the classroom process.

(5) Teaching a foreign language within a translanguaging classroom model compels the teacher to develop new translanguaging practices, in which students learn the language through communicative experiences – both their own and those orchestrated within the classroom. In contrast, traditional instruction within a monolingual classroom model treats communication as a separate competence and as a linear outcome of accumulated (philological) linguistic knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

It is self-evident that teaching and learning within the Polish educational system cannot remain unaffected by the changes brought about by globalization—including the growing proportion of students who come from different cultural backgrounds and speak native languages other than Polish. This observation also applies to English foreign language lessons. For this reason alone, the prevailing monolingual classroom model requires critical reconsideration. An additional impetus for such reflection comes from pedagogical translanguaging – an innovative concept that calls for a fundamental rethinking of how foreign language learning is approached in school contexts.

In this paper, we presented the core ideas of pedagogical translanguaging and considered their potential for transforming the monolingual classroom model into a translingual one. We argue that pedagogical translanguaging challenges widely held assumptions about the teaching and learning of second languages. These assumptions, in our view, should inspire teachers to seek out educational approaches that build upon the potential of processes unfolding within the translingual domain.

We hope that the reflections offered here will contribute to further critical engagement with the innovative potential of pedagogical translanguaging – both glottodidactic theories derived from practical educational experience (Dakowska 2005) and specific pedagogical strategies for implementation in educational practice.

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**Use of AI:** rarely used for translation of specific expressions.

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## Propagation of the Decroly Method in the “Wychowanie Przedszkolne” Journal (1925–1939): a Theoretical and Practical Context

Upowszechnianie metody Owidiusza Decroly’ego na łamach czasopisma „Wychowanie Przedszkolne” (1925-1939) – kontekst teoretyczny i praktyczny

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**Abstract:** The author scrutinises the dissemination of Jean-Ovide Decroly’s didactic concepts in the pages of the “Wychowanie Przedszkolne” journal from 1925 to 1939. The paper aims to present the theoretical foundations of the method, such as the child’s activity, integration of educational content, and reference to the child’s natural interests, as well as their practical applications in Polish preschool education. For this end, the journal issues from 1925–1939 have been subject to qualitative content analysis using elements of the historical approach. First, the journal’s profile and functions were discussed, followed by a biographical outline of O. Decroly, a medical doctor who became a practical educator and developed his own innovative method. Next, the content of publications devoted to his concept and how he was presented as a scholar, teacher, and reformer were analysed. Particular attention was paid to his concept of a didactic triad, i.e. observation, association and expression as well as “centres of interest”. Both ideas were tools for organising the child’s experiences. The analysis suggests that “Wychowanie Przedszkolne” served as a forum for the transfer and adaptation of Decroly’s ideas to Polish reality and preschool practice, combining theoretical lectures with practical examples that, in turn, contributed to the professionalisation of preschool staff in interwar Poland.

**Keywords:** Decroly method, preschool education, interwar Poland (1925–1939), “Wychowanie Przedszkolne” journal, early childhood pedagogy, professionalisation of kindergarten teachers, history of education

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł analizuje propagowanie pedagogiki Owidiusza Jana Decroly’ego na łamach czasopisma „Wychowanie Przedszkolne” w latach 1925-1939. Celem jest ukazanie teoretycznych podstaw metody – aktywności dziecka, integracji treści kształcenia i odwołania do naturalnych zainteresowań dziecka – oraz ich praktycznych zastosowań w polskiej edukacji przedszkolnej. Materiał badawczy stanowią roczniki pisma z lat 1925-1939, poddane jakościowej analizie treści z elementami podejścia historycznego. W pierwszej kolejności scharakteryzowano profil i funkcje periodyku, następnie przedstawiono zarys biograficzny O. Decroly’ego – od lekarza do pedagoga-praktyka i twórcy nowatorskiej metody. Dalej omówiono treści publikacji poświęconych jego koncepcji oraz sposoby prezentowania go jako uczonego, nauczyciela i reformatora. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono triadzie dydaktycznej obserwacja – asocjacja – ekspresja oraz „ośrodkom zainteresowań” jako narzędziom



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organizacji doświadczeń dziecka. Analiza wskazuje, że „Wychowanie Przedszkolne” pełniło funkcję forum transferu i adaptacji idei Decroly’ego do polskich realiów i praktyki przedszkolnej, łącząc wykład teoretyczny z przykładami praktyki, co sprzyjało profesjonalizacji kadry przedszkolnej w Polsce międzywojennej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** metoda Decroly’ego, wychowanie przedszkolne, Polska międzywojenna (1925-1939), „Wychowanie Przedszkolne” (czasopismo), edukacja wczesnoszkolna, profesjonalizacja nauczycieli przedszkola, historia edukacji

## INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the promotion of Jean-Ovide Decroly’s pedagogical approach presented in the journal “Wychowanie Przedszkolne” in the years 1925–1939. Being one of key approaches to pedagogy, the Decroly method is characterized by the focus on the child’s activity, integration of the teaching content and considering the child’s natural interests. The aim of this article is to analyse how its theoretical assumptions and practical applications in preschool education were presented in the aforementioned periodical.

The article is structured into four main parts. In the first, the author characterizes the “Wychowanie Przedszkolne” journal, examining its thematic profile as well as educational and popularizing functions it served. The second part presents a synthetic biography of Jean-Ovide Decroly, showcasing his professional path which he started as a medical graduate to become an outstanding practitioner of pedagogy, academic lecturer and creator of an innovative didactic method. In the remaining two parts, the content of publications devoted to his pedagogical concept is analysed, as well as the manner in which Decroly was presented as a scholar, teacher and educational reformer. Special attention is paid to the three fundamental aspects of his didactic concept, i.e. observation, association and expression; all three play a fundamental role in the process of the child’s discovery of the world. Methodologically, the article relies on a critical analysis of sources: a qualitative content analysis of all issues of „Wychowanie Przedszkolne” published between 1925 and 1939.

### 1. PEDAGOGICAL JOURNALS OF THE SECOND POLISH REPUBLIC AND THE BIRTH OF “WYCHOWANIE PRZEDSZKOLNE” (1925–1939): PROFILE, FUNCTIONS, AND STRUCTURE

Over the course of the interwar period, psychology and pedagogy underwent significant development, which was reflected in intense research into early childhood. The increased interest in the education of young children and in the preschool pedagogy resulted in the implementation of new educational concepts. Specialist pedagogical journals played a key role in the promotion of modern teaching theories and methods as they constituted a knowledge- and experience-sharing platform.

In Poland alone, between 1918 and 1939, more than 300 periodicals dedicated to pedagogy were issued (Sosnowska 2016, 31; Wira-Świątkowska 2007, 91). Although most of them were published irregularly or periodically, their main goal was to improve the professional competence of teaching staff and to popularize the achievements of Polish and international thinkers in the field of pedagogy. Furthermore, editors sought to raise the educational awareness of the general public, hence the journals constituted a forum for substantive debates on how to restore and model the education system in Poland.

In the above-mentioned period, seven journals targeting preschool teachers were published in Poland (Sosnowska 2016, 33). The most important ones were "Przedszkole," issued by the Section of Preschool Teachers of the Polish Teachers' Union, and "Wychowanie Przedszkolne." The latter was published by the Society for Preschool Education, the first Polish organization to promote preschool education (Sosnowska 2016, 33–34).

"Wychowanie Przedszkolne" appeared regularly between 1925 and 1939, initially as a monthly (1925–1931) to later become a bimonthly. Its creation and development were closely related to the activities of Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa, an outstanding pedagogue and social activist who had been involved in the development of preschool education in Poland for many years (Wira-Świątkowska 2004, 151–156; Leżańska 2008, 59–63).

In her role as editor-in-chief, Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa gave the periodical a specific thematic profile, focusing on the propagation of modern concepts of preschool education and the integration of foreign pedagogical models in Poland. Interestingly, the editorial office of the magazine was located in her private apartment in Warsaw, at 16/6 3 Maja Avenue, which also served the pedagogical community as a venue for the exchange of ideas and experiences.

In the introduction to the first issue of the magazine "Wychowanie Przedszkolne," the editorial board precisely defined its thematic scope, namely:

- scholarly and methodological papers devoted to pedagogy,
- tips on how to use stories, narratives, games, sensory exercises and manual activities in a manner that is both engaging and effective in the educational process of children,
- analyses of the then condition of preschool education in Poland and other countries,
- establishment of a communication platform between teaching staff and the editorial team through the publication of questions and answers,
- reports and reviews of pedagogical literature and children's books (Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa 1925, 2).

Outstanding academics, including pedagogues, psychologists, medical doctors and social activists, collaborated with the editorial staff of "Wychowanie Przedszkolne." Their contributions ensured that the content of the journal was of high quality. Valuable additions to the national contents were translations of foreign articles, introducing readers to international models of preschool education and innovative methods of working with children.

The journal was divided into two main parts: the theoretical one, containing texts on pedagogy, psychology and medicine, and the methodical i.e. practical one, which presented specific solutions to be applied in early childhood education. The internal layout of the periodical and the names of individual sections were frequently modified, reflecting how dynamically the pedagogical thought at the time evolved.

## 2. OVIDE DECROLY'S PATH FROM MEDICINE TO PEDAGOGY

Jean-Ovide Decroly was born into an industrial family on July 23, 1871, in the Belgian town of Renaix, in the eastern part of Flanders. He completed his medical studies at the University of Ghent in 1896, following which he took up a position as an assistant at the university to focus on pathological anatomy. As a laureate of a university competition and a scholarship holder of the *Fondation des bourses de voyage*, he spent the academic year 1896/1897 at the University of Berlin under the supervision of Prof. Langerhaus and at the Pitié-Salpêtrière University Hospital in Paris, where he collaborated with Prof. Raymond and Prof. Joffroy.

While in Berlin and Paris, Decroly came into contact with leading specialists in the field of mental disorders. This directed his interests towards neuropsychiatry and later towards psychology. In 1898, he returned to Ghent, where he continued his research into mental disorders and brain pathology. At the same time, he took up a position at the Polyclinic in Brussels, initially as an assistant in the neurology ward and at a later point in the ward for children with mental retardation and speech impairments. It was there that he first encountered the problem of social and educational alienation of children with disabilities.

In 1901, in his own house, he founded the *Institut d'Enseignement special*: a small clinic where he observed and treated children with intellectual handicaps. In 1910, the *Institut* was moved to *le Vossegat*, a district on the outskirts of Brussels. There, it quickly developed into a laboratory school where children were provided with normal living conditions, appropriate care and education tailored to their individual abilities. The experience gained while working with the handicapped children allowed Decroly to formulate the initial assumptions of his own didactic and educational system as well as postulates concerning how the elementary education should be reformed.

In 1907, with the help of his assistants Julie Degand and Eugène Monchamp, he founded an experimental school for neurotypical children in the Ixelles district of Brussels: *École de l'Ermitage*, located at 60 rue de l'Ermitage. It was an institution he called "a school for life through life" (*l'école pour la vie par la vie*), whose primary goal was to prepare children to function in the natural and social environment and to provide them with the conditions necessary to meet their basic needs. His wife, Agnès Guisset, played a major role in Decroly's endeavors. She supported him in his research, attended conferences, prepared summaries of books and articles, and did translations. In fact, it is thanks to her financial support, particularly the

inheritance she received from her father, a textile entrepreneur, that Decroly was able to pursue his educational projects.

Acknowledging his experience in the field of working with children with disabilities, the education authorities of Brabant asked him in 1912 to give lectures as part of a special education course for teachers. The following year, Decroly began working with the Higher Institute of Pedagogy (*Institut Buls-Tempels*), an establishment providing basic and continuing education for teachers.

At the end of 1918, *Université Nouvelle*, a university with which Jean-Ovide Decroly had been affiliated for ten years, was closed for financial reasons. Nevertheless, the autonomous Faculty of Social Sciences was preserved and continued its activities under the new name *Institut des Hautes Études*. There, Decroly taught courses on mental synthesis in children, occupational orientation and differential psychology.

Starting from 1919, he taught child and adolescent psychology at the University of Brussels (*Université Libre de Bruxelles*). Then, from 1921, he offered classes on educational hygiene and pedagogical therapy for Ph.D. candidates at the medical faculty (Madeja 1958, 275; Wróbel 1962, 45; Dubreucq 1993, 249; Karcz 2003, 626–627; Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2003a, 284; Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2003b, 228–229, 233–234; Van Gorp 2005, 137; Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2018, 225–226, 229).

Decroly's busy schedule and exceptional activity can be evidenced by the list of positions he held in 1927 alone, in addition to his teaching job at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). Apart from giving lectures at schools and institutes in Brussels (Hautes Etudes, Buls-Tempels), he held "provincial courses for special and technical education teachers," was active as a medical inspector for child protection at the Ministry of Justice, and as a chief medical inspector for special services for educational classes in Brussels. Furthermore, he managed the psychology department and the occupational orientation office, the child psychology laboratory at the *Institut des Hautes Etudes* and the Municipal School No. 16 in Brussels. On top of that, Jean-Ovide Decroly headed the *Institut d'Enseignement Spécial* and the *École de l'Ermitage*, and he also managed a polyclinic dedicated to the diagnosis and treatment of children with developmental difficulties. Moreover, he was committed to activities carried out for care institutions, i.e. he was the head of the *Foyer des Orphelins* children's home, where he contributed to the development of innovative support and education methods offered to its pupils (Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2003a, 284–285). In the same year, he also oversaw the relocation of his experimental school from *Ermitage Street* in Brussels to a property on *Avenue Montana* in the suburban district of Uccle.

Surrounded by vast forests, the new site provided favorable conditions for scientific research and innovative teaching methods (Madeja 1958, 276; Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2003b, 234). In 1930, after consulting with parents, the school was expanded to include the three highest grades of secondary school so that its graduates could then pursue university studies (Dubreucq 1993, 251; Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2018, 225–226).

It is worthwhile noting that Decroly perceived urban-industrial society as being marked by numerous social pathologies and maladies such as alcoholism, syphilis and tuberculosis. He believed that all manifestations of deviation in fact resulted from deeper social dysfunctions, and that the latter required systemic prevention through targeted education. The aim of this process was to neutralize destructive environmental impact and to create conditions conducive to a more comprehensive social integration of individuals.

Consequently, the researcher's academic and didactic activity was closely related to his social activism. In 1914, he set up a foundation to support orphans of war and organized an orphanage. He also initiated the establishment of a vocational counselling office, the *Brabant Farm School* and a scholarship fund for working-class students. Furthermore, Decroly actively supported the development of a medical inspection system for juvenile offenders, focusing on the adoption of comprehensive methods in the area of diagnosis and rehabilitation. His approach was based on interdisciplinary research in the fields of psychology, pedagogy and medicine; hence, educational strategies could be adapted to the individual needs of persons at risk of social exclusion (Madeja 1958, 276; Dubreucq 1993, 252; Karcz 2003, 628; Van Gorp 2019, 221–222).

According to the Decroly method, also described as “pedagogy of efficiency,” it is paramount to ensure social integration of as many children as possible. This could be achieved through the use of psychological tests so as to establish norms for individual categories of pupils (Van Gorp 2019, 222). Decroly played a key role in the development of the test movement as he undertook a critical analysis of both European and American diagnostic tools. Together with Julie Degand, he made a significant contribution to the improvement of the intelligence measurement scale elaborated by Alfred Binet and Théodore Simon.

In 1922, he undertook a research trip to the United States with Raymond Buyse; the trip lasted several months and was aimed at analysing the state of contemporary applied psychology, with a particular focus on how to apply tests in education and in social policy (Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2003a, 287; Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2003b, 244; Van Gorp, Depaepe and Simon 2004, 602; Van Gorp 2005, 143; Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2018, 234).

Over the period from 1901 to 1932, he attended around 50 international scientific conferences (Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2003a, 286; Van Gorp, Depaepe and Simon 2004, 594). After more than 10 years of gaining experience at the *Ecole de l'Ermitage*, Decroly proposed his own program of “natural education,” which he presented at the inaugural congress of the New Education League in Calais in 1921. During the subsequent congresses of this organization held in Montreux (1923), Heidelberg (1925), Locarno (1927), and Elsenör (1929), he drew on his own research and experiences and those of his colleagues, as well as the theoretical and practical achievements of other experimental centers, to put forward some new proposals aimed at improving school work (Wróbel 1962, 47; Van Gorp 2006, 40).

Throughout his academic career, Decroly was a lecturer at two Brussels universities: the *Université Nouvelle* (UN) and the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* (ULB), as well as at other institutions and scientific societies such as the *Institut des Hautes Études*, the *Institut Buis-Tempels* and the *Société Belge de Pédotechnie*. His teaching activities ranged from popular education, through pedotechnique and child psychology, to educational hygiene. Numerous students and colleagues who shared his reformist approach to pedagogy were trained under his academic direction.

As of 1922, the Decroly method was officially implemented in all municipal schools in Belgium and became one of the pillars of the new curriculum in 1936 (Mallinson 1955, 69; Karcz 2003, 627–628; Van Gorp 2007, 7–8). His scientific output, comprising over 400 publications in the fields of pedology, pedotechnique, neurology, child psychiatry, *médecine mentale*, criminal anthropology, psychology and special education, was cut short by his sudden death on September 12, 1932. This happened only one month after the congress of the New Education League in Nice, where Decroly gave one of his central lectures entitled "On social change, the unified school and the preparation of the elite" (Madeja 1958, 276; Wróbel 1962, 47–48; Debreucq 1993, 252; Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2003a, 279–280, 283–284; Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2018, 229; Van Gorp, Depaepe and Simon 2004, 613).

### 3. THE DECROLY METHOD PRESENTED IN THE "WYCHOWANIE PRZEDSZKOLNE" JOURNAL

From its very establishment, "Wychowanie Przedszkolne" played an essential role in the propagation of the New Education movement, which was one of the key pedagogical phenomena at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The genesis of the movement in Poland was inextricably linked to the socio-economic, political and cultural transformations that unfolded in the territories of the three partitions before the outbreak of World War I. New philosophical and ideological trends also played an important role in its development, as did the demand for reform of the traditional education system (Drynda 2000, 27–39). Referring to the period of the Second Polish Republic (1918–1939), which is the subject of this analysis, Sobczak (1998) points out that thanks to the efforts of Maria Grzegorzewska, the director of the Institute of Special Education, Decroly's concept of centers of interest, could be implemented in Polish special education institutions. Only in the following years were its principles adapted also in primary schools, including early grades.

Looking at how the Decroly method was introduced into Polish education, the teaching activities carried out at the Jan Kanty Public School in Krakow were of huge significance. There, Maria Garbacz, a teacher working with children in grades 1–3, was in charge of its implementation (Dzierzbicka 1963, 287–289). The fact that the method in question was initially used in special education was also emphasized in articles published in the "Wychowanie Przedszkolne" journal (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 104; Weinlesowa 1933, 76).

The magazine published texts by leading Polish researchers who introduced readers to the latest pedagogical developments in an accessible, yet substantively reliable manner. With regard to the achievements of Decroly, the publications of Polish writers, who often referred to themselves as his students and followers, were of critical importance. It is worth emphasizing that three books on Decroly's pedagogical concept were translated into Polish in the interwar period, which clearly indicates that his method was of great interest to the national pedagogical community. A particularly important work was the monograph on the Decroly method by Amelia Hamaïde, a long-time collaborator and one of the most active advocates of the Belgian pedagogue. In fact, the book was published in Poland twice (Hamaïde 1926, 1932), and its significance is confirmed by numerous overviews, including a review published in "Wychowanie Przedszkolne" (M.F. 1926, 32–33; Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2003b, 229–230; Van Gorp 2006, 43–44; Jacques 2006, 303–304).

Furthermore, two other publications that Decroly authored in collaboration with Gerard Boon and Eugène Monchamp were translated into Polish (Decroly and Boon 1930; Decroly and Monchamp 1931). Their availability in the Polish pedagogical milieu was an important factor influencing the reception of the centres of interest concept and its gradual implementation in the educational system of the Second Polish Republic. This was particularly critical with regard to the then activities aimed at reforming the education system.

As far as the first studies on the reception of the Decroly method in the Polish pedagogical community are concerned, the article by Wanda Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa, published in 1928, played a key role. It presented both the fundamental assumptions of the Belgian pedagogue's concept and the description of the school he created (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 101–104). In the following years, further analyses were made on how to adapt this method to the specific nature of the Polish education system, as exemplified by the 1931 Girtlerowa's study. The author investigated the possibilities of implementing Decroly's principles in preschool education, examining in detail their application in national early school establishments (Girtlerowa 1931, 46–52).

In the following years, publications devoted to Decroly were mainly of memorial nature, especially after his death in 1932. The papers in question mainly focused on his academic achievements and his contribution to the development of pedagogy and child psychology (Oderfeldówna 1933, 77–78; Weinlerówna 1933, 1–4; Weinlesowa 1933, 70–76). In the following part of this paper, a detailed analysis of the manner in which Decroly's profile was presented in the "Wychowanie Przedszkolne" magazine will follow. At this stage, however, it is crucial to focus on the scholar's teaching method itself, the channels of its dissemination and the aspects that individual authors considered fundamental.

Mira Weinlesowa based her analysis on the assumption that the educational and teaching methods developed by Decroly directly reflected his psychopedagogical concept, in which child psychology and pedagogy functioned

symbiotically and consequently created a coherent and complementary whole. Decroly did not limit himself to criticizing the traditional education system; on the contrary, he formulated a consistent theory of modern education underpinned by empirical findings and the positive outcomes of implementing innovative methods in experimental schools (Weinlesowa 1933, 70).

With his didactic concept, he fundamentally sought to prepare pupils for active and creative participation in social life, develop their intellectual potential and stimulate their creativity; this was possible by enabling them to experiment and independently explore the phenomena occurring in the reality surrounding them (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 101).

Evaluating the traditional system of teaching and education, Decroly identified a number of deficits which he attempted to eliminate by applying his own pedagogical method. Mira Weinlesowa offered the following categorization of these shortcomings:

1. No consistency in individual educational activities, excessive thematic fragmentation of classes and a fundamental diversity of their objectives.
2. Disconnection of educational content from the child's real interests and lack of adaptation to their development.
3. Artificial division of educational content into subjects, which is inadequate to the natural development of the child's thought processes.
4. The dominance of verbalism in teaching, which is manifested in the lack of direct contact of the pupil with the discussed subject or phenomenon.
5. Insufficiency of pupils' own activity, spontaneity and the possibility of independent agency.
6. Non-individualized teaching process (Weinlesowa 1933, 70; cf. also Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 101).

Having analysed the structure of lessons taught at schools, Decroly concluded that the concepts discussed at math, language, science and geography lessons were not coordinated and the subjects were completely unrelated to one another. Consequently, in his didactic approach, all disciplines of knowledge should form integral elements of a universal life science, which implies the necessity of their close connection. In accordance with this assumption, any problem should be analysed from different perspectives: natural, historical, mathematical or geographical ones, which also applies to preschool education.

Weinlesowa illustrated this methodological principle referring to "nutrition" as an example of a centre of interest. In her view, the observation of food products and their perception with all the senses corresponds to natural sciences. The location of the places where food is grown or produced is part of the geographical perspective, while the analysis of products in terms of number, size or weight incorporates mathematical concepts (Weinlesowa 1933, 70–71).

As mentioned, Decroly recognized significant deficiencies of the traditional didactic model, in particular the lack of logical and substantive coherence between the individual activities undertaken by pupils as part of the educational process.

The fragmented nature of the teaching content disrupted the continuity of cognitive processes, forcing children to make sudden and unintuitive leaps between unrelated topics. Adapting to dynamically changing content caused difficulties which led to a weakened ability to perceive reality in an integrative way. This in turn in fact compromised the fundamental goal of education, i.e. to holistically show the child the reality and the environmental structures in which it lives.

In response to the indicated deficits, Decroly proposed the principle of concentration in didactics, which became one of the pillars of his pedagogical method. It was introduced through the implementation of a system of centres of interest, the basic assumptions of which included:

1. Structuring of didactic content around overarching thematic categories that serve as axial centres that organize the cognitive process.
2. Implementation of a progressive model of deepening the content of education, where the information provided in the early stages of education was fragmented and elementary, but in the later phases it was successively expanded, supplemented and systematized.

The main objective of this concept was to introduce a dominant theme into the curriculum, which would be analysed from the perspective of a multidimensional interdisciplinary approach. Individual pieces of didactic content did not function in isolation but constituted an integrated system in which the material permeated and complemented each other both in the short term (at individual lessons) and in the long term (over weeks and months). This system allowed for a more natural and effective assimilation of knowledge, taking into account both the developmental needs of the child and the principle of organic integration of content into a unified cognitive construct (Weinlesowa 1933, 71).

Decroly postulated that the didactic program should be closely related to children's natural interests and correspond to the fundamental goal of education, namely, to prepare an individual for life, both in practical and social terms. To achieve this, two main cognitive areas had to be considered: (1) the child's self-knowledge, including the identification of their own needs, goals and aspirations, and (2) the analysis of the environmental conditions in which they function, which would enable these needs to be effectively met.

Universal needs is a category which Decroly considered fundamental in the process of an individual's adaptation to reality. These needs included: (1) the need for nutrition, (2) the necessity of protection against adverse weather conditions, (3) defence mechanisms against threats and antagonistic environmental factors, and (4) the need for solidary work, activity, and rest. The categories listed above formed the organizational basis of the year-round curriculum in Decroly's schools and they determined the selection of educational content and the structure of the didactic process.

The concept of learning about the environment, which was key in the pedagogical model in question, included an analysis of human living conditions, looking at how fundamental needs are satisfied. This process was twofold: on the

one hand, it included the study of the social environment, considered from the perspective of interpersonal interactions in the family, educational institutions and the wider community, and on the other hand, it encompassed the study of the natural environment, with particular emphasis on fauna and flora. As a consequence, Decroly's approach to education was truly interdisciplinary as its structure reflected the organic connections between the individual and the environment in which they live (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 102; Weinlesowa 1933, 71–72).

Weinlesowa observed that the traditional division of teaching content into separate subjects did not do justice to the natural dynamics of children's cognitive processes, which develop in a sequence, involving sensory perception, thought processes and expression.

Decroly, when developing his pedagogical concept, distinguished three fundamental aspects of mental activity that should be reflected in the teaching process:

1. Observation: corresponds to the stage of perception and reception of sensory stimuli. During this phase, the child directly experiences reality through contact with specific objects and phenomena. Sensory exploration is the starting point for further information processing.
2. Association: refers to the process of making associations, as well as analysis and creation of abstract cognitive representations. At this stage, the child integrates the information obtained through observation with their existing experiences, memories and other data from the cultural background. Decroly distinguished four major cognitive methods, corresponding to different stages of the associative process:
  - a) the direct method: based on the child's personal experience,
  - b) the indirect method I – based on the individual's memories,
  - c) the indirect method II – concerning contemporary phenomena, but distant in space,
  - d) the indirect method III – covering historical phenomena.
3. Expression: consists in verbal and non-verbal expressing of acquired experiences and knowledge. At this stage, the child formulates conclusions and presents the effects of its work in a concrete manner (e.g. through drawing, modelling, motor activity) or an abstract one (through writing and oral expression).

What Decroly emphasized is that the individual phases of the cognitive process do not unfold as separate, isolated stages, but rather are closely related and intertwined. During observation, thought mechanisms are triggered, while in the expression phase, both repeated perception and processing of information take place. The above structure was designed not only to systematize the teaching process, but also to create a coherent teaching model that would make it possible to perceive reality holistically and analyse phenomena from different perspectives as part of specific centres of interest (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 103; Weinlesowa 1933, 72).

Weinlesowa analysed the three-part structure of the didactic exercises introduced by Decroly, comparing it with the traditional division into subjects. The author drew the following conclusions:

1. Observational exercises corresponded to classical environmental talks and the study of objects. Their main purpose was to develop sensory perception and cognitive skills through direct contact with objects and phenomena.
2. Associative exercises replaced traditional geography and history lessons, as they enabled the analysis of reality from a temporal and spatial perspective. Thanks to them, the child could place the phenomena they were learning about in the context of their historical evolution and geographical diversity.
3. Expression exercises included both concrete forms of expression such as crafts, drawings, gymnastics, and abstract ones written and spoken language. An important element of the teaching process was also the close correlation of arithmetic exercises with observation, i.e. children, when comparing objects, were to develop numerical intuition and concepts related to numbers, size and mass.

To illustrate this approach, Weinlesowa used “nutrition” as a sample centre of interest, which was the main topic for first graders in a selected school year. The teaching process would begin with the children being introduced to bread, a basic food product. During the observation phase, the teacher would bring various types of bread and rolls to the classroom, which the pupils could analyse by touch, taste and smell. The next step consisted in exchanging observations and systematizing knowledge by comparing the characteristics of different types of bread. This information was then organized in the form of a lesson plan and recorded by the students in observation notebooks, which were additionally illustrated with drawings.

Simultaneously, the evolution of nutrition was thematized during association lessons, where for example, the food of early humans or the diversity of diets in different countries were discussed. For their research, children were tasked with collecting illustrations, documents, and notes related to the topics discussed, which then they placed in association notebooks.

This teaching model demonstrates the fundamental role of the principle of visualization, whereby the child would come in direct contact with a real object of cognition. The elimination of verbalism, defined as passive absorption of information, and the active involvement of pupils in the teaching process allowed to use the full potential of natural cognitive mechanisms, which was one of Decroly’s key assumptions (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 102; Weinlesowa 1933, 72–73).

In addition to standard observational exercises directly related to the centre of interest, occasional lessons were also introduced; they were based on current events in the classroom. These included observing plant growth, classifying objects brought in by children, and making meteorological observations (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 103).

An example of this teaching methodology was described by Sikorska in “Wychowanie Przedszkolne,” where it was illustrated by a sample lesson based on

the observation of a host of sparrows. Children would analyse the behaviour of birds and the ways in which they obtained food and shelter. The cognitive process was spontaneous, i.e. pupils collected information in the course of their own observations; then, the information was systematized and supplemented by the teacher. In the course of the class, questions and answers were exchanged between children, which fostered the development of independent thinking and cooperation.

Some pupils took the initiative to recreate the environment in which sparrows live. Children would actively participate in the implementation of this project: some of them built houses out of matchboxes, a windmill or miniature gardens using clay and sticks as trees and bushes. To imitate snow, they used finely cut crepe paper. Every day, the model would be enriched with new elements, such as additional trees or figurines of people and animals.

During classes, special attention was paid to the integration of various forms of expression: children would cut out sparrows from illustrations, make frames for them from various materials (cardboard, straw, twigs, raffia) and perform movement exercises imitating the behaviour of birds: flying, jumping, searching for grains, resting, flicking their feathers or bathing in the snow. The movements were accompanied by the recitation of a poem:

*A sparrow jumps down the street,  
looking for grains of wheat,  
and I jump in a circle  
and choose who I favour.*

These activities demonstrated how fundamental it was to actively explore reality through multiple senses and strengthen the correlation between observation, conversation and action. That kind of didactic structure facilitated a more comprehensive acquisition of knowledge and development of social competences (Sikorska 1932, 53–55; cf. Bogdanowiczowa 1927, 6).

Maria Darewska proposed a centre of interest that could be successfully implemented in a kindergarten: setting up a doll nursery. It was a comprehensive didactic project involving children in observational, manual, and cognitive activities. The educational process began with an analysis of the room's furnishings. The next stage was the independent making of miniature furniture. The teacher provided materials such as paper, cardboard, boxes, glue, plasticine, clay and sticks, from which each child created a piece of nursery furniture of their choice. This process helped develop manual skills, spatial imagination and hand-eye coordination.

An integral part of the class was a trip to a carpentry workshop. Its purpose was to familiarize children with the process of making furniture and the tools used in craft work. The teacher carefully selected the elements of the tour, adapting them to the level of cognitive development of the children. A few days after the visit, the children shared their observations and reflections, which allowed them to deepen their knowledge.

In order to consolidate the experience of craftsmanship, a themed game "carpenter" was organized. The children played the role of craftsmen and

recreated the activities carried out in the workshop, which was a form of active learning through imitation. Inspired by the visit to the workshop, some children tried to work with a handsaw, which indicates their genuine commitment and willingness to explore a new field.

The final stage of the project was to decorate the furniture and the nursery. The children decorated their work by painting it and adding aesthetic elements. Special attention was paid to interior design details such as paintings, flowers and curtains. Finally, pupils were tasked with making decorations out of paper and crepe paper themselves.

The described didactic process reflected critical assumptions of progressive pedagogy, which focuses on the child's active participation in learning, developing independence, and combining theory with practice. Thanks to the interdisciplinary approach, the classes combined elements of observation, creative expression and knowledge of the surrounding world, contributing to the all-round development of children (Darewska 1930, 85–89; cf. M.M. 1931, 96).

Girtlerowa (1931) emphasized that the basic assumption of Decroly's pedagogy was to activate the child by getting to know its daily needs, the surrounding environment and overcoming difficulties arising from life experiences. As an example of the subject of educational activities, she proposed the topic of human labour, with particular emphasis on the role which human hands have in manual and cognitive processes.

#### 1. Observation and comparative analysis

The didactic process began with observation and comparative analysis, the aim of which was to develop perceptual abilities and functional body awareness. At this stage, children:

- compared the structure and functions of arms and legs, identifying their similarities and differences,
- analyzed the range of motion of the limbs and their importance in everyday functioning,
- pointed to tools adapted to working with arms and legs.

#### 2. Spatial and temporal association

At the second stage of education, association was introduced to link the acquired information with real-life contexts. Over this phase children would:

- recognize manual professions (e.g. shoemaker, carpenter),
- imitate movements characteristic of selected professions,
- participate in educational trips, e.g. to a carpenter's workshop,
- analyze the processes of selling handicrafts in cities.

Temporal association, on the other hand, consisted of introducing the concept of time by comparing the duration of various activities, such as washing hands or putting on gloves and shoes.

#### 3. Physical activity and measurements

Children were involved in physical exercises and sensory experiments aimed at shaping body and spatial awareness. In the course of these activities, they:

- practiced balancing (e.g. standing on one leg),
- compared the strength and resistance of different objects,
- measured the length, width and thickness of their arms and legs to develop comparative and analytical skills.

#### 4. Introduction of abstract elements

The final stage of the educational process was the introduction of abstract content. This was achieved through children's literature and teacher's story-telling. The literary texts were carefully selected to integrate the experiences gained and to deepen the reflection on the issues discussed.

Gertlerowa's analysis of Decroly's concept emphasizes the importance of a multisensory and interactive approach in preschool education. The methodology based on observation, association and physical activity is consistent with contemporary research on the effectiveness of learning by doing (Kolb 1984; Bruner 1966). A key element of this concept is a focus on the development of social and communication skills, which is achieved through peer interaction and the integration of play elements into the structure of the teaching process.

The presented educational concept, based on the assumptions of Decroly, was an innovative approach to the education of children in the interwar period. Drawing on the principles of the child's active participation in the cognitive process, Gertlerowa developed a teaching model that integrated experience with learning by doing. Her work constitutes a valuable contribution to the development of preschool pedagogy and is still relevant for modern teaching methods.

Weinlesowa, in turn, when analysing the pedagogical concept of Decroly, identified three main categories of exercises: observation, association and expression, with the latter being classified into two separate types: abstract and concrete. She paid particular attention to the latter group, emphasizing its close relationship with the function of globalization in the child's cognitive process. Globalization, understood as the ability to perceive images and phenomena as a whole before analysing them in detail, is a basic perceptual mechanism in children. In contrast to adults, children do not analyse and synthesize in the initial phase of cognitive development but perceive reality holistically. An example of this mechanism is how a child sees a doll; first, it registers its general shape, and only later does it begin to notice details such as clothing or facial features. This phenomenon explains why children are equally eager to play with both complicated toys and simple ones, made of basic materials such as rags.

The process of transition from global perception to analysis occurs gradually along with gaining new experiences and cognitive abilities. Weinlesowa emphasized that in preschool and early school education, it is crucial to allow the child to observe freely before they start analysing. In fact, the excessive use of detailed questions in the early stages of education can disrupt the natural cognitive flow in children. Decroly, taking this perceptual property into account, developed an educational method based on the gradual narrowing of the field of observation: from the general picture of the world to the analysis of individual elements of phenomena.

The function of globalization was the basis not only for the synthetic curriculum and method of Decroly's centres of interest, but also for his ideo-visual method of learning to read and write, which was an alternative to the phonetic approach. The new method involved associating centres of interest with visual stimuli and using visual memory in the process of learning to read. The key principle was to start learning not with individual letters, but with whole words and sentences, which the child initially recognized as graphic images. Only in the subsequent stages of education did the transition to the analysis of linguistic structure take place through the identification of words, syllables, and letters (Weinlesowa 1933, 73).

The aim of this method was to make it easier for children to learn difficult concepts, especially those related to time. A helpful teaching tool were calendars designed as clocks, depicting different units of time (day, week, month), on which children could move the hands and do practical exercises. This approach was intended to support the development of operational thinking and enable a gradual transition from global perception to cognitive analysis and synthesis (Weinlerówna 1933, 3).

The process of acquiring literacy can be classified as a form of abstract expression, while concrete expression includes manual activities, motor exercises and other practical activities. In accordance with Decroly's pedagogical approach, children engage in modelling, cutting and drawing, relating these activities to specific centres of interest. Manual activities often serve as a starting point for further theoretical analysis. For example, as part of the topic "nutrition," pupils bake bread themselves, which allows them to compare the product with bread available in bakeries. Similarly, in the context of the topic "housing," children build structures out of bricks or wood, and then compare them with buildings erected by professional craftsmen. Such experiences not only develop practical skills but also contribute to shaping the understanding of technological and social processes, introducing children to the issues related to the history of civilization.

An important element of this educational model is also gardening and animal care, which are an integral part of the process of shaping ecological sensitivity and the ability to observe natural phenomena. These activities foster a sense of responsibility, contribute to developing social skills and teach consistency and patience (Weinlesowa 1933, 73–74).

One of the fundamental principles of modern pedagogy involves the individualization of the teaching process, which was also emphasized by Decroly. In this context, he postulated a maximum of 20 learners per class, which enabled the adaptation of teaching methods to the individual predispositions and needs of each child. Psychometric tests and Decroly's original questionnaire, aimed at analysing the emotional and cognitive aspects of pupils, played a key role in the teaching process. These tools allowed for the personalization of teaching strategies and for treating each child as an individual with unique developmental potential.

Analysing individual differences was one of the key aspects of research on effective teaching. From this perspective, it was important to use psychological

tests to assess pupils' cognitive competences. Psychometric tests for numeracy are an example of such tools, a register of which was presented by Hellmann (Hellmann 1931, 135–138), based on earlier research by Descoedres on the education of children with special needs (Descoedres 1916, 320–321). However, the author pointed out that the effective use of these tools required specialized training on the part of teachers, as well as knowledge of research methodology and the ability to interpret the results obtained. The need to precisely adapt diagnostic methods to the abilities of learners was also pointed out by Bużycka-Krasuska (Bużycka-Krasuska 1926b, 3), who made a reference to arithmetic tests prepared by Decroly and Degand.

Decroly stressed the existence of significant individual differences between children at the same stage of development. For this reason, he recommended respecting the natural interests and individual abilities of learners. He argued that personalizing the teaching process promotes their optimal intellectual and emotional development (Girtlerowa 1931, 47; Weinlesowa 1933, 74; Weinlerówna 1933, 4).

Looking at the idea of individualizing the teaching process, Weinlesowa emphasized the importance of teaching aids developed by Decroly, in particular educative lotto cards. These tools played a key role in consolidating the knowledge acquired through observation and association, while developing the independence of students and stimulating their natural cognitive curiosity. The lotto game enabled each child to work at their own pace: after completing one puzzle, the pupils could move on to the next one, which was more difficult, regardless of the progress of the other children. If necessary, the teacher provided individual support, adapting explanations to the pupil's perceptual abilities.

In order to intensify the sensory stimuli, picture lotto was often replaced by exhibits that relied not only on visual perception but also on motor responses. For example, to develop the concept of size, physical models of dolls made of wood or cardboard were used instead of pictures of dolls of different sizes (Weinlesowa 1933, 74–75).

Decroly's lotto games were not only teaching aids in kindergarten education, where the key was to shape sensory perception, attention and motor coordination, but were also crucial for primary school teaching. They were applied in various educational areas, creating counting, grammar, history and geography lotto, among others. Decroly's kindergarten used lotto games involving various sensory modalities, including:

- visual perception,
- visual-kinesthetic perception,
- tactile perception (excluding sight),
- auditory-motor perception.

The number and range of educative games employed depended on the teachers' inventiveness, their commitment and their ability to adapt the content to the children's developmental abilities (Weinlesowa 1933, 74). Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa emphasized the necessity to avoid monotony and oversimplification

in game design, emphasizing that games should correspond to the developmental level of children and provide them with an engaging challenge (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 101, 104).

According to Janina Bużycka-Krasuska, the games developed by Decroly fostered various perceptual abilities in a comprehensive manner and were an effective diagnostic tool for assessing pupils' perceptiveness. They were appealing to children as they used colorful, varied educative materials that caught learners' attention (Bużycka-Krasuska 1926a, 4–5; Bużycka-Krasuska 1926b, 5). Weryho, on the other hand, stressed that Decroly's teaching aids reflected reality and enabled children to experience the world in a direct manner (Weryho 1929, 220).

Graded according to level of difficulty, educative games were used to assess and develop visual perception and to analyse how children differed individually in terms of their cognitive abilities. Bużycka-Krasuska (1926b, 5) distinguished six main areas of perceptual examinations, which were carried out using lotto cards:

1. Recognizing objects of different colours and shapes,
2. Identifying the same object (e.g. lamp) in different colour variations,
3. Distinguishing and classifying two colours of one object,
4. Analysing the direction based on the same object (e.g. sandals),
5. Perceiving three colours in one picture,
6. Analysing directions and movements.

By using interactive teaching tools, the Decroly method enabled the gradual development of children's perceptual analysis and synthesis skills, allowing the level of difficulty to be adjusted to the individual needs of each student. Thus, it made a significant contribution to the development of modern educational methods based on active experience and personalization of the teaching process.

An example of a teaching aid for children aged 4–5 was a puzzle composed of six cubes with 5 cm long edges. Each side of the cubes featured illustrations of objects belonging to the same thematic category, such as flowers, fruit, gardening tools or toys. For instance, one cube could contain a picture of a chair, another of a table, another of a wardrobe, another of a stool, a sideboard or a bed, illustrating the category "household goods". The child's task was to arrange the cubes in the correct order by grouping them according to the topic shown, e.g. by placing only fruit or only furniture next to each other. For younger children (3–4 years old), the exercise could be simplified by using cubes with the same illustrations on each wall, allowing for more intuitive matching of the elements (Łamigłówwka (Pomysłu Decroly'ego) 1929, 44).

Analysing Decroly's educational system, the authors of articles published in the "Wychowanie Przedszkolne" magazine pointed out that there was no clear division between the preschool and school stages of education. The curriculum in preschools was an integral part of its overall pedagogical concept, which made it possible to adapt materials intended for the first year of school education to the needs of a preschool. However, this required adjusting the teaching methods to correspond to the developmental level of preschool-age children. The main goal of education in Decroly's kindergartens was to foster observation skills, develop

thinking, and enable children to freely express their own ideas (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 104; Girtlerowa 1931, 47; Weinlesowa 1933, 74).

Importantly, Decroly did not restrict children's freedom of movement, but their activities had to be purposeful and useful. He was not in favour of chaos; on the contrary, he emphasized the need to develop the ability to work independently and spontaneously. In his concept, he emphasized that the demands on a child should be tailored to their individual abilities, and that comparing them to their peers is unjustified. Consequently, he rejected the traditional grading system based on marks and school certificates, replacing it with detailed reports describing the physical and psychological condition of the child and his or her educational progress (Weinlesowa 1933, 75).

In the school model developed by Decroly, pupils were not passive subjects of teaching, but active subjects of education, acquiring knowledge through action, developing independence and understanding the value of work and learning. The school functioned as a community in which both teachers and students were responsible for its development and aesthetics. The school was largely managed by learners, who organized its operation in close cooperation with the teachers. The pupils elected a student government from among themselves, as well as learners on duty responsible for taking care of plants, animals raised in the classroom, the aesthetics of the rooms, and other aspects of school life.

The Decroly school encouraged children to actively participate in organizing the learning environment: pupils would decorate classrooms with their own hand-made works and also bring in objects with potential didactic value (e.g. buttons, scraps of leather, fur, materials), which they then classified on their own. A significant element of the educational process was also mutual learning, i.e. children prepared talks and presentations on topics of their choice, and after giving them, they participated in the discussion, making comments and asking questions. Older students would act as mentors for younger ones, organizing games, concerts and performances for them.

This approach to education encouraged activity, commitment and cooperation among students, which in turn led to the development of internal discipline and the ability to adapt to the rules which govern social life (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 101–102; Weinlesowa 1933, 75–76).

Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa admired the enthusiasm of the pupils at the Decroly school. She emphasized that the school did not isolate the children from reality or impose a monotonous discipline on them. The pupils derived satisfaction from conscious and creative work, as well as from developing their own interests; this made them eager to participate in the daily life of the school, which they perceived as a space for both learning and playing (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 104).

Weinlesowa also paid attention to the architecture and spatial organization of the school, located at *Avenue de Montana*. She noticed that the facility was located in a picturesque area, surrounded by a forest and that it occupied a vast area. However, the buildings themselves were not architecturally distinctive – the

classrooms were relatively small, resembling museums and laboratories rather than traditional classrooms. They contained a variety of teaching materials and specimens from various fields of science, collected by both teachers and students themselves.

In accordance with Decroly's pedagogical concept, there were no specialized rooms for teaching specific subjects such as history or geography. Similarly, Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa observed that the rooms were more like laboratories and workshops than a traditional school. The pupils were free to move around the entire building, which abounded in library collections and teaching aids (Krahelska-Mackiewiczowa 1928, 103).

Summarizing her observations, Weinlesowa noted that to set up a model school no luxurious conditions or impressive buildings were required; it is the content of the teaching that is of key importance, not its external form. Despite its modest infrastructure, the Decroly school stood out for its rich didactic content and high level of education (Weinlesowa 1933, 76; Weinlerówna 1933, 3).

#### 4. DECROLY AS A PERSON, SCIENTIST AND EDUCATOR

A few weeks after the death of Jean-Ovide Decroly, the editorial staff of "Wychowanie Przedszkolne" published an obituary, announcing that a detailed analysis of his thirty years of his professional career as a doctor, psychologist, educator and social activist would follow. The articles in question were to present his merits in the field of care for children with disabilities in Belgium, the development of sensory games for preschool education and the "centers of interest" method, which revolutionized curricula in primary schools (Ś.P. Dr. Ovide Decroly 1932, 161).

When analysing Decroly's image in the pages of "Wychowanie Przedszkolne," it is worthwhile referring to the concept of the hagiographic trend described by Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp. These researchers pointed out that Decroly was idealized by his students and colleagues, who made him a hero of education, sometimes mythologizing the thinker (Depaepe, Simon and Van Gorp 2003a, 279; Van Gorp 2006, 42, 45). As a result, they presented his method as an educational ideal (Van Gorp 2007, 9–10).

Weinlerowa recalled her experiences from her pedagogical studies at the University of Brussels, where she personally attended lectures by Decroly. In her accounts, she described him as a modest, straightforward man who avoided pathos. His lectures were clear and fact-based, often supported by examples from everyday life. She emphasized that Decroly was aware of the limitations of his knowledge and encouraged students to continue his research. Exams with him took the form of a scientific conversation, and the lecturer was interested in the students' experiences, especially their observations concerning the psyche of children (Weinlerówna 1933, 1–2).

Weinlerowa also noted that Decroly, owing to his daily contact with children, transformed from a psychologist-theoretician into a psycho-pedagogue. He created

his own teaching method based on the psychological needs of children, his own scientific experiments and modern pedagogical concepts. She also emphasized his contribution to the development of Polish education through the adaptation of his tests to national conditions (Weinlerówna 1933, 2–3).

Anna Oderfeldówna presented Decroly as a doctor who treated children with intellectual disabilities and who became a pedagogue in order to help them better. By believing in their potential and using appropriate teaching methods, he proved that such children could become independent. Convinced of the effectiveness of his methods, he extended them to general pedagogy, focusing on the activity and independence of students. During World War I, O. Decroly was a social activist, helping homeless and delinquent children. As a result of his efforts, the *Zakład Ferme-École* was established in Waterloo, where children could combine learning with vocational training (Oderfeldówna 1933, 76–77).

Although Girtlerowa described Decroly as a "pedagogical genius," she noted that the popularization of his method carried the risk of distortion of its basic ideas. She underlined the key role of adapting the curriculum to the child's developmental stages, which was one of the foundations of Decroly's pedagogy (Girtlerowa 1931, 46).

## CONCLUSION

"Wychowanie Przedszkolne" played a significant role in propagating O. Decroly's ideas in Poland, especially among preschool teachers. The journal presented both the theoretical foundations of his concept and detailed descriptions of how to apply it during classes.

Their contributors did not limit themselves to theory; instead, they also described how to use the principle of globalization, how to teach reading and writing, and how to individualize teaching. It must be pointed out that the papers showed a fascination with O. Decroly's method and often lacked critical analysis. Despite the fact that Decroly's pedagogy did not gain much popularity in Polish public schools, it was applied in special institutions.

Contemporary education could draw on O. Decroly's ideas, adapting his principles to current teaching needs, among other things by eliminating verbalism and passive reception of knowledge, and emphasizing that children should discover the world independently.

O. Decroly's achievements remain an important point of reference for contemporary education, albeit one that requires critical reinterpretation. The postulate of excluding verbalism and passive reception of knowledge should be understood as the consistent design of educational environments and situations where the child can undertake real cognitive activities, i.e. explore and create meanings, and generate products of work, rather than merely reproduce presented content. Central to this approach are the integration of content around problems and "centres of interest" (transdisciplinary modules), research cycles (question–

hypothesis–action/experiment–reflection), field and observational experiences, manipulative material to structure the transition from the part to the whole, and individualized learning paths and pace. The education process should be systematically documented (portfolio, narrative documentation of the process) and supported by formative assessment, while technologies should serve as tools for exploration, recording, and analysis of data, rather than an end in themselves. An inclusive perspective is also key, as it makes it possible to operationalize Decroly’s ideas in diverse learner populations.

However, putting these ideas into practice entails a change in the role of the teacher—from a transmitter of knowledge to a designer of the learning environment and a reflective researcher of their own practice. Moreover, it requires flexible organization of educational time and space, cooperation with the local community, and the involvement of parents as partners. From the perspective of educational research, further comparative studies on the effectiveness of O. Decroly-inspired solutions in general and special education are recommended, as well as action research and multi-source verification of results (e.g., analysis of student work, observations, interviews) to gain insight into the mechanisms of meaning-making learning. Understood in this way, a critically updated reception of O. Decroly’s concept could provide a coherent, empirically verifiable framework for practices focused on child agency.

Given the limitations of previous analyses, such as the lack of critical approaches in the literature and the dominance of enthusiastic descriptions, there is a need for further comparative research on the effectiveness of Decroly-inspired solutions in education.

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## The Identity of the Role of Ukrainian Writers in the Development of National Pedagogical Ideas in the Conditions of a Crisis Society

### Tożsamość roli pisarzy ukraińskich w rozwoju idei pedagogicznych narodu w warunkach społeczeństwa kryzysowego

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**Abstract:** Today, more than ever before, Ukraine needs nationally conscious youth; therefore, the education system and all of humanity are tasked with raising worthy representatives of their nation. The purpose of the article is to examine the theoretical aspects of Ukrainian writers' activity in the development of national pedagogical ideas in the context of a crisis society. Research methods: general scientific – analysis, synthesis, idealisation, formalisation, generalisation, comparison, etc.; interdisciplinary: historical and pedagogical – genetic, periodisation, historical and comparative, etc.; content analysis, discourse analysis; biographical; contextual and interpretive. A powerful means of realising such a task is the creative heritage of Ukrainian writers, and the public interest is precisely the Ukrainian studies activity of Ukrainian writers, which has become a distinctive page of the Ukrainian literary process in our time, under conditions of a crisis society. Humanity's cultural experience has demonstrated the significant potential of fiction to foster a selfless struggle for independence and well-being. Our society has found itself in new realities, and this topic is gaining relevance right now in the conditions of full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. In the formation of a socially active and responsible crisis society, the younger generation possesses self-identity, a national-patriotic consciousness, and dignity.

**Keywords:** Ukrainian writers; national pedagogical ideas; national identity; fiction literature; educational and cultural activity; crisis society; literary heritage

**Abstrakt:** Współcześnie, bardziej niż kiedykolwiek, Ukraina potrzebuje świadomej narodowo młodzieży; dlatego system edukacji oraz całe społeczeństwo stoją przed zadaniem wychowania godnych przedstawicieli swojego narodu. Celem artykułu jest zbadanie teoretycznych aspektów działalności ukraińskich pisarzy w rozwoju narodowych idei pedagogicznych w warunkach społeczeństwa kryzysowego. Zastosowane metody badawcze obejmują metody ogólnonaukowe – analizę, syntezę, idealizację, formalizację, uogólnienie i porównanie – oraz interdyscyplinarne metody historyczno-pedagogiczne, takie jak ujęcie genetyczne, periodyzacyjne i historyczno-porównawcze, a także analizę treści, analizę dyskursu oraz metody biograficzne, kontekstowe i interpretacyjne. Twórcze dziedzictwo ukraińskich pisarzy stanowi istotny środek realizacji wspomnianego zadania. Szczególnego znaczenia nabiera ich działalność ukrajinistyczna, która staje się wyrazistym elementem współczesnego ukraińskiego procesu literackiego rozwijającego się w realiach spo-



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czeństwa kryzysowego. Doświadczenie kulturowe ludzkości niejednokrotnie dowiodło, że literatura piękna posiada znaczący potencjał w kształtowaniu postaw gotowości do bezinteresownej walki o niepodległość i dobro wspólne. W obliczu nowych realiów, wynikających z pełnoskalowej agresji Federacji Rosyjskiej przeciwko Ukrainie, zagadnienie to nabiera szczególnej aktualności. W procesie kształtowania społecznie aktywnego i odpowiedzialnego społeczeństwa młode pokolenie odgrywa ważną rolę, zachowując własną tożsamość, świadomość narodowo-patriotyczną oraz godność.

**Słowa kluczowe:** pisarze ukraińscy; narodowe idee pedagogiczne; tożsamość narodowa; literatura piękna; działalność edukacyjno-kulturowa; społeczeństwo kryzysowe; dziedzictwo literackie

## INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the study is grounded in the need for a fundamental, integral analysis of the historical origins of the methodology of studying literature as a science, tracing its genealogy, and forming an objective view through a critical understanding of prior studies. Generations of scientists and teachers, which will become the basis for the formation of key areas of development of subject didactics and the practical implementation of advanced achievements of the past in the context of the constructive filling of content, forms, and methods of modern methods of studying foreign literature and the most favourable implementation of its practical results (Fizeshi 2012).

At the current stage of the development of pedagogical science, there is an urgent need for a profound rethinking of the accumulated pedagogical ideas in the history of education, the theory and practice of teaching and upbringing, and the history of Ukrainian culture and literature, which remain relevant in today's crisis society. Domestic historical-pedagogical science holistically and systematically studies pedagogical views, educational activities of teachers, and cultural and educational figures of the past. However, in the history of Ukrainian pedagogy, much less attention has traditionally been paid to the study of the views and practices of educators and teachers in individual regions than to the study of the activities of the central part of the country (Rozman and Lemak 2022a).

Knowledge of the language, history, and culture in crisis conditions is a necessary condition for the formation and preservation of the national self-awareness of the Ukrainian people, which became especially acute after the attack on Ukraine. Ukrainian writers in Volyn in the interwar period not only made a significant contribution to the history of literary enrichment of Ukrainian pedagogy but also laid a reliable foundation for awareness and understanding of one's own national identity.

The development of the modern Ukrainian state, its multinational community, and the entry of this community into the system of the civilised commonwealth is successful only under the condition of the moral readiness of every citizen to carry out the specified processes in the modern crisis society. In this regard, among the priority problems, the problem of the formation of the civic qualities of the individual in future generations, in particular the formation of his national identity as a whole and the disclosure of the peculiarities of the implementation of

the process of national identity formation in the structure of intrathecal relations, is gaining particular relevance (Bahrii 2020).

The study of the creative heritage of Ukrainian writers of Transcarpathia in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century of enlightening ideas and paradigms proves that it accumulates a significant layer of national memory, consciousness, character, and mentality of the Ukrainian people. Therefore, through fiction, knowledge of traditional culture and the heroic past takes place on an emotional and sensory level, intellectual activity develops, and national self-awareness crystallizes.

On this basis, a substantive study of pedagogical ideas and educational concepts, laid out in their creative heritage and experience of their social and educational activities in the conditions of a crisis society, is carried out.

## 1. ANALYSIS OF RECENT RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Since ancient times, the problem of civic identity formation has been a central concern (Aristotle, Plato, Socrates). The development of pedagogical ideas at the current stage covers various aspects of the formation of citizenship and is revealed in the studies of O. Kovalchuk, V. Kuzia, Yu. Rudenko, M. Stelmakhovych and others. The works of P. Kosarieva, P. Ihnatenko, V. Popluzhnyi, and others were covered as the subject of citizen education research. The works of M. Borshchevskiyi, O. Sukhomlynska, and others are devoted to the technology of civic personality education.

The study of certain aspects of the research from the perspective of the problems of the ethno-cultural, social, and political situation in the 20s-30s of the 20th century determined the interdisciplinary nature of the problem (L. Babola, M. Vehesh, I. Pipash, V. Sandor, etc.); development of activities of public pedagogical and educational societies (L. Maliar, V. Starosta, etc.); development of the education system (I. Hbranchak, A. Ihnat, Yu. Mudra, T. Rosul, V. Khymynets, etc.).

The complex problems related to the study of pedagogical ideas and educational activities of Ukrainian writers, the life and work of its representatives, and the development of the Ukrainian literary process are studied by scientists (Y. Baleha, M. Vehesh, S. Vidnianskyi, V. Hommonai, M. Demchak, M. Zymomria, A. Ihnat, M. Lelekach, R. Mahochii, M. Molnar, L. Potapiuk, I. Rozman, V. Saharda, M. Tyvodar, V. Turianitsa, O. Fizeshi, V. Khymynets, etc.).

The *purpose* of the article is to reveal the theoretical aspects of the activity of Ukrainian writers in the development of national pedagogical ideas in the conditions of a crisis society.

### **Methodology.**

*Research methods:* general scientific – analysis, synthesis, idealisation, formalisation, generalisation, comparison, etc.; interdisciplinary: historical and pedagogical – genetic, periodisation, historical and comparative, etc.; content analysis, discourse analysis; biographical; contextual and interpretive.

## 2. PRESENTATION OF THE PRIMARY MATERIAL

Significant changes occurred in the field of education in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century, which consisted of three types of schools (state, church, and community) and had a distinct multi-ethnic character.

This had a double meaning for the formation of literary figures as pedagogical personalities. On the one hand, thanks to the availability of relatively high-quality education, they began to be actively recruited from the rural environment; on the other hand, they actively chose the teaching profession, which became in demand and made it possible to combine professional, creative and public-educational work.

In their research, I. Rozman and O. Lemak (2022b), O. Fizeshi (2012) identified five main groups of prerequisites and factors for the development of pedagogical, cultural and educational activities of Ukrainian writers in the 20s and 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

- socio-political, ethnonational, and socio-economic situation of the region.
- development of ideological and political currents (orientations).
- formation of the system of education and schooling in the region.
- institutionalisation of the national and cultural life of Ukrainians.
- influences of Ukrainian emigration and European literary currents.

Each of the specified groups of prerequisites and factors is complex multifaceted and requires a synthesized analysis.

The problem of the ethnic identity of Ukrainians in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century is quite complicated. Long-term coexistence with Hungarians, Jews, Czechs, Slovaks, Romanians, and Germans crystallised the ethno-cultural tolerance of Ukrainians.

Ethno-national diversity was reflected in the schooling system and affected the creativity and social activity of Ukrainian writers.

The democratic way to solve the language issue, which was inextricably linked with the formation of the literary language and the language of education, in practice intensified the chaos and struggle of various ideological and political factors (Potapiuk 2023).

The institutionalisation of the national and cultural life of Ukrainians became an important factor in the activation of the creative and social activity of writers. We focus on two interrelated components of this process in the form of the creation of a network of cultural and educational, pedagogical societies and creative associations and their printed bodies, other periodicals, and publishing centres.

As a result of further reforms at the turn of the 20th and 30s of the 20th century in educational institutions, educational programs were introduced, which provided for an increase in the number of hours for studying the native language (up to 8–10 hours per week), mathematics (4–6 hours), history, science about the native land, etc. The educated orientation of the educational process in terms of the formation of citizens, loyal and devoted to the state, and love for the native land was strengthened (Pustovit 2020).

Significant changes took place in the field of primary education, which consisted of three types of schools (state, church, and community) and had a distinct multi-ethnic character.

Of great importance for the development of pedagogical ideas and educational activities in Transcarpathia was the appearance of textbooks, in particular the alphabet and readers, which appeared during the interwar period, not only as a means of ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian school but also as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon determined by various social factors.

The development of schooling contributed to the growth of intellectual potential and the cultural and educational progress of Ukrainians (Rozman and Lemak 2022a).

The activity of Ukrainian writers in creating textbooks for primary schools in Transcarpathia during the studied period was determined by several general factors in the form of the state policy of Czechoslovakia in the field of education, the help of Ukrainian social institutions in solving this problem, the nature and trends of the development of the regional schooling system, the peculiarities of the ethnic culture of the Ukrainians of the region, etc. This process was strongly influenced by the national textbook-making traditions of the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries (M. Shashkevich, O. Dukhnovych, O. Barvinskyi, K. Luchakivskyi, O. Partytskyi, etc.). Acute issues of textbook creation were related to spelling and the need to take into account the peculiarities of the dialects of local Ukrainians.

Against this background, the understanding that Ukrainian literature in its genre diversity should become a powerful means of creating a national in content and European in form educational book. Ukrainian writers and educators of the region acted as the main spokespersons for this conceptual approach.

The period of the second half of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century in the western Ukrainian lands was characterized by a significant exacerbation of national and social contradictions, strengthening the struggle of Ukrainians against various oppressions, spreading the ideas of the famous Ukrainian luminaries M. Hrushevskyi, M. Drahomanov, I. Franko, Western scientific socialism; a new elevation of the national liberation struggle of the region. This situation led to the emergence of political parties that had a significant impact on the activation of the national liberation movement and constantly combined cultural, educational, and political ideas in their activities. Among them, the leading place belonged to the Ukrainian national idea of a democratic basis, which was an impetus for practical affairs and penetrated deeper and deeper into the masses. The studied period in Western Ukraine was characterised by the aggravation of national and social contradictions and the strengthening of the struggle of Ukrainians against various forms of enslavement (Matviishyn 2009).

The aggravation of social contradictions, Western scientific socialism, and the new rise of the national liberation struggle led to the emergence of political parties, which, in their activities, tried with all their might to combine cultural,

educational, and political ideas. Among them, the leading place belonged to the Ukrainian national idea, which penetrated deeper and deeper into the popular masses, destroying the wall that previously separated the intellectuals-patriots and the people. Today, the Ukrainian national idea is a determining factor.

Of great importance in the development of pedagogical ideas and educational activities in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century was the process of the emergence of cultural and educational societies in the western Ukrainian lands in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at the beginning of the 20th century. This is what convinces us that, despite certain contradictions and, in some cases, inconsistencies, the Ukrainian national movement stimulated both the general socio-economic, political, cultural, and scientific progress of Ukrainian society as a whole, as well as the growth of civic consciousness among the broad masses of the people. We see that the young democratic intelligentsia has become a real pioneer, the originator of progressive ideas, and the leader of the national and cultural revival and restoration of Ukrainian statehood in Western Ukraine (Semenoh and Bazyl 2008).

The emergence of cultural and educational societies was determined by objective reasons of socio-economic (development of capitalist relations), political (attempts to denationalize the Ukrainian population by the Russian government), cultural and educational (mass illiteracy of the Ukrainian population, insufficient number of Ukrainian educational institutions, the need to develop Ukrainian culture, science, education in a national form) character. The efforts of all Western Ukrainian progressive forces aimed at counteracting the government's policy, eliminating its negative consequences, actively promoting native-school ideas among the population, initiating various nationally oriented educational and school activities, the Ukrainization of foreign-language schools, the training of national pedagogical professional staff, the creation of Ukrainian textbooks and development of the theoretical foundations of the educational process in the new Ukrainian school, became an essential integral and necessary part of the state policy of the period under study.

It is worth emphasizing that Ukrainian writers of the interwar period not only contributed to the development of the educational movement in Volyn but also carried out important cultural and educational work among children, youth, and adults through reading rooms and libraries, promoted Ukrainian national ideology, working in various societies and public institutions, The Women's Union was active in promoting the work of Ukrainian writers in Volyn. At numerous public educational events, they tried to awaken national consciousness and love for the Motherland, bringing live works of authors to a wide audience. The Union of Ukrainian Women of Volyn did a lot to raise the educational and cultural level of the Ukrainian population, eliminate illiteracy, fight for the native language and school, and teach children the Ukrainian language. One of the main tasks of Ukrainian education was self-education (Fizeshi 2012).

As we can see, from 1920 to 1930, it was education that became the main factor of national revival. One of the most difficult problems of that time was the

Ukrainization of gymnasiums due to the decolonisation of schools. In the 1920s and 1930s, an effective system of youth education (moral-religious, national, economic-social, aesthetic, and physical) operated in Ukrainian schools, and several educational traditions were developed and established.

The appropriate level of work with young people was ensured thanks to the high-quality selection of teachers who had special education, high national consciousness, and professional qualifications. The personality of a teacher, especially a gymnasium professor, his official status, individuality, erudition, and a high degree of subject competence created for him high authority, respect, and sincere trust among students.

In the 1920s and 1930s, various amateur groups of student youth became widespread in educational institutions, which played an important role in deepening knowledge, acquiring skills for independent work, and shaping the civic position of an individual. Most often, these were historical and literary, Ukrainian studies, philological, natural science, sports, and various amateur groups (radio and photo groups, modelling groups).

Student communities, whose activity in educational institutions began at the beginning of the 20th century, proved themselves to be a real school of self-governance, acquisition of organisational skills, and the manifestation of initiative and received further development in the 20s and 30s. Many advanced teachers tried to involve young people as widely as possible in solving various issues of school life.

The most important task was the development of pedagogical ideas and educational activities in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century there were cultural and academic societies that considered it necessary to spread knowledge among the people, to revive their national consciousness by printing books, magazines, reading lectures, opening courses on Ukrainian studies and the Ukrainian language, holding cultural and economic events, which involved the best scientists and public figures.

The members of the societies were deeply convinced that education would raise the consciousness and culture of the people to a higher level.

Educators-writers, by placing their own works and the works of Ukrainian writers in teaching aids for various types of schools, as well as by their practical activities in different educational institutions, caused the suspension of the process of assimilation of Ukrainians, since primers, reading books, textbooks, literature textbooks were usually used in schools, where the works of Polish authors dominated, who raised children in the spirit of love for the Commonwealth, Polishness was supposed to be the basis for the education of loyal citizens, and this gave rise to such a phenomenon as "mankurstvo". Western Ukrainian writers-pedagogues served as exemplary humanist, patriotic, educational, and specialist teachers for several generations of children and youth.

The literary process and the development of pedagogical thought in Western Ukraine found a close mutual interweaving and complementation, therefore, it is appropriate to perceive artistic works not only as a reflection-conjecture but also

as an essential historical and pedagogical source that reflects the real conditions of professional work and the social position of the Ukrainian teacher, the requirements for him, understanding his image in the intellectual, in particular professional and pedagogical, environment and among school students, school youth of different ages, and the general public (Khymynets et al. 2009).

We have singled out several trends in the development of pedagogical ideas, the experience of their cultural, educational, scientific, and public work:

- in the Ukrainian literature of the studied period, such a unique phenomenon appeared as teacher-writers or writer-teachers, in whose educational and literary activity it is necessary to draw a line of demarcation, how organically (and naturally) these two spheres were intertwined; the pedagogy of the literary process takes place, which we characterize as a marker, the most significant feature of the development of Ukrainian literature at the end of the 19th century – in the 1930s, and this feature distinguished it from the literary process that took place in Soviet Ukraine.
- many writers, especially of the 19th century, were priests or came from a Greek-Catholic priestly environment and an Orthodox one, which affected their work, in particular, the actualisation of the problems of education and moralism, enlightenment ideas.
- a child, a schoolboy, or a teacher becomes a hero of small and large prose, special poetic works of an educational nature are created for the smallest and youngest schoolchildren.

The theme of the cult of knowledge, books, and education is central to the work of writers. Since a significant percentage of the writers were teachers (they worked in folk schools, private teachers, gymnasiums and teachers' seminaries, university teachers, and professors), not only did school themes become the leading theme in their work, but also their works are actively included in teaching aids and textbooks of folk schools, Ukrainian gymnasiums, and teachers' seminars. They are published:

- by Ukrainian public periodicals, in particular children's, youth, educational, economic, women's, stratum, literary and artistic publications, etc., which gives reason to assert the popularisation of the work of the writers of the region, its accessibility to the mass reader, and its fulfilment of an educational function.
- writers, well-known Shevchenko experts, translators, lexicographers, literary experts, and linguists stood at the origins of the development of Ukrainian, especially philological, science, gymnasium, and university education in Western Ukraine.
- During the studied period, the foundations of education were interpreted by various theorists not only from the standpoint of philosophical or cultural studies. First of all, the situation of society was taken into account, as well as various branches of science: psychology, sociology, philosophy, cultural studies, religious studies, etc. These theories convince us that only

- in the knowledge of true human nature can one acquire the basis for the formation of personality and find the most effective methods of education. That is why an important trend in the progress of pedagogical science during this period was determined by its development on the foundation of psychology. Therefore, in the majority of works about children and for children, Western Ukrainian writers trace the peculiarities of character, emphasise the actions of heroes, distinguish characteristic features, actualise the cult of the national hero, and outline an ideal that will serve as a model for the formation of the national character of a young Ukrainian.
- poetic and prose works of historical and patriotic content, literary and critical articles, journalism, feuilletons, intelligence on the history of the Sichov shooting, memoirs, etc. – all this belongs to the creative heritage of representatives of the literature of Western Ukraine of the studied period, who especially enriched the Ukrainian literary treasury with the national and patriotic subject matter, original artistic imagery, the authenticity of the depicted; the phenomenon of this literature, among other things, consists in the fact that during this period a new original genre of literature was created – the rifle song, which, equipped with great energy of patriotism, heroism and the greatness of the Ukrainian spirit, became the chronicle of the heroic struggle of Ukraine for its statehood, the expression of the Ukrainian ideas, a real talisman of the spiritual heritage of the Ukrainian nation, turned into a layer of folk song creativity.
  - In the 20th century, a group of Subcarpathian writers appeared in Subcarpathian Rus, which represented a new generation of Ukrainian intelligentsia, nationally conscious, patriotically disposed, ready to self-denial to fight for the national idea, to work for the benefit of the native people for its happy future. Their works raised Ukrainian national consciousness in the region to a level of national awareness and social activism, culminating in the struggle for a national state –the Carpathian Ukraine. In this way, the writers-pedagogues of Subcarpathian Rus fulfilled their historical mission – they formed a sense of patriotism (love for the Ukrainian language, culture, customs, and traditions) among their compatriots, speaking with fervent poetic words that were folklorised, close to the vernacular, colloquial, accessible and sincere to the Ruthenians, calling them Ukrainians. The hopes placed on this category of ascetic teachers (“our greatest hope for teaching”) have come true.
  - following the example of famous writers who published their works in numerous Ukrainian publications of Western Ukraine, self-made writers, masters of the word from the people, who raise the problems of the formation of a nationally conscious personality, enlightenment, the anti-alcohol struggle of Ukrainians, etc., appear, which gives grounds for asserting the creation such a unique phenomenon as self-made literature of pedagogical content (Fruktova and Pokas 2013).

## CONCLUSIONS

The period of the second half of the 19th – beginning of the 20th century on Ukrainian lands was characterized by a significant exacerbation of national and social contradictions, strengthening the struggle of Ukrainians against various oppressions, spreading the ideas of the famous Ukrainian luminaries M. Hrushevskyi, M. Drahomanov, I. Franko, Western scientific socialism; a new elevation of the national liberation struggle of the region.

This situation led to the emergence of political parties that had a significant impact on the activation of the national liberation movement and constantly combined cultural, educational, and political ideas in their activities. Among them, the leading place belonged to the Ukrainian national idea of a democratic basis, which was an impetus for practical affairs and penetrated deeper and deeper into the masses.

Of great importance for the development of pedagogical ideas and educational activities was the appearance of textbooks, in particular the alphabet and reading books, which appeared during the interwar period, not only as a means of ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian school but also as a complex socio-cultural phenomenon determined by various social factors.

The development of schooling contributed to the growth of intellectual potential and the cultural and educational progress of Ukrainianism in the region. Against this background, the understanding that Ukrainian literature in its genre diversity should become a powerful means of creating a national in content and European in form educational book. Ukrainian writers and educators of the region acted as the main spokespersons for this conceptual approach.

The most important task was the development of pedagogical ideas and educational activities in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century for Transcarpathia, there were cultural and educational societies that considered it necessary to spread knowledge among the people to revive their national consciousness by printing books and magazines, giving lectures, opening courses on Ukrainian studies and the Ukrainian language, holding cultural and economic events, which involved the best scientists, public actors.

The most important task for the development of pedagogical ideas and educational activities in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century were cultural and educational societies, which considered it necessary to spread knowledge among the people, to revive their national consciousness by printing books, magazines, reading lectures, opening courses on Ukrainian studies and Ukrainian languages, holding cultural and economic events, which involved the best scientists and public figures.

This is what convinces us that, despite certain contradictions and, in some cases, inconsistency, the Ukrainian national movement stimulated both the general socio-economic, political, cultural, and scientific progress of the entire Ukrainian society, as well as the growth of civic consciousness of the broad masses of the people. The emergence of cultural and educational societies was determined by objective reasons of socio-economic (development of capitalist relations), political

(attempts to denationalize the Ukrainian population by the Russian government), cultural and educational (mass illiteracy of the Ukrainian population, insufficient number of Ukrainian educational institutions, the need to develop Ukrainian culture, science, education in a national form) character.

The efforts of all Western Ukrainian progressive forces were aimed at counteracting the government's policy, eliminating its negative consequences, actively promoting native-school ideas among the population, initiating various nationally oriented educational and school activities, Ukrainization of foreign-language schools, training of national pedagogical professional staff, creation of Ukrainian textbooks and development of the theoretical foundations of the educational process in the new Ukrainian school, became an important integral and necessary part of the state policy of the studied period.

The contribution of the writers of Western Ukraine at the end of the 18th – 30s of the 20th century is clarified in the creation of educational and methodological support for the educational process.

It was noted that a special place in the work of the artists of the world was occupied by the compilation of primers, reading books, textbooks on the Ukrainian language, literature, etc., which were a response to the need for the methodological science of that time, the challenges faced by Ukrainian-language education, a reaction to its reformation, especially after 1932, development and improvement of pedagogical science, etc. Ukrainian writers performed the functions of governmental and educational factors – they created curricula, textbooks, and manuals, providing an important factor in the development of Ukrainian national education. Writers-pedagogues who stood on populist positions advocated phonetic spelling and had pedagogical or university education. Working in various types of educational institutions, they knew the practical problems of Ukrainian education, so to speak, from the inside, and were able to improve the educational process by creating high-quality educational and methodological support (“for the needs of the day”) – educational literature for schools, gymnasiums, teachers' seminars, extra-curricular institutions (“dorostu”, “Plastu”, etc.) – and using their own works and selected special high-art thematic works, in addition to educational purposes, they cultivated national consciousness, patriotic feelings, Christian virtues, moral values, artistic and aesthetic feelings, hygienic education, health-preserving values, promoted ideas of sobriety, fostered a love for nature, all living things, etc. Consequently, these educational editions also became excellent educational aids.

The first area that was filled with Ukrainian textbooks was Ukrainian literature. Ukrainian writers also took part as scientists who contributed to the development of the history and theory of Ukrainian literature, Ukrainian linguistics, propaganda, analysis, and popularisation of T. Shevchenko's works in Western Ukraine, and contributed to the familiarisation of compatriots with the works of writers from the Dnipro region. Their role in establishing a living colloquial vernacular and developing the modern Ukrainian literary language is an indisputable merit in the conditions of the current crisis society.

All these prerequisites determine the identity of the role of Ukrainian writers in the development of national pedagogical ideas in the conditions of the current crisis society.

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## Young People in Cyberspace: Threats and Opportunities

### Młodzież w cyberczasoprzestrzeni – zagrożenia i szanse

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**Abstract:** The article examines the presence of young people in cyberspace, presenting it as an environment of both multidimensional risks and developmental opportunities. The study aims to analyse the functions that the Internet fulfils in the lives of the young generation, with reference to its instrumental, socialization, and entertainment roles, as well as to identify problematic phenomena resulting from excessive (problematic) use of interactive media. The paper draws on a review of the literature and the findings of recent empirical research. The findings indicate that the Internet has become a natural environment for youth socialization and identity formation, enabling the development of passions, the broadening of horizons, the establishment and maintenance of relationships, and access to knowledge. Moreover, the virtual world has been primarily designed and adapted to meet the needs of young people in their pursuit of personal, social, psychological, and even physical well-being. At the same time, growing concerns are raised about Internet addiction, escapism, neglect of responsibilities, emotional and relational disturbances, as well as exposure to violent content, misinformation, disorganization, risky behaviours, and even self-destructive tendencies. Health and psychosocial consequences such as depression, social phobia, sleep disorders, and weakened family bonds are also emphasized. The conclusions highlight the need for preventive and therapeutic measures (cognitive-behavioural, pharmacological, and family-based) and for education on the safe and responsible use of the Internet. While the Internet has become an indispensable element of young people's everyday lives, its responsible use requires support from families, schools, and broader social institutions.

**Keywords:** youth, cyberspace, cyber threats, internet, teenagers, interactive media, prevention

**Abstrakt:** Artykuł podejmuje problem obecności młodzieży w cyberprzestrzeni, ukazując ją jako obszar zarówno wielowymiarowych zagrożeń, jak i szans rozwojowych. Celem opracowania jest analiza funkcji, jakie pełni Internet w życiu młodego pokolenia, z uwzględnieniem aspektów instrumentalnych, socjalizacyjnych i rozrywkowych, a także identyfikacja zjawisk problematycznych wynikających z nadmiernego (problematycznego) korzystania z mediów interaktywnych. W opracowaniu wykorzystano przegląd literatury przedmiotu oraz wyniki najnowszych badań empirycznych. Ustalenia wskazują, iż Internet stał się naturalnym środowiskiem socjalizacji i budowania tożsamości młodzieży, umożliwiając rozwój pasji, poszerzanie horyzontów, nawiązywanie i utrzymywanie relacji oraz dostęp do wiedzy. Ponadto, świat wirtualny został wykreowany i zasadniczo dostosowany do potrzeb młodzieży w zakresie poszukiwania dróg, sposobów i źródeł osiągnięcia przez nich



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dobrostanu osobistego, społecznego, psychicznego, jak również fizycznego. Jednocześnie obserwuje się narastanie problemów związanych z uzależnieniem od sieci (zagrożeń wynikających z problematycznego korzystania z Internetu), eskapizmem, zaniedbywaniem obowiązków, zaburzeniami emocjonalnymi i relacyjnymi oraz narażeniem na treści przemocowe, dezinformację, dezorganizację, dezintegrację, ryzykowne zachowania, a nawet tendencje autodestrukcyjne. Wskazano także na konsekwencje zdrowotne i psychospołeczne nadmiernego korzystania z Internetu, takie jak depresja, fobia społeczna, zaburzenia snu czy osłabienie więzi rodzinnych. Wnioski podkreślają konieczność podejmowania działań profilaktycznych i terapeutycznych (poznawczo-behawioralnych, farmakologicznych, rodzinnych), a także edukacji w zakresie świadomego i bezpiecznego korzystania z sieci. Internet jawi się jako niezbędny element codzienności młodzieży, jednak jego odpowiedzialne użytkowanie wymaga wsparcia ze strony rodziny, szkoły i instytucji społecznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młodzież, cyberczasoprzestrzeń, cyberzagrożenia, Internet, nastolatki, media interaktywne, profilaktyka

## INTRODUCTION

Cyberspace has become the domain of contemporary youth, defined by convenience, ease, flexibility, and technological proficiency acquired from the earliest years of life. Unlike previous generations, who had to adapt to digital progress, young people today have been using smartphones, smartwatches, computers, and the Internet almost since birth. The Internet itself has become the playground of their lives, and, to some extent, of their very existence. Although it is a virtual space, it has been inscribed into the fabric of everyday life as a real social world, where values, norms, and patterns of behaviour are acquired, identity is constructed, and personal channels of communication are created, maintained, and expanded. Moreover, it may be argued that this virtual world has been largely designed and adapted to the needs of young people in their pursuit of personal, social, psychological, and even physical well-being. At the same time, the satisfaction of these needs may be accompanied by individual risks, disorganisation, disintegration, misinformation, and even self-destructive tendencies.

Since the 1990s, the issue of youth in cyberspace has occupied a prominent place in both theoretical and practical reflection as well as in scientific research, owing to its significance for the development and functioning of the young generation. Early conclusions were predominantly negative. It was often assumed that young people's use of interactive media by led to their exclusion from real social interactions and adversely affected their mental health. Over time, however, scholars began to emphasize the complexity of the phenomenon and increasingly to highlight the benefits that adolescents may derive from online activity. Research has focused on the nature of the activities undertaken by young people in the digital environment and the amount of time they spend in virtual reality (Valkenburg & Peter 2009, 1-5). It has been demonstrated, among other things, that Internet communication can support the maintenance of social relationships already existing in the offline world, foster the development of social skills, stimulate creativity and a willingness to learn, and nurture passions through participation in various virtual interest groups. It can also broaden horizons through real-time interactions with

peers living in different parts of the world—a possibility particularly significant for young people from small towns—as well as provide support, resilience, and opportunities for building social relationships for adolescents who, for various reasons, experience ostracism and social stigmatisation. Furthermore, scholars have examined issues such as the formation of consumerist ideologies, the construction of new identities, the prevalence of risky behaviors facilitated by interactive media, and the circumstances under which adolescents become victims of the virtual world (McKeena 2008, 228-242; Ito et al. 2008, 5-18; Buckingham 2008, 153; Kowalski, Limber & Agatson 2010, 47-101; Cybal-Michalska 2007, 133; Pindel 2019, 83-90).

### 1. INSTRUMENTAL, SOCIALIZATION, AND ENTERTAINMENT ASPECTS OF DIGITAL MEDIA

The growing impact of the virtual environment on contemporary youth has made its influence a defining feature of a generational phenomenon. One may go further and argue that young people today can only be fully understood by examining their engagement with cyberspace and their participation in digital activities.

What, then, are today's teenagers immersed in online? An analysis of contemporary digital media makes it possible to distinguish a wide range of instrumental, socialization, and entertainment aspects (Smith 2013, 72). Instrumental aspects refer to various life needs of the individual, such as education, employment, and health (Gomes & Dias 2019, 67). Socialization aspects are primarily associated with social media (which, according to research, achieve 45% global penetration) and, through the formation of online bonds and social networks, involve the generation and distribution of information, opinions, interests, and ideas (Kemp 2019, 64; Beyens et al. 2020, 1-11). These encompass numerous domains, including careers and employment (e.g., LinkedIn), research (e.g., ResearchGate), romantic and/or sexual relationships (e.g., Tinder), friendships (e.g., Facebook), and even political activism (e.g., Twitter). Entertainment aspects, in turn, encompass various digital platforms providing pleasure and amusement, such as digital games and audiovisual content (Chayko 2020, 43). Online games are often enriched with realistic animations and augmented reality features, which operate simultaneously in both online and offline environments, often in identical, real-world locations—for example, Pokémon Go (Hamari et al. 2019, 804-819). These may be designed for single players or allow multiplayer interaction (MMOs—massively multiplayer online games). Some, such as role-playing games (RPGs), require the development and enactment of a player's identity through an avatar (Jones et al. 2014, 73).

Such a constructed virtual world thus becomes for young people a sphere of fascination, aspiration, pursuit, and exploration—one that cannot simply be ignored.

## 2. PROBLEMATIC USE OF THE INTERNET—INTERACTIVE MEDIA

In a situation where the majority of teenagers integrate the Internet fluently and appropriately into their everyday lives, it is nevertheless indisputable that a large proportion of young people struggle with Internet addiction.

In the literature, a multitude of terms are used to describe the problem of Internet abuse or misuse, often considering its social or psychological consequences. These include Internet addiction, problematic Internet use, gaming addiction, and problematic gaming. However, despite this multitude of terms, each of them has its own limitations, as they do not fully reflect the heterogeneity of problems experienced by teenagers in the context of their use of digital media. At the same time, they lack precision or consistency to capture the fluid, cross-cutting functionality of online activities. It therefore seems more appropriate to replace the commonly used term “Internet addiction” with the term “problematic use of interactive media.” This formulation retains the conceptualisation of the Internet as an addictive medium while avoiding the stigmatising and overly restrictive connotations of existing terminology (Bickham 2021, 3-5).

The conceptualisation of the Internet as an addiction (understood as excessive time spent online, combined with an internal compulsion to remain connected) assumes that an individual’s interaction with digital media depends on factors that may “push” or “pull” the individual towards the online world (Kozak 2014, 126; Davis 2001, 187-195; Douglas et al. 2008, 3027-3044). Push factors (encouraging Internet use) include user characteristics such as personality traits or psychological symptoms, as well as environmental characteristics such as peers and family. Pull factors (discouraging Internet use) include the online environment and/or the way individuals experience themselves in virtual spaces. These factors interact to produce negative outcomes such as symptoms of Internet addiction, sleep disturbances, and decreased academic, relational/interpersonal, and overall performance (Stavropoulos, Motti-Stefanidi & Griffiths 2021, 5).

Possible determinants of Internet addiction among young people include individual, demographic, and psychosocial characteristics. The most common risk factors are as follows:

1. Male gender (up to 5 times higher percentage of Internet-addicted boys and young men than girls and young women).
2. Age (in early adolescence, Internet addiction increases with age, reaching its highest level around the age of 15-16).
3. Low socio-economic status (including lower maternal education and single-parent households).
4. Family dysfunction (including low family cohesion, poor parenting, more family conflicts and poorer family relationships, resulting in spending little time with parents, hostility from parents, and less affection from both mother and father).

5. Deficits in self-control (low self-control) and higher levels of impulsivity (dysfunctional impulsivity, including certain aspects of this trait, e.g. high levels of urgency).
6. Higher scores on scales of rule-breaking and aggressive behaviour, and behavioural traits associated with hostility.
7. Neuroticism (as a common element of internalising mood disorders, including anxiety and depression), tendency to feel nervous and worried (Yang et al. 2020, 81-92; Yang et al. 2018, 101-120; Karacic and Oreskovic 2017, 38-42; Bonnaire & Phan 2017, 104-110; Schneider, King & Delfabbro, 2017, 321-333; Kim et al. 2016, 32-39; Choi et al. 2014, 246-253; Gervasi et al. 2017, 293-307; Müller et al. 2015, 565-574; Firat et al. 2018, 97-103; Wartberg et al. 2016, 272-277; Müller et al. 2014, 129-136; Griffith et al. 2010, 1125-1136).

Furthermore, when considering Internet addiction, particular attention should be paid to the results of American studies, which emphasise that people are not actually addicted to the substance or the behaviour itself, but to the brain's response to the drug or activity (Fauth-Bühler & Mann 2017, 349-356). Thus, mania focused on digital entertainment can be compared to the use of psychoactive substances and gambling disorders. Certain online activities, including gaming, release dopamine at a rapid rate, producing immediate gratification and a cyclical response that may include compulsive behaviour and increased tolerance (Sussman et al. 2018, 307-326).

Behavioural and EEG studies of reward processing and inhibitory control indicate that young people addicted to the Internet exhibit abnormalities in these areas. At the same time, magnetic resonance imaging results confirmed, with neurobiological evidence, that Internet-addicted individuals, like those with gambling disorders, have dysregulation of the reward system, reduced impulse control and other maladaptive behavioural and cognitive patterns (Li et al. 2020, 28).

The brains of young people addicted to the Internet, similar to those with psychoactive substance use disorders, show reduced orbitofrontal cortex thickness, which is a structural abnormality. In addition, neuroimaging studies have shown similarities in neural functioning and specific brain structures between Internet addiction and both compulsive behaviour and substance-use disorders (Hong et al. 2013, 1-5).

Nevertheless, in view of the above, compulsive, excessive Internet use should not be definitively classified as a behavioural addiction. It may instead represent maladaptive coping or a manifestation of existing self-regulation problems. Behaviours indicative of Internet addiction may also be symptoms of existing psychiatric disorders expressed through the digital environment (Starcevic 2017, 110-113; Przybylski, Weinstein & Murayama 2017, 230-236).

A worrying phenomenon observed among teenagers is indulging in gaming or other online social activities in order to escape from everyday problems or reality, as well as seeking solace from a difficult social and family life in a world of illusions, fantasies and virtual friendships (the phenomenon of escapism as a motive for being

online) (Beranuy, Carbonell & Griffiths 2013, 149-161). Young people frequently pursue a “new life” online when their “normal” life does not meet their expectations.

As a result, the time they spend online is increasing year by year. Many adolescents also multitask while connected, for example, eating meals while online or falling asleep with the Internet on. Data from the “Teenagers 3.0” study (Teenagers 3.0, 2023, 7-12) indicate that young people spend on average 5 hours and 36 minutes online per weekday. For comparison, this figure was 4 hours and 50 minutes in 2020, and 3 hours and 40 minutes in 2014 (Teenagers 3.0, 2021, 10). On weekends, young people use the Internet for an average of 6 hours and 16 minutes per day (Teenagers 3.0, 2023, 7-12). American studies report even higher levels—up to 8 hours daily on weekdays (Bickham 2021, 2).

Young people spend their time online primarily on the entertainment aspects of the virtual world, i.e. listening to music (75%), watching films and series (59%), playing online games (46%) and socialising, which translates into establishing and maintaining social interactions through the use of social media (42%) and contact with friends (64%) (Stavropoulos, Motti-Stefanidi & Griffiths 2021, 20).

The presence of the younger generation on social media is also becoming problematic. Teenagers claim that they cannot go an hour without access to it. Furthermore, they treat their activity on social media as a morning ritual, a habit, a daily practice, a way to start the day, immediately after waking up. One in four teenagers is unable to think about anything other than social media platforms. As a result, they often neglect their household and school responsibilities. Teenagers also use social media to feel better about themselves. Yet, paradoxically, most of them experience high and above-average levels of loneliness on social media (Teenagers 3.0, 2023, 7, 25-26, 233-238).

The incorporation of social media into everyday life exposes young people not only to the diverse content it offers, but also to pressure to share aspects of their own lives. Alarmingly, almost half of teenagers report being bombarded with antisocial content online and feel compelled to share images and personal details of their daily lives and surroundings step by step (Bickham 2021, 7).

Young people have different motives for posting their photos, videos or live streams. Girls prioritise the attractiveness of people, places and personal physical appearance, while boys refer to elements related to a sense of humour. Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, TikTok, Pinterest and Messenger are the social media platforms preferred by girls. Boys, on the other hand, choose YouTube and Twitch (Teenagers 3.0, 2023, 38).

Despite the minimum age requirement of 13 for most social media platforms, increasingly younger children are using them, often registering with fictitious data. This sometimes occurs with the knowledge or even consent of parents and guardians. Unfortunately, the content shared on social media platforms is often inappropriate or unsuitable for the emotional, intellectual, and cognitive development of young people, who may accept it uncritically and lack the ability to distinguish between genuine and false information.

Another trend concerns education. Using websites such as Sciaga.pl, Bryk.pl, Brainly.pl, and KLP.pl, they search for ready-made solutions to various types of tasks, summaries, and book reviews (Teenagers 3.0, 2023, 152-156, 287). Problematic Internet use carries significant risks of psychological, social, and physiological consequences. Due to the problematic use of the Internet by young people, there is a real danger in the form of psychological, social and physiological consequences of this activity.

The psychological consequences include social phobia manifested by avoidance of face-to-face contact, disruption of non-verbal communication, anxiety, depression caused by the inability to be online (even temporarily), reformulation of the hierarchy of needs by redirecting attention and activity to constant use of the network, loss of motivation and energy for purposeful action, abandonment of previous goals and plans, cognitive deprivation, narrowing of the world to a smartphone or computer monitor, circadian rhythm disruption (leading to irritability, tension, anxiety, discomfort, nervousness, and reduced mental performance), and reorganisation of sleep and activity patterns. These processes are further linked to abnormal fluctuations in blood levels of hormones, glucose, and other substances essential for proper bodily functioning.

The social effects include weakening or loss of emotional ties with previously close people such as family and friends, neglect of interpersonal relationships, frequent conflicts, social isolation, and the organisation of daily life around the computer, often leading to neglect or abandonment of responsibilities (Kozak 2014, 129-130).

Problematic Internet use can have a very negative impact on the health and well-being of young people. For example, in terms of mental health, the DQ Institute reports that young people who are victims of cyberbullying are up to 160% more likely to attempt suicide or engage in other self-harming behaviours. Excessive screen time may also correlate with risky behaviours, increased exposure to crime, low academic achievement, and physical health problems such as weight gain, obesity, failure to meet basic physical fitness guidelines, and even chronic conditions including weakened back muscle strength (Stavropoulos, Motti-Stefanidi & Griffiths 2021, 14).

In terms of cultural illustration, the Polish film *Suicide Room* (2011, dir. Jan Komasa) vividly portrays the tragic consequences of problematic Internet use. In real life, the main character has everything he needs—many friends, the prettiest girl in school, rich parents, money for clothes, gadgets and parties. Nevertheless, in line with the statement that “often the people who hate life the most are those we would never suspect,” in the face of failures and a lack of understanding from others, he grows weary of everyday life and escapes from reality into a virtual world where he loses himself. This world, although initially giving him a sense of security, eventually reveals itself to be only an illusion as relationships limited to cameras, games and all-day conversations are worthless and, like any other, it becomes imperfect. However, it is too late to escape from the trap of his own feelings, thoughts and the web of virtual intrigue, and for help from his loved ones, who realise too late the problem associated with the physical and psychological consequences of Internet addiction.

As a result, the protagonist of the film loses what is most precious—his life—and commits suicide. The most disturbing aspect of this striking image of the tragic consequences of problematic Internet use and losing oneself in the web is that it mirrors more than one true story that unfolds every day around the world.

Due to its advantages, unlimited possibilities and diverse offerings, the Internet has become a source of satisfaction for human needs, including an attractive form of leisure activity, and is therefore irreplaceable and necessary for everyday human functioning. Nevertheless, improper, unconscious, irrational and irresponsible use of the global network creates dangers in various areas of its exploitation and poses a threat to users within its sphere of influence (Kozak 2014, 132-134).

### 3. TREATMENT OF PROBLEMATIC USE OF THE INTERNET AND INTERACTIVE MEDIA

At the current stage of research into the treatment of problematic use of the Internet and interactive media, including its effectiveness, three approaches (application and adaptation to recipients) have been adopted:

1. Cognitive-behavioural therapy.
2. Pharmacological therapy.
3. Group/family therapy (Zajac et al. 2017, 979-994).

With regard to the first approach, dialectical behaviour therapy, which builds on cognitive-behavioural therapy but addresses emotions as well as thoughts and behaviours, appears highly promising.

Pharmacological treatment, on the other hand, involves the use of drugs targeted at comorbidities or underlying abnormalities, dysfunctions, disorders that are responsible for, or exacerbate, problematic internet use (including obsessive-compulsive disorder, ADHD, and depression). Among the drugs noted as effective in reducing problematic Internet use (both directly and indirectly, i.e. by treating other conditions whose management also leads to improvement in this area) are antidepressants such as escitalopram and bupropion. The latter is also beneficial for inattention, impulsivity, as well as mood problems, i.e. features typical of ADHD. In addition, the stimulant methylphenidate and the non-stimulant atomoxetine (both used to treat ADHD) are considered potentially effective due to their ability to regulate impulsivity (Han & Renshaw 2012, 689-696; Song et al. 2016, 527-535; Park et al. 2016, 427-432; Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez 2016, 143-176).

With regard to the third approach—group/family therapy—it has been observed that group therapies lasting eight weeks or more and involving 9-12 participants are particularly effective. These include single-family groups, multi-family groups and school groups. Therapy sessions are based on the cognitive-behavioural model, considering innovative psychotherapeutic methods and strategies designed specifically for people with problematic Internet use, as well as traditional family therapy. In one study, 20 out of 21 adolescent participants, supported by cooperation with their families, were no longer classified as Internet addicts after six two-hour

sessions. Such results suggest that group/family therapy represents an encouraging method of treatment for problematic Internet and interactive media use (Kuss & Lopez-Fernandez 2016, 143-176; Chun, Hyeonsuk & Sunhee 2017, 225-231; Lindenberg, Halasy & Schoenmaekers 2017, 64-71; Liu et al. 2015, 1-8).

Nevertheless, in order to gain a more comprehensive clinical picture and broaden treatment options, further research is required into the general and specific behaviours that define Internet addiction, as well as clearer explanations of key concepts, including the terminology of the disorder itself (Bickham 2021, 8).

It should also be emphasised that all treatment methods must be supported by the family environment—the parents and guardians of those affected. Parents possess preventive tools that can shape a positive home environment, strengthen relationships and family bonds, and enhance overall family functioning, which are protective factors against the adverse consequences of problematic Internet use.

#### 4. PRIVACY ON THE INTERNET

Every day, more and more young Internet users are discovering the extent to which relative anonymity online can pose a serious problem. Even if individuals believe they are anonymous and take measures to protect this status, it does not mean they cannot be traced online. Frequently, users themselves—sometimes unknowingly in the face of hidden e-threats, and at other times willingly and with their explicit consent—post (or allow others to post) a wide range of information about themselves and their surroundings. This includes personal data, addresses, images, dietary preferences, hobbies, views, emotional states, activities, and locations, as well as information about places they have visited or events in which they participate regularly. A clear example of such practices can be observed on Facebook and Instagram, where posts are further enriched with photos, videos, and live streams (Kozak 2014, 133).

At the same time, every second teenager reports that although they wish to remain anonymous in cyberspace, their parents or guardians prevent this by constantly posting photos on social media accounts that make their image public. This practice, known as “sharenting,” often causes embarrassment, disappointment, and frustration among adolescents (Teenagers 3.0, 2021, 7; Teenagers 3.0, 2023, 181-189).

Furthermore, when young people engage in online activities—such as, communicating with strangers, accepting invitations to join groups of friends, participating in forums and groups, subscribing to various social media accounts, adopting new identities, and sharing them with others—they rarely verify the authenticity of recipients, authors, or profile owners, nor do they assess the credibility or sources of the content (Górka 2017, 234-243).

In addition, young people frequently assume different roles on the Internet and experiment with various versions of the “self” without the fear of pejorative criticism or peer rejection they might encounter offline. A significant proportion of teenagers present themselves online as someone other than who they truly are, falsifying, among other things, their gender, age, skin colour, views

or sexual orientation, and using multiple email addresses and online nicknames. While this perspective is appealing to those in the process of self-discovery, it is also dangerous, as pretending to be someone else may lead to online interactions spilling into the offline world, where those they meet may not be who they claim to be (Kowalski, Limber & Agatson 2010, 9).

Furthermore, anonymity on the internet (often referred to by young people as an “invisibility cloak”) encourages behaviours that would be unlikely to occur in real life. Teenagers may say or do things online that they would never attempt offline, due to their sense of reduced identifiability. This phenomenon, known as “online disinhibition,” is well documented. For example, adolescents who are physically smaller or weaker than their peers, have lower self-esteem, and are not perpetrators of offline school violence are often found to engage in cyberbullying (Kowalski, Limber & Agatson 2010, 73-74, 202).

## 5. CYBER THREATS: CYBERBULLYING—CYBERCRIME—EXPOSURE TO RISKY BEHAVIOUR

Currently, the issue of youth safety online focuses primarily on the risks of sexual exploitation and cyberbullying. However, the scope of cyber threats extends far beyond these two areas.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has developed a framework for categorising cyber threats, which has been widely adopted, including by UNICEF and many other organisations. This framework consists of the following categories:

1. Content—including exposure to illegal and age-inappropriate material, embedded marketing and online gambling.
2. Contact—including ideological persuasion, exploitation (e.g. sexual exploitation and human trafficking), harassment, drug addiction, and the violation and misuse of personal data.
3. Behaviour—including cyberbullying and the effects of excessive screen time and digital device ownership on children.
4. Consumer—including marketing, commercial profiling, financial risks and security risks (Wójcik 2020, 174-175; Livingston et al. 2011, 13; Pyżalski 2012, 89-92).

In addition, privacy violations are also highlighted, which permeate all of the above categories.

Cyberbullying is an extremely dangerous phenomenon circulating on the internet. It includes intimidation, blackmail, slander, harassment, dissemination of compromising material, mocking others, impersonation, and stalking, all of which can result in serious harm (Kozak 2014, 133-134; Teenagers 3.0, 2021, 79-90; Kowalski, Limber & Agatson 2010, 53-59).

The Internet is flooded with hate speech—verbal attacks, name-calling, ridicule and humiliation are everyday occurrences, and teenagers are aware

that people who insult others online often go unpunished. It is also important to note that freedom of speech on the Internet is unlimited and often treated as more important than combating hatred. What is more, the prevalence of violent situations faced by young people causes a kind of numbness, as many teenagers display a passive attitude by not reacting to these situations and not reporting them to anyone. The reasons for this situation can be found in the still insufficient education on how to properly recognise and understand the various categories of online threats, as well as how to respond to them appropriately and responsibly, and in the fear of speaking about the perpetrator or the situation itself (Teenagers 3.0, 2021, 88).

The virtual world is moreover an area which, on the one hand, can foster self-confidence and self-expression, but on the other hand, can also have the opposite effect. For instance, the website *doyoulookgood.com* allowed users to create an account, post information and photos, and then be rated by others for attractiveness, with comments attached. Negative evaluations often left young people feeling wronged and humiliated, triggering a cascade of negative psychological consequences (Kowalski, Limber & Agatson 2010, 10).

Other cyber threats experienced by adolescents include hacking into social media accounts, messengers or email, theft of virtual goods (e.g. game items, app points), hacker attacks, spam attacks, data theft, online transaction fraud, extortion attempts, threats of physical violence (including death threats), body-shaming, disclosure/acquisition of secrets, trolling, exclusion from the online communities, offers to purchase pirated versions of films or music, offers to purchase illegal substances such as drugs, designer drugs, anabolic steroids, coercion into sexual contact, paedophilia, grooming, flaming, “happy slapping”, deepfakes, dissemination of inappropriate images and content (including sexting and pathostreams often broadcast live, on YouTube or Twitch), bombardment with unwanted advertising, secret meetings with adults encountered online, and the use of websites and applications intended for adults, especially pornographic sites such as Pornhub (Pyżalski 2012, 126-129; Teenagers 3.0, 2021, 92-103; Teenagers 3.0, 2023, 91-93; Pospiszyl 2023, 236-237; Rywczyńska & Wójcik 2018, 21-82).

At the same time, teenagers participate in various online challenges, ranging from humorous to irrational or even life-threatening, endangering their own or others’ lives or physical and/or mental health. They also use websites (including STS.pl and Betclic.pl) that draw them into the world of gambling, e.g. sports betting (Teenagers 3.0, 2023, 263-274).

Overall, cyber threats in the youth environment are constantly evolving and expanding, both in frequency and in scope. This is linked to the many hours adolescents spend online each day watching films, videos, or streamed television, gaming, and using social media. At the same time, this is complemented by the rapid technological progress that has been observed for years in relation to the Internet of Things or devices operating online, cloud-based devices—wearable devices, household appliances (small and large), toys and robots, through which

cyber threats can be expected, including the misuse of personal data, e.g. location and usage patterns (Kwiatkowska 2014, 7-11).

## 6. YOUTH AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REAL VIS-À-VIS THE VIRTUAL WORLD

Today's teenagers have well-established skills and a remarkable ability to use digital tools, which means they can become guides in the area of cybersecurity challenges. They can also be advocates for reliable measures to protect the virtual world from threats, as well as for policies aimed at protecting individuals and communities. Young people are the generation that can effectively deal with cyber threats. It is they, more than anyone else, who point out and experience situations that violate the well-being and security of the Internet. At the same time, they develop a conviction about the far-reaching consequences of such circumstances, which affect many areas of social and economic life, and may even reach the national level. They can, and indeed must, be involved as leaders in activities related to raising awareness and educating their peers and the wider community about online safety, for example through various platforms, including social media.

Furthermore, when observing coding competitions, tech start-ups or design marathons, makes it clear that many young people are active participants, including initiators and creators of innovative strategies, technologies and IT tools. As a society, we must decisively and constructively transform this potential, which is within our reach, into support for solving problems, and for expanding and improving the world, both real and virtual.

Finally, in the face of rapid advances in artificial intelligence, it is worth emphasising the important role of young people in its ethical development, implementation and integration. It is young people who see the potential, opportunities and many positive aspects of artificial intelligence, but also the fundamental, though manageable, risks and areas that remain insufficiently known and understood. Based on this, the younger generation should be provided with reliable knowledge and enabled to acquire skills so that they can use this technology in ways that ensure the well-being and protection of themselves and others, while also promoting a safer digital world (Stavropoulos, Motti-Stefanidi & Griffiths 2021, 18).

## CONCLUSION

Cyberspace for young people is a modern fairy tale, a place of unlimited social, creative and entertainment possibilities. Through the world of interactive media, teenagers can change the areas of their lives with which they are dissatisfied, restart and begin anew. They can reconfigure aspects of their identity, make friends, be beautiful, "travel, have adventures without leaving home, live in a palace they build themselves," be rich and wise. "And with all this, it is a world so universal, universally accepted, useful, almost 'real' that it is harder to leave this Matrix than to stay in it" (Pospiszyl 2021, 307). Just as the benefits of young people being online are indisputable (e.g.

for developmental, educational, pro-social and affiliative purposes), so too are the dangers that lurk there. Therefore, in the context of the important issues concerning young people described in this article, there is a need not to leave them alone online, nor to reinforce their physical and mental exhibitionism or digital slavery (Kozak 2014, 267-292). There is also a need to shape appropriate attitudes among young people towards interactive media and the positive phenomena in cyberspace, to create a safe online environment, to expand knowledge about the digital world, and to ensure proper supervision of online activity, e.g. through parental control using dedicated programmes or applications, or through measures to expose and combat cybercrime by establishing special units and organisations for this purpose.

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## Red Pill Community as a Spiritual Community

### Red Pill Community jako wspólnota duchowa

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**Abstract:** The secularisation of contemporary Western societies has led to the disintegration of traditional forms of spirituality and the emergence of a “transcendental void” filled by alternative spiritual communities. One such phenomenon is the Red Pill Community, functioning within the so-called manosphere. This study aims to explore the spiritual dimension of this community and to determine how it assumes functions typically associated with religious groups. The research employs a qualitative content analysis of the statements made by Andrew Tate – one of the leading figures of the manosphere – combined with discourse analysis focused on the categories of identity and axiology. The findings indicate that the Red Pill Community constructs a nonconformist belief system in which initiatory practices, narratives of self-realisation, and responses to existential questions play a central role. The group’s online forums serve a communal function and facilitate effective recruitment of new members. The results allow for interpreting the Red Pill Community as a form of new digital spirituality that responds to the contemporary crisis of religion and identity. Despite lacking a direct reference to the sacred, this community fulfils functions typical of religious groups by using new technologies to shape a sense of belonging and meaning.

**Keywords:** Red Pill Community, young men, spiritual community, manosphere, new spirituality, secularisation, Andrew Tate, Matrix

**Abstrakt:** Sekularyzacja współczesnych społeczeństw zachodnich doprowadziła do rozpadu tradycyjnych form religijności i powstania „transcendentalnej pustki”, wypełnianej przez alternatywne wspólnoty duchowe. Jednym z takich fenomenów jest Red Pill Community, funkcjonująca w ramach tzw. manosfery. Celem niniejszego opracowania jest ukazanie duchowego wymiaru tej społeczności oraz określenie, w jaki sposób przejmują one funkcje charakterystyczne dla wspólnot religijnych. W badaniu zastosowano jakościową analizę treści wypowiedzi Andrew Tate’a – czołowej postaci manosfery – oraz analizę dyskursu skupioną na kategoriach tożsamości i aksjologii. Wyniki wskazują, że Red Pill Community tworzy system przekonań o charakterze nonkonformistycznym, w którym centralną rolę odgrywają praktyki inicjacyjne, narracje o samorealizacji oraz odpowiedzi na pytania egzystencjalne. Fora internetowe tej grupy pełnią funkcję wspólnotową i umożliwiają skuteczną rekrutację nowych członków. Wnioski z analizy pozwalają interpretować Red Pill Community jako formę nowej duchowości cyfrowej, odpowiadającej na współczesny kryzys religii i tożsamości. Pomimo braku bezpośredniego odniesienia do strefy *sacrum*, wspólnota ta realizuje funkcje typowe dla religii, wykorzystując nowe technologie do kształtowania więzi i sensu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Red Pill Community, młodzi mężczyźni, wspólnota duchowa, manosfera, nowa duchowość, sekularyzacja, Andrew Tate, Matrix



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## INTRODUCTION

Around the twenty-ninth minute of the 1999 film, directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, *The Matrix*, a scene takes place that has become a staple of pop culture: Neo meets Morpheus (Wachowski & Wachowski 1999):

Morpheus: This is your last chance. After this, there is no turning back. You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes... Remember... All I'm offering is the truth. Nothing more.

Neo, the main protagonist, who until now has navigated between a corporate career and illicit hacking activity, reaches for the red pill without hesitation, as it is the only way for him to understand what the “Matrix” is. He then awakens inside a mechanical cocoon to which he is connected by a system of cables. Soon he sees that he is only one among thousands of such pods, each occupied by dormant, utterly unaware human beings. With the help of Morpheus, the enigmatic leader of the rebels, he manages to escape, and the truth about the Matrix is revealed: it is a reality simulation woven by machines, in which every human being is merely an image transmitted by robots to the body confined within the pod. The film became a global hit, and the expression “escape from the Matrix” emerged as an important metaphor signifying the act of leaving behind an enslaving, artificial, and conformist reality – one bound by norms and social expectations – that limits genuine understanding and experience of the world, deprives individuals of freedom, and enforces mechanical, unreflective functioning. Nowadays, the film’s symbolism is used by the online Red Pill Community (RPC), whose members call themselves Redpillists, which directly refers to the scene of Neo’s first meeting with Morpheus, when he had to choose his future. As the nomenclature suggests, community members chose the red pill, which meant escaping the Matrix.

### 1. RED PILL COMMUNITY

The Red Pill Community is one of the communities that function within the “manosphere”, which, as Debbie Ging explains, is a collection of online blogs, channels, chat rooms, groups and organisations that fight for “men’s rights” (Ging 2017). She explains that the term “manosphere” was first used in 2009 to describe male blogging communities, and its popularisation is attributed to the book *The Manosphere: A New Hope for Masculinity*, published in 2013 by Ian Ironwood. It mainly focuses on teenagers and young men, who are extremely susceptible to manipulation. Youth is drawn into this online world during a developmental period in which the worldview and the revaluation of original value systems are formed (Crone & Konijn 2018). Therefore, it is young people who are most appealed to by the Red Pill. A survey commissioned by the charity Hope not Hate found that 80% of 16- and 17-year-old British boys had consumed content created by Andrew Tate (Hope not Hate 2023).

Unlike the main character of the movie *The Matrix*, the Gentlemen who become redpilled (a term meaning embracing the philosophy of the Red Pill Community) do not wake up in a slippery capsule in a world dominated by machines, but in a universe ruled by feminists and democrats. This state of affairs is, of course, as terrifying as the dystopia proposed by Lily and Lana Wachowski. Fortunately, the Red Pill community can help them acclimatize to this terrible reality with advice on how to live without succumbing to the mainstream, or even how they will be able to overcome the obstacles that feminism throws at them. According to them, the true nature of society and sexual relations is completely different from the one created today.

The Red Pill community is one of many similar groups that make up the manosphere. As the name implies, it is a collection of virtual spaces designed for men and men's rights. Most of these will be communities that share similar philosophies to the RPC or focus on right-wing ideologies (Ging 2017). It brings together men from all over the world under a single, virtual banner, and their most popular meeting place is forums dedicated to individual subgroups on reddit (Cousineau 2021). Supporters of men's rights already noticed the oppression imposed on them by society in the 1960s, and now researchers are paying attention to the psychological aspect of men's interest in the manosphere.

Modernity is characterised by a huge pace of development and change, and is therefore closely related to risk and impermanence, which has a huge impact on individuals (Giddens 2002). In such a climate, the individual is in a constant process of shaping his own self and image, but in order to do this, one needs to know what course to take.

“These aims imply a masculinity that is looking for answers on how to deal with the changing expectations of men, within both the crisis of masculinity and the rejection of traditional masculinity. In this way, men seeking guidance on how to construct their masculinity, because traditional role models have been called into question, are drawn to strong characters and the provided proof and the reassurance of male superiority that the manosphere represents” (Mountford 2018, 4).

Young men may find it much more beneficial to follow the philosophy of male supremacy in a reflective project of building identity. The crisis of male loneliness makes them extremely susceptible to misogynistic influences.

Social research makes it clear that dissatisfaction with one's social and romantic life is a major motivator for joining the Red Pill Community. Due to an alternative value system that encourages the rejection of modern society, Red Pill members involuntarily separate themselves from real life. The virtual community convinces them of the superiority of the views of the manosphere over the mainstream, while at the same time putting the members themselves in a superior position to the average bread-eater. This mechanism further deepens the feeling of isolation from the rest of the world. The ideology on which the Red Pill is based and the values instilled in its members make social integration significantly more difficult and, as part of the feedback, effectively locks the RedPill members in their virtual spaces.

The researchers also point to another reason why young men crave the philosophy of the Red Pill and the like. The most commonly declared motivation for joining the community was the fact that they felt vulnerable in their relationships with women (Cedzyński 2024). This is a deceptively simple but true explanation. After the first romantic failures of adolescent men, the question arises about their source. The lack of satisfaction and the inability to build a male-female relationship make them naturally start looking for the reason for this situation. From a psychological point of view, the Red Pill community offers its members an asylum from self-reflection and self-criticism and allows feminism to be blamed for personal failures.

Nevertheless, it is not only the anti-feminist attitude that focuses the manosphere. Its members also adhere to one homogeneous vision of masculinity, the overriding goal of which is to maintain a dominant social position by referring to violent practices and manifestations of discrimination (Mountford 2018). The core thought of the Red Pill Community is based on references to the supposed “laws of nature.” Red Pill men represent a growing subculture that rejects popular narratives. The origin of the name of the community, which is presented in the introduction, is crucial to the main idea of the movement. Manosphere believes that the truth that men need to wake up to is that feminism hurts them and robs them of their masculinity. They are advised to reject modern, Western and liberal social thought, and propose the path of “truth”. All the above beliefs make up a belief system of a nonconformist nature. In times of physical division and digital proximity, Red Pill forums are extremely effective in recruiting and indoctrinating new, young members.

## 2. SPIRITUAL COMMUNITIES

According to Ferdinand Tönnies, a community is a stable, permanent form of functioning and coexistence; the individuals within it are dependent on each other, benefit from relationships, and possess and use common goods (Tönnies 2008, 182). Emile Durkheim saw the community as a functional space: he distinguished mechanical solidarity (primary communities, the harmony of thoughts and actions) and organic solidarity (modern communities, society is a complementary creation thanks to the internal division of labour, but not reducible to individuals), which differ from each other in the degree of development of the communities in which they occur (Durkheim 2021). The community is the source of rights and obligations regarding the proper functioning of society: socialisation aims to introduce the individual into communities and equip them with normative systems that facilitate functioning in society. The lack of a point of reference, which is a community, leads to anomie – a state in which an individual is unable to discover what he thinks social expectations are because the system that was the source of this information has collapsed (Sztompka 2002). An important part of the individual is the religious community, which, according to Paweł Załęcki, is

a kind of social collective, forming a strong interpersonal bond between members who share a worldview, beliefs and participate in the same practices (Załęcki 2002, 358-359). The functional dimension of religion is crucial in this context, as it is conditioned by its ability to create specific value systems, ideological, symbolic, ritual elements and specific evoked feelings that help navigate the hardships of everyday life (Martin-Velasco 1988, 23). Religious communities thus equip the individual to answer questions about the meaning and purpose of life, shape morality and provide support in difficult moments.

Postmodern societies seem to function in opposition to communities; instead, social life is realised through associations, which are individualised creations. Individuals care about their own well-being, and members are negative and distrustful of each other; there is no concept of common goods (Tönnies 2008: 185). Nevertheless, as Paweł Załęcki points out, the sense of threat, which, according to Ulrich Beck, is characteristic of postmodern societies (Beck 2002), is often intensified by the inability to meet basic needs and occurs as a result of the inevitable course of social events, leads to the emergence of protective communities, which include religious communities, characterized by, among others, interpersonal intimacy and the introduction of meaning-creating contexts and moral obligations (Załęcki 2002, 360). Janusz Mariański points out that the beginning of the 21st century is associated with the weakening, but not the disappearance, of religious influence, with a simultaneous increase in its importance in some areas of life (Mariański 2009, 34). The researcher explains that secularisation, the aim of which was to deprive man of the transcendental dimension, effectively weakened the position of the Church and caused the development of new spiritualities (Mariański 2016, 3), whose fluid, non-institutionalised form satisfies spiritual hunger, without requiring subordination to organised ritualism (Mariański 2015, 16). The very concept of spirituality, according to Janusz Mariański and Stanisław Wargacki, means an innovative, inclusive, individualised style of spiritual culture in postmodern societies: "it is democratic, easily accessible, individualistic in nature and goes beyond the structures of institutionalised religion, so it is often non-ecclesiastical" (Mariański & Wargacki 2011, 142). Due to their personalised form, postmodern forms of religiosity reject an objective understanding of Christian values, which are extremely important in the formation of human identity, i.e. all facts inscribed in human nature, "which serve the harmonious realisation of the needs and desires of human nature leading man to his goals .." (Schrade 1993, 138). The universality, ruthlessness and transcendentality of these values make them create a stable axionormative system that allows us to navigate reality and give life seriousness and purpose (Schrade 1993, 138). The lack of rational assimilation of these values leads to the shallowness of the human experience through the practice of hedonistic and materialistic acts: the individual rejects an objective, natural understanding of ethical principles and develops his own definition of values such as love, responsibility or justice. Threat is therefore not the only reason for the search for communities in the postmodern reality: globalization and the

resulting flood of information, as well as the radical structural changes that affect postmodern societies, detach the individual from stable norms and values, forcing an individual choice of lifestyle (Mariański 2009, 52), i.e. a culturally defined form of realization of given norms, habits and needs (Dubis 2014; Fatyga 1999). This means that the individual is no longer dependent on the values-based traditions of local communities in the context of choices that shape their everyday life: nowadays they choose from alternative forms that put man at the very centre, promising him to find the way to his "I" and the sphere of *the sacred* (Mariański 2009, 53).

There is a growing interest in esoteric movements that refer to "astrology, mysticism, Eastern religions, psychological techniques, magic, parapsychology, and to live extraordinary experiences and sensations" (Mariański 2009, 57). These movements are the postmodern equivalent of religious communities, which equip with an appropriate axionormative system, help navigate reality and answer questions about meaning. They provide psychological closeness, but do not always meet the requirement of physicality by functioning in virtual spaces, which, thanks to anonymity, liberate from the prevailing social norms and give freedom in proclaiming views, have a positive overtone (Willson 1997).

One of such virtual communities is the Red Pill Community, the essence of which, conditioned by the emotional identification of its members (Siewierski 2015, 6), is a metaphor of "leaving the Matrix", which leads to learning the truth about the laws that govern society and the matrimonial market. According to RPC members, the rest of society exists in ignorance, which intensifies the sense of social anomie on a global level and strengthens bonds within the group. Members of the RPC are bound not only by a system of values and a sense of belonging to a group, but also by the belief that they are superior to the "unenlightened", who are still forced to live in a lie. By distinguishing itself from the rest of society and creating the illusion of the only true social ideology, the RPC shapes a unique, alienated, virtual community. Members share the same value system and specific beliefs, practices, and emotional states (Siewierski 2015, 6). What sustains the RPC community is the networks of contacts based on forums on services such as Reddit or Discord, and the consumption of content published by mentors of the manosphere, such as Andrew Tate. They are the ones who show the members of the community what they should focus on and what they should believe in. In addition, RPC forums are a safe zone for men to share their thoughts and experiences. An inseparable part of the manosphere is also giving each other advice in accordance with a given value system. In this way, the community helps regulate negative emotional states and creates an atmosphere of a "support group".

By providing a specific axionormative system, integration through sharing the "truth", unity of worldview and virtual anonymity, which allows for the expression of controversial views and deepens the sense of separateness from the rest of society, the RPC ensures the fulfilment of the psychosocial needs of individuals and functions as a community.

The secularisation and marketisation of spirituality have significantly changed the original character of spiritual communities: they are not tied to a specific

religious institution, they are selective (the individual decides on the degree of his or her own involvement and consumption of given content) and may have a virtual dimension. They bring together like-minded people, equip them with an axionormative system, navigate everyday life and provide answers to the ultimate questions: about the meaning and purpose of life. One such community is the Red Pill Community, which is spiritual in its structure, ideology and practice.

### 3. RED PILL COMMUNITY AS A SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY – AN ANALYSIS OF ANDREW TATE’S STATEMENTS

Among the most famous celebrities and gurus of the manosphere are brothers Andrew and Tristan Tate, who became famous thanks to their activity on social networks: as former professional kickboxers, they have amassed millions of followers thanks to their conservative, misogynistic views. They publish videos in which they flaunt their luxurious lifestyle and introduce the RPC philosophy to the audience, and they also run an online academy where they share methods to get rich and give advice on how to succeed in the matrimonial market. They are the most popular idols of the community, who additionally take part in the creation of the community philosophy, and Andrew Tate, who is the most media-oriented of the brothers, is perceived as the global voice of the community. Their lifestyle is aspirational for the members of the group, as he has all the qualities of a real man in the eyes of the Redpillists (BBC 2025).

An analysis of Andrew Tate’s statements, the self-proclaimed leader of the manosphere, reveals the spiritual dimension of Redpill thought. The use of a qualitative research method allows for a greater dose of interpretation, “taking into account the broader context and intentions of the sender” (Czarnik 2020, 10). The statements presented below are selected excerpts from Andrew Tate’s speeches according to the criterion of thematic relevance.

An important aspect that gives the RPC a spiritual character is the ritual nature of the practices that accompany joining its ranks. The very vocabulary used to describe this process is indicative of the ritualism associated with it: in a popular podcast episode, hosted by Tucker Carlson, Andrew Tate presents the following definition of the Matrix (YouTube 2024a):

Tucker Carlson: What is the Matrix?

Andrew Tate: Good question. I guess some Americans call it the Deep State, but I like to look at it in a more global way. When I say the Matrix, I think there are certain agendas which are being pushed, I think the media machine and the judicial systems of the world work together hand in hand. I think the goal is to control people’s minds to a point where they don’t discuss anything that’s important. The reason I use the Matrix is because I’ve watched that movie a few times and it has so many similarities (...) and the basic premise is that human’s minds are controlled and put inside of a false reality so that their body heat can be manifested for the machines, and I don’t think it’s much different to reality our minds are controlled. We’re put in a false version of reality,

we're told things that aren't true, we're arguing over things that don't matter, we're observing a false version of events and the goal of it is just to distract us long enough for our bodies to be used for the machines, the soulless, and I think it's pretty similar.

He explains that you need to wake up from the Matrix: first you need to understand that you are part of a controllable, limited reality, then you need to awaken in yourself the desire for something bigger, inconvenient and non-conformist, then you need to "swallow the red pill" and take your fate into your own hands, free yourself from social dictatorship and understand the true mechanisms that govern this world. This process is ritualistic, as it assumes a specific sequence of activities, the performance of which leads to the achievement of specific goals; however, due to the lack of a physical dimension and the sequential form of thought processes, it is not a ritual in the strict sense of the word.

Another important element that shapes the spiritual dimension of RPC is the regulation and determination of the most important dimensions of everyday life, and thus the shaping of specific lifestyles. Leaders and popularisers of the RPC consider work on their image and material condition to be crucial: the result is dedication to exercise and paid work. Members of the community are encouraged to attend the gym every day and to choose a profession that brings the most profits. Physical exercise is supposed to improve the figure, self-confidence and eliminate malaise, and doing well-paid work is supposed to improve social status.

The spiritual dimension of the RPC is constructed primarily by providing answers to questions about the meaning and purpose of life. The motivational video "Andrew Tate: The Purpose of Life" posted on YouTube presents the following ideology of the RPC leader and guide (YouTube 2024b):

Host: Is happiness the purpose of life?

Andrew Tate: No absolutely utterly not, the purpose of life is to be confident, successful. If you try and base your life and your mentality purely around how happy you are you'll end up hedonistic and destroyed. (...) I think that as a man your happiness comes from feeling respected over feeling loved and the reason perhaps, you're happy now is because you have more respect for yourself because of the decisions you're making, and you have self-respect. And I think that a lot of men even if they have self-respect if nobody else respects them, they're struggling.

Thus, the vision is presented that the meaning of life is social success determined by respect, both from within and from without. In another statement presented in the film "Andrew Tate: I Will Achieve The Purpose Of Life | Masculine Motivational Advice On How To Win" Andrew Tate points out that this approach only characterizes men (YouTube 2024c):

Andrew Tate: I do not believe happiness is the purpose of life for a man I believe happiness is what children should strive for, and I believe women should aim to be happy I believe happiness is for women and children, I believe men should have a sense of purpose, I believe we should live for something. If you live for happiness then you're hedonistic, you go to festivals, you do drugs, you drink alcohol, you're

an idiot. Living for happiness as a man makes you an idiot 99% of the time. If you live for happiness as a woman, you probably want to have a good relationship with your spouse and you wanna be giddy and you wanna laugh and joke and raise your children and make pretty things and it's, it's pretty good but male happiness is, is just being an idiot. I think you need a sense of purpose as a man I think you need something to live and to die for. If you feel purposeful, you'll never feel sad, you may be stressed and you may be busy, but you'll never feel sad.

According to this ideology, men are burdened with enormous responsibility; they must renounce temporary pleasures and work hard to find meaning in success, which is an appropriate social status and universal respect. This perspective is also confirmed by the following statement by Tate, presented in the video entitled "Andrew Tate: Explains the Purpose of Life" (YouTube 2023):

Host: Why we are created as humans and why we are here? What is the purpose of life? Why have we been given life?

Andrew Tate: I think we're here to struggle and to learn. I don't think we're here to be happy. (...) You're a man. You have responsibilities. You're here to do important things. And important things are going to be difficult. And they're going to be hard, and you're going to get frustrated. But that's what gives you purpose. I don't see anyone who's chasing happiness. I think that's a very feminine frame. I understand why some women just want to be happy I don't think, I don't know how it feels to be a girl because I'm not one. But in my experience, I know women who just want to be happy. Girls just want to have fun. Fine. But you're a man, right? And if you're a man, then it's absolutely, entirely different experience of life. I, I think we're here to struggle. I think we're here to endure pain. I think we're here to just see how hard we are to kill. I think that going through terrible things and living through them and coming out the other side is one of the most fantastic things about being a human. I think it's like once you understand what life is really about, there's no emotion, which isn't enjoyable. The only emotion that, the only emotional state which can be seen as detrimental is feeling nothing at all.

Through suffering and hard work, one can find the way to success, which becomes the meaning of life: a man who is lost and unsure of his fate and who is looking for answers to ultimate questions should say goodbye to immediate gratification and to finding easy solutions. In order to truly understand life and oneself, one must prepare for suffering and acquire the attributes that will allow for a dignified life, find strength, respect and maintain the will to fight. On his website, Andrew Tate outlines 41 principles that men should follow, including: "Principle 1: I believe that men have the divine imperative to become as capable powerful and competent as possible in this life"; "Principle 13: I believe that a man's life is difficult and he has the sacred duty to become strong to handle such difficulty"; "Principle 14: I believe men are personally responsible for their actions and for the results they achieve in their lives"; "Principle 25: I believe in acquiring wealth and abundance in order to improve my life and do good for those I care about"; "Rule 41: each day I dedicate myself anew to create the greatest possible positive

impact in the world and do the work necessary to achieve a greater masculine excellence across all realms of human endeavour” (Andrew Tate: Live What You Dream – official website). These principles show that one of the leaders and main popularisers of the RPC believes in the divine destiny of men, which is to obtain the right social status that will allow for a dignified, wealthy and hardworking life: the meaning lies in overcoming the natural obstacles of life, in shaping one’s masculinity. Success is defined by the material state and the social respect aroused. If men face their fears instead of running away from them, they will embark on the glorious and ultimately successful path that was destined for them in advance: life is supposed to be difficult, profit is supposed to be great.

## CONCLUSIONS

The transcendental emptiness, which is a long-term consequence of secularization, the fact that “morality loses its institutional safeguards, becomes more and more a matter of autonomous, individual conscience” (Mariański 2002, 48) and rejects the objective concept of Christian values, has significantly expanded the possibilities of the spiritual market: a number of groups, organizations and communities are created that focus on religious practices and answers to ultimate questions and thanks to the technological progress often take on a virtual dimension. One such online community is the Red Pill Community, which, using the terminology of the popular movie *The Matrix*, calls on its members to wake up from an artificial, tightly controlled reality and to join the “real world”. The very process of entering the community already assumes a ritualised character, and the elements that confirm the spiritual framework of the RPC and evoke the functional dimensions of religion include the valorisation of life attitudes as well as the provision of key answers to questions concerning the meaning and purpose of life. The ideology is addressed to men, who are encouraged to take full responsibility for their own lives, to confront adversity, and to deliberately construct success – understood as the ultimate goal, defined by wealth and masculinity. The Red Pill Community thus exploits the openness of the spiritual marketplace and the human need for belonging to communities in which one may find both acceptance and significant philosophical constructs. Therefore, despite the RPC not explicitly positioning constructs. Therefore, despite the RPC not explicitly positioning itself as a community that refers to the sacred, it can nonetheless be observed that it assumes a spiritual character by virtue of the functions it performs.

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## Family Determinants of Sports Consumption in the Sociological Aspect\*

### Rodzinne uwarunkowania konsumpcji sportowej w aspekcie socjologicznym

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**Abstract:** The aim of the work is to characterize the family as a social group reproducing attitudes and behaviours in the field of sports. More precisely, to show the family socio-cultural variables that determine sports consumption. The work presents the basic social issues that have a decisive impact on the participation of the family in sports consumption, namely the types of families, their structure, power, but also the types of families and the differences and inequalities that exist between them. The work is of a review-theoretical nature, in which existing empirical data constituting scientific theories, as well as data generated by earlier social researchers, were used. To solve the formulated research problem, the method of critical analysis of literature was used, but also, as a kind of auxiliary, the inductive and deductive method and the synthetic and analytical method. The conducted analyses show that the positioning of families in the social structure is of fundamental importance from the point of view of preparing the younger generation for sports consumption. The high position of the family in the social structure in terms of class, status and strata, the high position in social stratification in terms of access to such social resources as education, profession, wealth and social prestige, is a circumstance that favours socialisation to sports consumption and, in a sense, guarantees the participation of the family and its members in sports culture. The low position of the family in the social structure adversely affects the process of socialisation to sports consumption and, in some cases, makes it a socialisation to not participate in it.

**Keywords:** family, sports consumption, sociological conditions

**Abstrakt:** Celem pracy jest charakterystyka rodziny jako grupy społecznej reprodukcją postawy i zachowania w dziedzinie sportu. Precyzyjniej zaś ukazanie rodzinnych zmiennych społeczno-kulturowych, które determinują konsumpcję sportową. W pracy zostały przedstawione podstawowe kwestie natury społecznej, które mają decydujący wpływ na uczestnictwo rodziny w konsumpcji sportowej, a mianowicie chodzi o typy rodzin, ich strukturę, władzę, ale także o rodzaje rodzin i występujące między nimi różnice i nierówności. Praca ma charakter przeglądowo-teoretyczny. Zostały w niej wykorzystane dane empiryczne



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zastane, konstytuujące teorie naukowe, ale także dane wytworzone przez wcześniejszych badaczy społecznych. Do rozwiązania sformułowanego problemu badawczego została wykorzystana metoda krytycznej analizy literatury, ale także, niejako pomocniczo, metody indukcyjna i dedukcyjna oraz metody syntetyczna i analityczna. Z przeprowadzonych analiz wynika, że usytuowanie rodzin w strukturze społecznej ma podstawowe znaczenie z punktu widzenia przygotowania młodszego pokolenia do konsumpcji sportowej. Wysokie ułożenie rodziny w strukturze społecznej w wymiarze klasowym, stanowym i warstwowym, wysokie ułożenie w stratyfikacji społecznej w wymiarze dostępu do takich zasobów społecznych jak wykształcenie, zawód, bogactwo i prestiż społeczny, stanowi okoliczność sprzyjającą socjalizacji do konsumpcji sportowej i w jakimś sensie gwarantuje udział rodziny i jej członków w kulturze sportowej. Niskie ułożenie rodziny w strukturze społecznej niekorzystnie wpływa na proces socjalizacji do konsumpcji sportowej, a w niektórych przypadkach czyni z niego socjalizację do nieuczestniczenia w niej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodzina, konsumpcja sportowa, socjologiczne uwarunkowania

## INTRODUCTION

Family is unanimously recognized by sociologists as a social microstructure, a basic institution present in all types of societies, regardless of whether it is a traditional, modern or postmodern society. Everyone is born into a family, and it is the first environment of life. The structure of the family, the system of organization, the way of functioning and the cultural, social and economic capital are very diverse. Regardless of the differences, we treat the existence of the family as something natural and obvious (Traver 2022; Lang 2020).

Regardless of the transformations of the family and its position in the social structure, it remains the basic group, implementing various and fundamental tasks of a biological-reproductive, socio-cultural, socialisation-care and psychological nature. Sociology is interested in the family in two ways. On the one hand, as a social group and its internal structure, the nature of the relations between its members, but also the functions it fulfils. It is also analysed as a primary group, which, according to Charles Horton Cooley, the forerunner of symbolic interactionism, is characterized by a strong bonding of its members through personal relationships and informal cooperation (Cooley 1962, 23). On the other hand, as an institution reproducing human beings in a controlled manner and the historical and cultural variability of the family (Pearce 2020).

The family is a group and a social institution in which sport is present to a greater or lesser extent, just as education, politics, economics, economy, religion, art, health care and others are present. This presence of sports in the family can manifest itself in many ways, namely the family home can be saturated with sports themes, or it can be marginalized or almost absent, household members can cultivate sports traditions in the family or not, they can actively practice sports or lead a lifestyle that does not include sports activity, they can participate directly or indirectly in sports events as spectators or fans or treat this type of participation as uninteresting and unnecessary, they can participate in competitive or professional or amateur sports, general or recreational. Family members can practice various sports disciplines or

participate in various forms of movement, these can be institutionalized, individual or family-based. The motivation for participating in sports can also be different, which can be a consequence of an internal need and the desire to pursue one's passions, but can also be a type of pressure from a closer (e.g. family) or wider social environment (Lenartowicz 2019, 267-277). The participation in sports of household members may be related to professional work as an instructor, teacher, coach, president, sports journalist, referee, scout, sports doctor, activist, etc., with work as a volunteer, steward, member of the security team, ball boy or with activities within the initiatives of various groups or fan organizations. Participation in sports may be accompanied by the realization of various values, the cataloguing of which is extremely difficult, and perhaps impossible. Without going into detailed teleological or axiological analyses, all goals and values accompanying sports participation can be divided into autotelic and instrumental, but, according to another typology, proposed by Stanisław Ossowski, into felt and recognized or ceremonial and everyday or, according to Antonina Kłosowska, into objective (vital), recognized, felt and realized, i.e. expressed in action (Krawczyk 1997, 61-81).

In the literature on the subject, sports consumption is most often understood in a narrow way and is associated with direct participation in sports events at the stadium or sports hall and participation via mass media. In the broad, economic understanding of the concept, sports consumption also includes the purchase of goods in the form of clothing, footwear and sports equipment. This type of consumption is also interesting for sociologists due to the symbolic meaning of the purchased sports goods (Giulianotti 2002, 25-46; Baudrillard 2006). For the purposes of our analyses, I propose that sports consumption be treated in a broad way, which we can call anthropological and also include active, active, practical participation in sports in all forms, varieties, types and contents. Therefore, by this type of consumption we will understand the active use of sports offers according to needs, interests and expectations. Consumption of this type may concern recreational sports, health sports, sports for the elderly, children and youth, universal sports, for everyone, amateur sports, but also competitive, professional and spectacular sports (Lenartowicz 2012).

In the initial characterization of the key concepts of work, such as the concepts of family and sports consumption, we can clearly see that they have many specific connections, approximations, conditions, dependencies and penetrations. This is because the family is a primary micro social group characterized by a higher or lower level of sports habitus (Bourdieu and Passeron 2006) and sports consumption, differentiated by the choices, attitudes and social practices of its members.

## 1. PURPOSE OF THE ARTICLE, MATERIAL AND RESEARCH METHOD

The aim of the work is to characterize the family as a social group reproducing attitudes and behaviours in the field of sports. More precisely, to show the socio-cultural variables that determine sports consumption. The basic social issues that

have a decisive impact on the participation of the family in sports consumption will be presented, namely the types of families, their structure, power, but also the types of families and the differences and inequalities between them. Classical theories of social divisions will be used for this purpose: the dichotomous Marxist theory, the Weberian theory of social divisions and the American theory of social stratification. Scientific theories will be supplemented with the results of empirical research conducted by both Polish and foreign researchers. The basic function of the family, which is related to socio-cultural reproduction, will also be presented. The concept of family socialisation, primary socialisation, which plays a fundamental role in the process of preparing the young generation for sports consumption, will be used for this purpose (Dziubiński 2019, 145-158).

The work is of a review-theoretical nature, in which existing empirical data constituting scientific theories will be used, but also data generated by earlier social researchers. To solve the formulated research problem, the method of critical analysis of literature will be used, but also, as if auxiliary, the inductive and deductive method and the synthetic and analytical method.

## 2. FAMILY AS AN OBJECT OF INTEREST FOR SOCIOLOGY

In common opinion, the family is considered to be the basic, fundamental and constitutive element of every society, as the oldest and most durable element of social organization. The family is most often associated with marriage, the ordering of sexual relations, the reproduction of the species, socio-cultural reproduction, as well as with kinship and the household (Adamski 1984; *The Sociology of the Family* 1999). In many societies, especially pre-modern ones, as well as in some ethnic groups and environments, especially those with high religious or ideological saturation, it is surrounded with exceptional reverence and respect (Szlendak 2000, 312).

In sociological theory, attention devoted to the family is focused on the following three areas of issues. Firstly, it is primarily about the family as a microstructure, i.e. a small social group, secondly, as a universal and common social institution controlling the process of species reproduction and thirdly, as a primary group. Family members as a small social group are connected by marriage and blood ties (kinship), but also often by adoption, a system of dependencies and social interactions. They are elements of a common household and each of them plays a specific social role, including spouse: husband or wife, father or mother, child: son or daughter, but also grandfather and grandmother or other, closer and more distant relatives or in-laws. It would seem that the most durable and identity-giving element of the family is marriage. However, in-depth analyses indicate that this is not the case, because marriages increasingly often break up and end in divorce. The bonds between parents and children and between siblings are definitely more durable and integrated. Recognition of the family as a universal social institution results from its constitutive role for society and from the fact, as pointed out by social anthropologists, that it belongs, despite the enormous differentiation in terms of ritualization and its manifestations, to the few cultural universals that occur in

societies known to us. It is characterized by a relatively permanent system of activities aimed at meeting the needs and expectations of its members (*Romantic Passion* 1995). The family is also analysed by sociologists as a primary group, which is characterized by a small number of people, ensuring frequent direct interactions, long-term, calculated for a long common existence, a strong social bond between its members and an informal division of duties in a common family household. The family is the process of biological reproduction of the species, children are born in it, but there is also a process of socio-cultural reproduction, called socialisation in sociology, in which children are introduced into the social life and culture of this society and the axionormative system of the closer and more distant community is passed on to them (Cohen 2018).

In the sociological literature devoted to the issue of family, attention is drawn to the diversity of models of both marriages and families functioning in different types and forms of societies (Tyszka 1979). Various criteria for classifying families are used, including the most common typology of families based on size and composition, the structure of the marital relationship, the kinship system and the inheritance system, and power relations (Randall and Scott 2000). Another criterion for classifying families may be the structure of marriage. Monogamous families are most often distinguished, in which we are dealing with a sexual relationship between one man and one woman, but also polygamous families, in which the sexual relationship involves a larger number of people. In the literature on the subject, families are also classified according to the power relations present in them. A patriarchal family is distinguished, in which power is held by men. Such a family is sometimes called male-centric and is the object of criticism by feminist movements and circles. A matriarchal family is also distinguished, in which power is held by women (Williams, Sawyer and Wahlstrom 2008).

Numerous studies aimed at understanding the family have allowed for a better understanding of it and a cataloguing of the functions and goals that society sets for it. The family is a kind of micro-society, in which almost all phenomena and processes characteristic of the broader society occur. Researchers draw attention to and emphasize the importance of the following functions: emotional-sexual, biological reproduction of the population, educational-socialisation, protective-care, stratification or allocation, economic-economic, integration-control, recreational-social or expressive (Tyszka 1995, 3-10; Newman 2008).

It should be noted that the above-mentioned functions are given different meanings in individual families, with some functions manifesting themselves with greater and others with lesser force. The functioning of the family is significantly determined by the culture of the closer and more distant social environment. In a caste society, the position in the social structure is determined by the place in the traditional system of stratification. In an open postmodern society, the position of the family and its members is determined to a small extent by inherited characteristics, but above all by achieved characteristics related to education, power, wealth, profession and social prestige (Dziubiński 2016, 15-41).

### 3. EVOLUTION OF THE FAMILY

In the second half of the 20th century, in Euro-American societies, families ceased to be treated as a contract between parties, ensuring economic and social stability, ordering sexual relations and securing the process of raising children, but became to a greater extent a place of erotic love between spouses and intensified parental feelings towards offspring. This happened, among others, due to socio-cultural changes, liberalization of people's lives and the sexual revolution (Giddens 1992; *The Sociology of the Family* 1999). Changes in sexual customs and gender relations are closely related to the atomization of the family community and individualization and questioning the so-called "traditional biography" in favour of "modern biography", for which the material is not exclusively drawn from the family source. The family ceased to be "the whole world" of a person, a place of birth, upbringing, learning, growth, development, work, care, old age and death, in which the principles of solidarity and community of needs dominated, and became only a part of this world. This was due to the development of capitalism, which undermined the previous rhythm of life and the need for a family in its traditional form (Hardyment 1999, 14).

Over time, marriages were concluded as a result of personal decisions of the young, and the motive was romantic considerations. Due to the lengthening of life, marriage ceased to be a couple raising a large number of children, and became a relationship based on feelings. A fairly clear division of a man's life occurred into the sphere of public affairs and matters related to professional work and the sphere of family life. The family home became a place of rest for a man, and the role of the father faded into the background, while the issue of his earning and financial security of the family came to the fore. The foundation of male identity was not the position of the father and the resulting relations with children, but the position of the husband and the resulting relations with the wife. The patriarchal power of the father, resulting from tradition, weakened more slowly than the actual changes in power in the family, which passed into the hands of the mother. This was largely the result of the abandonment of absolute monarchical power in favour of a democratic system (Gills 1996, 188).

In industrial society, after the production activity, which was almost entirely devoted to men, had been moved outside the family home, the woman was almost entirely connected to the functioning of the private sphere of the family and burdened with reproductive, caregiving and educational duties. The role of the mother became more important than the role of the wife. The mother took over the place of the head of the household, not only in the social but also symbolic dimension. As child mortality decreased, the emotional attitude towards them also changed. They became the object of investment, not only emotional, but also organisational and economic. Children ceased to be only a source of benefits but were associated with increasingly significant costs. A new category of childhood also emerged as a period of life from which gainful employment was excluded (Zelizer 1989).

In the postmodern era, which falls on the last three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the years of the third millennium, we are dealing with changes that are downright revolutionary in nature. This also applies to the family, which is of interest to us here, in which changes occur as a result of socio-cultural influence related to the development of science, and especially medical science, the dissemination of modern technologies, the dominance of rationality, individualism, pragmatism, consumerism, hedonism and convenience. These and other trends promote the separate treatment of sexual life, marriage and procreation, which in traditional society were strongly interconnected.

In the family, the twilight of patriarchal power is increasingly noticeable, which is largely limited by the state. It limits not only paternal power, but also parental power by introducing appropriate legislation, family courts, the institution of the children's rights advocate and many others. The husband's power is being radically limited as a result of, among other things, the emancipatory aspirations of women gathered in feminist movements and organizations. There has been a reduction in gender differences and inequalities in many aspects of life. Women are well-educated, have high professional competences and aspirations in the social and political sphere. The changes discussed are in line with the applicable formal regulations in the national, European and global dimension and are consistent with the basic principles of democracy and the concept of human rights. Women taking up professional work is becoming common and enables them to gain independence as well as a sense of self-worth, which gives them satisfaction and fulfilment. A woman is no longer perceived as a person solely responsible for the household, which has given rise to the need to equally burden both spouses with these duties. In this way, a partnership family was born, which operates according to the "do it yourself" project and everything that happens within it is discussed, negotiated and agreed (Bernardes 1997).

In postmodern societies, the situation of the child in the family has changed dramatically. Due to the emergence of pension systems, the child ceased to be an investment providing parents with existential security in old age, and its well-being became the primary goal of the family. The child gained autonomy in the family, the parents' obligations towards the child began to dominate over rights, and new social categories of "childhood" and "teenagers" emerged, which were associated with certain social privileges and a lack of duties characteristic of adults. Children became a costly investment, requiring increasingly greater financial outlays, which consequently protect children from social degradation and ensure a high position on the labour market. The concepts of "high-quality" or "high-test" children appeared. The state has an increasing influence on the process of family reproduction. It controls the family through legislation guaranteeing the equality of parents and respect for the rights of the child, social legislation guaranteeing financial support for children in the family (Chris 2005).

Despite the changes taking place in the family related to its structure, power, positioning of its members, methods of financial security, organization of reproduction, etc., the family in postmodern societies is valued and important, it is

perceived as a place of the highest trust, security, harmonious cooperation, strong interpersonal bonds, respect, empathy and love. However, it should be noticed that the family is also a place of dangerous tensions, disintegration of bonds, physical violence, psychological abuse, suffering, rape and sexual harassment. Concepts such as “battered child syndrome”, “toxic parents”, “overprotective mothers” or “marital rape” are appearing with increasing frequency in discussions about the family. Such families are described in sociology as deviant, dysfunctional, oppressive or pathological. An extremely dangerous phenomenon in terms of consequences is the demographic collapse in European societies, which consists of a drastic decrease in the number of births. This situation has been going on for many years, and it is a situation in which generations are not being renewed, which means that more people die than are born. This not only causes the shrinkage of these societies, but also huge disruptions and complications in all areas of life (Hakim 1999, 25-50).

#### 4. THE FAMILY’S POSITION IN THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND ITS SPORT CONSUMPTION

When looking for the relationship between the position of the family in the social structure and sport, we notice that not all criteria of family differentiation have the same weight and significance for sociological analyses. For example, for our sociological analyses, the differences between families that are biological in origin, such as the height, eye or hair colour of its members and inherited family assets or noble or aristocratic titles and distinctions, are of lesser importance. On the other hand, the focus is on those differences that have their social consequences and concern positions, roles, and social divisions and inequalities. These differences not only divide families into better and worse ones but consequently differentiate them in terms of the level of sports culture and position in the social sports structure (Bourdieu 1978, 819-840).

In a sociological, macro-social perspective, families can be analysed in the context of social divisions in two ways, namely in a structural and gradational sense. In the first case, families are analysed as structurally related elements that make up a specific social whole. In the second, they are considered elements differently located on the scale of access to some valued social resource, in other words, they are arranged hierarchically within a specific category. An extremely important category, necessary to explain the issue of interest to us, is profession, which plays an extremely important, differentiating role in (post)modern society, but also helps to define the processes of social mobility. The discussed differentiations and social inequalities of families, treated as inequalities in life chances, are related to access to economic, cultural, educational, etc. resources, including sports resources. Access to valued social resources, including the resource of sports culture, can be analysed in the context of unequal access of families to these goods, but also the possibility of access to the community of families unequally distributed goods (Giddens 1973, 346).

Analysis of participation in sports consumption from the perspective of the Marxist theory of social divisions does not exhaust the issue but only shows certain tendencies that indicate class (economic) determinations of families. Max Weber, observing the development of European societies, noticed that the Marxian, bipolar and polarized class model is far from precise, because it does not take into account those social categories that do not belong to the working class or the capitalist class. Weber, unlike Marx, did not limit his theory of social divisions to distinguishing one, economic criterion, but indicated that there are more and distinguished a material criterion – economic (division into classes), but also immaterial criteria, such as social prestige (division into estates) and power (division into parties).

Continuing the analysis of the undertaken issue, we can state that the location in the class or social layer significantly determines the participation of the family in sports consumption. The access of the family to social resources, such as education, wealth, profession, power, prestige, recognition and social respect, conditioned by class or layer, has a great influence on the participation of the family in sports consumption. It should be noted that access to each of these goods is important for the participation of the family in sports consumption, but access to all of them constitutes a huge multi-source force that somehow determines this participation. Numerous studies show that in meritocratic societies, access to these goods is complex, which means that well-educated people who hold high professional positions are usually wealthy, occupy a high position in the hierarchy of power and enjoy social respect. The opposite is the case for poorly educated families, those who do not work or work in professions that do not enjoy social recognition, are usually poor, have no access to power and do not enjoy social prestige. Therefore, we can say that a high position of families on the social stratification ladder clearly increases the probability of their participation in sports consumption, while a low position complicates and limits this participation (Eitzen and Sage 1991; Bourdieu 1978, 819-840).

The presented relationship is confirmed by numerous empirical studies conducted in the Polish society, as well as in other European and non-European societies. These studies clearly demonstrate that the position of family members, especially parents, in the social structure has a significant impact on the process of children's socialisation into sports consumption. This relationship is as follows: the higher the family and its members occupy and thus have access to the most valued social resources, such as wealth, education, power, prestige, etc., the more effective the process of sports consumption. The opposite is true for parents with a low position in the social structure (Organista and Lenartowicz 2019, 116-135; Lenartowicz, Dziubiński and Jankowski 2017, 195-210; Fredricks and Eccles 2005, 3-31; Green, Wheeler and Johansen 2023, 615-636).

## 5. FAMILY SOCIALIZATION FOR SPORT CONSUMPTION

Socialisation is the subject of interest of psychology, which focuses on personality development, cultural anthropology, which analyses the processes of transmitting culture, but also sociology, which analyses issues related to the regularities and similarities of human behaviour and the mechanisms of grounding the axiological-normative order. Socialisation understood in this way consists of both intended actions, called upbringing, carried out by such agencies as family, kindergarten, school, sports club, church or community centre, as well as unintended actions, i.e. those that affect the individual in their closer and more distant environment, and here we mean peer groups, acquaintances, work teams, information obtained within mass culture, family and social events, educational, political, social or economic and economic experiences. During socialisation, the individual learns and acquires values, patterns and norms of behaviour and emotional reactions, motor, interactional, intellectual and social competences, but also shapes their personality and identity (Tillmann 1996).

In the literature on the subject, two stages of socialisation are distinguished. Primary socialisation and secondary socialisation are usually distinguished, which differ not only in the nature of the course, introduction to other spheres of social life, but also in the time period of its occurrence in the life of the individual (Berger and Luckmann 1983, 202-249). The difference also lies, which is of particular importance from the point of view of our analyses, in the level of family involvement in its course. In the case of primary socialisation, the family is, metaphorically speaking, the whole world for the child, while in secondary socialisation its role is usually also significant, but definitely smaller due to the appearance of significant others from outside the family (Cromdal 2006, 462-466).

The birth of a child is closely related to the beginning of primary socialisation, which takes place in the family environment and the people who are its members. The key role is played by parents, who create a kind of total social environment that affects the child through all possible channels. Other family members may participate in this socialisation, but their role is usually much smaller. It is also important to know that in the light of sociological theory, a person comes into the world without any social and cultural competences, in this respect, metaphorically speaking after John Locke, they are a "blank slate". This means that they are not equipped with any knowledge and skills thanks to which they could understand the world around them and function within it. Genetic transmission is only a biological framework, a range of possibilities, the content of which depends entirely on the influence of the social environment. It is pointed out that the task of science is to detect the limitations resulting from biological heritage, to determine in what way and to what extent these boundaries can be shifted and modified (Kunicki-Goldfinger 1993, 86).

Just as in childhood, as a result of primary socialisation, an individual becomes a member of society, so too, by analogy, they become a member of a sports community. Socialisation for sports consumption can take different courses. It can be total and

extremely intensive socialisation, fully preparing the child to move competently in the world of sports, but it can also be socialisation in which matters of participation in sports consumption are on the complete periphery. However, it must be added that regardless of the intensity of socialisation to participate in sports consumption, it takes place in every family, and the differences result from its intensity. During this primary socialisation, the child learns basic motor activities, control over their body, use of toys or specific equipment, cooperation with others, learns, metaphorically speaking, the ABC of sports, its basics in the physical-motor, emotional and social dimensions. For this reason, this type of family socialisation is the most important in the life of an individual, because it concerns the foundations of social and sports competences that shape the child's identity and awareness (Dziubiński 2022, 370-396).

During primary socialisation for sports consumption, a characteristic fundamental, basic or essential personality is formed. This is a personality characteristic of a given sports culture and sports institutions. It constitutes the subsoil, the basis and the canvas of value systems and emotional attitudes common to members of the surrounding community, on the basis of which personalized, individualized forms of the modal sports personality are created (Kardiner 1975, 86; Inkeles and Smith 1984, 434). Primary socialisation takes place in a special emotional climate, saturated with cordiality and love. The child is connected to the parents by an emotional bond, which creates a space for transmitting knowledge about the society and its culture and their rules and principles to the child. This situation causes the child to mechanically take over from the parents all the transmitted content and skills related to sports culture, but also sports values and norms, attitudes and ways of behaving in the field of sports. Sports culture passed on to a child by parents is without alternative, the only possible one at all, to which the child is somehow condemned, which means that they live in a sports culture created by their parents (Kenyon and McPherson 1973, 303-332).

Based on the sociological theory of socialisation, we can say by analogy that primary socialisation to sports culture transforms over time into a more diverse socialisation in the context of sources of influence. The appearance in the child's consciousness of the concept of the generalized other is a sign of the individual entering the stage of secondary socialisation. It consists in the individual discovering universally respected regularities regarding sports consumption, discovering that it is not only the parents who are active in sports, but that this results from more general patterns. For example, families belonging to the upper class, enjoying social recognition and high in the social hierarchy, have a kind of obligation to participate in it if they do not want to expose themselves to negative social sanctions. Therefore, the discovery or awareness by an individual of a certain social obligation, the need to respect general social rules in the scope of participation in sports consumption, constitutes a kind of caesura for entering the stage of secondary socialisation (Warde 2006, 107-122).

Secondary socialisation occurs after family socialisation, thanks to which the individual has internalized the ABC of sports culture and on this basis learns to use

it. Secondary socialisation introduces the individual to individual segments of the community and sports culture, the individual learns how to play roles occurring in sports, what is the scenario of the role of a participant in a game of hide-and-seek, a competitor in a sports club, a volunteer, an instructor, a coach, a scout, a referee or a club president. In secondary socialisation, not only parents are significant others, but there is a wider range of them. Regardless of this, secondary socialisation for sports consumption is built on primary socialisation. The role of parents is of course decreasing, but regardless of this, they have a very significant influence on their children's further preferences and choices regarding participation in sports consumption (Dziubiński 2019, 145-158).

## CONCLUSION

In contemporary societies, there is no single, universal type of family, but these primary social groups and social institutions come in many forms, types and shapes. They differ in terms of numbers, structure, division of power, inheritance, but also in ways of thinking, values, norms and patterns of behaviour. Families differ in their location in the social structure. Using the Marxist theory of social divisions, we can say that working-class families are located lower, while bourgeois families are located higher. According to Weber's more complex theory, families are not only differentiated by access to economic resources, but also by class affiliation, prestige and social recognition, and by access to power resources. Families also differ due to their different locations in social stratification due to such features as education, profession, wealth, power or social prestige.

The multifaceted analysis of the family allowed for the confirmation of certain social regularities that explain the issue of sports consumption by families and their individual members. It follows that the location of families in the bourgeois class, in a class with advantages on the free market, in a state that enjoys social respect and recognition, as well as in a high layer in terms of wealth, education, power, profession and social prestige, favours the participation of families in sports consumption. This is confirmed by both sociological theories and individual empirical studies conducted by Polish and foreign researchers. The situation is reversed when we are dealing with families that constitute the so-called social bottom, which means that they are located in a low class, low status and low social layer. This situation is intensified by the lack or limited access to valued and desired social resources related to education, wealth, profession, power or social prestige. Such a situation limits the possibilities of participating in sports consumption, and in some cases is alienating and exclusive.

The family, as it results from sociological theory, is also an institution whose basic functions, apart from biological reproduction, include teaching the child the ABCs of social life, introducing them to culture, to the world of values, norms and patterns of behaviour. In other words, it is about inculturation, according to social anthropologists, or socialisation, according to sociological terminology. The process of family socialisation, primary socialisation, is given great importance in

sociological theory, because it is considered the key to the survival and development of society and its culture.

The general socialisation process consists of domain-specific socialisation processes. One of them is the process of socialisation to participate in sports consumption, to get to know the world of sports and to acquire the skills to move around in it. This involves both the acquisition of sports values, norms, principles and patterns of behaviour relating to both active participation as part of social practice and direct or indirect participation in its spectacular segment, but also through the purchase of sports goods and services and the use of offers made by the sports and tourism industry.

The analyses carried out show that the position of families in the social structure is of fundamental importance from the point of view of preparing the younger generation for sports consumption. The high position of the family in the social structure in the dimension of class, status and stratification, the high position in social stratification in the dimension of access to such social resources as education, profession, wealth and social prestige, constitute a circumstance conducive to socialisation to sports consumption and in a sense guarantees the participation of the family and its members in sports culture. The low position of the family in the social structure adversely affects the process of socialisation to sports consumption and, in some cases, turns it into socialisation into non-participation.

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## Persons with Intellectual Disabilities, their Right to Human Rights: Personal Assistant's Work Context

Osoby z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną, ich prawo do praw podstawowych.  
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**Abstract:** Background: The fundamental rights of individuals with intellectual disabilities are being restricted, including the right to work, housing and cultural participation. This situation can be changed by developing personal assistance. Objective of the study: To find out the extent to which people with intellectual disabilities realize their basic rights with the support of a personal assistant. Methods: The study involved 13 adults (11 in early adulthood and 2 in middle adulthood) with intellectual disabilities. The study was designed using an interpretive approach and a focus interview method. Participants answered questions related to work and employment, housing and cultural participation in the context of personal assistance. Results: Participants felt that a personal assistant is essential in finding work and employment, using assisted housing and enabling and facilitating participation in cultural life. Conclusions: Personal assistance enables individuals with intellectual disabilities to execute their fundamental rights, and the results can help state agencies prepare comprehensive strategies to support this social group.

**Keywords:** persons with intellectual disability, human rights, personal assistant, support

**Abstrakt:** Kontekst: Podstawowe prawa osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną są ograniczane, w tym prawo do pracy, mieszkania i uczestnictwa w kulturze. Sytuację tę można zmienić poprzez rozwój asystentury osobistej. Cel badania: Poznanie zakresu realizacji praw podstawowych przez osoby z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną przy wsparciu asystenta osobistego. Metody: W badaniu wzięło udział 13 osób dorosłych (11 młodych dorosłych i 2 w średniej dorosłości) z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną. Badanie zostało zaprojektowane przy użyciu podejścia interpretacyjnego i metody wywiadu fokusowego. Osoby badane odpowiadały na pytania związane z pracą i zatrudnieniem, mieszkaniem i uczestnictwem w kulturze przy wsparciu asystenta osobistego. Wyniki: Osoby badane uważały, że asystent osobisty jest niezbędny w znalezieniu pracy i zatrudnienia, korzystaniu z mieszkań wspomaganych oraz umożliwianiu i ułatwianiu uczestnictwa w życiu kulturalnym. Wnioski: Asystent osobisty umożliwi osobom z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną realizację ich podstawowych praw, a wyniki badania mogą pomóc agendum państwowym w przygotowaniu kompleksowych strategii wspierania tej grupy społecznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** osoby z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną, prawa człowieka, asystent osobisty, wsparcie



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## INTRODUCTION

Fundamental human rights are the rights inherent to a person by virtue of being a human being (Hersch 1986, 132). They gained universal recognition only after World War II (Weston 1984). The history of humanity is filled with numerous examples of violations of these rights (slavery, racial discrimination, genocide, religious and political persecution, gender-based violence). The deprivation of fundamental rights can occur on a mass and systematic scale. The fundamental human rights constitute one of the most important principles of the organization of a civilized state. They are the foundation of enacted law and a just public order, and their respect should be a prerequisite for any public action.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights* 1948) constitutes a collection of human rights and principles for their application. Every individual has the right to: equality before the law, freedom of speech, religion, movement, work, education and health care. The concept of human rights is based on the belief that every person, regardless of gender, religion, health condition or nationality, has a set of basic rights, which should be guaranteed by the state (Klug 2000).

In all societies, there have been and still are individuals or groups experiencing social exclusion, which is a blatant violation of their rights. One such group is persons with intellectual disabilities, who experience restrictions in exercising fundamental rights, discrimination, abuse, segregation, barriers in access to education, work or culture. The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) defines people with this type of disability not only as a group with a lower-than-average intellectual functioning and limitations in adaptive behaviour, but above all as a group requiring support (Schalock, Luckasson, & Tassé 2021). “Systems of supports: (a) are characterized by being person-centred, comprehensive, coordinated and outcome oriented; and (b) encompass choice and personal autonomy, inclusive environments, generic supports, and specialized supports” (Schalock, Luckasson, & Tassé 2021, 4). The lack of support for this social group will result in a negative impact on various areas of their lives: safety, health, employment, intimate relationships, self-determination, well-being and quality of life (Ditchman et al. 2016).

The situation of people with intellectual disabilities requires state intervention, which should guarantee them the right to equality, dignity and autonomy in accordance with the human rights model (Degener 2014). This model enables the creation of coherent social structures that promote the development of both individuals and the community. It emphasizes the importance of individual preferences and choices, granting people the right to full participation in social life (Lawson & Beckett 2021). It rejects the assumption that disability can in any way limit the enjoyment of human rights and clarifies that people should not be judged solely on the basis of their usefulness, but rather on their inherent personal dignity, which is theirs from birth (Degener 2016). This model is substantively related to the

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006, CRPD), which sets standards for states to ensure social justice for individuals with disabilities (including those with intellectual disabilities) and their equal participation in various areas of social life (Lawson & Beckett 2021). People with intellectual disabilities must have the opportunity to express their opinions, participate in public life, make decisions about their personal lives and access public services and goods on an equal basis with all citizens, including employment and work, housing and participation in cultural life. This would be in line with Article 19 of the CRPD “Living independently and being included in the community”, which establishes the right of people with disabilities to independent living and social inclusion.

Personal assistance (PA) is a support model for people with intellectual disabilities and a condition for their independent living. It also helps in the realization of the fundamental rights of this social group (Mladenov 2020). Availability of personal assistant services is crucial for the process of deinstitutionalization and for respecting the rights of an individual to self-determination, including the choice of a person – a potential personal assistant (Porter, Shakespeare & Stöckli 2020). A civilized state should have a comprehensive system of personal assistance services, developed with the involvement of its beneficiaries (Riobóo-Lois et al. 2024). This would align with the provisions of the CRPD, which states that all solutions concerning people with disabilities should be developed with their participation and genuine consideration of their opinions. Decisions relating to people with disabilities should be made in accordance with the principle of participation, especially if they concern the implementation of fundamental rights, for example the right to work, housing and access to cultural goods.

For people with intellectual disabilities as well as for everyone else, work facilitates social interaction, gives life meaning and builds self-esteem. It is a means of supporting oneself and one’s family, enabling a dignified life. Work also allows for personal development, increases the chance of social participation and significantly improves the quality of life of this group (Kocman & Weber 2018). People with intellectual disabilities, however, require support in obtaining and maintaining employment, as well as within the workplace (Cheng et al. 2018). Such support should be provided by a personal assistant, acting as an advocate and trusted representative of the person with intellectual disabilities. A personal assistant should also help coworkers understand how a person with intellectual disabilities functions (Brennan et al. 2015).

Participation in culture influences cognitive development and compensatory-rehabilitation processes, providing a sense of pleasure and satisfaction (Nowak 2015). It helps develop and shape one’s identity. Through exploration of various areas of culture, persons with intellectual disabilities can discover their interests, preferences and strengths. Active participation in culture contributes to the social independence of these people and to their empowerment. Participation in cultural life is an individual, personalized matter. In the absence of an inclusive cultural environment, personal assistantship becomes essential for people with intellectual

disabilities. The role of a personal assistant is to accompany a person with this disability in selecting cultural areas that align with their individual interests and to support them in these choices. Fulfilling this role requires the personal assistant to possess the awareness and skills necessary to avoid limiting the individual's autonomy (Romer & Walker 2013).

Housing is a fundamental human right and represents having a place where an individual or group of people can fulfil their basic needs. It plays a significant role in a person's well-being and sense of security. It is a private space that shapes identity and creates a personal, intimate world. For people with intellectual disabilities, housing forms the foundation of independent living and is of great importance for social inclusion. The realization of the right to housing is possible through personal assistance. The primary goal of supported housing is to assist individuals with intellectual disabilities in leading independent lives (Wiesel 2014).

## 1. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

In our research, we aimed to understand (in line with the research questions below) the experiences of adults with intellectual disabilities in exercising their fundamental rights (employment and work, housing and participation in cultural life) with the support of a personal assistant.

1. How does a personal assistant support a person with an intellectual disability in exercising their right to work?
2. How does a personal assistant support this person in the process of employment in the open labour market?
3. How does a personal assistant support this person in exercising their right to participate in cultural life?
4. How does a personal assistant support this person in exercising their right to housing?

We considered it important to learn about the experience of the institution of a personal assistant for young adults from this social group. In pursuing such a goal of the study, our aim was to listen to people with intellectual disabilities, to learn about their voices. The goal of the study, set in this way, fits in with the human rights-based model of disability. We assumed that achieving our research objective would enrich the subject literature and contribute to expanding research on problems of personal assistance within the interpretative and participatory paradigms.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1. Project

The interpretive approach is applied in research conducted in a qualitative strategy (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2011). For interpretive researchers, the starting point is an individual and the goal of the research is to explore and understand their interpretation of the surrounding world. In our research, we decided to focus on

adults with intellectual disabilities to learn about their personal experiences, needs and perspectives. We wanted to understand the role of a personal assistant as an indispensable tool in enabling this group to exercise their fundamental rights and participate fully in society. The research project received a positive decision from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences (No. 36/2024).

## 2.2. Participants

The selection of the research sample (13 individuals: 11 in early adulthood and 2 in middle adulthood) in the study was done in a purposeful manner (purposive sampling), because “qualitative samples are deliberately purposeful, not random (Kuzel 1992; Morse 1989)” (Miles & Huberman 2000, 28). The criteria we used in selecting the sample were as follows: all participants were adults with diagnosed intellectual disability of moderate or severe degree, used verbal communication, and attended a day care institution for adults focusing on social and professional rehabilitation. They self-reported on a fully voluntary basis. The purposeful selection of the sample enabled a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study. However, it should be noted that the use of this method does not guarantee the representativeness of the sample, and thus no inferences can be drawn about the wider population. Consequently, it was necessary to be prudent in interpreting the context in which the data were obtained to minimise errors in their analysis.

## 2.3. Materials

In the study, we applied the focus group interview method, during which each participant had the right to express themselves freely. The researcher acted as a moderator, recording the discussion on an audio device. The interview was conducted on the basis of a questionnaire consisting of eighteen questions, previously reviewed by competent judges recruited from representatives of both science and practice (DeVellis 2017). Each participant was clearly informed about the following: the voluntary nature of their participation in the study and the right to withdraw at any stage, the requirement to give informed consent to participate in the study, the researcher’s coding of their identity and the deletion of their data after its use for analysis. The survey took place at the institution that the subjects attended, in a setting that was friendly and familiar to the subjects. Each interview lasted approximately two hours. The interviews were conducted over six weeks. The study was conducted on the legal basis – the Mental Capacity Act of 2005, ensuring the right to exercise legal capacity as outlined in Article 12 of the CRPD.

## 2.4. Procedure

Each participant provided verbal informed consent to participate in the research. This was done after several detailed explanations. We had to ensure that each person studied understood the information that was relevant for making a decision and received appropriate practical support from us, under Principle 2 of the MCA

(Harding 2021). During the focus group interviews, certain issues occurred such as inconsistencies between the questions and responses or participants straying from the core topics of the interviews. After repeating the question several times, participants returned to key issues.

## 2.5. Analysis

The stages of data analysis include data reduction, representation and verification. The collected data were coded substantively line by line. Substantive coding began with an open approach, in which the text was analysed from multiple perspectives, allowing for the identification of as many analytical categories as possible. The next step was selective coding, which involved choosing only those categories that best reflected the research problem for further theoretical analysis. After completing the open coding process, the codes that were directly related to the research topic were selected. The selected codes formed the basis for the representation of the collected data (cf. Babbie 2003).

In Table 1, we present a comparison of the research questions and those selected from the interview questionnaire.

Table 1. Comparison of research questions with selected questions from the interview questionnaire.

Research question	Question from interview questionnaire
How does the personal assistant support a person with intellectual disabilities in exercising their right to work?	What does work mean to you?
	What is important to you in a job?
How does the personal assistant support this person in the process of employment in the open labour market?	Did the personal assistant help you find a job? If so, how?
How does the personal assistant support this person in exercising their right to participate in cultural life?	What cultural events have you attended?
	How does the personal assistant encourage you to participate in cultural events?
How does the personal assistant support this person in relation to their right to housing?	Is it better to live independently?
	Would you like to live independently?

Source: own study.

In Table 2, we present examples of questions from the interview questionnaire, responses and selected analytical categories.

Table 2. Data coding examples.

Questions from the interview questionnaire	
What is culture for you?	
Sample answers	Analytical categories
“For example, if you see elderly or disabled people on the tram, or those with strollers or walkers, you should be even more polite and understanding towards such people. It says a lot about a person how they behave in such situations.”	Personal culture Empathy
“Culture to me means showing respectful behaviour towards others, such as saying good morning, good evening, please, thank you, excuse me – these are basic, everyday courtesies. That is what my mother always taught me.”	Respect in interactions with others Respectful behaviour
“Of course, proper personal attire such as dressing elegantly when needed, and personal hygiene like bathing daily, taking care of your teeth and keeping your hair looking neat and tidy. This is also culture.”	Personal hygiene Appearance

Source: own study

### 3. RESULTS

#### *Personal assistant provides comprehensive support in job searching and employment.*

The first research question required analysing data obtained from responses to five questions in the interview questionnaire. Twelve participants were employed in the sheltered labour market, which provides adapted positions for employees with disabilities. Only one person worked in the open labour market. Three persons obtained employment before receiving support from a personal assistant. The remaining participants consistently stated that their assigned personal assistant comprehensively engaged in actions aimed at finding a suitable job offer and prepared them for the selected job position. The personal assistant's strategies related to job search began with assessing the individual's competences, as well as their interests and preferences related to future employment.

I remember that we simply started with conversations about what I like to do or where I would like to work. We also talked about my interests and where I would see myself, in what job. (KA – f)<sup>1</sup>

My assistant asked me to complete several tests, where I had to mark an answer. He read them to me, and I told him which answer to mark. It helped me understand what jobs might interest me most and in which would be good. (A – m)

<sup>1</sup> The uppercase letter indicates the initial of the name, and the lowercase letter indicates the metric gender. The transcript of the statement is original.

The personal assistant presented career options and used tests to examine vocational predispositions, which further helped in understanding the expectations of the beneficiaries and developed an action plan aligned with their competence profile.

Work means, for example, arriving on time. The purpose of work is to do it, not to come and be lazy. I am already an adult, so I have a job, and I go to work. I try to do everything properly, carefully. I know what I have to do and I do it. Everyone has their own tasks. When I've completed everything, I feel satisfied with myself. (B -f)  
I used to give some of the money to my mother, and she was happy when I brought it home. She was proud of me, and I felt so happy then. I can say that I was proud of myself for being able to do it. (K -f)

Having a job means having some means to simply accomplish something. It means being independent. (D - m)

Work serves as a means of acquiring new skills, which strengthens self-esteem and effectiveness. Work provides money, which is the basis for economic independence from family or the social welfare system. People with intellectual disabilities view work as a collection of diverse activities, which contributes to a sense of competence and helps in structuring their daily routine.

I like going to work. I know what to do. In the morning, I get up, get ready for work, then when I finish, I have time for myself. I like knowing what to do when and having my day planned out. (KA - f)

Respondents emphasized the significant role of personal assistants in maintaining employment. Assistants support them with organizational matters, prepare them for work and teach them how to handle daily tasks. They help adapt their beneficiaries to professional tasks and the work environment.

The assistant did not help me find a job, but they did help me adjust to it. They introduced me to this job, prepared me and reminded me about punctuality and my responsibilities. (A - m)

Assistants also offer emotional support, which is crucial in the process of maintaining employment. They help their beneficiaries cope with stressful situations related to performing work, thus motivating them to keep going.

I was very nervous, but my assistant was with me the whole time and comforted me. She said that everything would be fine. Having her by my side was important to me. (A - f)

People with intellectual disabilities feel more confident in previously unfamiliar conditions thanks to assistants.

My Marcin was with me almost from the beginning of this job. He helped me there when I didn't know something and also when I got nervous, when things weren't going well. He always calmed me down and said that I would definitely manage and then I felt better. (P - m)

*Personal assistant helps in every aspect of supported employment on the open labour market.*

The second research question required analysis of data obtained in responses to two questions from the interview questionnaire. Supported employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities on the open labour market involves cooperation between employers, employees, job coaches and other people involved in the process. The participants confirmed that assistants play a crucial role in the process of acquiring vocational skills and in handling employment-related formalities.

He helped me. He found this job, this place and helped me fill out the paperwork, he completed the documents with me. Then he helped me there too, because this was a new place for me. (D – m)

Assistants facilitate adaptation to new job conditions. The interviews indicate that the first stage is often training, during which the assistant introduces the person to specific tasks that they will perform at the selected job position.

He showed how to perform all the duties, showed what to do in this job. (D – m)  
Operating machinery, observing safety rules, or time management at work. (A – m)

In addition to direct training, assistants can also provide support in developing interpersonal relationships in the workplace and communicating with other employees, which creates a friendly professional environment. They educate employers about the functioning, needs and possibilities of individuals with intellectual disabilities.

My assistant helped me make friends at work and that girl is still my friend and we meet often. It's important to also like the people you work with. (KA – f)  
I also know that my assistant talked to my boss about me and what I can do, what problems I sometimes have. I think that it helped a little, because my boss was more understanding and nicer to me afterwards. We worked well together. I remember it well. (A – m)

Assistants also represent the interests of their clients regarding the scope of duties, hours and working conditions including remuneration. They monitor their clients' progress and adjust their support depending on their needs.

My assistant always checked how I was doing. It was very nice because if I was struggling with something, she would ask if she could help me in any way and she would always explain something and assisted me if I wanted. (KA – f)

*Personal assistant encourages participation in various cultural events.*

The third research question required analysing data obtained from the responses to seven questions from the interview questionnaire. The responses were extremely varied. For the participants, the concept of culture encompasses a wide range of behaviours and practices from personal hygiene, appearance, respect for others to social behaviours that reflect their daily lives.

Culture, for me, is respectful behaviour towards others like saying good morning, good evening, please, thank you, excuse me. These are basic, everyday courtesies. That's what my mother always taught me. (K – f)

Of course, proper attire such as dressing elegantly when needed, personal hygiene, like taking care of yourself, bathing daily and keeping your hair looking neat and tidy, is also part of culture. (A – f)

This indicates that the participants understand that different situations require appropriate forms of presentation and behaviour. Appropriate behaviour towards others in public places and elsewhere is perceived by the respondents as synonymous with personal culture.

For example, if you see elderly or disabled people on the tram, or those with strollers or walkers, you should be even more polite and understanding towards such people. It says a lot about a person how they behave in such situations. (K – m)

Caring for others, empathy and assistance are seen as integral components of culture, which highlights its social dimension. Culture, in the respondents' statements, occupies an important place in their personal space and in defining its boundaries.

The same with touch. We can't pet, hug, squeeze or touch everyone. Then you can treat the other person inappropriately if they don't wish for it. Everyone has their own boundaries, and you have to respect that, being cultured and polite. (KA – f)

For the respondents, culture is also a form of participation in various cultural events: concerts, film screenings, festivals, theatre performances.

For example, I once went to this cinema, a sort of art house cinema, to see the film *Where Are You, Anne?* It was a Jewish film. I absolutely love going to the cinema. It gives me a lot of joy to be able to go out somewhere. (K – f)

The assistant encourages the participants to take part in various cultural events and accompanies them during such outings.

For example, when there was an event in big town with some concerts, the assistant took me there. It's nice to be among people, to walk around and be with strangers, not to stay at home or at least go for a walk and take a leisurely stroll. Well, but I probably wouldn't have dared to do it if it weren't for the assistant. I would have been afraid, but with her I feel much more confident because she introduces me to everything. (K – f)

One of the respondents emphasizes how important the presence of an assistant is in overcoming barriers and fears of the unknown. The assistant enables safe exploration of public spaces.

Yesterday I went to the cinema with my assistant. I freshened up, washed, dressed a bit nicer because I wanted to feel better. I go out with my assistant for various things like that. (KA – f)

Going to cultural events can provide an opportunity to express oneself through appearance and proper preparation. Choosing suitable clothing, make-up or accessories allows individuals to express their individuality and feel more comfortable around other people. All participants agree that activities related to cultural life are a significant element of their social interactions.

When you stay at home all the time, it's the worst. You have to go out to meet people so you're not so lonely. Talk to someone or something. You can get bored to death otherwise. That's why I'm glad I have this assistant. (KA – f)

Personal assistants supporting people with intellectual disabilities in accessing various forms of culture use various strategies and methods. The assistant not only presents the available options but also discusses them in detail.

My assistant always asks me what I would like to see or what event I would like to participate in. Together, we browse information about events, and my assistant helps me choose the ones that interest me the most. (P – m)

Before every outing, we go through flyers and event websites together. The assistant helps me understand what exactly is going to happen, who will perform, for example, or how long it will last. (E – f)

This approach builds the autonomy of people with intellectual disabilities, enabling them to make informed and independent decisions. Many respondents emphasized that assistants often prepare various offers that are tailored to the individual's level of understanding and sensory accessibility. Arranging transportation and ensuring the destination is fully accessible is also important.

The assistant always makes sure that the place we are going to is safe for me. For example, whether there are wheelchair ramps or if the staff working there are prepared properly. (A – m)

When we go to a concert, the assistant always finds a place where it is a bit quieter so that I can enjoy the music without too much noise. (E – m)

At the venue, assistants act as mediators, helping with communication between staff and participants, which is especially important for people with communication difficulties.

When we were at the exhibition, my assistant explained how best to talk to me. I feel better when someone speaks a little louder and a little slower too. (K – f)

The role of the assistant also includes support in independent travel. They not only accompany outings, but also teach how to get around the city, which significantly increases the participant's independence.

I simply want to say that I would go to the cultural centre with the assistant. I went to see beautiful monuments and paintings. We went to the cinema to various film premieres. Then, I would go for a walk with my assistant. I learned how to ride the bus with them, and now, thanks to them, I travel on my own. (A – f)

*Personal assistant means independence in living.*

The fourth research question required analysis of data obtained in the responses to three questions from the interview questionnaire. All thirteen individuals live with their parents and most of them have never lived independently. This living arrangement results from their health condition and the need for permanent support (including economic), which, apart from the assistant, is also provided by their family.

I live with my parents, but that's because of my illness. Of course, my assistant helps me with that too, but they are not with me all the time. Sometimes I wake up at night and then my mother comes to help me take the right medication or gives me an inhaler. If I were alone, I wouldn't be able to cope with it. (A – f)

I live and get along well with my mom. I'm attached to my mother; we're like two friends. My mother is about 80, so obviously, that's quite an age. I don't want to think about it, but I know that I might be on my own soon. I'll have to manage. It's good that my assistant helps me with household chores now. She is teaching me many things that my mother can't show me anymore. My assistant often talks to me about how important it is that I can function on my own, without my mother. (E – f)

In the housing context, it is important to ensure emotional stability, which is often achieved by living with loved ones.

My parents are already elderly. I help them a little too and sometimes even my assistant helps. Well, but I enjoy living with them. I wouldn't want to move out, but I know they're getting older. (A – m)

Some of the respondents expressed a desire to live independently or live with a partner without parents or caregivers.

I would also like to live without my parents. (A – m)

Me too, I want to live with someone, but not with my parents, not with my mom. (K – m)

The statements indicate a desire for independence among the participants. While the motivations may be different, the denominator is the wish to become independent from parents or caregivers.

That's really true, it's about becoming independent. But also, when you reach a certain age, you want to stand on their own. You want to be independent, and that's how it should be. It's the natural order of things. (Z – f)

For the respondents, becoming independent is a natural stage in a person's life. They indicate the need to be independent not only in the physical sense, but also emotionally and socially.

Only two respondents used the support of a personal assistant in supported living. They indicated that the actions taken by the assistants aimed to adapt the living space to the specific needs of the residents.

I lived in a supported apartment twice. Once in the summer, once in the winter. When I was there for the first time, I had a barrier when it came to speaking. A kind of block. The assistant helped me by showing me cards with sentences on them, like

wanting to go to the bathroom or something. I used those for a while, and then I gained confidence and started speaking normally. (B – f)

Assistants work with their residents to develop skills: cooking, cleaning, managing finances or shopping.

Overall, it was great in that apartment later on. My assistant suggested various things to me, we were always doing something. Sometimes shopping, other times cooking or playing games. (B – f)

My assistant told me that it was important to open up to others. She said that if I have someone to talk to, it will always be easier for me and that, if necessary, I can ask someone for help or help someone myself. (B – f)

#### 4. DISCUSSION

“People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) around the world experience stigma that can limit social inclusion” (Jansen-van Vuuren & Aldersey 2020, 163). This situation can be counteracted by the personal assistance support model. It depends on the socio-cultural and economic factors of a given country. Personal assistance for persons with intellectual disabilities is a condition for their independent living, empowerment and choice in terms of work, type of housing and participation in cultural life.

Having a job can bring life-changing benefits. The work of people with disabilities, including supported employment and open employment, translates into contentment, satisfaction, independence and social inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities (Robertson et al. 2019). Personal assistants play a key role in supporting this social group in realizing their fundamental right – the right to work. Support includes psychological and practical preparation for employment and work, help in coping with the position, support in interpersonal contacts in the workplace and education of employers and co-workers related to the specifics of social functioning of people with intellectual disabilities. Assistants not only support in acquiring professional skills, but also in building self-esteem. The experiences of the respondents and research by other authors (Nevala et al. 2019) clearly indicate that work is perceived by people with intellectual disabilities not only in the economic context, but also as an important factor in personal development and fulfilling their professional aspirations.

Participation in cultural life for people with intellectual disabilities is not only one of the fundamental rights, but also a considerable challenge for personal assistants. It requires assistants to identify the individual needs and preferences of each person with this type of disability, to awaken their interest in culture and to select appropriate, satisfying cultural events. The role of the assistant also involves accompanying the person under their care, ensuring their safety during cultural events, always with respect for their dignity and autonomy.

The right to housing is a very important fundamental right, as it provides a sense of security and intimacy. Housing is a right that allows every person to meet their needs in a private space, to spend time with loved ones and

individuals important to them. People with intellectual disabilities have varying housing experiences, ranging from living with a family to living independently, in sheltered or supported housing (Douglas et al. 2022). These latter forms of housing for people with intellectual disabilities provide greater independence while securing the necessary support. Living with a family involves emotional support and familiar routines that are well-known to the individuals. The role of a personal assistant is to aid with daily activities in the family home and making architectural, sensory, and technological adjustments in supported housing. Personal assistants play a multifaceted role in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities, in the context of housing. Their support extends from life skills education to adapting living spaces to meet individual needs.

Personal assistance affects the well-being of people with intellectual disabilities and improves their quality of life (Anderson 2021). It is important that personal assistance forms a part of a broader movement toward emancipation of this group (Tschanz 2018). Personal assistance plays an important role in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities in realizing all of their fundamental rights. “The last decades have been marked by a shift in thinking. From viewing disability as a personal problem that needs to be cured (the medical model), we have come to see the source of the problem: the society’s attitude towards persons with disabilities. This means that we have to act collectively as a society in order to remove the barriers that hinder persons with disabilities from living among us and contributing to our society, and to fight against their isolation in institutions or in the back-rooms of family homes” (Hammarberg 2011, 639).

Proper understanding of the mechanisms and effectiveness of personal assistance support is crucial for improving the quality of these services. The study focused on identifying specific fundamental rights such as the right to work, housing and participation in culture with the aim of providing a comprehensive overview of the situation of people with intellectual disabilities in these areas. Their analysis allows for an understanding of the support provided by personal assistants in helping people with intellectual disabilities exercise their fundamental rights. This enhances the knowledge about personal assistance as a tool enabling full participation of people with intellectual disabilities in society and can contribute to the preparation of comprehensive and effective support strategies by state agencies.

It was very difficult to select a sample for the study. These difficulties resulted from the institutions’ reluctance to conduct any research on their premises (fear of its functioning being assessed), and the selection of participants (the institutions wanted to select the participants for the study). The sample of our study was small, so the possibility of generalisation is limited. In this study, the experiences of people with intellectual disabilities were used to learn about the role of a personal assistant in supporting this group in employment and work, housing and participation in cultural life. These experiences may differ from the experiences of other adults with this disability. Further research is needed to explore how the current findings may apply, for example, in the work environment. The findings from the presented studies

can be transferred to a wider population (Maxwell & Chmiel 2014; Maxwell 2019) and may become a new perspective for the state building a system of assistance.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study showed the importance of professional activity, access to culture, and individually adapted housing in the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. For the study participants, employment is not only a guarantee of economic stability but also a source of self-realization, self-esteem, and social inclusion. In this context, the role of personal assistants is invaluable. An important conclusion from the data analysis is the need to develop more integrated support strategies that would enable people with intellectual disabilities to successfully enter the open labour market. Only one out of thirteen people participating in the study was employed in the open labour market. Comprehensive cooperation between personal assistants and employers, as well as education about the needs and abilities of people with intellectual disabilities, is necessary to foster more accessible employment opportunities.

Personal assistants, by supporting the study participants in creating art and participating in cultural events, contribute to the social inclusion and personal development of this social group. Creating and presenting their artwork provides an opportunity for self-expression and contributes to the development of self-confidence.

Personal assistants support people with intellectual disabilities in adapting to independent living. This support includes carrying out daily tasks, managing finances, and developing the skills necessary for independent living. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the surveyed individuals live with their parents, and only two out of thirteen used assisted housing services. Therefore, there is a need to develop accessible forms of housing support that will enable more people with intellectual disabilities to lead independent lives.

In the interviews conducted, respondents did not report negative experiences with personal assistant services, as presented by some studies (Wadensten & Ahlström 2009; Stårek 2020).

It is crucial to create a comprehensive and coherent support system, also based on personal assistance, that considers the diverse needs and abilities of people with intellectual disabilities. Only in this way can this marginalized and discriminated social group be ensured full participation in social, professional, and cultural life, which forms the foundation of social inclusion and equal opportunities. At the same time, it will fulfil Article 19 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (cf. von Granitz et al. 2017).

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# Resilience and Subjective Stress Among University Students: The Moderating Role of Sex

## Resilience a subiektywny stres wśród studentów – moderacyjna rola płci

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**Abstract:** Introduction: The increasing level of stress among the university student population represent a major concern for both psychological well-being and academic functioning. Within this framework, resilience serves as a crucial protective factor, facilitating effective coping with adversity and mitigating the negative impact of stress. This research aims to examine the association between resilience and stress, with a specific focus on sex-based differences. Methods: The study was conducted in 2023 and included 389 university students (55% female, 45% male). The mean age of the participants was 21.5 years (SD = 4.14). Data were collected via an anonymous online survey, Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) and the Resilience Scale (RS-14) were administered. Results: A high prevalence of stress was noted in 58.6% of the participants. Females exhibited statistically significantly greater levels of stress than males. Furthermore, the moderation analysis indicated that sex moderates the association between resilience and stress; however, this effect was specific to males. Discussion: These findings highlight the necessity of considering gender differences in research on stress and resilience, as well as in designing psychological interventions. Such interventions should be adapted to address the distinct needs and coping mechanisms of both male and female university students.

**Keywords:** resilience, stress, university students, gender

**Abstrakt:** Wprowadzenie: Wzrastający poziom stresu wśród studentów stanowi poważne wyzwanie dla ich zdrowia psychicznego oraz funkcjonowania akademickiego. W tym kontekście rezyliencja jest kluczowym czynnikiem ochronnym, który umożliwia efektywne radzenie sobie z przeciwnościami i minimalizuje negatywne skutki stresu. Celem badań jest określenie zależności między rezyliencją a subiektywnym stresem w zależności od płci studentów. Ustalenia te są istotne dla opracowania skutecznych strategii wsparcia studentów w środowisku akademickim. Metody: Badanie przeprowadzono w 2023 roku i wzięło w nim udział 389 studentów uczelni wyższych (55% kobiet, 45% mężczyzn). Średni wiek uczestników wynosił 21,5 roku (SD = 4,14). Dane zebrano za pomocą anonimowej ankiety internetowej. Do pomiaru subiektywnie odczuwanego stresu wykorzystano Skalę Odczuwanego Stresu (PSS-10), a do oceny rezyliencji – Skalę Rezyliencji (RS-14). Wyniki: Wysoki poziom stresu zaobserwowano u 58,6% studentów. Silny stres dotyczył niemal dwóch trzecich studentek, podczas gdy wśród studentów odsetek ten wynosił połowę. Kobiety wykazywały statystycznie istotnie wyższy poziom stresu w porównaniu z mężczyznami. Analiza moderacyjna wykazała, że płeć studentów moderuje związek między rezyliencją a stresem, ale efekt ten dotyczy jedynie mężczyzn. Dyskusja: Uzyskane wyniki podkreślają konieczność uwzględniania różnic płci w badaniach nad stresem i rezyliencją, a także przy projektowaniu interwencji psychologicznych w środowisku akademickim.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rezyliencja, stres, studenci, płeć



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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in scholarly interest in research on the mental health of the student population (Duffy, Twenge, and Joiner 2019; Gibbons, Trette-McLean, and Crandall 2019; Juchnowicz et al. 2021; Kang et al. 2021; Kupcewicz et al. 2024; Lipson, Lattie, and Eisenberg 2019; Porrou et al. 2021). This rapidly developing field of inquiry focuses not only on the epidemiology of mental disorders among students but, more importantly, on the systematic identification and analysis of the multilevel determinants of psychosocial functioning. The primary aim of these studies is to precisely delineate both risk factors (e.g., chronic academic stress, achievement pressure, adaptation challenges, socioeconomic factors) and protective factors (e.g., psychological resilience, social support, effective coping strategies) that influence individual well-being and the capacity for effective participation in academic and social life (Camilleri et al. 2022). In addition to the aforementioned determinants, external global events—such as natural disasters, pandemics, and wars—over which societies have limited control, are also of significant importance, as they have the potential to impact mental health not only at the individual level but also at local, regional, national, and even international scales. Recent examples include the ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. The overarching objective of intensifying research within the academic environment is to develop empirically grounded knowledge that enables the identification of priority areas requiring intervention.

### 1. STRESS AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL PROCESS: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND IMPLICATIONS

The phenomenon of stress is a complex and multidimensional process that can be analyzed from various perspectives, depending on the adopted point of view. From a biological standpoint, stress is primarily considered as the organism's response to external or internal factors that disrupt its homeostasis. Analyses in this domain focus on physiological symptoms such as increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, muscle tension, and hormonal changes, as well as the long-term health consequences, including weakened immune function, sleep disturbances, and psychosomatic disorders. In contrast, the psychological perspective centers on the individual's subjective perception of stressful situations. Key factors in this context include the nature of stressors, individual sensitivity, coping styles, and personality traits such as anxiety levels, self-esteem, and previous life experiences. This approach also emphasizes the role of cognitive mechanisms in the interpretation of threats and the strategies an individual employs to manage challenging situations. Finally, the social perspective takes into account the influence of the social environment on the experience and consequences of stress. This approach considers both individual outcomes, such as reduced work performance or difficulties in interpersonal relationships, as well as contextual factors related to functioning within broader

social systems—such as the family, professional groups, or society at large. Social factors that may either mitigate or exacerbate stress, including social support, cultural norms, and living conditions, are also considered.

In this article, we do not intend to provide a comprehensive review of the extensive literature on the definitions of stress, its indicators, underlying mechanisms, or the diverse coping strategies. Instead, we will focus on one of the most influential conceptualizations of stress, which has significantly shaped contemporary understanding of this phenomenon. Specifically, we refer to the classic transactional model of stress developed by Richard S. Lazarus, who emphasized the importance of the individual's subjective appraisal of a situation. As Lazarus (Lazarus, and Folkman 1986, 19) notes, "psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being." This approach posits that stress is not merely a reaction to an objectively challenging situation, but rather arises from the dynamic interaction between environmental demands and the individual's capacity to cope with them. Thus, cognitive appraisal—the way in which a situation is interpreted—plays a pivotal role in the emergence of stress and determines its intensity as well as its consequences for health and psychological functioning. Each person perceives stimuli from the surrounding environment in a unique manner; these differences stem from both biological predispositions and personal experiences, temperamental traits, as well as psychological and social factors. What may serve as a motivating challenge for one person can be perceived as an overwhelming threat by another, exceeding their coping resources. The interpretation of stimuli, the attribution of meaning, and the selection of coping strategies are therefore deeply subjective processes, shaped by a broad individual context.

From these considerations, it follows that stress can be conceptualized from both objective and subjective perspectives. Objective stress refers to external, measurable life events (e.g., job loss, illness) that are widely recognized as stressful. In contrast, subjective stress pertains to the individual's perception and appraisal of these situations—what is difficult for one person may be neutral or even motivating for another. The subjective evaluation of resources and threats in social situations is of key importance here. This distinction underscores that the impact of stress depends not only on the event itself, but also on the way it is interpreted by the individual.

The literature on the subject highlights not only the destructive effects of chronic stress—referred to as *distress*—which can lead to psychophysiological exhaustion, reduced immune function, mood disorders, and difficulties in social functioning. University students constitute a population that is particularly vulnerable to mental health problems, both in terms of the exacerbation of pre-existing difficulties and the onset of such issues for the first time during this period of life. Research conducted as part of the WHO World Mental Health International College Student (WMH-ICS) project aimed to estimate the prevalence of mental

disorders among first-year university students and to examine key socio-demographic correlates (Auerbach et al. 2018). A series of surveys was carried out at 19 universities located in 8 countries (Australia, Belgium, Germany, Mexico, Northern Ireland, South Africa, Spain, United States). Online self-report questionnaires were administered to students beginning their first year of study (overall response rate: 45.5%). The analyses included a sample of 13,984 full-time students: 35% of respondents met criteria for at least one of the assessed lifetime disorders, while 31% met criteria for at least one disorder within the past 12 months. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, an upward trend has been observed in the prevalence of psychological distress and mood disorders among students, as well as elevated levels of subjective stress (Bueno-Notivol et al. 2021; Fiorillo et al., 2020; Horigian, Schmidt, and Feaster 2021; Reyes-Portillo et al. 2022; Shpakou et al. 2023; Kobelski et al. 2024; Juchnowicz et al. 2021; Rogowska et al. 2022). Empirical studies indicate that undergraduate students frequently experience moderate to high levels of stress, resulting from academic pressure and high educational expectations (Anjala 2024). Research conducted in Poland among 721 university students in Łódź aimed to assess health status after two years of the pandemic (Talarowska et al. 2023). Among the surveyed students, 33% reported elevated stress levels after two years of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the overall mental health of Polish university students significantly deteriorated, particularly in terms of anxiety symptoms and sleep disturbances. Other Polish studies indicate that a large proportion of students experience high levels of stress in daily life. In empirical research by Rogowska and colleagues (2022), 20% of 3,230 students reported high levels of stress. Similarly, in analyses by Juchnowicz (2021), approximately 41% of a group of 2,172 students declared high stress levels, while in a research report concerning 798 medical students, nearly 80% reported experiencing high stress (Kupcewicz et al. 2024). In the United Kingdom, a study involving  $N = 1,273$  students assessed suicidal ideation, anxiety, depression, insomnia, mania, psychosis, and perceived stress. The results indicated that 37.3% of students were classified as being at high risk for suicidal behavior (Akram et al. 2020).

Academic stress is characterized by a state of psychological or emotional tension resulting from the demands and expectations associated with the educational environment. It may also arise from other factors that affect the entire population, regardless of age. These include financial problems, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, health issues, addictions, low self-esteem, and mental disorders (Korolkiewicz et al. 2022; O'Reilly et al. 2014; Juchnowicz et al. 2021). Numerous international studies also indicate that high levels of stress among students are correlated with reduced quality of life and diminished psychological well-being (Barbayanniset al. 2022; Rogowska et al. 2022; Juchnowicz et al. 2021). This is particularly concerning given the developmental period of early adulthood, during which young people make a series of decisions with long-term consequences.

## 2. RESILIENCE: APPROACHES, MODELS, AND RESEARCH CONTEXTS

University students are increasingly exposed to various stressors that may negatively affect their mental health. Recent reports indicate that students frequently experience low self-esteem, anxiety, depressive symptoms, stress, difficulties in adaptation, and challenges in family, peer, and academic relationships. The rapid pace of life and the demands inherent in academic environments make university years particularly challenging, often impacting academic performance and, in some cases, leading to dropout. Nevertheless, some students are able to cope effectively with these adverse circumstances and succeed academically. Understanding the mechanisms that facilitate such positive adaptation is therefore crucial.

In light of the numerous challenges faced by university students, understanding the mechanisms that facilitate, and often enable, positive adaptation and the maintenance of psychological equilibrium appears crucial. One such mechanism is resilience – a construct that, over the past decades, has gained significant attention in developmental, health, and educational psychology. Resilience is broadly defined as the capacity for positive adaptation in the face of stress and traumatic experiences, as well as a process of returning to a state of relative psychological balance (Masten 2014). Its multifaceted nature encompasses both individual predispositions and the influence of the social and cultural context in which the individual operates (*The Social Ecology* 2011). Resilience research has evolved from identifying individual traits and resources (first wave), through exploring the processes behind effective adaptation (second wave), and developing intervention programmes (third wave), to the current fourth wave, which embraces a dynamic, systemic, and contextual perspective that considers the complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors in adaptation to adversity (Masten et al. 2021).

It is important to note that contemporary models of resilience highlight not only its dynamic character but also its multidimensionality and cultural embeddedness. In the neurodevelopmental approach (Masten 2014), resilience is conceptualised as the result of interactions among multiple systems – from biological and cognitive to emotional, social, educational, and economic. This perspective allows for the inclusion of both innate resources (e.g., temperament, cognitive abilities) and environmental protective factors such as supportive teachers, peer relationships, and family resources. A review of theoretical models of resilience reveals diverse mechanisms that support adaptation. The compensatory and promotive models emphasise the role of resources that foster positive development regardless of the level of risk. In contrast, the protective model focuses on buffering factors that mitigate the impact of stressors. Lastly, the challenge model – though not always formally distinguished – posits that confronting adversity may paradoxically strengthen an individual's adaptive capacities (Fergus, and Zimmerman 2005). Resilience is therefore not a fixed trait but a process that can be strengthened or weakened depending on circumstances.

The existing literature indicates that resilience is associated with numerous positive outcomes, including improved emotional and cognitive functioning, the achievement of developmental tasks, resistance to the negative effects of stress, lower risk of mental health disorders, and the promotion of psychological health and wellbeing (Aburn, Gott, and Hoare 2016; Liu, and Cao 2022). In light of current research, the application of the resilience construct in the context of higher education appears particularly relevant, as students are increasingly exposed to chronic academic stress, especially during periods of uncertainty and transition (Joseph et al. 2021). Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that resilience served as a significant buffer in the relationship between stress and academic burnout, with students exhibiting higher levels of resilience reporting lower burnout symptoms (Liu, and Cao 2022; Bajaj, Khoury, and Sengupta 2022).

In Poland, empirical research on academic resilience among university students has been systematically developing in recent years. Recent validation studies of the Polish version of the Academic Resilience Scale (ARS-30) conducted on a large sample of students ( $N = 380$ ;  $M = 22.06$ ;  $SD = 2.79$ ) provide evidence that academic resilience is a multidimensional construct encompassing both adaptive and maladaptive cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to academic adversity (Gabryś, Boczowska, and Konaszewski 2025). Importantly, adaptive dimensions of academic resilience—such as perseverance and support-seeking—were positively associated with general resilience, self-efficacy, and mental wellbeing, whereas maladaptive responses were negatively related to these indicators of psychological functioning. These findings confirm the protective role of academic resilience in the mental health of Polish students and highlight its relevance in understanding individual differences in coping with academic stress within the Polish higher education context.

Despite the growing body of research on resilience in academic contexts, significant gaps remain. Firstly, data from Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland, are limited. Secondly, studies rarely examine the role of moderating variables such as sex, socioeconomic status, or living conditions. Research conducted among Spanish university students found that women and individuals with lower income or less living space were more likely to experience deteriorated mental health and heightened emotional distress (Parrado-Gonzalez, and Leon-Jariego 2020). These findings suggest the need for a more nuanced approach to resilience research—one that considers structural factors, cultural context, and individual differences. In particular, empirical investigation of the relationship between resilience, perceived stress, and sex among Polish university students is still lacking.

The aim of the present study was twofold: (1) to establish the relationship between students' sex and perceived stress and resilience, and (2) to examine whether sex moderates the relationship between resilience and stress among university students.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1. Participants

The study involved 389 university students. The majority of the sample were females (55.50%), while males constituted 45.50% of the participants. The mean age of participants was 21.5 years (standard deviation = 4.14). Students primarily resided in Lublin Province (52.70%) and Masovian Province (47.30%). Regarding place of residence, the largest group comprised individuals from rural areas (35.48%), followed by those from cities with populations up to 500,000 (20.57%) and towns with 20,000 to 99,999 inhabitants (19.02%). Smaller proportions of respondents came from cities with populations between 100,000 and 500,000 (9.77%) and towns with up to 19,999 inhabitants (15.17%).

Data were collected in October 2023 using anonymous and voluntary online questionnaires administered via Microsoft Forms. The average completion time for the questionnaire was approximately 12 minutes.

The inclusion criterion for participation was active university student status. The study employed a non-random, self-selected volunteer sample. Participants were recruited through invitations distributed via university communication channels and online platforms addressed to students. Participation was entirely voluntary. Due to the self-selection nature of the sample, the results cannot be generalized to the entire population of Polish university students; however, the relatively large sample size allows for robust statistical analyses and provides valuable insight into relationships between resilience and perceived stress within the Polish academic context. Participants were informed about the study's aim and procedure, as well as their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Informed consent was obtained by ticking an appropriate box on the form prior to participation.

#### 3.2. Measures

Resilience Scale (RS-14) originally developed by G. Wagnild and H. Young translated into Polish and adapted by J. Surzykiewicz et al (Surzykiewicz, Konaszewski, and Wagnild 2019). The scale consists of 14 items assessing different aspects of resilience: self-esteem, interpersonal competence and ability to adapt and cope with difficulties. Each item is rated on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (I definitely disagree) to 7 (I definitely agree). Test items in the scale included, e.g.: "I can always find a way to cope with unpredictable situations" or "I look positively into the future". In this study, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.88.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) originally developed by S. Cohen, T. Kamarck and R. Mermelstein (1983), translated into Polish and adapted by Zygryd Juczyński and Nina Ogińska-Bulik (2009). It is one of the most widely used scales to assess the level of stress perceived by individuals in different life situations. PSS-10 measures the degree to which an individual has perceived and responded to stressful situations over the previous month. It consists of 10 items rated by

the respondents on a 5-point Likert scale, from 0 (never) to 4 (very often). Test items in the scale included, e.g.: “In the last month, how often have you felt you were unable to control important things in your life?” or “In the last month, how often have you felt that things were not going your way?”. The scores can range from 0 to 40, and higher scores indicate the higher subjective stress. In this study, Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient for PSS-10 was 0.86.

### 3.3. Statistical procedure

The statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 29. In the first stage, descriptive statistics were calculated for the variables of subjective stress and resilience among the university students. Subsequently, Pearson’s correlation analysis was performed to examine the relationship between the variables. Independent samples t-tests and chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests were then used to assess group differences based on gender and field of study. In the final stage, moderation analysis was carried out using the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 1; version 5.0; Hayes 2013), with a bootstrapping procedure (5,000 resamples) and 95% confidence intervals, to examine whether gender moderates the association between resilience and subjective stress.

## 4. RESULTS

The first stage of the analysis involved determining the descriptive statistics of the variables under study among the participating students.

The data for subjective stress showed scores extending from 5.00 to 34.00, with a mean of 20.61 and a standard deviation of 5.61. This mean value is indicative of a moderate stress level across the cohort. The breadth of the score range, however, implies a sample composed of individuals at both a very low and a very high end of the stress spectrum. Regarding resilience, the results pointed to a relatively high mean score ( $M = 71.47$ ,  $SD = 13.56$ ). Nevertheless, the substantial range of scores, from 28.00 to 98.00, underscores considerable individual variation in resilience among the participants. The Pearson correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant but weak negative association between psychological resilience and subjective stress levels ( $r = -0.22$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This inverse relationship indicates that individuals with higher resilience scores demonstrated lower levels of subjective stress. These findings suggest that enhanced psychological resilience, defined as the capacity to adapt successfully in the face of adversity, may serve as a protective factor against stress perception.

A statistically significant gender difference was observed in subjective stress levels ( $p < 0.001$ ). Female participants exhibited significantly higher levels of subjective stress compared to males ( $M_{\text{female}} = 21.47$ ,  $SD = 5.23$ ;  $M_{\text{male}} = 19.53$ ,  $SD = 5.89$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding indicates that women within the study sample experienced greater daily stress than their male counterparts. Consequently, these results suggest a potential need for targeted stress-reduction interventions tailored

for female populations. In contrast, no statistically significant gender difference was identified in resilience levels ( $p = 0.86$ ). The mean resilience scores for both genders were highly comparable ( $M_{\text{female}} = 71.57$ ,  $SD = 13.33$ ;  $M_{\text{male}} = 71.33$ ,  $SD = 13.85$ ), indicating similar resilience capacity across groups.

The subsequent analysis aimed to investigate whether there is a relationship between subjective stress and the selected academic discipline. In the studied student cohort, 184 participants were enrolled in humanities and social sciences programs, while 201 were pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. No significant differences were observed between the field of study and experienced stress levels, indicating that students of humanities and social sciences exhibit comparable stress exposure ( $M = 20.63$ ,  $SD = 5.31$ ) to those enrolled in exact science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields ( $M = 20.55$ ,  $SD = 5.90$ ;  $t(383) = 0.137$ ,  $p < 0.89$ ).

Table 1  
*Distribution of Stress Levels in University Students (N = 389)*

Stress Level	Total Sample (N = 389)	Females (N = 216)	Males (N = 173)
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Mild	44 (11.3)	16 (7.4)	28 (16.2)
Moderate	117 (30.0)	62 (28.7)	55 (31.8)
Severe	228 (58.6)	138 (63.9)	90 (52.0)

The presented data in table 1 illustrate the distribution of stress levels across a comprehensive sample of 389 university students, stratified by gender. The stress categorization reveals a nuanced pattern of psychological distress within the academic population. The aggregate sample demonstrates a predominant prevalence of severe stress, accounting for 58.6% ( $N = 228$ ) of participants. Moderate stress was observed in 30.0% ( $N = 117$ ) of the sample, while mild stress represented the smallest category at 11.3% ( $N = 44$ ). Sex-specific analysis unveils notable variations in stress manifestation. Female participants exhibited a markedly higher proportion of severe stress (63.9%,  $N = 138$ ) compared to their male counterparts (52.0%,  $N = 90$ ). Conversely, males demonstrated a higher representation in the mild stress category (16.2%,  $N = 28$ ) relative to females (7.4%,  $N = 16$ ). The data suggest a significant psychological burden among university students, with nearly 90% experiencing moderate to severe stress levels. The sex-based disparities in stress perception and manifestation warrant further investigation into potential underlying psychosocial mechanisms and institutional support strategies. A chi-square test was performed to investigate the relationship between student's sex and levels of subjective stress. The results revealed a statistically significant

association ( $\chi^2(2) = 9,15, p < 0,01$ ; *Cramer's V* = 0,11). Given the significance level set at  $\alpha = 0.05$ , the null hypothesis of variable independence was rejected. Standardized residual analysis indicated that women reported higher stress levels compared to men. Men were twice as likely as women to be classified in the low-stress category (16.2% vs. 7.4 %), whereas women were over-represented in the high-stress group (63.9 % vs. 52%). These findings contribute to the growing body of literature on academic stress, highlighting the critical need for targeted mental health interventions in higher education settings.

Subsequently, a moderation analysis was conducted to examine whether student's sex serves as a moderator in the relationship between the level of resilience and subjective stress perception. Model 1 from the PROCESS macro v5.0 was applied for this purpose, allowing for the assessment of whether the strength and direction of this relationship differ depending on the gender of the participants.

Table 2. Resilience and subjective stress – gender as a moderator

Variable	b	SE	t	p	95% CI
Intercept	20.7142	4.5370	4.5656	<.001	[11.7939 ; 29,6345]
Resilience (RS14)	0.0381	0.0623	0.611	.542	[-0.0845 ; 0.1607]
Gender (1=Female, 2=Male)	4.3560	2.9350	1.484	.139	[-1.4147 ; 10.1267]
Interaction RS14*gender	-0.0884	0.0404	-2.189	.029*	[-0.1677 ; -0.0090]

\*  $p < .05$

The moderation analysis revealed that student's sex significantly moderates the relationship between resilience and subjective stress perception ( $B = -0.0884$ ;  $p = 0.029$ ). This indicates that the effect of resilience on subjective stress differs between men and women. Detailed results show that, among men, an increase in resilience was associated with a statistically significant decrease in stress levels ( $B = -0.1386$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, among women, a weaker effect was observed — while higher resilience was also related to lower stress, this relationship did not reach statistical significance ( $B = -0.0503$ ;  $p = 0.068$ ).

## 5. DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between resilience and subjective stress among university students, as well as to investigate the moderating role of sex in this relationship.

The data suggest a significant psychological burden among university students, with nearly 90% experiencing moderate to severe stress levels. The prevalence of severe stress among students was 58.6%. This finding is consistent with previous

research on Polish student populations, which also documented exceptionally high stress scores. Recent Polish studies have reported high levels of students stress, with findings including 58% of 400 students (Kulawska 2020) 41% of 2,172 students (Juchnowicz et al. 2021), 49% of 150 students (Kobelski et al. 2024), and 80% of 798 students (Kupcewicz et al. 2024). This suggests that Polish students experience significant stress and may struggle with effective coping mechanisms.

In our study, severe stress affected nearly two-thirds of female students compared to half of males. Females reported statistically significantly higher levels of stress compared to males. This result is in line with previous research on student populations in Poland and internationally (Graves et al. 2021; Juchnowicz et al. 2021; Porru et al. 2021; Rogowska et al. 2022; Talarowska et al. 2022;). Within the present sample, a statistically significant association was observed between sex and self-reported stress levels. Females were more likely to report high stress, whereas males were more likely to report low stress. This disparity could be attributable to a combination of genuine differences in lived experience and sociocultural norms governing the expression of psychological distress.

In contrast to the observed gender differences in stress levels, no statistically significant gender differences were found in resilience in our study among university students. This means that, regardless of gender, the surveyed students demonstrated comparable levels of psychological resilience, i.e., the ability to effectively cope with adversity and adapt to changing conditions. This finding is consistent with some previous research, which also did not show significant gender differences in resilience within student populations (e.g., Ari, and Çarkıt, 2020; Boczkowska 2023). A meta-analysis conducted by Ari and Çarkıt (2020) on a large group of participants also indicated a negligible and statistically non-significant effect of gender on resilience levels, suggesting comparable resilience levels in males and females. Furthermore, our study revealed a significant negative correlation between resilience and subjective stress among students. This finding suggests that individuals who report higher levels of resilience—defined as the ability to cope effectively with adversity and adapt to changing circumstances—also tend to report lower levels of subjective stress. In other words, the more psychologically resilient a student is, the less subjective stress they tend to experience. This result is consistent with prior findings in the scientific literature. For example, Campbell-Sills et al. (Campbell-Sills, Cohan, and Stein 2006) also reported a negative association between resilience and psychiatric symptoms (often linked to ineffective stress coping) as well as a positive relationship between resilience and adaptive coping styles. This indicates that resilience functions as a protective factor, buffering the negative impact of stressors. Individuals with high resilience may be more inclined to employ effective, problem-focused coping strategies and to reinterpret difficult situations in a more positive light, which, in turn, leads to lower subjective stress (Lazarus, and Folkman 1984). This may be due to their greater capacity to ‘bounce back’ from adverse experiences, maintain a positive outlook, and retain a sense of control even when faced with academic or personal challenges.

Importantly, sex appears to be a significant moderator in the relationship between resilience and subjective stress—but only among male students. These results are essential for understanding the complex interplay between resilience and stress experiences among university students. The fact that sex serves as a significant moderator suggests that the mechanisms through which resilience affects stress perception may differ between men and women. Among male students, resilience appears to be a stronger buffer against high levels of stress in challenging situations. This may imply that highly resilient men are better equipped to manage stressors effectively—perhaps by employing more problem-focused coping strategies (Lazarus, and Folkman 1984) or by perceiving stressful events differently.

Among female students, although the trend also indicates that greater resilience is associated with lower levels of stress, this effect is not statistically significant. This may imply that, in women, the relationship between resilience and stress is influenced by other factors not captured in the present model. Possible explanations may include gender-based social roles, differences in emotional expression, or a greater propensity among women to report subjective stress, regardless of their level of resilience. Women may also be more likely to adopt emotion-focused coping strategies (Tamres, Janicki, and Helgeson 2002), which may not be as directly associated with a significant decrease in subjective stress in this context. The study by Tamres and colleagues (Tamres, Janicki, and Helgeson 2002) found that women were more likely than men to engage in coping strategies involving emotional support seeking and rumination. It is therefore worth considering whether sex-specific coping strategies—such as seeking social support, rumination, or avoidance—may influence the strength of the relationship between resilience and subjective stress, particularly among women.

These findings underscore the importance of taking student's sex into account in studies on stress and resilience, as well as in the development of psychological interventions, which should be tailored to the specific needs and functioning mechanisms of both male and female. Beyond traditional sources of academic stress, it is also necessary to consider the impact of non-academic stressors, the effects of which may persist beyond the university period. Such an approach, combined with an analysis of the deeper, underlying causes of these stressors, may contribute to a more adequate, proactive, and effective response to the global mental health crisis (Emmerton, Camilleri, and Sammut 2024).

Future research should focus on identifying gaps in systemic support, assessing the effectiveness of current preventive and therapeutic programmes, and formulating precise policy recommendations for universities to foster academic environments that promote both mental health and personal development—while taking sex/gender differences into consideration. Of particular interest would be an investigation into which specific coping strategies are most effective for highly resilient men and women, and which factors (e.g., social support, emotional intelligence, attribution style) may modulate the relationship between resilience and stress among female students.

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Boczkowska Magdalena: conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, writing text - 50%

Kulawska Ewa: conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, writing text - 50%

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**Catholic Youth Ministry in the United States Today: Paths of Renewal through Dialogue and Engagement with Protestant Models (La Pastorale Giovanile Cattolica negli Stati Uniti oggi. Verso il suo rinnovamento a confronto e in dialogo con i modelli protestanti), ed. Paweł Wątor, LAS, Roma 2025, ISBN: 978-88-213-1639-5.**

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I begin this review of an insightful volume with a quotation taken from the *Preparatory Document for the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, cited in the book: “In pastoral ministry, young people are subjects, not objects. Yet in practice they are often treated by society as a useless or inconvenient presence. The Church cannot mirror this attitude, for all young people, without exception, have the right to be accompanied along their journey. Each community is therefore called to give particular attention to poor, marginalised, and excluded young people, and to make them protagonists. (...) The Church herself is called to learn from the young: many young saints offer a luminous witness and continue to inspire all.”<sup>1</sup>

The book presents the image of a Church that takes the first step, that cares for and truly sees young people by initiating dialogue with them - not to persuade them, not to instrumentalise them, not to offer superficial appeasements, but to recognise their presence, their gifts, and their grace. It proposes learning to listen even before speaking, and doing so sincerely, not condescendingly: dialogue grounded in listening and esteem, attention and respect, openness and humility – listening before proposing or accompanying, and without fear of questioning or being questioned in every dimension of life.

Particularly noteworthy is the author’s observation on page 24: “A significant contribution to youth ministry in the United States comes not only from the Catholic Church, but above all from the educational experience developed



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<sup>1</sup> Segreteria Generale del Sinodo dei Vescovi, *Documento preparatorio alla XV Assemblea generale ordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi*, 13 gennaio 2017, Città del Vaticano, LEV, 2017, 49-50.

by Protestants, which is in many respects more active and dynamic than that of Catholics. Their concern and interest for young people have led them to seek and create new models of ministry. It is therefore necessary to consider their research and solutions in light of the expectations of young people and the demands of postmodern culture. One must also highlight the ecumenical dimension of the relationship between these pastoral approaches: while mutual interest exists at the theoretical level, practical collaboration remains limited.”

Although the author focuses on the North American situation, many of these reflections apply to the universal Church. He refers to the vibrancy of Catholic youth ministry in the United States, shaped by two major currents – traditional and *Latino* – with a third emerging in recent years: ministry among people with diverse sexual orientations. Many pastoral experiences in the Catholic world remain insufficiently known or shared as the Church seeks evangelical responses to the signs of the times.

The book, written in Italian, is structured in three clear sections (six chapters). The introduction and conclusion guide the reader by outlining its origins, aims, methods, challenges, opportunities, outcomes, and future perspectives. The bibliography is rich and well curated, drawing on magisterial documents and scholarly works primarily in English, with some in Italian.

The first part (“The Historical-Sociological-Theological Context of Catholic Youth Ministry in the United States”) offers a three-chapter overview. Several notable insights emerge: the “boomerang generation,” together with “helicopter parents,” contributes to the growth of the so-called *nones* (around one-quarter of young people, and rising); *Latinos* form an increasingly significant presence, poised to reshape pastoral practice and community identity; and sexual deregulation among young people has become a consolidated reality, opening new pastoral challenges and causing divisions within Catholic communities unsure how to respond.

These trends point to a profound transformation underway. They raise the question of how the Catholic institution can prepare to face this epochal shift – both theologically and pastorally. The analysis also shows that classic pitfalls recur in every generation: youth ministry reduced to entertainment, centred on a charismatic leader now often resembling a “media guru,” or confined to strictly intellectual formation.

The second part (“The Contribution of Protestant Thought to Youth Ministry in the United States”), following the chosen methodology, investigates Protestant youth ministry theorists in search of guiding criteria for contemporary pastoral thinking. A particularly compelling aspect is the so-called theological turn in youth ministry. The Lutheran theologian Andrew Root notes that after decades of justifying youth ministry through sociological, educational, or therapeutic categories, leaders are now entering a phase in which theology becomes the norm rather than the exception. Methodist pastor and theologian Kenda Creasy Dean similarly emphasizes that this shift reflects a longing for something solid and

profound with which to accompany young people – a move beyond consumerism and entertainment-driven approaches.

This represents an important, perhaps decisive, contribution for the future – one that Catholics can fruitfully share with Protestant brothers and sisters, and one that has been developing in our own university context for at least a decade: a theological vision of youth ministry capable of integrating insights from the educational and communication sciences while maintaining a clearly theological identity, thus shaping a distinctly Christian, evangelizing, missionary, vocational, and popular approach. In a pluralistic society, the ability to present one's identity and proposals clearly is not only a right but a duty; Christian identity can only arise from faith, for which theology serves as its critical reason.

The third and final part (“Toward the Future”) projects outward. After highlighting certain weaknesses in Protestant approaches – weaknesses relevant to Catholic youth ministry as well, such as the lack of sacramental life and insufficient vocational discernment – the author proposes integrative pathways. He envisions U.S. youth ministry as “a permanent laboratory of ecclesial renewal” for all pastoral practice. Indeed, youth ministry often anticipates and inhabits the future of both the local and universal Church life.

One particularly enriching proposal is that of *Adoptive Youth Ministry*, which reimagines the Church's identity in familial terms, shaping youth ministry in an “adoptive” way: as Christians we are “adopted children” invited to become part of God's household, and by mirroring God's attitude, we too can become adoptive toward young people, welcoming them into ecclesial communion. This section concludes with a critical synthesis, interconnections, and practical proposals.

With this work, the author successfully achieves the stated goals:

- presenting the reality of the Catholic Church in the United States and the current situation of youth ministry, highlighting resources, opportunities, challenges, and difficulties;
- offering biblical-theological, pedagogical, anthropological, and pastoral criteria borrowed from Protestant youth ministry to enhance Catholic pastoral practice with young people;
- suggesting orientations and operational proposals to concretely support the overall objective.
- The methodology – both theological and critical – is also project-oriented, unfolding in three phases: a *karyological* phase (evaluative analysis of the context), a *criteriological* phase (criteria for pastoral planning), and a *strategic-projectual* phase (planning the transition from current to renewed pastoral practice).

Overall, this book stands as a significant and constructive resource for scholars, pastoral ministers, and Church leaders. Its theological clarity, ecumenical sensitivity, and pastoral realism make it an excellent contribution to youth ministry and an important guide for the Church as it seeks to accompany young people in an era of rapid transformation.



**Crime Against the Family and Care: A Theoretical and Empirical Approach (Przestępczość przeciwko rodzinie i opiece w ujęciu teoretyczno-empirycznym), ed. Barbara Małgorzata Kałdon, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University Press, Warszawa 2023, ISBN: 978-83-8281-234-3.**

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A family undoubtedly plays a primary role in human development. It is the best place for a person to live and grow. In a properly functioning family, people realise their plans and have their needs met. Family community influences the well-being and sense of security of young people. “The family, as the basic unit of social life, is widely recognised as a natural institution with a transcultural and timeless value” (p. 7).

The issue of crime against the family and care is a significant area of research in contemporary criminology and criminal law. In an era of dynamic social and cultural changes, and in the context of redefining the concept of family, this issue is gaining particular importance, both theoretically and practically. The book *Crime against the Family and Care in a Theoretical and Empirical Approach* contributes to the interdisciplinary research on the protection of the family as the fundamental unit of society and the legal and criminal mechanisms used to safeguard it.

Edited by Barbara Małgorzata Kałdon, *Crime Against the Family and Care in a Theoretical and Empirical Approach*, published by the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University Press, explores the family from various perspectives. The book’s substantive structure is divided into three parts: the first, “The Family Environment as a Place of Development and Protection from Abuse” (two chapters); the second, “Selected Phenomena Causing Family Disintegration” (six chapters); and the third, “Domestic Violence: a Still-Today Problem” (two chapters). The publication also includes an introduction and information about the authors.

The book opens with an Introduction, which notes that “the family exerts the greatest influence on the process of shaping a child’s personality and is the best and irreplaceable place for a child’s socialisation” (p. 8). The authors emphasise that contemporary issues, along



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with the current needs and problems of the family, were their main inspiration in working on the monograph.

The volume opens with the chapter *The Family Environment: The Best Form of Crime Prevention. The Educational Influence of the Family*, developed by Jan Niewęglowski. The researcher introduces the family as a social group that plays a significant role in crime prevention. The author writes that the family is the most important group when it comes to the socialisation and upbringing of young adults. It is within the family that young people acquire truthful knowledge of reality and become familiar with the principles and norms of social life. A shared world of values is passed on to them, which helps prevent the commission of criminal offences. However, the absence of a family or its breakdown threatens individuals with committing illegal acts. Therefore, he concludes that “caring for the family and providing assistance in fulfilling its responsibilities is the most effective way to avoid educational problems” (p. 28).

The second chapter, authored by Natalia Wójcik-Krokowska, is titled *Family Ties and Personal Rights in the Judgments of the Supreme Court*. The author examines the relationship between family ties and personal rights. She analyses Supreme Court case law. The author also describes “the issue of awarding compensation for the violation of family ties” (p. 31). She considers the concepts of personal rights, family ties, and compensation for severing family ties. She concludes that in her analysis of Supreme Court case law, family ties have the status of a personal right.

The second part of the monograph, introduced by Edyta Bielak-Jomaa and Stanisław Dziekoński, is entitled *Phenomena that Infringe on Children’s Privacy Online as Factors Violating Family Integrity – Selected Aspects*. The authors present and analyse online phenomena that threaten children’s safety and privacy. These include cyberbullying, sexting, grooming, sharenting, parental trolling, and online challenges. These phenomena violate children’s rights to privacy and security, which relate to a broader right, namely, family integrity. The researchers agree that the state should systematically protect children from these digital crimes.

In her study *Crimes Against the Natural Environment of the Family as a Natural Community: Historical and Ecological Implications*, Edyta Wolter introduces the reader to the issue of crimes that threaten the natural environment, which is the best environment for raising children. She analyses the latest normative acts, the social thought of the Catholic Church, and environmental protection laws in Poland. Wolter concludes that properly implemented environmental education and a well-functioning family are crucial for shaping ecological attitudes.

In the next chapter of his monograph, *The Crime of Offending Religious Sensitivity Against Children and Youth*, Eugeniusz Sakowicz points out that the religious worldview adopted by a child’s parents or legal guardians is inviolable, as “parents are the first and most important educators of their children” (p. 114). The author discusses actions that should be taken to protect children from offences against religious feelings. The theologian emphatically states that individuals who commit offences against religious feelings violate the state’s constitutional order.

He points out that the state should impose consequences on those who attack the religious freedom of children and youth.

In the chapter *Children Left Behind, Not Abandoned in the Windows of Life*, Beata Krajewska considers the issue of the so-called baby hatch, where leaving a child behind is not considered a crime of abandonment. Krajewska emphasises that a baby hatch is an important institution for caring for children when parents are unwilling or unable to care for the child and meet their needs. It provides a human being with the opportunity to survive. The researcher emphasises that her argument about the lack of criminal liability for leaving a child in the baby hatch is based on knowledge and analysis of the views of criminal law representatives.

In the next chapter of the monograph, *General Characteristics of Illegal Adoption*, Justyna Gózdź and Barbara M. Kałdon describe illegal adoption as a crime. The authors provide a detailed description of the phenomenon of illegal adoption. Gózdź and Kałdon refer to the grey area of illegal adoption as child trafficking, which has nothing to do with the child's well-being. At the same time, they note, based on statistical data, that this crime is rarely committed in Poland and its frequency has significantly decreased.

Next, Barbara M. Kałdon, in the chapter *The Crime of Bigamy in Polish Law – Article 206 of the Penal Code*, reflects on the phenomenon of bigamy as a criminal offence. In this study, the author discusses the origins of the crime of bigamy and identifies the legal regulations governing this offence. It is crucial to emphasise the subject of protection for the crime of bigamy: the family and monogamous marriage. She discussion is supplemented by a statistical presentation of the incidence of this criminal offence in Poland between 1999 and 2020.

The third part of the book opens with a chapter by Aleksandra Magdalena Pręgowska, entitled *The Phenomenon of Domestic Violence*, based on data from the Warsaw VI District Police Headquarters and interviews with police officers in Warsaw and Ciechanów. Pręgowska offers a compelling analysis of the issue of domestic violence in Poland. Primarily, she explores the widespread social phenomenon of violence, including domestic violence, and the concepts associated with it: perpetrator and victim. To illustrate the scale of the phenomenon, Pręgowska analyses statistical data collected through the Blue Card process. The initial sections of the chapter present data from the Blue Card issued by the Warsaw IV District Police Headquarters for the years 2012-2017. The author characterises the perpetrators of violence, the victims of violence, the forms of violence, and the effects of violence on victims. In the following sections, Pręgowska presents the results of research conducted based on interviews with police officers from the Warsaw VI District Police Headquarters and the Ciechanów County Police Headquarters regarding domestic violence interventions. She describes, among other things, the perpetrators and victims of violence, as well as the types of violence. Finally, the author comprehensively summarises her considerations, considering the theoretical and empirical aspects of the phenomenon.

The final chapter of the book, written by Wiktoria Wiśniewska, is titled *Domestic Violence in the Opinion of Parents of School-Age Children Based on Her*

*Own Research.* Wiśniewska devotes her article to a discussion of intrafamily violence, which can affect various individuals within a family relationship. The author emphasises that domestic violence is a punishable offence under Polish law. She begins with a theoretical presentation of the phenomenon of domestic violence in Polish law. She then presents the results of her own empirical research conducted among a selected group of parents of school-age children in Włocławek. The researcher demonstrates that attitudes toward domestic violence among parents of school-age children vary. Wiśniewska states that domestic violence is a significant contemporary social problem and appeals to society for a willingness to help victims of domestic violence.

In this review, the authors of individual chapters introduce readers to crimes against the family and caregiving from a theoretical and empirical perspective. They present various activities that threaten the proper functioning of the family. The chapters of the monograph are based on thoroughly researched literature on the subject, as well as the results of their own research. The book is inspiring due to the multifaceted nature of the issues it addresses. It discusses not only the dangers threatening the family but also identifies specific ways to support this fundamental social unit. The authors have comprehensively presented and analysed criminal phenomena related to the family.

This publication stands out for its original approach to the topic. It combines in-depth theoretical analysis with empirical research findings, providing a multifaceted and innovative perspective on the issue of crime against the family. This book makes a significant and original contribution to the development of research on crime against the family, expanding existing knowledge with new theoretical findings and empirical analyses. While the book offers a thorough overview of phenomena threatening the family, a comparative international perspective could have enriched the analysis.

Anyone concerned with the well-being of the family and its proper development should familiarise themselves with this book. The monograph is also worth the attention of professionals working with families, such as family assistants, family coaching specialists, and family pastors. The book's intended audience includes students of family studies and pedagogy.

While the book offers a thorough overview of phenomena threatening the family, a comparative international perspective could have enriched the analysis. The empirical parts are particularly valuable for practitioners and researchers alike. The volume makes a valuable contribution to the literature on family protection and criminal law, combining theoretical reflection with empirical findings. Its interdisciplinary character will make it a useful resource for both academics and practitioners.

# Sociological Research on the Occurrence of Violence and the State of Security Among Young Men of the Youth Educational Centre (MOW-46) in Trzcinec (Poland): Research Report as a Presentation of the First Stage of Situation Analysis and Recommendations for Practical Solutions

## Badania występowania zjawiska przemocy i stanu bezpieczeństwa wśród wychowanków MOW-46 w Trzcińcu (Polska). Sprawozdanie z badań jako pierwszego etapu analizy sytuacji i rekomendacji rozwiązań praktycznych

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**Abstract:** The presented text describes sociological research on the occurrence of acts of violence and the state of security among pupils of the Salesian Educational Centre of St. John Bosco in Trzcinec (Poland). The research was commissioned by the centre's management in a letter dated 8 February 2025 addressed to Head of the Department of Health Sociology and Social Work at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. After developing a research tool in the form of a mixed non-standardised questionnaire containing 20 questions tailored to the content of the commissioned research topic, qualitative research was conducted at the centre in Trzcinec. The study involved 56 pupils in the following age groups: a) up to 15 years old – 1, b) 16-18 years old – 55, c) 19-21 years old – 0, in groups according to school classes Youth Educational Centre. The research was conducted by a researcher from the Institute of Sociology at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, preceded by pilot interviews with pupils indicated by the management.

**Keywords:** Youth, education, resocialization, sense of security, violence, Trzcinec

**Abstrakt:** Prezentowany tekst opisuje socjologiczne badania występowania aktów przemocy oraz stanu bezpieczeństwa wśród wychowanków Salezjańskiego Ośrodka Wychowawczego im. św. Jana Bosko w Trzcińcu (Polska). Zostały one zlecone przez dyrekcję ośrodka pismem z 8 lutego 2025 r. skierowanym do kierownictwa Katedry Socjologii Zdrowia i Pracy Socjalnej INS UKSW w Warszawie. Po opracowaniu narzędzia badawczego w postaci arkusza ankiety mieszanej niestandardyzowanej, w której postawiono 20 pytań dostosowanych do treści zleconego zadania badawczego, przeprowadzono w ośrodku w Trzcińcu badania jakościowe. W badaniu uczestniczyło 56 wychowanków w następujących przedziałach wiekowych: a) do 15 lat – 1, b) 16-18 lat – 55, c) 19-21 lat – 0, w grupach wg klas szkolnych MOW-46. Badania przeprowadził pracownik naukowy Instytutu Socjologii UKSW, poprzedzając je wiadomymi pilotażowymi ze wskazanymi przez dyrekcję wychowankami.

**Słowa kluczowe:** młodzież, wychowanie, resocjalizacja, poczucie bezpieczeństwa, przemoc, Trzcinec



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## INTRODUCTION

Violence occurs when a young man or a group of young men mistreats another person (ridicules, insults, uses vulgar language, spreads rumours, behaves aggressively, beats, isolates, or deprives the person of money or belongings). Furthermore, violence is a deliberate act aimed at controlling and subordinating the victim. In such relationships, one party has an advantage over the other, and this advantage is exercised in a harmful manner. The perpetrator exploits this power and violates the victim's fundamental rights (e.g., the right to physical integrity, dignity, and respect). The sociological research presented here, examines the sense of security and the lack thereof arising from various factors in a facility designed to help the residents of the Trzciniec residential care centre in their reintegration into society. Participating in the study gave the young men the opportunity to express their opinions and experiences, which is crucial for engaging them in the process of creating a safer environment within the facility. The study findings provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of existing anti-violence programs and strategies and enabled a more in-depth understanding and identification of problems related to violence, bullying, and other violations of fundamental rights within the youth community. These findings will be used to develop a report and to implement preventive measures.

### 1. OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH AREA

The first area of research concerns the phenomenon of violence, which in this study is understood as intentional and repeated actions aimed at violating the rights, dignity or physical and mental integrity of another person. Violence may take various forms, however, it invariably involves the physical or psychological superiority of one party over another and results in humiliation, stress, physical or psychological suffering, fear, anxiety, or other types of existential harm. The relevant literature distinguishes several types of violence, including: physical violence (e.g., beating, pushing, choking, restraining movement); psychological violence (e.g., humiliation, ridicule, threats, isolation, manipulation, hovering – subtle forms of psychological abuse involving emotional manipulation and control); sexual violence (e.g., forced sexual contact, groping, sexual blackmail); economic violence (e.g., financial control, confiscation of money, preventing or hindering employment); cyberbullying (e.g., online harassment, publication of compromising content); abandonment and neglect (e.g., lack of care, disregard for physical and emotional needs); and collective violence (e.g., acts of group aggression directed at an individual or another social group).

Violence in juvenile rehabilitation centres is a well-documented phenomenon and is often encountered in the context of an isolated environment imposed by institutional circumstances. In setting such as youth educational centres or reformatories, violence may take multiple forms and arise from different sources.

Among pupils, it may manifest as fights, intimidation, exclusion, or verbal abuse. Directed towards staff, it may include verbal and physical aggression or refusal to cooperate. On the part of the staff, violence may involve abuse of power, psychological or physical coercion, ignoring pupils' needs. Self-directed violence includes self-harm and suicide attempts, while indirect violence includes gossip, informing, manipulation of interpersonal relationships. Research indicates that many minors admitted to the centres come from dysfunctional families, where they have experienced violence, neglect, addiction and lack of support. These experiences often contribute to emotional disorders, impulsivity, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, as well as and deficits in so-called social skills.

The second area of analysis concerns the sense of security among the pupils at the Youth Educational Centre in Trzciniec. In this context, security is understood as a situation free from threats, in which an individual or a group can function without fear of physical, psychological, social or material harm. It encompasses a sense of certainty, stability and protection from risk factors. From a social and institutional perspective, safety is a process involving continuous efforts to eliminate threats and strengthen protective mechanisms. In institutions such as youth educational centres or correctional facilities, safety is multidimensional and includes physical safety (protection against physical violence from other pupils or staff, provision of adequate living conditions through monitoring, secure access, and rapid response to crisis situations such as fights or self-harm); psychological safety (prevention of verbal abuse, intimidation and isolation, access to psychological and therapeutic support and the development of relationships based on trust and respect); social safety (prevention of exclusion and stigmatisation, creation of conditions for integration and cooperation, and counteracting the development of criminal subculture among pupils); and educational and upbringing safety (implementation of individual educational and therapeutic programmes, rehabilitation activities based on creative development and the strengthening of personal potential, and preparation for independent life outside the institution).

Difficulties in ensuring safety in Youth Educational Centres may result from shortages of specialist staff (psychologists, therapists – sometimes pupils have access to a psychologist only a few minutes per week), reliance on outdated rehabilitation models focused primarily on punishment rather than therapy, excessive use of isolation and a lack of individualised activities. These factors may contribute to increased social anxiety and feelings of resentment among pupils. Consequently, contemporary educators working in Youth Educational Centres increasingly emphasize that ensuring an adequate level of safety requires an individualised approach to pupils, multifaceted interdisciplinary cooperation (involving educators, psychologists, therapists, and chaplains), and the development of appropriate forms of openness to the external environment. Such measures aim to prepare pupils for life outside the educational institution, which should function as a supportive structure facilitating socialisation and new socio-cultural adaptation.

## 2. AIM AND SUBJECT OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study was to diagnose the scale, nature and determinants of violence in a specific rehabilitation and educational facility run by the Salesian Society. The study was intended to provide information on the effectiveness of programmes and strategies implemented to counteract violence and to identify problem areas related to the phenomenon of violence and non-compliance with pupils' fundamental rights. The research focused on the following aspects: the frequency and forms of violence experienced or observed, the location and timing of violent incidents, the characteristics of perpetrators, procedures for reporting violence and the effectiveness of imposed sanctions, the respondents' sense of security, and their perception of changes in the institutional environment during the last school year. The collected data will be used to prepare a report and to implement specific preventive measures.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD, TECHNIQUE AND TOOL

The study employed a quantitative diagnostic survey method. The research technique used was a self-administered questionnaire. The research tool used was a non-standardised questionnaire consisting of 20 substantive questions and a personal data section. The survey was anonymous, as emphasised in the introductory instructions, in order to encourage respondents to provide honest and accurate answers on the sensitive topic of violence. The questionnaire consisted primarily of closed-ended questions, including single-choice items (e.g. questions 1, 9, 10, 15-20), using a Likert-type scale (e.g. "definitely yes", "rather no"), multiple-choice questions (e.g. questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13), allowing respondents to select more than one answer; a numerical rating scale (question 14), in which respondents assessed their sense of safety on a scale from 1 to 10, and one open-ended question (question 11), which allowed respondents to express their views freely on the consequences imposed on perpetrators. The questionnaire introduction included an operational definition of the key concept, precisely defining "violence" as an intentional act based on the superiority of one party over another involving violation of, violating of the victim's rights (e.g. ridicule, physical assaults, isolation, theft).

## 4. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The findings indicate that violence occurs in the centre, however, it is not linked to specific times of day or particular situations. Rather, it is primarily associated with uncontrolled emotions and situational opportunities. Violent incidents most often occur during recreational activities and free time in enclosed spaces. The main perpetrators of violence are the pupils themselves, acting both individually and in groups. Centre staff are rarely identified as perpetrators, and the management is

not mentioned in this context. A significant proportion of pupils do not report acts of violence, and many experience pressure or coercion to remain silent, which makes it difficult to respond effectively. Although a significant percentage of pupils declare that they experience violence rarely or never, this may reflect repression or reluctance to admit victimisation. At the same time, there appears to be a distinct group of “scapegoats” who experience violence more frequently. More than half of the pupils believe that the centre consistently punishes perpetrators of violence, most commonly in the form of penalty points and referrals to the court. The sense of security is ambivalent: on the one hand, pupils report a decrease in aggression and theft, but on the other, there has been an increase in the number of runaways, which indicates the presence of organisational and emotional problems within the institution. Although pupils generally demonstrate awareness of the obligation to report violence, a significant group either lacks this awareness or avoids fulfilling it. Support in situations of violence is not always provided, as nearly half of the pupils report having been left to cope on their own in difficult moments. Most pupils report being able to rely on family support, which constitutes an important stabilising factor and facilitates the process of rehabilitation. Despite the institution’s Christian foundations, only about 25% of pupils report using prayer as a form of spiritual support in difficult situations. This finding suggests the need to review existing forms of religious and spiritual engagement and to develop more effective methods of reaching pupils with Christian values as well as alternative forms of emotional help appropriate at this stage of development. Finally, while the centre offers most pupils opportunities to develop their passions and interests, which has a positive impact on their self-development, a significant group reports either a lack of such opportunities or dissatisfaction with their scope.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen the system of support and monitoring of violence by encouraging pupils to report problems openly and by more effectively counteracting pressure to remain silent.
2. Increase the scope and quality of preventive and educational activities addressing violence, including sessions focused on emotional awareness, assertiveness and conflict resolution skills.
3. Intensify educational activities aimed at perpetrators of violence, especially those acting in groups, while ensuring an individualised approach and therapy.
4. Improve the accessibility and quality of support offered to pupils in difficult situations, including through specialised training for staff to enable more effective and timely responses.
5. Sustain and further develop positive changes identified by pupils, such as a greater number of interest groups and organised trips, which contribute to better social integration and a reduction in negative behaviours.

6. Address the problem of pupils running away from the centre by systematically analysing its underlying causes and implementing preventive measures and psychological support.
7. Emphasise the role of the family as an important source of support and develop mechanisms that facilitate regular contact between pupils to their relatives, thereby strengthening pupils' sense of security and emotional stability.
8. Consider introducing a diverse range of spiritual and emotional support, not limited to prayer, in order to respond to the varied needs of pupils.
9. Expand and adapt opportunities for the development of interests and passions so that the widest possible group of pupils as can engage in activities suited to their individual needs and preferences.
10. Introduce a system of rewards and positive behavioural reinforcement to complement the existing disciplinary measures, thereby motivating pupils to engage in positive change and cooperation.

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