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Research Article

Family Upbringing in the Context of Contemporary Social Change: Parental Authority, Educational Accompaniment, and Child Autonomy

Wychowanie w rodzinie wobec współczesnych przemian społecznych. Autorytet rodziców, towarzyszenie wychowawcze i autonomia dziecka

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Abstract
This article examines family upbringing in the context of contemporary sociocultural change. Its aim is to identify the key tasks of family upbringing through three interrelated concepts: parental authority, educational accompaniment, and support for the child's autonomy. The study is theoretical and analytical in nature and employs the analysis and synthesis of pedagogical, psychological, and axiological literature. First, it examines the family as a subject of pedagogical research and outlines the main contemporary factors affecting its functioning. It then discusses parental authority as a relationship grounded in trustworthiness, consistency, and respect for the child. Educational accompaniment is subsequently considered as an approach based on presence, dialogue, and support for the child's integral development. The analysis indicates that effective family upbringing requires a balance between parental authority, dialogue, and respect for the child's agency. Such a balance fosters autonomy and prepares children for mature personal and social life. In educational practice, this involves establishing clear rules, listening attentively to children, assigning age-appropriate responsibilities, and allowing independent choices within safe boundaries. These practices help parents combine the exercise of authority with the gradual development of the child's independence.

Keywords
family pedagogy, family upbringing, parental authority, pedagogy of accompaniment, child autonomy, parent-child relationships, parenting practices, child development

Abstrakt
Artykuł podejmuje problematykę wychowania w rodzinie w kontekście współczesnych przemian społeczno-kulturowych. Jego celem jest wskazanie kluczowych zadań wychowania rodzinnego w perspektywie trzech wzajemnie powiązanych kategorii: autorytetu rodziców, wychowawczego towarzyszenia oraz wspierania

autonomii dziecka. Opracowanie ma charakter teoretyczno-analityczny i opiera się na analizie oraz syntezie literatury pedagogicznej, psychologicznej i aksjologicznej. W pierwszej części przedstawiono rodzinę jako przedmiot badań pedagogicznych oraz zarysowano najważniejsze współczesne uwarunkowania jej funkcjonowania. Następnie omówiono autorytet rodziców jako relację opartą na wiarygodności, spójności i szacunku wobec dziecka. W dalszej części wychowawcze towarzyszenie ukazano jako podejście oparte na obecności, dialogu i wspieraniu integralnego rozwoju dziecka. Analiza wskazuje, że skuteczne wychowanie rodzinne wymaga równowagi między autorytetem rodziców, dialogiem a poszanowaniem podmiotowości dziecka. Równowaga ta sprzyja rozwojowi autonomii i przygotowuje dziecko do dojrzałego życia osobistego i społecznego. W praktyce wychowawczej oznacza to potrzebę jasnego określania zasad, uważnego słuchania dziecka, powierzania mu obowiązków odpowiednich do wieku oraz umożliwiania samodzielnych wyborów w bezpiecznych granicach. Takie działania pomagają rodzicom łączyć sprawowanie autorytetu ze stopniowym rozwijaniem samodzielności dziecka.

Słowa kluczowe
pedagogika rodziny, wychowanie rodzinne, autorytet rodziców, pedagogika towarzyszenia, autonomia dziecka, relacje rodzic–dziecko, praktyki wychowawcze, rozwój dziecka

Introduction

In pedagogical, psychological and sociological research, the family remains one of the principal areas of interest within the humanities and social sciences. In the history of education and pedagogical thought, the family has often been regarded as the oldest social group, present throughout human history (Jundził 2001, 9–17). By its very nature, the family creates conditions conducive to the harmonious development of society and transmits norms that guide moral behaviour and shape attitudes. In the twenty-first century, Polish families face profound social changes, including an accelerating pace of life, technological advances, economic, cultural and religious transformations, and emerging social challenges. These changes affect the fulfilment of family roles, expectations placed on parents and patterns of socialisation among children and young people.

The aim of this article is to identify the key tasks of family upbringing in relation to three interrelated concepts: parental authority, educational accompaniment, and support for the child's autonomy. The article is a review-based analytical study grounded in a critical examination of the relevant literature. It is structured as follows: (1) the conceptualisation of the family in pedagogical research, (2) an analysis of parental authority, (3) a discussion of educational accompaniment in the family home, and (4) a reflection on the child's autonomy within the process of family upbringing.

1. The Family in Pedagogical Research

The significance and role of the family have been a subject of reflection by numerous thinkers since ancient times. Plato and Aristotle identified the family as the fundamental unit of social life and an

environment for the cultivation of virtues and civic attitudes (Kowalczyk 2004). In the 19th and 20th centuries, reflection on the family intensified, as sociocultural changes prompted a redefinition of its functions, structure, and educational tasks (Barzycka-Paździor 2023, 109). The literature offers a variety of definitions. Kałdon views the family as a social institution that gains new members either through birth or through their inclusion "from outside" (Kałdon 2011). Dyczewski emphasises the family's personal and axiological dimension, pointing to marriage as the foundation of a community built on love and responsibility for raising children (Dyczewski 1994, 27). Głaz draws attention to socialisation and kinship ties (Głaz 1998, 6), while Giddens focuses on the importance of relationships and expectations within the socialisation process (Giddens 2004, 733). Okoń defines the family as a small social group and identifies its procreative, socialising, caregiving and organisational functions (Okoń 2004, 351). Adamski, in turn, emphasises the family's role in integration, upbringing, and the transmission of cultural traditions (Adamski 2006, 309).

The variety of definitions shows that there is no single, universally accepted understanding of the family today. Changes concern, among other things, the ways in which family roles are performed (from patriarchal arrangements towards more egalitarian and democratic forms) and patterns of organising everyday life (Barzycka-Paździor 2023, 109). Within pedagogy, family pedagogy has developed as a specialised field of research that draws on insights from the sociology and psychology of the family (Adamski 2006, 306; Opiela 2019). Śliwerski notes that contemporary approaches to upbringing are moving away from institutional models towards a pedagogy based on dialogue and the development of social competences (Śliwerski 2006, VII–XII).

The literature identifies several parenting styles, distinguished by the approaches parents adopt in raising their children: democratic, authoritarian/authoritative, liberal and inconsistent (Grzesiak 2023, 433). Regardless of the classification, the quality of upbringing depends on the consistency of parental attitudes, attention to the child's developmental needs, and a family environment that supports the child's integral development. Researchers also emphasise that family upbringing is conditioned by anthropological, teleological, axiological, and praxeological factors (Jarosz 2009, 448). This means that educational practices are based on an adopted understanding of the human person, educational goals, a system of values and the effectiveness of educational actions. Consequently, providing parents with reliable scientific knowledge may reduce the risk of family dysfunction and inappropriate parenting responses (Wierzbicki 2023, 381).

2. Parental Authority in the Process of Raising Children

Children and parents are the primary agents in the process of family upbringing, which is based on a relationship of trust, voluntary recognition of authority and the emulation of a personal role model (Grzesiak 2023, 430). Authority (Latin: *auctoritas*) is linked to credibility, gravitas, and the capacity to exert influence. It is an asymmetrical relationship in which one person recognises the other's competence and conduct (Kumaniecki 1995, 59; Okoń 2004, 37). Parental authority is not a static phenomenon; it evolves alongside sociocultural transformations that affect educational environments and the models of family life (Leśniak 2017, 19). In a well-functioning family, parents become figures of authority for their children not merely by virtue of their legal and caregiving responsibilities, but above all through consistency in their attitudes, the example they set in their own lives, and the clarity of the norms they convey. Sources of parental authority may include intellectual, character-based, and emotional competences, as well as the ability to provide security (including economic security) and predictability in decision-making (Leśniak 2017, 31).

Research indicates that the inspiration drawn from family authority can strengthen a child's initiative, self-education, and creative development (Chłodna 2011, 164). At the same time, establishing authority in the contemporary social context requires conscious effort. Authority must be earned through respect, trust, recognition of the child's dignity and a willingness to engage in dialogue and share responsibility (Wilk 2002, 87–90). Biernat emphasises the importance of accepting the child, affirming their worth, devoting time to them and showing them love, as well as consistently applying clear rules (Biernat 2001, 69–72). From an axiological perspective, parental authority is strengthened by ethical conduct, creativity, emotional intelligence, the capacity to "be with" the child, and a commitment to promoting the child's well-being (Kobyliński and Waleszczyński 2023; Ferraroli 2012, 44–49).

3. Educational Accompaniment in the Family Home

The educational atmosphere of the family home plays a significant role in a child's development by helping to meet their biological, psychosocial and emotional needs, as well as, in many families, their religious and spiritual needs. From the perspective of the pedagogy of accompaniment, increasing emphasis is placed on an attitude of presence and support for the child in the face of the complex crises of contemporary life (Marek 2017, 18). Educational accompaniment is expressed, among other things, through the continuity of the upbringing process, which does not end when a child reaches the age of majority but continues, in various forms, through adolescence and into adulthood (Kwak 2006, 314). An important condition for this continuity

is a family atmosphere conducive to integral upbringing, aimed at forming a self-aware, free and mature person (Stańkowski 2014, 79). Accompaniment, however, does not mean abandoning expectations. On the contrary, it involves setting boundaries and enforcing consequences in a spirit of educative love that supports physical, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social, moral, personal, religious and spiritual development (Rynio 2017, 33–38). The literature also emphasises the intentional nature of upbringing in the family home, understood as the educational awareness of parents and other family members (Biernat 2001, 13–17). This intentionality may also be expressed through a recreational and social model that fosters the development of bonds and a positive atmosphere through shared activities (Stańkowski 2014, 101). Other characteristics of upbringing in the family home include spontaneity (responding to everyday events) and interactivity, through which the child is not merely a passive recipient of educational influences but becomes a partner in the upbringing process (Kwak 2006, 314; Piecuch 2016, 356).

In summary, educational accompaniment is an approach adopted by adults that involves supporting the child's development while showing respect through presence, dialogue, understanding and cooperation. It is not simply a matter of directing the child, but of discovering together the path towards maturity.

4. Child Autonomy in the Process of Family Upbringing

Child autonomy is an important concept in pedagogical discourse, referring to independence from others or external influences and the ability to regulate one's own behaviour in accordance with accepted rules and values (Obuchowski 1985). Autonomy has both an internal dimension (self-determination, worldview and system of values) and an external dimension (taking action or refraining from it). In the context of upbringing, it refers to the ability to make responsible choices that take into account one's own needs and those of others, and to build social relationships.

The literature emphasises that the development of autonomy is associated with a natural need for exploration and the growth of a child's cognitive and social competences (Jezierska 2003, 244–246; Olczak 2015, 92–100). From the perspective of family law, a minor's autonomy encompasses, among other things, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, but must always be considered in the context of parental responsibility and respect for the rights of the child (Kędziera 2021, 75). In practice, upbringing aimed at fostering autonomy requires parents to listen to the child's views when making important decisions and, where the child's maturity allows, to take those views into account. This approach helps develop a sense of agency and responsibility. In a study conducted by Agnieszka Lasota, respondents placed particular emphasis on the

need to develop child autonomy (Lasota 2017, 93). The study involved 120 parents of children aged between one and four years. Half had previous experience of nursery care for their children, while all had children attending preschool at the time of the study. The researcher conducted structured interviews using a self-designed questionnaire containing both closed- and open-ended questions. The study was conducted in late 2016 and early 2017, mainly in the Lesser Poland Voivodeship, both in person and via an online platform. When asked an open-ended question about the practices and qualities they considered important in caring for and raising young children, more than 80% of the parents mentioned the development of child autonomy (Lasota 2017, 89–90, 93). This finding highlights the importance of child autonomy for the parents surveyed, although their views cannot be generalised to all parents.

Parental accompaniment also plays an important role in fostering autonomy. The pedagogy of accompaniment emphasises experience, reflection and action as ways of helping young people choose their path in life, guided by values and dialogue (Marek 2017, 29). Learning to engage in dialogue helps individuals develop the ability to listen and express their views in multicultural and multireligious contexts, thereby fostering mutual understanding and the protection of human and family values (Wierzbicki 2018, 61). In practice, this means that adults should remain available to offer support while giving children the space they need to develop independence.

Conclusion

This article has examined family upbringing in the context of contemporary social change from a theoretical and analytical perspective. It examines the family as an important environment for upbringing and discusses three key dimensions of the upbringing process: parental authority, educational accompaniment and support for the child's autonomy. The analysis of the literature suggests that parental authority can no longer be regarded as something established "once and for all", but must be consistently built through credibility, consistency, dialogue and respect for the child. Educational accompaniment in the family home, understood as presence, dialogue and appropriate expectations, fosters the integral development of young people, including their social and moral competences. Child autonomy, when appropriately supported, strengthens a sense of agency and responsibility, helping children mature and prepare for social and family roles. In response to contemporary challenges, family pedagogy emphasises the need to combine authority and dialogue harmoniously while creating opportunities for children to develop independence.

The analysis also offers practical implications for upbringing. Parents can combine authority with respect for the child's autonomy by clearly explaining rules and consistently upholding them, listening to the child's views, assigning age-appropriate responsibilities and allowing the child to make decisions within safe boundaries. It is also important to discuss the consequences of choices and treat mistakes as learning opportunities. This approach to upbringing helps children gradually move from acting under parental guidance towards independent and responsible behaviour. The issues addressed in this article contribute to the interdisciplinary discussion of upbringing and the development of the younger generation presented in *Seminare Studies in Youth and Society*.

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