STUDIA PAEDAGOGICA
IGNATIANA

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Change in the Individual
and Institutional Context

Zmiana w kontekście indywidualnym
i instytucjonalnym

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RAPORTY Z BADAŃ

MISCELLANEA

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Introduction

Change constitutes an inherent element of an individual's social life, shaped by both in a rapidly evolving world and by personal experience. Every change requires readiness, openness, flexibility, and responsiveness to external factors that trigger transformation. Individual readiness for change in therapy or rehabilitation is widely discussed through models of change, which distinguish between internal factors—rooted within the individual—and external, environmental factors, among which social support plays a pivotal role.

Key individual determinants include motivation for change and a sense of self-efficacy, understood as the belief in one's ability to succeed and adapt successfully to new circumstances. In education, change may be conceptualized as a developmental transformation within the learner, as well as a proposed or implemented reform, or a breakthrough observed within the institutional education system—each of which is, in turn, shaped by broader social, civilizational, and cultural shifts.

This issue of *Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana* explores change across multiple spheres: axiological-normative, ideological, and even religious, as well as transformations in culture and art, and shifts in attitudes toward contemporary socio-cultural phenomena, such as the experience of war or homoparentality. The majority of contributions in this volume address change within educational practice (at all levels), as well as therapeutic interventions, and social rehabilitation.

A multi-author article titled "Values of the Young Generation in the Postmodern World: Challenges for Pedagogy" examines the role of values in young people's lives by analyzing correlates and predictive factors that influence their choices between traditional and postmodern values. The findings indicate that while the younger generation attaches significant importance to values, the hierarchy of those values is influenced by social and cultural determinants. These insights have direct implications for educational practice, as they emphasize the need to integrate diverse value systems, make effective use of technology, and maintain a balance between traditional and modern values.

The topic of homoparentality has sparked ongoing debate and controversy in Poland across various communities and media outlets, despite the growing number of same-sex parents or guardians raising children. These discussions clearly reflect social change. In the article "Are We Ready to Accept Homo-Parentality? Reflections on Changes in the Political, Social and Educational Spheres of Two Central-Eastern European Countries," Anna Odrowąż-Coates and Ivo Jirásek analyze the ethical, cultural, and institutional dynamics shaping social attitudes toward same-sex parenting in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Elena Kurant's contribution shifts the focus to culture and art, highlighting the educational and therapeutic potential of participation in Playback Theatre—understood as a psychological, ritual, and social process of change through individual yet communal artistic experience. Rooted in performance theory, drama therapy, Moreno's psychodrama, and engaged theatre, Playback Theatre fosters adaptation to changes in beliefs and emotions, promotes integration and inclusion, and creates a climate of transcultural solidarity. Kurant's literature review and field research conducted in two Kraków-based theatres suggest that Playback Theatre may serve as a tool for community development and an intervention for refugees and culturally diverse groups.

Remaining within the context of social change linked to migration, the article "Shifts in Educational Smartphone Use among Ukrainian Adolescents during Migration" draws attention to evolving patterns of smartphone use as a tool for communication and informal learning among young war refugees from Ukraine. Survey research conducted with a sample of 128 respondents reveals that

smartphones are perceived as instruments that support adaptation to new cultural environments.

Stefan Kwiatkowski's article offers a comprehensive analysis of the changes needed in the Polish education system. This review synthesizes key areas of primary, vocational, and higher education in light of contemporary social and civilizational needs, which, according to the author, should guide the direction of proposed reforms. The article emphasizes the role of the modern teacher, whose training requires substantial transformation aimed at developing socio-emotional and digital competencies aligned with the needs of today's learners and the contemporary world.

Further reflection on educational environments shifts to South America, where changes in education systems—particularly in teaching models—have become increasingly visible. Urith Ramírez-Mera analyzes seminal texts by leading scholars of South American education, reconstructing the shift away from traditional Eurocentric, colonial education toward more localized approaches tailored to the South American cultural and civilizational context and oriented toward community development and empowerment. At the same time, the analysis also reveals a lack of research on educational practice and a persistent gap between reformist proposals and classroom realities, which continue to marginalize ethnicity, local identity, and social participation.

Aleksandra Bułat's study, presented in the article "Art-Based Research in Pedagogy in the Context of Individual and Institutional Change: A Study on the Mandala as Expression of School Difficulties," explores the potential of art therapy through mandala creation as a means of uncovering and organizing individuals' internal experiences. The findings indicate that the process of creating mandalas among individuals facing school or social difficulties fosters greater self-awareness and supports the development of learning strategies for coping with challenges.

Finally, Agnieszka Konieczna's article "The Art of Healing with Laughter: The Transformative Potential of Humorous Interactions" analyzes the use of humor and laughter in hospital-based therapy. The author's research demonstrates that humor in therapeutic contexts facilitates emotional regulation through validation and transformation, restores subjectivity, activates bodily and behavioral

engagement, reinterprets hospital spaces, strengthens relationships among children, parents, and medical staff, and eases medical procedures. The practical implications include the need to revise traditional medical protocols by incorporating humorous interactions into treatment standards and, crucially, to provide training for medical personnel in this area of hospital therapy.

The resocialization of socially maladjusted individuals entails a transformation of identity parameters or a shift in social attitudes and personality traits. In the literature, change is conceptualized either as the ultimate goal of rehabilitation interventions or as an indicator of successful social readaptation. In the article "The Factors Limiting the Effectiveness of Resocialization of Prisoners," Beata Mydłowska analyzes institutional factors that act as barriers to effective resocialization and hinder individuals' transformation toward socially desirable functioning.

The author's pessimistic assessment of resocialization is counterbalanced by Hubert Kupiec in his article "Changes in Behavior Self-Reported by Minors Residing in Youth Educational Centers." Kupiec conducted a survey of 506 residents of youth educational centers and identified significant differences in their attitudes and behaviors. Intensive rehabilitation interventions were associated with changes in minors' functioning: participants began to perform differently as students and children, improved their relationships with parents, and showed better school performance. The author also observed variations in these changes depending on residents' age and gender. Less optimistic findings, however, concerned their continued involvement in problematic behaviors.

In the "Research Reports" section, we present Katarzyna Skalska's article "Subjective Predictors of Emotional Intelligence in People with Physical Disabilities and Their Significance for the Institutional Context." Her research focuses on emotional intelligence as a key personal resource that enhances adaptive responses, interpersonal relationships, and engagement in social roles. The findings indicate that individuals with physical disabilities who prioritize values such as personal security, family, social harmony, and order exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence. Furthermore, the development of emotional intelligence is closely linked to the social support provided by care and medical institutions to individuals with physical disabilities.

Magdalena Wędzińska's research report "Mental Health of Students as a Contribution to Change in Higher Education" presents alarming survey results concerning students' mental health. The study reveals a high prevalence of mental health issues, such as anxiety, low mood, low self-esteem, and feelings of loneliness, as well as suicidal thoughts and self-harm. These findings underscore the need for systemic changes in higher education, including the expansion and professionalization of psychological support services and systematic training for academic staff in basic mental health issues.

In the "Miscellanea" section, Barbara Jamrozowicz offers a critical reflection on the content of school textbooks used in family life education classes, which present inconsistent models of masculinity and femininity alongside the assignment of active and passive social roles. The author expresses hope that critical analyses of textbook content can be employed in school education as a tool for fostering alternative ways of thinking among students and for encouraging deeper reflection among contemporary teachers on the condition of school education.

We are pleased to present this extensive issue of our journal and hope that its contributions will inspire reflection on the need for change in various areas of education at all levels, as well as in therapy, resocialization, and social practices. We also hope that this volume will support readers in adapting to changes already occurring in our environment, which often evoke uncertainty, anxiety and misunderstanding.

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Wprowadzenie

Zmiana jest elementem życia społecznego jednostki, dokonującym się zarówno w kontekście dynamicznie rozwijającego się świata, jak i w perspektywie indywidualnej. Każda zmiana wymaga od jednostki gotowości, otwartości, elastyczności, reaktywności na czynniki zewnętrzne, które tę zmianę powodują. Indywidualną gotowość do zmiany w terapii (leczeniu) lub rehabilitacji opisuje się szeroko poprzez modele zmiany, w których rozróżnia się czynniki wewnętrzne, leżące po stronie samej jednostki, oraz czynniki zewnętrzne, czyli środowiskowe, a wśród nich przede wszystkim wsparcie społeczne.

Ważnymi czynnikami indywidualnymi są motywacja do zmiany lub poczucie skuteczności, rozumiane jako przekonanie, że jednostka odniesie sukces i pomyślnie zaadaptuje się do zmiany.

Zmiana w edukacji może być pojmowana jako zmiana rozwojowa u jednostki uczącej się, a także jako postulowana lub już wdrażana reforma czy obserwowany przełom w systemie instytucjonalnej edukacji, który jest implikowany z kolei zmianami społecznymi, cywilizacyjnymi czy kulturowymi.

Niniejszy numer czasopisma „Studia Paedagogica Ignatiana" prezentuje zmianę w różnych sferach: aksjonormatywnej, ideologicznej, nawet religijnej, zmianę w kulturze i sztuce czy w obserwowanych postawach wobec współczesnych zjawisk społeczno-kulturowych, takich jak doświadczenie wojny czy homoparentalność. Najwięcej tekstów zgromadzonych w niniejszym numerze czasopisma dotyczy zmiany w obszarze praktyki edukacyjnej (na każdym poziomie edukacji), terapeutycznej i resocjalizacyjnej.

Zmiany w sferze aksjonormatywnej prezentuje artykuł wieloautorski pt. *Wartości młodego pokolenia w postmodernistycznym świecie. Wyzwania dla pedagogiki*. Autorzy analizują rolę wartości w życiu młodych ludzi, badając korelaty i czynniki prognostyczne ich wyborów między wartościami tradycyjnymi a postmodernistycznymi. Wyniki badań wskazują, że młode pokolenie, choć przywiązuje dużą wagę do wartości, to ich hierarchię postrzega w zależności od czynników społecznych i kulturowych. Wnioski z badań przekładają się bezpośrednio na praktykę edukacyjną, w której należy integrować różnorodne systemy wartości, efektywnie wykorzystywać technologię i zadbać o równowagę między wartościami tradycyjnymi i nowoczesnymi.

Temat homorodziecielstwa budzi w naszym kraju od lat dyskusje i kontrowersje w wielu środowiskach i mediach, mimo rosnącej liczby rodziców lub opiekunów tej samej płci wychowujących dzieci. Dyskusje te są bez wątpienia świadectwem zmiany, a autorzy artykułu pt. *Czy jesteśmy gotowi zaakceptować homorodzicielstwo? Refleksje nad zmianami w sferze politycznej, społecznej i edukacyjnej z dwóch krajów Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej* Anna Odrowąż-Coates, Ivo Jirásek analizują dynamikę etyczną, kulturową i instytucjonalną wpływającą na postawy społeczne wobec rodzicielstwa osób tej samej płci w Polsce i Czechach.

Artykuł Eleny Kurant przenosi czytelnika w obszar kultury i sztuki i podkreśla edukacyjne oraz terapeutyczne implikacje uczestnictwa w Teatrze Playback, rozumianego jako psychologiczny, rytualny i społeczny proces zmiany poprzez indywidualne, a zarazem wspólnotowe przeżycie artystyczne. Teatr Playback wywodzi się z teorii performansu, teatroterapii, psychodramy Moreno oraz teatru zaangażowanego. Autorka przeprowadziła badania literaturowe oraz badania terenowe w dwóch krakowskich teatrach i zauważyła, że praktyka Teatru Playback sprzyja adaptacji do zmian w sferze przekonań i emocji, ma potencjał integracyjny i inkluzyjny oraz stwarza klimat solidarności transkulturowej. Fenomen Teatru Playback może się stać narzędziem wspierającym rozwój wspólnoty oraz być pomocny w pracy z uchodźcami i grupami zróżnicowanymi kulturowo.

Pozostając w kontekście zmian społecznych związanych z doświadczeniem migracji, autorzy artykułu pt. *Zmiany w korzystaniu ze smartfonów edukacyjnych wśród ukraińskich nastolatków w czasach migracji* zwrócili uwagę na zmianę w korzystaniu ze smartfonów jako

narzędzia komunikacji w środowisku młodych migrantów. Badania sondażowe przeprowadzono na grupie 128 osób – młodych uciekinierów wojennych z Ukrainy. Wyniki badań wskazują, że respondenci widzą w smartfonie narzędzie edukacji nieformalnej i pomoc w procesie adaptacji do nowego środowiska kulturowego.

Artykuł Stefana Kwiatkowskiego jest analizą pożądanych zmian w polskim systemie edukacji. Artykuł ma charakter przeglądowy, systematyzuje te obszary edukacji podstawowej, zawodowej i wyższej w kontekście współczesnych potrzeb społecznych i cywilizacyjnych, które powinny – w ocenie autora – wyznaczać kierunek postulowanych zmian. Artykuł akcentuje rolę współczesnego nauczyciela, którego proces kształcenia wymaga gruntownych zmian nakierowanych na kształtowanie kompetencji społeczno-emocjonalnych i zarazem kompetencji cyfrowych, adekwatnych do potrzeb współczesnego ucznia i otaczającego go świata.

Refleksja nad środowiskiem szkolnym przenosi się w kolejnym artykule do Ameryki Południowej, gdzie zaobserwowano zmiany w systemie edukacji, a właściwie w modelach edukacyjnych stosowanych przez nauczycieli. Urith Ramírez-Mera poddała analizie teksty czołowych badaczy systemów edukacji w Ameryce Południowej i zrekonstruowała odejście od tradycyjnej, europocentrycznej, kolonialnej edukacji na rzecz edukacji bardziej lokalnej, swoistej dla południowoamerykańskiego kręgu kulturowo-cywilizacyjnego, zorientowanego na rozwój lokalnych społeczności i ich uprawomocnienie. Wskazała jednak na brak badań praktyki edukacyjnej i rozdźwięk między postulatami zmian a obowiązującą praktyką, która wciąż deprecjonuje etniczność, lokalność i partycypację społeczną.

Wyniki badań Aleksandry Bułat zamieszczone w artykule pt. *Art--Based Research w pedagogice wobec zmiany indywidualnej i instytucjonalnej. Badania nad mandalą w kontekście wyrażania trudności szkolnych* opisują potencjał arteterapii z wykorzystaniem mandali w ujawnianiu i porządkowaniu doświadczeń wewnętrznych jednostki. Wnioski z badania pokazują, że proces tworzenia mandali przez osoby zmagające się z trudnościami w środowisku szkolnym czy społecznym służy nie tylko lepszemu samopoznaniu, ale także wspiera proces uczenia się radzenia sobie z trudnościami.

Z kolei artykuł Agnieszki Koniecznej pt. *Sztuka leczenia śmiechem. Transformacyjny potencjał humorystycznych interakcji* traktuje

o wykorzystaniu śmiechu i humoru w terapii osób leczonych w szpitalach. Badania autorki wskazują, że wykorzystywanie humoru w terapii wpływa na regulację emocji poprzez uprawomocnianie i przekształcanie oraz odzyskiwanie podmiotowości, aktywizację cielesno- -behawioralną, reinterpretację przestrzeni szpitalnej, wzmocnienie relacji dziecko–rodzic–personel oraz ułatwienie procedur medycznych. Implikacje dla praktyki obejmują konieczność zmian w tradycyjnych procedurach medycznych poprzez włączenie do procedur leczenia spotkań naznaczonych humorem, a przede wszystkim szkolenia kadr medycznych w tym obszarze terapii szpitalnych.

Resocjalizacja osób społecznie niedostosowanych to zmiana ich parametrów tożsamościowych lub też zmiana dokonująca się w sferze ich postaw społecznych czy cech osobowości. Obecne w literaturze definicje dotyczą zmiany jako celu oddziaływań resocjalizacyjnych lub jako wskaźnika udanej readaptacji społecznej. Beata Mydłowska w artykule pt. *Czynniki ograniczające skuteczność resocjalizacji więźniów* analizuje czynniki instytucjonalne, które stanowią bariery dla skutecznego procesu oddziaływań resocjalizacyjnych i utrudniają zmianę jednostki w kierunku społecznie pożądanym.

Pesymizm resocjalizacyjny autorki równoważy autor artykułu pt. *Zmiany w zachowaniu zgłaszane przez nieletnich przebywających w Młodzieżowych Ośrodkach Wychowawczych*. Hubert Kupiec przeprowadził badania sondażowe na grupie 506 wychowanków młodzieżowych ośrodków wychowawczych i zaobserwował różnice w ich postawach oraz zachowaniu. Intensywne oddziaływania resocjalizacyjne skutkują zmianą nieletnich wychowanków, którzy zaczynają inaczej funkcjonować w roli uczniów i dzieci, poprawiają swoje relacje z rodzicami i wyniki w szkole. Autor badania zaobserwował też różnice w tej zmianie występujące ze względu na wiek wychowanków i płeć. Wnioski mniej optymistyczne dotyczą ich zaangażowania w zachowania problemowe.

W dziale „Raporty z badań" prezentujemy artykuł Katarzyny Skalskiej pt. *Subiektywne predyktory inteligencji emocjonalnej u osób z niepełnosprawnością fizyczną i ich znaczenie dla kontekstu instytucjonalnego*. Przedmiotem badań autorki była inteligencja emocjonalna rozumiana jako kluczowy zasób osobisty, który wzmacnia reakcje adaptacyjne, relacje interpersonalne i zaangażowanie w role społeczne. Wnioski z badań wskazują, że preferowanie przez badane osoby

z niepełnosprawności fizyczną wartości, takich jak bezpieczeństwo osobiste, rodzina, harmonia społeczna i porządek, wiązało się z wyższym poziomem inteligencji emocjonalnej. Sam zaś rozwój inteligencji emocjonalnej zależy także od wsparcia społecznego udzielanego przez instytucje opiekuńcze i lecznicze wobec osób z niepełnosprawnością fizyczną.

Raport z badań Magdaleny Wędzińskej pt. *Kondycja psychiczna studentów jako przyczynek do zmian w edukacji akademickiej* zawiera alarmujące wyniki badań sondażowych studentów. Badania dotyczą kondycji psychicznej studentów i wskazują na występowanie takich problemów zdrowia psychicznego, jak: poczucie lęku, obniżony nastrój, niska samoocena, poczucie samotności, a także myśli samobójcze i samookaleczenia. Wnioski z badań wskazują na potrzebę zmiany w systemie edukacji akademickiej, polegającej m.in. na rozbudowie i profesjonalizacji systemu wsparcia psychologicznego oraz systematycznym szkoleniu kadry akademickiej w zakresie podstawowych zagadnień zdrowia psychicznego.

W dziale „Miscellanea" znalazła się refleksja nad treściami podręczników szkolnych do zajęć Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie, w których reprezentowane są niespójne wzory męskości i kobiecości wraz przypisywaniem im aktywnych i pasywnych ról społecznych. Barbara Jamrozowicz postuluje, by krytyczna analiza treści podręczników była wykorzystywana w edukacji szkolnej jako narzędzie do tworzenia alternatywnego myślenia u adresatów podręczników szkolnych. Ma też nadzieję, że przyczyni się ona do pogłębionej refleksji współczesnego nauczyciela nad kondycją edukacji szkolnej.

Oddajemy w Państwa ręce obszerny numer naszego czasopisma i wyrażamy nadzieję, że jego lektura wzbudzi potrzebę refleksji na koniecznością zmian w niektórych obszarach edukacji na każdym jej poziomie, zmian w obszarze terapii, resocjalizacji czy praktyk społecznych, oraz będzie wparciem w adaptacji do tych zmian, które już zachodzą w naszym otoczeniu i niosą za sobą niepokój i niezrozumienie.

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Values of the Young Generation in the Postmodern World: Challenges for Pedagogy

Wartości młodego pokolenia w postmodernistycznym świecie. Wyzwania dla pedagogiki

ABSTRACT

The contemporary world, characterized by rapid technological development, globalization, and pluralism of values, influences the belief systems of the young generation. This article analyzes the role of

values in young people's lives, examining the correlates and predictors of their choices between traditional and postmodern values. Particular attention was given to the influence of sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, and place of residence on the formation of value systems. The theoretical foundation for the study included axiological and sociological concepts concerning value transformations in postmodernity (Bauman, Giddens, Inglehart, Welzel), modernization theory, and approaches to cultural pluralism (Kymlicka, Parekh). The analysis highlights the impact of globalization, individualization, and the relativization of norms on shaping the value hierarchy of the young generation.

Empirical research was conducted among university students in southern Poland (N = 272; age 18–54; M = 27.63; SD = 8.64) using an author-designed survey questionnaire. The questionnaire contained items assessing the importance of value systems (1–7 scale) and 12 statements concerning traditional and postmodern values (Likert scale 1–5). The results indicated that the young generation places considerable importance on values, although their hierarchy depends on social and cultural factors. Key findings include, among others, stronger identification of older respondents with traditional values, greater reflexivity among women in matters of spirituality, and differences in the importance of religious values between urban and rural residents.

The discussion underscores the influence of postmodern tendencies, such as individualism and pragmatism, on contemporary perceptions of values, as well as the difficulties in establishing a coherent value system in a culturally diverse society. In the pedagogical context, the article identifies challenges related to educating the young generation in an era of postmodernity, including the need to integrate diverse value systems, effectively use technology in teaching, and maintain a balance between traditional and modern values.

ABSTRAKT

Współczesny świat, charakteryzujący się dynamicznym rozwojem technologicznym, globalizacją i pluralizmem wartości, wpływa na system wartości młodego pokolenia. W tekście analizowana jest rola wartości w życiu młodych ludzi, badane są korelaty i predyktory ich wyborów między wartościami tradycyjnymi a ponowoczesnymi. W przeprowadzonych badaniach szczególną uwagę zwrócono na wpływ zmiennych socjodemograficznych, takich jak wiek, płeć i miejsce zamieszkania, na kształtowanie systemu wartości. Podstawą teoretyczną badań były koncepcje aksjologiczne i socjologiczne dotyczące przemian wartości

w ponowoczesności (Bauman, Giddens, Inglehart, Welzel), teoria modernizacji oraz podejścia do pluralizmu kulturowego (Kymlicka, Parekh). Podkreślono znaczenie globalizacji, indywidualizacji i relatywizacji norm w kształtowaniu hierarchii wartości młodego pokolenia.

Badania empiryczne przeprowadzono wśród studentów uczelni wyższych w południowej Polsce (N = 272; wiek 18–54; M = 27,63; SD = 8,64) z wykorzystaniem autorskiego kwestionariusza ankiety. Kwestionariusz zawierał pytania o znaczenie systemów wartości (skala 1–7) oraz 12 stwierdzeń dotyczących wartości tradycyjnych i postmodernistycznych (skala Likerta 1–5). Wyniki badań pokazały, że młode pokolenie przywiązuje dużą wagę do wartości, ale ich hierarchia zależy od czynników społecznych i kulturowych. Do kluczowych wniosków należą m.in. silniejsza identyfikacja starszych respondentów z wartościami tradycyjnymi, większa refleksyjność kobiet w kwestiach duchowości oraz zróżnicowanie znaczenia wartości religijnych wśród mieszkańców miast i wsi.

W dyskusji wyników badań podkreślono wpływ tendencji postmodernistycznych, takich jak indywidualizm i pragmatyzm, na współczesne postrzeganie wartości, a także trudności w kształtowaniu jednolitego systemu wartości w zróżnicowanym kulturowo społeczeństwie. W kontekście pedagogicznym artykuł identyfikuje wyzwania związane z edukacją młodego pokolenia w epoce ponowoczesnej, w tym potrzebę integracji zróżnicowanych systemów wartości, efektywnego wykorzystania technologii w nauczaniu oraz zachowania równowagi między wartościami tradycyjnymi i nowoczesnymi.

Introduction

The rapid development of technology, globalization, and the ongoing processes associated with postmodernity pose numerous challenges for the young generation. Changing social, economic, and cultural conditions have a significant impact on the way in which values are perceived and in which the system of values is formed among young people. In this context, the question arises about how important values are in the lives of the young generation and what correlates and predictors guide them in choosing the values that they embrace. This issue forms the basis of the present article, whose aim is to understand how traditional and postmodern values shape the lives of young people, as well as what challenges are faced by pedagogy, which is tasked with educating the young generation in a changing world.

In line with the research questions posed, the article seeks to answer the following: *What role do values play in the lives of the young generation? What are the correlates of value-driven behavior among young people? What factors influence young people's preference for traditional values? What predictors influence their orientation toward postmodern values?*

This article also pays particular attention to cultural pluralism and the perception of values in the context of cultural diversity, as well as the distinctions between traditional and postmodern values. The analysis presented aims to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges that the contemporary world poses for pedagogy and of how educators can respond to these challenges in their work with the young generation.

Literature review

A. Values and the value system of the young generation

Values are a key element that shapes the attitudes and behaviors of individuals in every community. The value system of the young generation is a complex structure that influences the way in which young people perceive the world, take part in social interactions, and make life decisions. These values develop under the influence of many factors, including family, school and peer groups, media, and the broader socio-cultural context in which young people grow up. In the context of postmodernity, the value system of young people is undergoing significant changes, with consequences both for the lives of individuals and for educational processes. Over the years, the values of the young generation have changed in response to social, technological, and cultural developments. In traditional societies, value systems were largely based on religious norms and social hierarchies, which dictated patterns of conduct. In contrast, the contemporary young generation, growing up in a postmodern world, is exposed to value pluralism, which leads to greater individualization and relativization of values.

Recent research indicates that globalization, technological development, and increasing cultural mobility favor the emergence of more diverse and flexible value systems (Korhonen, Lindh 2010; Humphrey,

Bliuc 2022). Contemporary youth live in a world without a single dominant ideology, overarching authority, or unified system of norms. Instead, they contend with a diverse spectrum of values that they select based on their experiences, beliefs, and needs (Giddens 2010; Humphrey, Bliuc 2022). Growing up in a state of "liquid modernity," today's young people are exposed to axiological pluralism that encourages greater individualization and the relativization of norms (Bauman 2006; Beyers, Soenens, Vansteenkiste 2024). One of the key aspects of the young generation's value system is the emphasis on autonomy and individualism (Peret-Drążewska 2014). International research demonstrates that autonomy in adolescence is not only a cultural value but also a developmental factor that supports well-being and adaptability in a rapidly changing world (Beyers et al. 2024).

These values are gaining importance in the context of postmodern societies, which promote individual freedom and the independent shaping of one's life path. According to modernization theory, the young generation increasingly chooses values related to personal aspirations, the pursuit of self-fulfillment, and the search for identity outside traditional social institutions (Inglehart, Welzel 2012). This phenomenon contributes to the growing emphasis on values such as tolerance, equality, openness to diversity, and respect for individual rights, which are becoming the foundation of contemporary value systems (Heys 2024).

Another important component of the young generation's value system is their perception of interpersonal relationships. In traditional value systems, social ties were strongly organized around family and community. In the postmodern world, shaped by technology and social media, young people tend to develop more fluid and diverse forms of relationships (Lewicka 2021). According to Bauman (2006), in liquid modernity, young people often seek relationships that allow them greater flexibility, fewer obligations, and more individual space. Values associated with family ties, traditional forms of relationships, or attachment to stability are increasingly giving way to more open and variable interpersonal configurations.

An equally significant aspect of young people's value systems is their attitude toward religion and spirituality (Marek 2017). In traditional societies, religion played a central role in shaping an individual's values. Contemporary generations, especially in developed

countries, tend to be less attached to religious institutions. However, as Inglehart and Welzel (2012) note, the decline in religiosity does not imply the disappearance of spirituality. Instead, young people increasingly turn toward individualized forms of spirituality, independent of formal religious structures. Values such as searching for meaning, reflecting on one's existence, and caring for others are becoming key for many young people, though they take less institutionalized forms than in the past. It is also worth noting that the young generation, particularly in developed countries, is becoming increasingly diverse in political and ideological beliefs. In the face of global challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and migration, young people are more inclined to engage in activism and social movements that are focused on specific goals, such as social justice, sustainable development, and gender equality. Values related to social, ecological, and justice-oriented responsibility are becoming one of the most important areas of engagement for the young generation (Bauman 2006). The table below (Table 1) summarizes the values of young people in traditional and postmodern societies in relation to various important aspects of their functioning.

Table 1. Youth values in traditional and postmodern society

Aspect	Traditional society (youth in traditional society)	Postmodern society (youth in postmodern society)
Social values	family relationships, hierarchy, respect for tradition, unambiguous system of norms	individualism, flexibility of social roles, diversity, pluralism of values and relativism of values
Authority	high respect for authorities (family, teachers, church)	different values shaped by experiences, beliefs, and needs
Religion	faith as a central part of life (collective and family spirituality, sustained by tradition), religious duties	emphasis on autonomy and independence
Material values	work and frugality as basic life values	relativization of authority, searching for one's own role models
Culture	traditional national culture, stability of values	a pluralistic approach to religion (individual spirituality, related to searching for the meaning of life), frequent indifference, agnosticism or even atheism
Technology	limited access to technology, greater emphasis on personal contact	consumerism, culture of "being here and now," and quick satisfaction of needs

Aspect	Traditional society (youth in traditional society)	Postmodern society (youth in postmodern society)
Future	work, starting a family, traditional social roles	globalization, mixing of cultures, influence of pop culture/media
Interpersonal relations	relationships based on a long-term bond, marriage as a goal	intensive development of technology, social media as an important element of life (often essential for young people)
Education	value of formal education, school as a main element of upbringing	variability of a career, professional flexibility, and other life models
Family	perceived as a relatively lasting relationship ending the period of engagement, with starting a family being one of the main goals and important values	more fluid relationships, less attachment to stable forms of relationships

Source: Author's own research.

The differences presented between traditional and postmodern societies clearly illustrate the shift from collective values (including family ties), hierarchy, and "cultural solidarities" (Heys 2024), toward values tied to individual freedom, flexible social roles, and consumerism, with particular emphasis on the growing importance of autonomy in adolescence and the individualism of younger generations (Beyers et al. 2024).

It can therefore be generalized that the value system of the young generation is produced through a complex interplay of traditional and modern influences. Values are a key element that shapes an individual's personality and has a direct impact on decision-making and personal attitudes. These values may differ depending on the cultural, social, and family contexts in which a young person is raised. Nevertheless, the value system of the young generation is evolving, shaped by changing social norms, media, and technology. Young people living in the postmodern world are increasingly guided by values related to individualism, autonomy and flexibility, which, in the educational context, poses new challenges for pedagogy in educating young people within such a diverse system of values.

Cultural pluralism, understood as the coexistence of different cultures, traditions, beliefs, and values within a single community, significantly influences how the young generation perceives values. In the contemporary world, marked by globalization, migration, and rapid technological development, young people often encounter multiple value systems. In this context, their perception of values becomes more diverse, flexible, and subject to constant negotiation. Values are no longer fixed or unchanging; instead, they emerge from interactions among the various cultural, religious, and social traditions that young people encounter.

Globalization, as a process linking nations and cultures, contributes to growing cultural pluralism, which reshapes how cultural identity and values are perceived. According to theories of cultural pluralism, contemporary societies exhibit greater openness to diversity and greater acceptance of differing value systems. This, in turn, shapes young people's willingness to adopt new ideas and their ability to understand and integrate values from different cultures (Kymlicka 1995). Young people raised in such diverse environments often face the challenge of constructing their identity amid conflicting beliefs and norms. Cultural pluralism also requires young people to negotiate values, which may lead to a more complex understanding of the world and themselves.

In the educational context, this means that schools and other educational institutions must face the challenge of educating young people in a spirit of tolerance, respect for other cultures, and appreciation of diversity (Parekh 2000). Encouraging young people to embrace cultural pluralism while maintaining their own cultural identity is an important component of contemporary education and is particularly relevant in the context of social development and international interaction.

One of the challenges associated with cultural pluralism is how young people living in multicultural societies negotiate and make sense of different, and sometimes contradictory, values. Although pluralism promotes openness and acceptance, it can also generate conflicts of values, especially when cultural groups hold divergent beliefs regarding social norms, religion, gender roles, or human

rights. In such a context, the perception of values becomes complex and requires young people to develop the ability to select and adapt values in ways that are consistent with their individual belief systems (Giddens 2010). This phenomenon is particularly evident in relation to values connected with family, marriage, religion, and social roles. In traditional societies, these values were clear-cut and widely accepted, whereas in a globalized world, they may be interpreted differently by different cultural groups.

Young people, who frequently encounter multiple cultural paradigms, may experience value conflicts—for example, concerning expectations around gender roles or differing religious norms. For this reason, the perception of values becomes a dynamic process, which is not free from tensions and controversies (Parekh 2000). It is also not without significance that in a world promoting cultural pluralism, young people are increasingly exposed to the influence of social media, which are major sources of information and platforms for exchanging ideas. Social media provide easy access to diverse views and value systems, which makes younger generations more aware of global issues, but also more vulnerable to manipulation and extremist ideologies (Hsu et al. 2021; Weir 2023). On the one hand, the media offer young people a broad spectrum of beliefs and viewpoints; on the other, they can lead to fragmentation and polarization of values, especially in political or religious contexts (Castells 2009).

As regards the perception of values, young people not only adopt external values but also transform them, creating new forms of cultural identity that blend traditional and modern elements. This means that the young generation often chooses values individually, combining them in ways that meet their personal needs and expectations. Values in pluralistic societies are therefore not only inherited from the past but constitute a dynamically shaped belief system that is subject to reinterpretation and transformation in response to new challenges (Bauman 2006).

New research indicates that a climate of cultural pluralism in schools positively correlates with students' self-esteem and sense of self-worth, which in turn promotes their psychological well-being (Oczlon, Bardach, Lüftenegger 2021). Table 2 presents the effects of pluralism on young people, both positive (e.g., the development of empathy, openness to diversity, and personal growth) and negative

(e.g., value conflicts, feelings of disorientation, and isolation). It is worth noting that the positive effects are more strongly associated with educational environments that support diversity, whereas a lack of such support can lead to an increased sense of discrimination and lower self-esteem and self-confidence (see Smith, Wang, and Hill 2020).

Table 2. Positive and negative effects of pluralism on a young person

Effects	Positive effects of pluralism	Negative effects of pluralism
Personal development	the opportunity to explore different ideas, which promotes individual development	the possibility of feeling lost due to an excess of options and a lack of stable values
Tolerance	the development of the ability to accept and respect cultural, religious and social diversity	an increased risk of intolerance and conflicts between groups with different values
Creativity	access to many different worldviews stimulates creative thinking and innovation	identity fragmentation, difficulty in developing a coherent self-image
Openness and readiness for change	increased flexibility and adaptability, which allows youth to better cope in a dynamic world	a lack of stable, enduring principles and values that could provide a sense of security
Independence in decision-making	learning to make informed decisions based on different information and perspectives	information overload and difficulty in choosing the right path in life
Increased empathy	increased ability to understand and empathize with others, recognizing different perspectives	The potential for moral relativism, in which all views and behaviors are treated as equally valuable
Globalization	increased awareness of global issues, international cooperation and solidarity	loss of local traditions and identity due to globalization
Development of social competences	building the ability to cooperate with people with different views and values	isolation from groups with different views, difficulty in finding common ground for interaction and communication
Autonomy	a sense of greater autonomy, freedom in choosing one's own life path and personal development	the risk of social disintegration and difficulty in finding one's place in a diverse world

Source: Author's own research.

In light of the above data, we can see that, on the one hand, pluralism creates favorable conditions for development, increased tolerance, and openness, but on the other, it can lead to a sense of confusion and even a blurring of values, which poses significant challenges for education and upbringing. It is crucial that the educational process not be limited solely to promoting tolerance, but also cultivate

critical thinking skills, the ability to assess the credibility of information sources, and the ability to consciously choose one's values (to counteract the effects of cultural pluralism) in an era of widespread internet access. Equally important is the ability to skillfully combine tradition with modernity while nurturing one's own culture and identity.

In this context, it is worth examining the young generation's approach to traditional and postmodern values in order to understand how changing value systems influence their attitudes and choices. Pluralism, so important to many today, has both positive and negative consequences for young people. On the one hand, it supports development, tolerance, and openness; on the other hand, it may generate confusion and contribute to the blurring of values. The comparison clearly shows how important the role of proper upbringing is, including appropriate actions by parents and schools. Thus, the ability to thoughtfully balance tradition and modernity becomes especially significant.

C. Traditional vs. postmodern values and their impact on the lives of the young generation

Traditional values constitute the cultural foundation of many societies and are passed down through generations through families, religious institutions, and other social structures. In traditional value systems, a central role is played by norms regarding family, religion, marriage, and social roles, which are clearly defined and widely accepted in society. For the young generation, these values still have considerable influence, although they are increasingly confronted with contemporary values, especially in postmodern, culturally diverse, and globalized societies. Traditional values, particularly those related to respect for family, social hierarchy, religiosity, loyalty, and adherence to norms and authority, remain deeply rooted in the lives of young people, especially in cultures that are strongly connected to religious traditions.

Historically, the family was regarded as the basic social unit in which moral and ethical foundations were formed. Family values (e.g., care for others, community, mutual support) were passed down from generation to generation, thus providing the basis upon which

younger people built interpersonal and social relationships. Over the past few decades, however, young people have increasingly revised their perceptions of traditional values. As Giddens (2010) notes, one of the key outcomes of globalization is that youth are becoming more open to alternative values that may conflict with traditional ones. Postmodern values prioritizing individual freedom, equality, and individualism tend to weaken the influence of traditional norms. Nevertheless, the young generation does not necessarily reject tradition outright; instead, they often select those elements that best suit their needs and experiences (Inglehart, Welzel 2012).

Traditional values also influence the young generation through family upbringing. Parents, especially those in families with strong religious traditions, place great emphasis on transmitting moral values that are based on religion, as well as on building bonds based on respect for family and social traditions (Parekh 2000). These values shape young people's decisions regarding life choices, career paths, marriage, child-rearing, and their role in the community. However, it must be remembered that traditional values are often perceived by younger generations as limiting, outdated, or "unable to keep pace" with social change. Modern society, dominated by technology and globalization, forces young people to choose between traditional and contemporary values (which is particularly visible in issues related to free will, gender roles, personal decisions, marriage, and religion).

As a result, traditional values centered on family, obedience, and clear rules—once the foundation for earlier generations—may give way to more individualistic patterns of thinking and critical thinking (Bauman 2006). At the same time, traditional values associated with social responsibility, respect for elders, solidarity, equality, and cooperation continue to play an important role in shaping young people's attitudes, especially in the context of social life and civic engagement. Despite the growing dominance of postmodern values, traditional values still act as an ethical anchor that helps young people find their way in a rapidly changing world while offering a sense of stability and security (Bauman 2006).

Postmodern values, in turn, reflect the changes taking place in contemporary societies, in which globalization and technological and cultural processes play a dominant role. These values are characterized by flexibility, individualism, and diversity. Unlike traditional

values, which tended to be stable and universal, postmodern values are characterized by heterogeneity, openness to experimentation and pluralism, and a tendency to criticize and deconstruct earlier norms. One example is the rising importance of individualism, personal freedom, equality, and the pursuit of personal goals and self-fulfillment (Bauman 2006). Bauman (ibid.) notes that in postmodernity, the notion of a single, unified "truth" no longer applies; instead, diversity becomes the norm, which allows young people to construct multiple life paths and identities. One of the defining features of postmodern values is their relationship to individualism. In the postmodern world, the individual becomes the central point of reference, and the pursuit of personal goals, freedom, and autonomy becomes the overriding goal. Values related to freedom of choice, autonomy, self-fulfillment, and responsibility for one's own life thus form the basis for the functioning of the young generation.

According to Giddens's theory (ibid.), in postmodern society young people live in an atmosphere of constant choice, in which the individual is responsible for constructing their identity and finding their place in the world, often in ways that subvert traditional social norms. The value of individual freedom, especially in the context of work, education, and private life, is of key importance for young people, who become consumers of information and ideas, selecting those that best suit their personal needs.

Another element characteristic of postmodern values is their flexibility and fluidity. In a world where technology, social media, and the rapid flow of information shape perceptions of reality, the young generation is often compelled to adapt to new norms and trends. As Castells (2009) notes, contemporary youth tend to live in a network society, in which traditional forms of social bonds are increasingly replaced by virtual interactions. These changes also affect values, which are becoming more diverse, fragmented, and subjective. The contemporary young generation is no longer bound to a single dominant value system, but has the opportunity to choose and construct their own hierarchy of values, in which flexibility, experimentation, and openness to change play a central role.

At the same time, postmodern societies demonstrate greater acceptance of diversity and pluralism. Values such as equality, respect for other cultures, combating discrimination, and promoting human

rights have become not only widespread but also socially sanctioned. Tolerance for different beliefs, sexual orientations, religions, and other aspects of identity is one of the defining features of the value systems of 21st-century youth (Kymlicka 1996). The following figure shows the positive and negative influences associated with traditional and postmodern values.

Fig. 1. Summary of positive and negative influences of traditional and postmodern values

POSITIVE EFFECTS		NEGATIVE EFFECTS	
Traditional values	Postmodern values	Traditional values	Postmodern values
Youth raised in the spirit of traditional values often benefit from social and family stability, and have clearly defined roles in society, which can build a sense of security and belonging. Attention to tradition can strengthen inter-generational bonds.	Youth living in accordance with postmodern values enjoy greater freedom to choose their own life paths; they are also more open to diversity and change. In addition, the pluralism of ideas and openness to different traditions promote the development of creativity and innovation.	Traditional values may limit individual and creative development. In particular, traditions related to religion and gender roles can restrict young people's personal freedom. Additionally, a strong emphasis on maintaining traditional social norms may lead to conflicts surrounding individual life choices.	An overabundance of options and a lack of clear, stable values can lead to a sense of disorientation. Young people may have difficulty finding meaning in life, which, in turn, may lead to existential doubts. Additionally, extreme individualism and easy access to information can contribute to social isolation.

Source: Author's own research.

Although postmodern values may appear attractive and consistent with contemporary social changes, they also present challenges and come with a price that young people must pay. The value of individualism, while positive in supporting self-fulfillment and freedom, can also weaken social bonds and contribute to alienation, a lack of solidarity, and reduced cooperation. Bauman (2006) notes that postmodern society promotes fragmentation, which may lead to feelings of loneliness and insecurity. Moreover, in a society in which the individual becomes the central point of reference, values such as social responsibility, caring for others and involvement in public affairs may be pushed into the background.

Nevertheless, the younger generation, living in a global culture and exposed to a variety of ideologies, including values related to gender equality, tolerance, environmentalism, and human rights, often manages to combine traditional values with modern ones. This approach enables them to create their own balanced system of values that responds to the demands of the contemporary world while remaining connected to their cultural and family roots. Traditional values, although weakened, do not disappear from the lives of young people. They remain a point of reference that supports them in the process of developing their identity, both individual and social.

Methodology

The survey questionnaire was developed by an interdisciplinary research team (psychologists, educators, and philologists) whose goal was to explore students' opinions on important values in a rapidly changing world. The questions were formulated based on an analysis of the literature on values, religiosity, and their role in life (e.g., axiological concepts, research on religiosity and values in the postmodern world); existing tools and various scales examining similar issues, which were analyzed and partially adapted in modified form (Roccas, Elster 2014; Strosser et al. 2016; Saroglou 2011; Inglehart, Welzel 2012; Huber, Huber 2012; Pearce et al. 2017; Brink, Bekhuis 2024); and consultations with specialists in psychology and pedagogy to ensure appropriate quality and validity. The questions were assessed for consistency with theoretical assumptions and for correlations between items within the subscales.

The questionnaire contained 32 questions, of which selected items related to variables associated with the value system were used for this article: questions about the importance of following a value system in life (participants rated this importance on a scale of 1–7), 12 authorial statements to which participants responded on a 5-point scale (1—strongly disagree, 2—somewhat disagree, 3—no opinion, 4—somewhat agree, 5—strongly agree), as well as items from the participant's personal data. The survey was anonymous, and the selection of questions for publication was based solely on their relevance to the variables analyzed in the article. Research on the values of the young generation was conducted between 18.12.2024

and 13.01.2025 among students at universities in southern Poland. A total of N = 272 individuals aged 18–54 (M = 27.63; SD = 8.64) took part in the study. Regarding gender distribution, women constituted 94.5% (n = 257) of the sample and men 5.5% (n = 15). The respondents varied in terms of place of residence—46.7% (n = 127) lived in rural areas and 53.3% (n = 145) in urban areas.

All respondents were students: 64.7% (n = 176) were full-time students, and 35.3% (n = 96) were part-time students. The majority were enrolled in long-cycle Master's programs (59.2%; n = 161), while 19.5% (n = 53) were pursuing a Bachelor's degree and 21.3% (n = 58) were pursuing a supplementary Master's degree. The sample was also diverse in terms of university type (University: 51.8%, n = 141; University of Technology: 27.9%, n = 76; Academy: 15.8%, n = 42; Other: 4.4%, n = 12) and field of study (Pedagogy: 69.1%, n = 188; Psychology: 12.5%, n = 34; Philology: 1.1%, n = 3; Social work: 11.4%, n = 31; Applied linguistics: 5.1%, n = 14; Other: n = 2).

All analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and factor analysis were applied. Statistical inference assumed a significance level of α = 0.05.

The following research questions were posed:

RQ1: *How important are values in the lives of the young generation?*

RQ2: *What are the correlates of value-driven behavior among young people?*

RQ3: *What factors influence young people's preference for traditional values?*

RQ4: *What predictors influence their orientation toward postmodern values?*

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles and with the approval of the Scientific Research Ethics Committee (No. 2024/12/4/E/3 of 17.12.2024).

Findings

(a) Values and value systems of the young generation

We began the analysis by identifying the value system declared by the young respondents and the ranking of selected values. Table 3 presents summary information on the value system of the young respondents.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics / Values and value system declared by respondents

Variables	Range of results	M	SD	Dominant
Salience of the value system	3–7	6.11	0.98	7
1. I believe that religious values are important for building a just society in Poland/the world.	1–5	3.21	1.34	4
2. I believe that honesty is losing its importance in today's world.	1–5	4.08	1.05	5
3. I believe that equality and social justice are key values in building a society.	1–5	4.05	0.85	4
4. In today's world, traditional values are less important than they used to be.	1–5	4.13	.89	4
5. Excessive consumption of material goods and services has a negative impact on the spiritual development of young people.	1–5	3.81	1.04	4
6. I believe that religion is still a relevant source of answers to contemporary challenges faced by humans.	1–5	3.32	1.18	4
7. Different views on morality and social norms weaken the importance of religion.	1–5	3.45	1.00	4
8. I often wonder about the meaning of life and my place in the world.	1–5	3.71	1.18	4
9. I believe that spiritual values are key to a happy life.	1–5	3.56	1.06	4
10. I have the feeling that in the postmodern world it is easy to lose one's moral compass.	1–5	4.03	0.87	4
11. I consider individual freedom to be a key value in building a just society, rather than values based on faith.	1–5	3.34	1.10	3
12. I believe that young people can find new, universal values that combine tradition with modernity.	1–5	3.55	1.00	4

Source: Author's own research.

The results indicate that the respondents attach great importance to being guided by a system of values in life (M = 6.11; SD = 0.98). They agreed most strongly with the statement *I believe that honesty is losing its importance in today's world*. They expressed no clear opinion regarding the statement *I consider individual freedom to be the key value in building a just society, rather than values based on faith*. They tended to agree with the remaining statements.

(b) Cultural pluralism, perception of values, and sociodemographic variables in relation to the importance of the value system

The results presented in Table 4 indicate that the importance placed on a value system in life is positively correlated with age—the older the students, the more important it is for them to be guided by such a system. Moreover, the greater the importance students attributed to being guided by a value system in life, the *more* they agreed that:

- religious values are important for building a just society in Poland and globally,
- honesty is losing its importance in today's world,
- excessive consumption of material goods and services has a negative impact on the spiritual development of young people,
- religion remains a relevant source of answers to contemporary human challenges,
- differing views on morality and social norms weaken the importance of religion,
- spiritual values are crucial for a happy life,
- in the postmodern world, it is easy to lose one's moral compass;
- and the *less* they agreed that:
- individual freedom—rather than values based on faith—is the key value in building a just society.

Table 4. Pearson r correlations between values and respondents' gender, age, and place of residence

Questions	Gender	Age	Residence	Salience of value system
Salience of the value system	−.043	**.267****	−0.109	1
1. I believe that religious values are important for building a just society in Poland/the world.	−.025	**.209****	**−.269****	**.488****
2. I believe that honesty is losing its importance in today's world.	.013	−.081	−.001	**.229****
3. I believe that equality and social justice are key values in building a society.	.043	**−.133***	.114	.029
4. In today's world, traditional values are less important than they used to be.	.037	−.055	.019	.090

Questions	Gender	Age	Residence	Salience of value system
5. Excessive consumption of material goods and services has a negative impact on the spiritual development of young people.	−.079	.181**	−.112	.285**
6. I believe that religion is still a relevant source of answers to contemporary challenges faced by humans.	−.025	.155*	−.233**	.407**
7. Different views on morality and social norms weaken the importance of religion.	−.060	.065	−.015	.238**
8. I often wonder about the meaning of life and my place in the world.	−.132*	−.065	.089	.040
9. I believe that spiritual values are key to a happy life.	−.081	.102	−.206**	.449**
10. I have the feeling that in the postmodern world it is easy to lose one's moral compass.	−.046	.036	−.075	.364**
11. I consider individual freedom to be a key value in building a just society, rather than values based on faith.	.102	−.151*	.195**	−.230**
12. I believe that young people can find new, universal values that combine tradition with modernity.	−.037	−.167**	.030	−.094

Source: Author's study.
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; Coding system: Gender: 1 – Woman; 2 – Man;
Place of residence: 1 – Rural; 2 – Urban

Moreover, the results presented in Table 4 indicate that women reflect more often on the meaning of life and their place in the world than men. In addition, the older the students are, the *more* they agree that:
- religious values are important for building a just society in Poland and around the world;
- equality and social justice are key to building a society;
- excessive consumption of material goods and services has a negative impact on the spiritual development of young people;
- religion remains a relevant source of answers to contemporary human challenges;
- individual freedom is key to building a just society, rather than values based on faith;
- the young generation is capable of finding new, universal values that combine tradition with modernity.

It should also be noted that, compared to students living in rural areas, students living in cities:

– agree *less* with the statements that:

- religious values are important for building a just society in Poland and around the world;
- religion remains a relevant source of answers to contemporary human challenges;
- personal development is more important than following traditional religious patterns;

– and agree *more* with the statement that:

- individual freedom is key to building a just society, rather than values based on faith.

(c) Traditional values and postmodern values

A factor analysis was conducted (principal component method with Varimax orthogonal rotation) on the authors' statements (KMO = 0.835; x^2 = 837.355; p < 0.01). The Kaiser criterion was used to determine the number of factors. Two component factors were identified. The analysis explained a total of 46.84% of the variance. The rotated component matrix with factor loadings is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Rotated component matrix: Factor analysis of declared determinants of the studied values

Variable	Component	
	1	2
9. I believe that spiritual values are crucial for a happy life.	.767	–.119
1. I believe that religious values are important for building a just society in Poland/the world.	.752	–.245
10. I have the feeling that in the postmodern world it is easy to lose one's moral compass.	.730	.219
6. I believe that religion is still a current source of answers to contemporary challenges that people face.	.726	–.260
5. Excessive consumption of material goods and services has a negative impact on the spiritual development of young people.	.707	.122
2. I believe that honesty is losing its importance in today's world.	.591	.329
7. Different views on morality and social norms weaken the importance of religion.	.528	–.044

Variable	Component	
	1	2
4. In today's world, traditional values are less important than they used to be.	**.433**	.427
3. I believe that equality and social justice are key values in building a society.	.060	**.702**
11. I consider individual freedom to be a key value in building a just society, rather than values based on faith.	−.425	**.579**
12. I believe that young people can find new, universal values that combine tradition with modernity.	−.288	**.541**
8. I often wonder about the meaning of life and my place in the world.	.115	**.443**

Source: Author's study.

Content analysis of the items allows us to assign the following names to the component factors: factor 1—traditional values: religious, spiritual, moral (reliability measured using Cronbach's alpha = 0.82); factor 2—postmodern values (Cronbach's alpha = 0.475).

In the next step, indicators of traditional values (sum of items 9, 1, 10, 6, 5, 2, 7, and 4) and postmodern values (sum of items 3, 11, 12, and 8) were calculated. Correlation analysis indicates that traditional values and postmodern values are negatively correlated ($r = -0.176$; $p < 0.01$). The more strongly an individual identifies with traditional values, the less strongly they identify with postmodern values. Table 6 presents the Pearson r correlations between these factors, sociodemographic variables, and the importance of following a value system in life.

Table 6. Traditional and postmodern values and sociodemographic variables, and the importance of the value system in life

Variables	Traditional values	Postmodern values
Age	**.128***	**−.202****
Gender	−.050	−.017
Place of residence	**−.184****	**.172****
The importance of the value system	**.495****	−.106

Source: Author's own research.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$ Codes: Gender: 1 – Woman; 2 – Man; Place of residence: 1 – Rural; 2 – Urban

Age correlates positively with traditional values (the older the respondents, the more they are guided by traditional values) and

negatively with postmodern values (the older the respondents, the less they are guided by postmodern values). In addition, place of residence correlates positively with traditional values and negatively with postmodern values. People living in the city are guided more by postmodern values and less by traditional values than those living in the countryside. The importance of the value system correlates positively only with traditional values: the more important the value system is in life in general, the more the individual is guided by traditional values, but not by postmodern values.

In the next step, taking into account all significant correlates of the factors simultaneously, we verified which correlates are significant predictors of traditional values and which predict postmodern values. Two regression analyses were conducted. The results for traditional values are presented in Table 7, and those for postmodern values in Table 8.

Table 7. Traditional values—regression analysis

	Model	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance
		B	Standard error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	15.191	2.249		6.754	< .001
	Age	−.012	.036	−.018	−.327	.744
	Place of residence	**−1.501**	**.597**	**−.133**	**−2.513**	**.013**
	Importance of the value system	**2.785**	**.314**	**.485**	**8.876**	**< .001**

Source: Author's own research.

The results indicate that, for traditional values, the strongest significant predictor is the overall importance of the value system in life (β = 0.485; p < 0.01). A weaker predictor is place of residence (β = −0.133; p < 0.05), while age proved to be statistically insignificant.

In turn, for postmodern values, both age (β = −0.183; p < 0.01) and place of residence (β = 0.149; p < 0.05) emerged as significant predictors.

Table 8. Postmodern values—regression analysis

Model		Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significance
		B	Standard error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	14.977	.739		20.257	< .001
	Age	−.055	.018	−.183	−3.067	.002
	Place of residence	.768	.308	.149	2.497	.013

Source: Author's own research.

Discussion

The results of the study provide valuable information on the values that guide the young generation, particularly in relation to sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, and place of residence. An important conclusion is that young people attach great importance to being guided by a system of values in their lives, although their value preferences vary depending on these factors. The respondents expressed strong agreement with the claim that a value system plays a significant role in their lives (Smyła 2024). However, the statement that honesty is losing its importance in today's world proved more controversial. The results suggest that some respondents perceive this value as less consistently upheld today, which may reflect the influence of postmodern trends promoting a more individualized and pragmatic approach to social norms (Giddens 2024). At the same time, the absence of a clear stance on the question of whether individual freedom is the key value in building a just society indicates difficulties in forming a coherent value framework in contemporary society, which is characteristic of the postmodern condition (Bauman 2006).

The analysis further shows that age has a significant influence on the importance respondents attribute to values: older participants rely more strongly on an internalized value system. This may stem from greater emotional maturity and reflectiveness, as individuals become more aware of their beliefs and values over time. This observation is consistent with theories suggesting that value systems tend to stabilize and become more firmly established with age (Perry 1970; Ahn et al. 2022). Correlations with gender also provide noteworthy

insights. The findings indicate that women more often reflect on the meaning of life and their place in the world, which may be linked to gender differences in emotionality and reflectiveness. Spiritual and religious values, as well as concerns about the impact of consumerism on spiritual development, are clearly more important to women, suggesting a more complex perception of the issue of spirituality and self-fulfillment compared to men (Mariański 2021).

Another interesting aspect of the results is the variation in value preferences depending on place of residence. Respondents living in cities are less likely to agree that religious values are important for building a just society, and they also view religion as a less relevant source of answers to contemporary challenges. This phenomenon may stem from the greater cultural and ideological diversity found in urban environments, which tends to promote more pluralistic attitudes (Beck 2006). In contrast, respondents from rural areas are more likely to emphasize the importance of religion and its role in social life, which may result from stronger religious traditions and less social diversity. With respect to religious values, these results indicate a clear divide between young people living in cities and those living in the countryside, which also confirms theories about the importance of cultural context in shaping value systems (Smyła 2024).

The analysis also indicates a strong correlation between preferences for traditional and postmodern values. Respondents who place great importance on traditional values tend to regard postmodern values as less important, suggesting a clear distinction between these two value systems. In addition, older participants adhere to traditional values more often, while younger people show greater openness to postmodern values, which emphasize individualism and a more subjective approach to morality (Bauman 2006). This pattern mirrors the evolution of beliefs over time and the social changes encountered by younger generations (Rawicka 2020).

Challenges for pedagogy: Summary

Contemporary pedagogy faces numerous challenges stemming from the rapid changes taking place in postmodern societies, particularly regarding the evolving value systems embraced by younger generations. Youth in the postmodern era encounter various pressures

that shape their attitudes, behaviors, ways of thinking, and the value systems that they tend to prefer. The most significant challenges that these changes pose for pedagogy include the pluralism of values, the integration of technology into the teaching process, dilemmas related to tradition and modernity, and the need to adapt to an ever-changing society.

The young generation lives in a world where they encounter a wide spectrum of values—traditional and contemporary, local and global, as well as culturally and religiously diverse. Therefore, one of the central challenges for contemporary pedagogy is the need to understand and integrate this pluralism into the educational process. Striving to transmit universal values such as respect for others, tolerance, and equality becomes crucial, yet questions arise regarding how young people orient themselves in situations in which different value systems often collide. In this context, education should not only impart knowledge but also help young people develop critical-thinking skills that enable them to make conscious choices about the values they adopt (Świtała 2019). Values such as pluralism, diversity, openness to other cultures, and the ability to understand different points of view are becoming essential components that pedagogy must incorporate into its educational goals (Beck 2002; Giddens 2010).

Another major challenge facing contemporary pedagogy is the need to effectively incorporate technology into the teaching process. The Internet, social media, artificial intelligence, and educational platforms are fundamentally transforming how young people acquire knowledge and shape their values. On the one hand, technology offers unprecedented educational opportunities, enabling global access to information and supporting interactivity and independent learning. On the other hand, educators must address negative aspects of technology, including social-media addiction, distraction, misinformation, and difficulties related to the lack of critical information-processing skills. In the context of values, educating young people about digital responsibility and ethics also becomes an urgent challenge. Questions arise concerning the role of media in shaping values, the formation of competences, and the influence of online environments on social identity. Addressing these issues requires educators to continually refine their teaching methods and strategies in response to a rapidly evolving digital world (Carr 2011; Prensky 2001).

Contemporary pedagogy also struggles with dilemmas arising from the tension between traditional and postmodern values. On the one hand, there is a need to preserve values such as respect for tradition, family, and authority, which form the cultural foundation of many societies; on the other hand, contemporary societies require young people to be flexible, open to change, and capable of adapting to a rapidly changing world. Thus, a key challenge for pedagogy is balancing the transmission of traditional values with preparing young people to face postmodern challenges. One of the questions that has no clear answer concerns the forms of education that help maintain cultural roots while not closing young people off from new ideas and perspectives. Although this question cannot be resolved in a definitive or universally convincing way, pedagogy must nevertheless focus on supporting students in navigating this tension while preserving the coherence of their value system.

Finally, contemporary pedagogy must respond to a society that is increasingly diverse, global, and pluralistic. The young generation faces new forms of uncertainty—economic, social, and political—that shape their perception of the future. Pedagogy must meet these challenges by adapting its methods to the changing realities of youth life (Sroczyński 2022). This requires approaching the task with openness and objectivity, regardless of personal preferences or attitudes. The research conducted shows significant differences in value orientations depending on sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, and place of residence. Traditional values still play an important role in the lives of younger generations, yet there is also a growing openness toward postmodern values. The results illustrate the diversity of contemporary approaches to values and highlight the challenges that pedagogy must confront in order to effectively integrate these differing value orientations into the educational process (Smyła, Szempruch 2024). Education must support young people not only in acquiring knowledge but also in developing the ability to cope with uncertainty, remain flexible in decision-making, and cultivate a constructive response to the challenges posed by postmodern society. This challenge requires the introduction of educational methods that help young people adapt to a rapidly changing world while also preserving their sense of identity and belonging to the community with which they wish to identify (Bauman 2006; Beck 2002).

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Are We Ready to Accept Homo-Parentality? Reflections on Changes in the Political, Social, and Educational Spheres of Two Central-Eastern European Countries

Czy jesteśmy gotowi zaakceptować homorodzicielstwo? Refleksje nad zmianami w sferze politycznej, społecznej i edukacyjnej z dwóch krajów Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej

ABSTRACT

The research presented in this article employs a critical, narrative literature review to examine the social, educational, and legal dynamics of homo-parentality in Poland and the Czech Republic. While family structures in Europe are rapidly diversifying, legal recognition and societal acceptance of same-sex parenting in Central-Eastern

Europe remain limited, reflecting persistent heteronormative norms and institutional inertia. Unlike systematic or scoping reviews, the narrative approach allows for interpretive flexibility by integrating a diverse range of sources—including peer-reviewed studies, legal and policy documents, government reports, and media accounts—while emphasizing conceptual clarity, theoretical insight, and socio-legal context. This method is particularly well suited to regions where empirical research on homo-parentality is scarce and fragmented.

The study addresses the following research question: How do socio-political, educational, and cultural factors influence the recognition and acceptance of homo-parental families in Poland and the Czech Republic? To explore this issue, the research examined national legal and policy frameworks; synthesized empirical findings on public attitudes, with a particular focus on educators and university students; investigated the role of demographic factors such as age, gender, education, and religiosity; and identified gaps in existing research, especially in the areas of education and policy. A purposive search strategy was used to select approximately 85 sources that met predefined inclusion criteria related to relevance, methodological rigor, and contribution to the discourse on LGBTQ+ parenting. Data were systematically extracted on legal recognition, adoption rights, public attitudes, and the influence of media and educational institutions. The findings were synthesized narratively and guided by gender and power theories, the concept of normativity in socialization, and the notion of empty signifiers, illustrating how debates around "gender" in Poland and Czechia shape both social perceptions and public policy. The study highlights the complex interplay between law, culture, education, and demographic factors in shaping acceptance of homo-parental families. While not exhaustive or generalizable, the review provides a multidimensional perspective that helps illuminate the realities of same-sex parenting in Central-Eastern Europe and underscores the need for further empirical research, inclusive education, and legal reform to promote equality and social justice.

ABSTRAKT

W badaniach przedstawionych w artykule wykorzystano krytyczny, narracyjny przegląd literatury do analizy społecznych, edukacyjnych i prawnych uwarunkowań homorodzicielstwa w Polsce i Czechach. Choć struktury rodzinne w Europie szybko się różnicują, prawne uznanie i akceptacja społeczna rodzicielstwa osób tej samej płci w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej pozostają ograniczone, co odzwierciedla

utrzymujące się normy heteronormatywne oraz inercję instytucjonalną. W przeciwieństwie do przeglądów systematycznych czy scopingowych podejście narracyjne pozwala na interpretacyjną elastyczność, integrując różnorodne źródła – w tym artykuły recenzowane, dokumenty prawne i polityczne, raporty rządowe oraz relacje medialne – przy jednoczesnym zachowaniu klarowności pojęciowej, wglądu teoretycznego i uwzględnieniu kontekstu społeczno-prawnego. Metoda ta jest szczególnie odpowiednia w regionach, gdzie badania empiryczne nad homorodzicielstwem są nieliczne i fragmentaryczne.

Przeprowadzone badanie miało odpowiedzieć na pytanie: W jaki sposób czynniki społeczno-polityczne, edukacyjne i kulturowe wpływają na uznanie i akceptację rodzin homoparentalnych w Polsce i Czechach? W tym celu przeanalizowano krajowe ramy prawne i polityczne, syntetyzuje wyniki badań empirycznych dotyczących postaw społecznych, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem edukatorów i studentów, przebadano rolę czynników demograficznych, takich jak wiek, płeć, wykształcenie i religijność oraz zidentyfikowano luki w istniejących badaniach, zwłaszcza w obszarze edukacji i polityki. Do selekcji wykorzystano celową strategię wyszukiwania, obejmującą około 85 źródeł spełniających wcześniej określone kryteria dotyczące trafności, rygoru metodologicznego i wkładu w dyskurs o rodzicielstwie osób LGBTQ+. Dane zostały systematycznie wyodrębnione w zakresie prawnego uznania, praw adopcyjnych, postaw społecznych oraz wpływu mediów i instytucji edukacyjnych. Wyniki zostały syntetyzowane narracyjnie, w oparciu o teorie płci i władzy, koncepcję normatywności w socjalizacji oraz pojęcie pustych signifikantów, ukazując, jak debaty o „płci" w Polsce i Czechach kształtują zarówno percepcję społeczną, jak i politykę. Przeprowadzone badanie podkreśla złożoną interakcję prawa, kultury, edukacji i czynników demograficznych w kształtowaniu akceptacji rodzin homoparentalnych. Choć nie jest wyczerpujące ani w pełni uogólnialne, dostarcza wielowymiarowej perspektywy, która pozwala spojrzeć na realia rodzicielstwa osób tej samej płci w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej i wskazuje na potrzebę dalszych badań empirycznych, edukacji inkluzywnej oraz reform prawnych wspierających równość i sprawiedliwość społeczną.

Introduction: When the law lags behind society

Across Europe and globally, family structures are undergoing rapid diversification. Consensually non-monogamous households, single-parent families, and homo-parental arrangements have emerged

both in public discourse and in lived experience (Barker, Langdridge 2010; Anapol 2010; Sheff 2011; Sadownik 2023). However, legal systems in many countries—including Poland and the Czech Republic—struggle to accommodate these evolving realities.

In both nations, despite their membership in the European Union and their status as signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, legal and policy frameworks largely fail to reflect the social presence of same-sex families. In Poland, tentative steps toward recognizing same-sex civil unions have conspicuously excluded any provisions related to parenting (Legalis 2024; Gov.pl 2024). Legislative silence regarding children born into or raised within same-sex households implicitly negates their existence, pushing them into legal and cultural invisibility. Even in the Czech Republic, although the institution of registered partnership has existed since 2006 and offers partial parity of rights with marriage, the legal framework does not permit joint adoption by same-sex couples, including recognition of a partner as a second parent. This limitation is confirmed both in Constitutional Court case law and in the scholarly literature (Maříková et al. 2022; Křičková 2023).

A key Constitutional Court ruling (Case No. I. ÚS 3226/16 of 29 June 2017) addressed a situation in which a Czech court refused to recognize the parenthood of the second member of a same-sex couple, even though the legal parent–child relationship had already been recognized in the United States (within the framework of a Californian marriage and surrogacy). The Constitutional Court held that non-recognition of this relationship would constitute an interference with the right to family life and would be discriminatory. This ruling did not amount to a general authorization of adoption but rather to the recognition of an already existing legal and factual family. As of 1 January 2025, registered partnership was replaced by a new legal institution of partnership (Act No. 123/2024 Coll.). Under this framework, a partner may adopt a child if the other partner is the child's legal parent; however, the standard procedures for establishing parenthood (§§ 776 and 777 of the Civil Code) do not apply to persons in a partnership.

This paper explores homo-parentality as an unresolved ethical dilemma situated at the intersection of cultural identity, normative structures, and institutional inertia. In our review of existing studies,

we examine whether and how demographic variables, particularly education, age, gender, and religiosity, influence acceptance of same-sex parenting. Importantly, this inquiry is conducted without predefined hypotheses, in accordance with the principles of exploratory research ethics (Fain, Deegan 1996; Merton, Barber 2004).

Research methodology

This study adopts a critical, narrative literature review approach to explore the social, educational, and legal dynamics of homo-parentality in Poland and the Czech Republic. Unlike systematic or scoping reviews, a narrative review offers interpretive flexibility, allowing for the integration of diverse sources—including academic studies, policy reports, legal documents, and media accounts—while emphasizing conceptual clarity, theoretical insight, and socio-legal context (Grant, Booth 2009; Cook et al. 1997). The aim is to synthesize existing knowledge, identify research gaps, and critically reflect on how institutional, cultural, and demographic factors shape the recognition and acceptance of same-sex families. This approach is particularly well suited to Central-Eastern Europe, where empirical research on homo-parentality remains limited.

This study addresses the following research question: How do socio-political, educational, and cultural factors influence the recognition and social acceptance of homo-parental families in Poland and the Czech Republic? To explore this question, the study pursues the following objectives:

- Examine legal and policy frameworks concerning same-sex parenting in both countries.
- Analyze empirical findings on public attitudes, with a particular focus on educators and university students as key agents of socialization.
- Investigate the influence of demographic variables, including age, gender, education, and religiosity, on social attitudes toward homo-parental families.
- Identify gaps in existing research and highlight areas for future investigation, particularly in education and public policy.

A purposive search strategy was employed to identify relevant literature. Sources were selected based on their relevance, methodological

rigor, and contribution to scholarly discourse on homo-parentality, LGBTQ+ parenting, and family diversity. Inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed academic articles and book chapters on gender, family diversity, and LGBTQ+ parenting in the fields of sociology, education, and psychology, as well as legal and policy documents, including national legislation, court rulings, and governmental reports. In addition, empirical studies using validated instruments or robust qualitative methods and media reports that reflect public and political discourse in Poland and Czechia were included.

The search was conducted using the following databases and repositories: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, JSTOR, Google Scholar, national government websites (Gov.pl; Legalis 2024), and Czech legal databases, including Constitutional Court rulings. Keywords included combinations of "homoparentality," "same-sex parenting," "LGBT families," "Poland," "Czech Republic," "education," "attitudes," and "legal recognition." In total, 85 sources were analyzed, including 45 academic studies and book chapters, 20 legal and policy documents, 15 media sources documenting public discourse, and 5 meta-analyses or large-scale surveys providing quantitative context. The scarcity of publications and data from the region was striking when compared with global sources. Data were systematically extracted to capture key dimensions of the research problem:

- Legal recognition and adoption rights for same-sex couples.
- Public attitudes toward homo-parental families, particularly among educators and students.
- Conceptual frameworks related to gender, normativity, and socialization.
- Media and policy narratives influencing societal perceptions.

The extracted information was synthesized narratively, with a focus on identifying recurring themes, contradictions, and gaps in the literature. Interpretation was guided by gender and power theories (Connell 2006; Butler 1990), as well as the concept of normativity in socialization, which examines how dominant family and gender models are institutionalized and transmitted through education, media, and policy.

The study is framed within gender and social power theories, highlighting how hegemonic norms shape both legal systems and social attitudes. Homo-parentality challenges heteronormative

assumptions about reproduction, care, and family legitimacy, inter-secting with education, religion, and civic culture. Teachers and future educators, as both products and producers of culture, represent pivotal agents in transmitting social norms; their attitudes toward homo-parental families influence children's perceptions and expe-riences of inclusion or exclusion (Bosch et al. 2016; Baiocco et al. 2020). The review also incorporates the concept of *empty signifiers* (Glasze 2007), illustrating how debates around "gender" in Poland and Czechia have become a rhetorical tool for framing same-sex parenting as a social threat, thereby influencing both public opin-ion and policy. By integrating socio-legal, cultural, and educational dimensions, this framework situates homo-parentality within broad-er debates about democracy, pluralism, and social justice.

Looking at the limitations, it should be stressed that this is a nar-rative review, which means that the study does not aim for exhaustive coverage or statistical generalization. The findings are context-spe-cific, reflecting Central and Eastern European societies, and are con-tingent on the availability and scope of existing literature, which is scarce due to the tabooization of the topic in the region. However, by combining academic, legal, policy, and media sources, the review provides a multidimensional perspective on the social, legal, and edu-cational realities faced by homo-parental families, while also high-lighting avenues for future empirical research and policy reform.

Theoretical framework: Normativity, gender, and social power

The study is framed within gender and power theories, most nota-bly the work of Raewyn Connell (2006, 2007, 2011, 2019), which sheds light on how hegemonic masculinity and gender normativity are reinforced through institutions, media, and interpersonal rela-tions, including children's literature (Jirásek, Maceková 2023; Jirásek et al. 2023). In this context, homo-parentality challenges not only legal systems but also gendered social orders and heteronormative assumptions about reproduction, care, and identity.

A critical concept in our framework is *normativism* in socializa-tion—the idea that certain models of behavior, gender, and family are normalized through repeated institutional endorsement. In Poland, this normativity is closely intertwined with the Roman Catholic

Church, whereas in the Czech Republic, a more secular social fabric has allowed for broader tolerance in some domains, albeit not consistently with regard to parenting. These differences invite deeper philosophical reflection: What makes a family legitimate in the eyes of the law? Who decides which forms of love or care are morally acceptable? And can societies be truly democratic and pluralistic while excluding certain families from legal recognition?

These questions become even more pressing when viewed against statistical data on children born to LGBTQ+ parents. According to the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law (LGBTQ Parenting 2024), in the United States alone, an estimated 5 million children are being raised by LGBTQ+ parents. This includes approximately 2 million children living in households with a single LGBTQ+ parent and nearly 300,000 being raised by parents in same-sex relationships. Additionally, about 30% of LGBQ parents either lack legal recognition or are uncertain about their legal standing as a parent or guardian of at least one of their children. In the United Kingdom, same-sex couple families in 2022 numbered 217,000, which translates into approximately six children from LGBT+ families in every educational institution in the UK (LGBT+ Parents Report 2024).

Data on Poland are limited and difficult to obtain (Mizielińska et al. 2014). EU studies highlight the lack of recognition of civil partnerships of same-sex couples, even when their legal union was established abroad in a country that recognizes such partnerships (Policy Department 2021). This situation may negatively affect same-sex parenting, freedom of movement, and the rights of children raised in these families (LawsAndFamilies 2016). Wycisk and Kleka (2014) reported that 5.5% of homosexual and bisexual respondents had raised their own children in Poland at the time of the study; however, it was unclear whether they were parenting as single parents, whilst in "traditional" families, or as same-sex couples. Political figures often cite data from NGOs and independent watchdog organizations suggesting that between 50,000 and 100,000 children may be raised by homosexual parents, but it is unclear whether these children live with same-sex parents and whether they are aware of their parents' sexual orientation (Demagog 2024).

Data on the Czech Republic are also limited. A study by Hašková et al. (2022) estimates that approximately 1,000 children in Czechia

live in same-sex families. The legal framework is complex and not straightforward. In the Czech Republic, LGBTQ+ individuals are legally permitted to adopt children as single parents. In 2016, the Constitutional Court overturned a previous ban that had prohibited individuals in registered same-sex partnerships from adopting, thereby allowing adoption regardless of partnership status (Ústavní soud 2016; Yahoo! 2016). Stepchild adoption by same-sex partners became legal on January 1, 2025. However, the legal framework still does not provide for joint adoption by same-sex couples. Despite this limitation, it is legally possible for both partners in a same-sex relationship—whether formally registered or informal—to adopt the same child individually. This arrangement effectively grants parental rights to both individuals, although not through joint adoption (Michalčíková 2023). Efforts to introduce legislation permitting joint adoption by same-sex couples have repeatedly failed since 2016, despite ongoing advocacy and public debate (Gay Star News 2016; Lazarová 2018).

While civic initiatives related to same-sex partnerships occasionally emerge in the Polish parliament, each such attempt is met with a renewed mobilization by far-right politicians (Veto 2021), the media (TVN 2014; Polityka 2024), and representatives of the Roman Catholic Church (Gość 2024; Ekai 2024). These actors activate negative public discourses centered on the alleged loss of family values, moral panic surrounding adoption by LGBTQ+ parents, and, above all, they instrumentalize the issue of "gender," drawing on its function as an empty signifier in public discourse (Glasze 2007). Moreover, several openly homophobic initiatives have appeared in the official actions and statements of state representatives (Ilga.org 2020). The notion of "gender" repeatedly reemerges as an external enemy of a shared national identity, creating an antagonistic divide between alleged supporters of "gender ideology" and self-proclaimed defenders of "true" social values (cf. Odrowąż-Coates 2015b). In this context, "gender" becomes a powerful, weaponized concept that allows the issue of homo-parentality to be subsumed under its umbrella. As an empty signifier, it has the capacity to encompass everything and nothing at once. Lacking a precise or universally agreed-upon meaning in popular consciousness, it facilitates the cultivation of fear and

amplifies negative emotional responses toward anything and anyone associated with it.

At this point in the discussion, Karl Popper's reflections (2012) come to mind, especially his criticism of populist political rhetoric and his defense of liberal democracy and the "open society" as opposed to a closed society based on excessive restrictions on individual freedom. In an open society, rules and regulations are more liberal and, at the same time, non-exclusionary. Popper advocated critical rationalism, social criticism, and individual freedom within a framework of relatively limited government intervention. He opposed all forms of totalitarianism and authoritarianism, emphasizing the importance of institutions that allow for peaceful transfers of power and the correction of political errors. As our knowledge of homo-parentality and its presence in contemporary societies continues to grow, it becomes necessary to ask why it remains so invisible in legal and normative frameworks. Why does bringing this issue into public debate so often result in its being labeled as "gender ideology" and, consequently, silenced time and again?

Law, politics, and the ethics of exclusion

Legal recognition, or the lack thereof, conveys powerful messages about social values and the ethical positioning of same-sex families. In Poland, same-sex partnerships lack parental rights, and political rhetoric has actively fostered anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment, exemplified by the creation of "LGBT-free zones." This legal and political invisibility signals moral exclusion and reflects the denial of full personhood to homo-parental families. In the Czech Republic, legal recognition is partial. Registered partnerships have existed since 2006, and individual adoption by persons of non-heterosexual orientation has been permitted since 2016 (Sloboda 2021). Joint adoption remains prohibited, access to assisted reproductive technologies is limited, and surrogacy lacks a clear legal definition (Hašková, Pomklová 2015). While this framework suggests a relatively tolerant society, these legal gaps indicate that ethical commitments to family plurality are incomplete.

Cultural narratives often stigmatize same-sex parenting, framing it as "unnatural" or potentially harmful to child development

(Clarke 2001). Empirical evidence, however, contradicts these normative claims. Children raised by same-sex couples demonstrate psychosocial outcomes comparable to those raised by heterosexual parents, including resilience, flexibility in gender roles, and tolerance (Bos, Sandfort 2010; Biblarz, Stacey 2010; Perrin, Siegel 2013; Adams, Light 2015; Bolaños et al. 2019). Meta-analyses and longitudinal studies further indicate that family stability, rather than parental sexual orientation, predicts educational outcomes (Rosenfeld 2010, 2013, 2015; Anderssen et al. 2008; Crowl et al. 2008; Vučković Juroš 2017). Polish research by Kowalska (2015, 2021) adds context-specific insights, highlighting non-binary parental roles, humor, and love-oriented disciplinary practices. These findings enrich the understanding of homo-parental families in Central-Eastern Europe and underscore the importance of culturally situated evidence rather than reliance on global generalizations. Assessing public and professional attitudes requires validated instruments (Sokolová 2009). Existing tools developed in Spain (Ramirez et al. 2006; Frias-Navarro, Monterde-i-Bort 2012) and validated in Mexico (Barragán-Pérez et al. 2016) remain largely unused in the Central and Eastern European context, leaving a significant empirical gap. Current EU-funded research, including projects at the University of Warsaw (UW 2025), promises methodological advances, though regional data are not yet available.

Poland and the Czech Republic share a communist past, accession to the European Union in 2004, and Bologna-aligned education systems, yet they diverge markedly in levels of religiosity, political engagement, and civic trust. Public support for adoption by same-sex couples reflects these differences: 12% in Poland versus 47% in the Czech Republic in 2019 (Nizinkiewicz, Krzyżak 2019; CVVM 2019). Trends among younger Poles suggest gradual shifts in social attitudes, with rejection of homosexuality declining from 47% in 2001 to 17% in 2021 (CBOS 2019, 2021). EU-wide comparisons show increasing acceptance of assisted reproduction and joint parenthood over time, although regional disparities remain substantial. This descriptive comparative context situates the findings without implying causal generalizations or a formal comparative model.

Educational institutions: Perpetuators or disruptors of norms?

Education is a key site for the transmission of ethical, axiological, and social norms (Łebkowska 2020; Nowak 2010). Teachers are not neutral actors; they both reproduce and contest dominant ideologies while guiding critical thought. Students internalize messages about family legitimacy, gender, and social inclusion not only through curricula but also through omissions and silences. The exclusion of homo-parental families from textbooks, classroom examples, and discussions conveys normative messages about family hierarchies, particularly in Poland and the Czech Republic.

Empirical research confirms that educators' attitudes influence students' perceptions of difference and belonging (Renzetti, Curran 2005; Deaux, Kite 2002). While Polish studies on gender and socialization are extensive (Kopciewicz 2007; Chomczyńska-Rubacha 2005, 2006; Gromkowska-Melosik 2017; Chmura-Rutkowska 2002; Odrowąż-Coates 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2016; Perkowska 2009), homo-parentality is underexplored (cf. Gajek 2021). Evidence indicates that female educators tend to support LGBTQ+ rights more than male educators (Costa et al. 2018), and that higher parental education may correlate with less stereotypical gender attitudes (Palus 2006). Nonetheless, ingrained assumptions about gender persist across educational settings (Brannon 2002).

Focusing on teachers and teacher trainees is justified both empirically and normatively. They are agents of socialization capable of either reinforcing heteronormativity or fostering inclusivity. Inclusive practices, representation, and anti-discrimination measures in schools reduce the stigmatization of children from homo-parental families (Bosch et al. 2016; Baiocco et al. 2020). Gender and generational differences among educators suggest potential levers for intervention (Costa et al. 2018; Richardot, Bureau 2020). From a normative perspective, societies should recognize diverse family models, as exclusion perpetuates social inequities. Empirically, existing evidence indicates that legal and educational systems in Poland and the Czech Republic lag behind social change, particularly among younger cohorts. By combining empirical assessment with normative reflection, this study situates homo-parentality within broader

ethical, legal, and social debates, aiming to inform policy and pedagogy without conflating what is with what ought to be.

Conclusion: Toward ethical inclusion and policy reform

Homo-parentality in Central-Eastern Europe is simultaneously a legal, social, and ethical issue. Comparative descriptive analysis reveals how evolving social attitudes interact with legislative inertia, particularly among younger and more educated populations. By focusing on educators, students, and measurement tools, this research highlights empirical realities without prescribing normative outcomes.

Understanding perceptions of new family arrangements is essential for responsible policymaking, social cohesion, and inclusive education. Ethical reflection guides the question of what ought to be, namely, recognition and support for diverse family models, while empirical evidence describes what currently exists in law, education, and public opinion. Encouraging researchers to study homo-parentality despite its taboo status contributes both to evidence-based public discourse and to the gradual alignment of ethical ideals with institutional practice.

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The Experience of Change within Playback Theatre: Between the Individual and the Community——as Exemplified by Local Practices

Doświadczenie zmiany w Teatrze Playback. Między jednostką a wspólnotą — na przykładzie praktyk lokalnych

ABSTRACT

The article examines the experience of change in Playback Theatre, understood as a process situated between individual experience and the communal dimension. It explores the psychological, ritual, and social aspects of this phenomenon, with particular focus on local practices in Kraków. An interdisciplinary perspective, encompassing performance theory, dramatherapy, Moreno's psychodrama, and approaches characteristic of community-based theatre, was adopted. The text draws on available literature, as well as case studies and participant observation from two Kraków-based playback groups: Ukrainian Playback Theatre and Playback Theatre Esperanto.

Articles and dissertations

The article first discusses the historical and theoretical context of Playback Theatre, then analyzes participants' individual transformation processes, and finally focuses on the role of community and dialogue with the Other. It demonstrates that Playback Theatre activities foster emotional closeness and the reinterpretation of experiences, while also creating a platform for integration, solidarity, and cross-cultural communication.

The main conclusion highlights the potential of Playback Theatre as a tool for community development and for supporting work with refugees and culturally diverse groups. At the same time, the article encourages further research into local practices, which can provide valuable insights into the transformations of community in the contemporary world.

ABSTRAKT

Artykuł podejmuje temat doświadczenia zmiany w Teatrze Playback, rozumianego jako proces rozpięty pomiędzy indywidualnym przeżyciem a wymiarem wspólnotowym. Analizowane są psychologiczne, rytualne i społeczne aspekty tego zjawiska, ze szczególnym odniesieniem do krakowskich praktyk lokalnych. Przyjęto perspektywę interdyscyplinarną, obejmującą teorię performansu, teatroterapię, psychodramę Moreno oraz podejścia charakterystyczne dla teatru zaangażowanego. W tekście wykorzystano dostępną literaturę przedmiotu, a także studium przypadków i obserwacji uczestniczących w dwóch krakowskich grupach playbackowych: Ukrainian Playback Theatre i Playback Theatre Esperanto.

W artykule najpierw omówiono kontekst historyczny i teoretyczny Teatru Playback, następnie podjęto analizę indywidualnych procesów transformacji uczestników, by w końcu skupić się nad rolą wspólnoty i dialogu z Innym. Wykazane zostało, że działania Teatru Playback sprzyjają oswajaniu emocji i reinterpretacji doświadczeń, a zarazem stwarzają przestrzeń do integracji, solidarności oraz porozumienia ponad granicami kulturowymi.

Zasadniczy wniosek wskazuje na potencjał Teatru Playback jako narzędzia wspierającego rozwój wspólnoty i pomagającego w pracy z uchodźcami oraz grupami zróżnicowanymi kulturowo. Jednocześnie artykuł zachęca do dalszych badań nad lokalnymi praktykami, które mogą dostarczać wiedzy o przemianach wspólnotowości we współczesnym świecie.

Introduction: Art and transformation

Over the past several decades, there has been a growing interest in the use of art as a medium for individual development and the building of social bonds. Contemporary approaches in pedagogy, therapy, and social work increasingly integrate forms of artistic expression that allow not only for articulating emotions, but also for negotiating difficult experiences, discovering and shaping one's identity, and initiating processes of transformation—both personal and communal (Stefańska 2017: 75–76). This process falls within the framework of transformative learning[1]—a pedagogical approach concerned with helping individuals critically analyze and alter their understanding of the world. Transformative learning often begins with a crisis or "disorienting dilemma" that challenges existing beliefs, leading to reflection, dialogue, and ultimately a shift in perspective. According to Mezirow's theory, changes in frames of reference—perspectives, ways of thinking, and habitual patterns of thought—occur through constructive dialogue, which allows us to draw on the experiences of others in order to critically evaluate their own beliefs and take steps toward transformation (Mezirow 2000: 7–8).

In therapy, art may function in several ways—as something we receive and experience, as a tool for understanding our emotions, or as an active creative process in which the participant becomes the author, interpreter, and witness of their own experience (Bielańska 2002: 13). This form of work enables the expression of experiences resistant to verbalization, supports internal integration, enhances the sense of agency, and creates space for personal and social change. In this sense, the creative act may serve as a symbolic transformation, which gives one's own story shape, meaning, and value. As Lech Śliwonik argues, its greatest significance lies in "the unrestrained development of personality, and all actions and activities serving self-realization and liberation from imposed and learned roles"[2] (Śliwonik 1999: 66).

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1   The concept of "transformative learning," developed by the American andragogue and adult education scholar Jack Mezirow, was introduced in 1978 and refers to adult learning processes, meaning-making practices, and the transformative potential of learning experiences.

2   Unless otherwise stated, all translations are the author's own.

In this article, we attempt to examine the ways in which Playback Theatre functions as a pedagogical tool for the reconstruction of identity, and how the experience of transformation—a process bridging the personal and collective dimensions of experience—takes shape within this practice.

Drama therapy: From historical traditions to contemporary practice

While drama therapy originated in medical and healing practices, it gradually expanded into education, preventive health, and personal growth. It is effective not only for people with impairments, but is also valuable for children, youth, and adults functioning without special limitations (Badora 2015: 129), offering these groups a space for self-discovery, emotional reflection, and purposeful action through the theatricalization of experience: "Dramatherapy is a form of dramatic art that, even if not explicitly religious or based on belief systems, has nonetheless a potential spiritual quality similar to that of ritual" (Pitruzzella 2004: 116). Although the term *drama therapy* came into common use only in the second half of the twentieth century—mainly to describe the combination of theatrical practices with psychotherapy and special education—the idea of using theater as a tool for healing, transformation, and psychological development has a much longer tradition. As early as antiquity, the stage was regarded as a space of inner purification—catharsis—understood as a profound process of spiritual and moral transformation for the spectator (Bielańska 2002: 17).

Precedents for the therapeutic use of theater can be found in the avant-garde experiments of the early twentieth century. Nikolai Evreinov's experiments with "theater therapy" and "theater for oneself" in Russia during the 1910s and 1920s investigated both the individual and collective dimensions of theatrical transformation, paving the way for later developments in therapeutic theater. For Evreinov, theatricality was not only an artistic practice but a fundamental human necessity—a capacity for self-transformation that precedes and enables emotional and social development (Evreinov 1922).

In the 1920s, the concept of *psychodrama* emerged, introduced by Jacob Levy Moreno, an Austrian physician and pioneer of action therapy. He proposed an innovative therapeutic method that used improvisation, the enactment of personal experiences, and role reversal as means of gaining deeper self-understanding and activating processes of internal change (Bielańska 2002: 19–20). In the second half of the twentieth century, ideas of using theater for therapeutic purposes were further developed by Brazilian director, theater scholar, playwright, and educator Augusto Boal, creator of the Theatre of the Oppressed. Boal introduced the concept of the *spect-actor* (spectator + actor), which challenged the traditional passive model of the theater audience: "the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself!" (Boal 1979: 155). Similarly to Moreno, Boal viewed theater as a space for artistic expression and, above all, as a tool for change—personal and social. In Europe, he enriched his method with a therapeutic element that arose from a growing need to work with internal forms of oppression.[3] The stage became a field for experimentation—a place where participants could test new roles, process difficult emotions, and better understand themselves. What distinguished Boal's approach was its strong emphasis on actively confronting oppression—whether social or psychological—through direct action, dialogue, conflict, and decision-making.

Contemporary drama therapy focuses primarily on the process and on the experience itself, rather than on creating a polished artistic product. Its goal is not to produce a "finished" performance, but to enable participants—through movement, improvisation, and body-based work—to reflect on their experiences, name their difficulties,

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3   In his book *L'arc-en-ciel du désir* (*The Rainbow of Desire*, 1990), Boal described the process of adapting his techniques to a Western European context. Rather than focusing solely on the exposure of external violence—as in the Latin American context—he began to concentrate on the concept of the "Cop-in-the-Head" (*Le flic dans la tête*): the internalized norms, fears, prohibitions, and stereotypes that constrain individual agency. As one commentator notes, "He concluded that while people in Western Europe—unlike those in Latin America—were not exposed to immediate external violence, they had nonetheless internalized an oppressive 'cop' into their own heads" (Feldhendler 1994: 87–88). Techniques such as "Cop-in-the-Head" and "Image Theatre" enabled participants to recognize and confront these internalized voices.

and discover new coping strategies. In recent years, a clear shift has become visible: drama therapy increasingly engages with themes related to trauma, the search for and expression of cultural identity, confronting social inequalities, and strengthening psychological resilience. Today, drama therapy extends far beyond clinics and hospitals, entering community, educational, and social settings. It relies less and less on traditional psychiatric models and instead becomes a tool for supporting social change and giving voice to those whose voices are often unheard. Improvisation, bodily expression, and storytelling remain its foundation, but they are now understood not only as forms of personal expression, but also as ways of creating collective dialogue and conscious participation in social life (Emunah et al. 2021: 31–35).

In Poland, the Art Generacje (Art Generation) project, carried out by the Drama Way Foundation for Education and Culture in Warsaw,[4] is evolving along a similar path. This intergenerational initiative brings together younger and older participants in a shared creative process based on theatre, movement, and improvisation. Its purpose is not to stage traditional artistic performances, but to create a space for self-expression, the sharing of experiences, and reflection on socially and existentially important themes. Participants co-create the performance script, drawing on their own stories and experiences, which gives the project both a personal and a communal dimension. Each edition focuses on a different theme—for example, values, the body, or harmony—and culminates in a public presentation, often accompanied by workshops and discussion. Art Generacje exemplifies socially engaged theatre, which strengthens intergenerational bonds, fosters empathy and social sensitivity, and builds a sense of agency and belonging through art.

Working in a similar vein is Patrycja Bartoszak-Kempa, a special educator and art therapist who develops theatre projects aimed at groups at risk of social exclusion. Her work addresses themes of

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4   The "Art Generacje" project has been active since 2013. It was initiated by the Drama Way Foundation for Education and Culture. In 2020, its fifth edition, titled *Love*, received second prize in the 11th Warsaw Cultural Education Awards in the category of non-governmental organizations. See: "Art Generacje," https://www.fundacja.dramaway.pl/projekty/art-generacje (accessed 29 July 2025).

identity, violence, and social oppression. *Homophobia in You and Me* (*Homofobia w Tobie i we mnie*, 2011) presents the struggles of loneliness, fear, and misunderstanding from the perspective of a seventeen-year-old lesbian girl. The project *I Felt a Hand* (*Poczułem dłoń*, 2014) explores the process of coming to terms with a homosexual identity and confronting dominant social norms, as it focuses on internal experiences and the social realities of heteronormative individuals. To address women's perspectives, she created projects such as *I Didn't Scream Either* (*Też nie krzyczałam*, 2020), which engages with the taboo of sexual violence, and *Madwoman* (*Wariatka*, 2018), performed in the Forum Theatre format.[5] The latter tells the story of a woman experiencing domestic violence at the hands of her husband; despite repeated attempts, she receives no real support from social services. While presenting the protagonist's experience, the performance also challenged social service workers to reflect on systemic barriers and entrenched patterns of action.

The aforementioned projects, although diverse in form, share the conviction that theatre can be a medium of personal expression and of social change as well as a space for marginalized voices (Bartoszak 2022: 37–55). Among similar European initiatives, one worth mentioning is REACT – Community Theatre Setting the Stage for Refugee Integration (2016–2018), which used community theatre to support refugee integration. Participants with migration experience devised performances grounded in their personal narratives, facilitating dialogue with local communities. Productions in Bristol, Rotterdam, and Palermo addressed questions of identity, cultural tensions, and the everyday challenges faced by migrants. The initiative promoted empathic engagement, strengthened communicative and social skills, and worked to counteract stereotypical representations.[6]

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5   Forum Theatre is a participatory form developed by Augusto Boal within the Theatre of the Oppressed, in which spectators intervene in the staged action by proposing and enacting alternative solutions to situations of oppression.

6   "REACT – Community theatre setting the stage for refugee integration," 5 January 2018, https://culture.ec.europa.eu/news/react-community-theatre-setting-the-stage-for-refugee-integration (accessed 29 July 2025).

Playback Theatre as transformative practice: Structure, safety, and collective meaning-making

Among the various theatrical approaches used in this integrative context, Playback Theatre holds particular significance. It functions as a "contemporary, interactive, non-scripted performance form" (Fox 1999: 5), in which the lived experiences of audience members are enacted in real time by a trained ensemble. "Playback theatre often takes place in performance settings with a trained company of actors enacting the stories of audience members… All that is needed is respect, empathy, and playfulness" (Salas 1999: 7). Rooted in principles of empathy, co-presence, and active listening, this method creates an environment in which individual narratives acquire communal relevance, and the theatrical enactment embodies ritualistic, artistic, and social aspects. (Dennis 2007: 19).

Playback Theatre functions both as a vehicle for individual development and as a practice that supports integration, therapeutic intervention, and educational objectives. Its effectiveness is especially notable when working with socially marginalized groups—such as refugees, migrants, or individuals affected by trauma—where the performance space facilitates recognition, safe emotional expression, and the rebuilding of social bonds: "If oppressed persons can be defined as those who have nowhere to tell their story, our mission has been to provide a space for anyone and everyone to be heard" (Fox 1999: 6).

Playback Theatre establishes conditions that are highly conducive to transformative learning: confronting traumatic experiences within a safe space, while maintaining essential critical distance, allows participants to engage in the process of reflection and reconstruction of meaning. As Mezirow emphasizes, supportive relationships and a supportive environment are central to transformative learning, as they ensure "a more confident, assured sense of personal efficacy, of having a self—or selves—more capable of becoming critically reflective […], and having the self-confidence to take action on reflective insight" (Mezirow 2000: 25).

Playback Theatre draws inspiration from the oral storytelling tradition, in which spoken narratives functioned as communal rituals. As Jonathan Fox, its founder and theorist, notes, stories in oral cultures conveyed potent emotions, carried social significance, and

transmitted foundational values (Fox 1999). Storytelling in these societies served predominantly communal ends: it maintained collective memory, consolidated social relationships, and ensured the intergenerational continuity of cultural knowledge. It functioned as a socially embedded practice rather than as a product of individual authorial intent. Informed by this heritage, Playback Theatre reclaims the performative and social power of the spoken word, employing it as a means of engagement, communal meaning-making, and the reinforcement of social connections.

Jacob Levy Moreno's psychodrama represents another major influence on Playback Theatre, influencing both its theoretical principles and practical applications. Jonathan Fox was introduced to psychodrama at the Moreno Institute in Beacon in 1973, shortly before establishing the first Playback ensemble. Moreno's concepts of spontaneity, unscripted action, and engagement with participants' personal experiences were instrumental in shaping this new theatrical form. Notably, psychodrama introduced the practice of grounding performances in the authentic, unplanned narratives of audience members (Fox 2018: 32), thereby positioning the creative act as a simultaneous process of understanding and transformation.

Unlike psychodrama, which is mainly therapeutic and centered on the protagonist's individual work, Playback stories are enacted by a company of actors while the narrator remains in the audience. This structural distinction introduces a degree of observational distance, fostering reflection and a sense of safety, especially when working with vulnerable participants. The facilitator's role also differs: whereas in psychodrama the director functions as a therapist who actively guides the process, the Playback conductor supports both the narrative and the ensemble's improvisational enactment. Crucially, Playback Theatre does not seek to induce catharsis; the goal is not an intense emotional breakthrough but rather the sharing of experiences and the collective engagement with personal narratives. Consequently, the method extends beyond clinical settings, functioning as a tool for promoting dialogue, reinforcing identity, and strengthening community bonds across diverse social contexts (Bielańska 2002: 22).

This emergent form rapidly developed across several mutually reinforcing levels. On the artistic level, Playback Theatre can be understood as a form of postdramatic performance, which eschews

linear narrative, scripted dialogue, and classical dramatic structures. Instead, it presents an improvised, collective creative act rooted in the lived experiences of participants (Carlson 2015). On the therapeutic level, it establishes a safe space for processing personal narratives, strengthening identity, and enhancing agency, while simultaneously functioning as a communal ritual with transformative potential. At the social level, Playback Theatre functions as a tool for engaging marginalized individuals and groups, facilitating dialogue, promoting integration, and affirming subjectivity through storytelling and its public witnessing. This hybrid character—combining artistic practice, therapeutic engagement, and social action—confers particular transformative power. As Rea Dennis observes, Playback performance constitutes a "ritual framework" in which participants undergo a liminal transition and "experience transformation in witnessing the enactment of their story" (Dennis 2004: 25).

Although Playback Theatre performances are improvised, they follow a clear and recognizable structure (Bielańska 2002: 21). Each performance begins with a warm-up led by the Conductor, a member of the ensemble experienced in group facilitation. This phase employs a range of exercises and techniques designed to cultivate an atmosphere of trust and openness, enabling participants to feel comfortable sharing their stories. Next, a member of the audience— the narrator—is invited to recount a personal narrative, which may relate to the theme of the performance or emerge from the narrator's current experience. During this exchange, the Conductor helps to identify key events and emotions that will form the basis of the scene.

Afterward, the actors and musicians of the ensemble (the Playbackers) enact the story, following the form selected by the Conductor: "As forms can be systematized as short, medium, and long, the performance should begin by making use of short forms and then evolve to longer ones. The most typical short forms are fluid sculptures and pairs, and through them performers can address several aspects present in the shared stories. Furthermore, using a relatively short time interval, several stories might be listened to at the beginning of the performance. In most of the forms, the use of body

expression and symbolic representation is welcome"[7] (Gonzales et al. 2024). Music is an important element of Playback Theatre, accentuating the mood and emotional tone of individual scenes. During the enactment of stories, their emotional core often becomes visible and—subject to the narrator's consent—may be modified, for instance, through an alternative ending. As the performance progresses, audience engagement deepens, and the shared experience of the narrative fosters empathy and strengthens group cohesion.

Although strong emotions may be stirred in Playback Theatre, the primary aim is not catharsis; rather, it is to allow participants to view their experiences from a reflective distance. Creating a theatrical space in which personal stories are enacted by others is crucial, as it enables the narrator to gain a new cognitive and/or emotional perspective on their own story. The essence of this practice lies in co-creating meaningful reflection rather than eliciting emotional release. While Playback Theatre was not originally conceived as a therapeutic intervention, both its structure and participant experiences reveal significant therapeutic potential: "Several other elements, known as the 'common factors,' like the empathetic presence of others, feelings of belongingness, social support, perspective taking, emotional expression or others more connected to group psychotherapies, like universality, altruism, instillation of hope and interpersonal learning, among others, can be identified in PT (Playback Theatre) contexts, especially in the cases of groups that attend multiple sessions" (Gonzales et al. 2024).

As Rea Dennis observes, participants in Playback Theatre continually move between a liminal space and everyday reality. This "back-and-forth" movement encourages critical reflection on what happens on stage in relation to their own experiences: "This results in audience members continually renegotiating their relationship to the values and ideas implicit in the form, particularly that of participation, and the mixing of the personal/public selves. The reflective experience extends beyond the formal performance frame" (Dennis 2004: 9).

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7   Forms employed in Playback Theatre improvisation include Narrative V, Tableau, Chorus, the Three-Sentence Story, Scene/Story, and others.

Playback Theatre and trauma: Psychological and cultural dimensions

In Poland, the first Playback Theatre group, Ole, was established in 2016 in Kraków by Ludmiła Litwinienko—a Ukrainian psychotherapist, psychodrama trainer, pioneer of Playback Theatre in Ukraine, and director of Playback Theatre Reflection (Otrazheniye) in Kyiv. Since 2018, Ole has operated under the name Playback Self 3.0. In the same year, in collaboration with the Centre for Foreigners in Warsaw, the group carried out a year-long project, *In the Footsteps of Children*, working with children of migrants and refugees living in Warsaw. A second Polish Playback Theatre ensemble, HeyNow, is composed of psychotherapists and regularly conducts workshops and sessions with live audiences in Kraków. However, we would like to draw particular attention to projects that focus on working with refugees and employ the democratic and empowering dimensions of Playback Theatre: "The role of personal story is often extrapolated as a chance to reclaim voice and as such enable the participants to establish legitimacy in the spirit of democracy. In the refugee sector, there is also scope to reinforce the promise within such events for an encounter with difference and for inclusion in civil society" (Dennis 2007: 355). The role of Playback Theatre in work with refugee groups appears to be especially significant. It provides participants with the opportunity to express themselves through storytelling and to share difficult or traumatic experiences within a safe and supportive environment, thereby facilitating the restoration of agency.

In discussing trauma, we understand the concept not only in the psychological sense—as a process linked to disruptions in identity, safety, and meaning-making (Herman 1992)—but also from a cultural perspective. As Jeffery Alexander writes, "cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander 2004: 1). Both perspectives underscore the impossibility of processing trauma in isolation. Herman argues that a communal response must entail not only recognition but also the attribution of responsibility and the remediation of harm (Herman 1992). For Alexander,

trauma becomes *cultural* when the community acknowledges it as central to its identity and assumes moral responsibility for addressing it (Alexander 2004: 1).

Two approaches to community building: Ukrainian Playback Theatre and Playback Theatre Esperanto

Transforming an individual personal narrative into a collective stage experience, enacted in a ritualized and symbolic form, enables the processing of emotions and experiences that may have been repressed or left unresolved. The simple act of telling one's story, often requiring considerable courage, followed by its enactment on stage, becomes a symbolic reclaiming of control over one's personal narrative for individuals who have previously encountered silence, neglect, exclusion, or stigmatization. In the context of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, the significance of Playback Theatre takes on an additional urgency and depth. Many Ukrainian practitioners of this art form have found themselves in situations of forced migration, often having to rebuild their work in another country without a permanent ensemble, without a shared language, and without institutional support. Playback Theatre, by nature rooted in locality, community, and mutual trust, has itself experienced a form of displacement.

In this new context, its therapeutic, community-building, and integrative functions have become even more pronounced, both for Ukrainian artists and for the individuals with whom they work: refugees, migrants, and members of local communities. Playback becomes an inclusive practice that amplifies previously overlooked or marginalized voices, while simultaneously serving as a source of identity formation, a site for collective reflection, and a tool for social integration and transformation. For Ukrainian refugees—artists and participants—Playback Theatre not only facilitates the processing of trauma but also provides a space of resistance against symbolic violence, exclusion, and loss experienced through forced migration.

These objectives can be observed in the work of two local Krakow-based groups. The first is the Ukrainian Playback Theatre

in Krakow,[8] founded by Veronika Proniakina, a trainer and actress from the Kharkiv Playback Theatre Living Mirror (Zhive Dzerkalo). The ensemble is composed of Ukrainian refugee artists who, after the outbreak of the war, sought to create a space of closeness, dialogue, and community for those forced to emigrate. As noted by Vlad Zernov, a Playback Theatre trainer, theorist, and facilitator of a youth Playback Theatre studio in Krakow, Playback Theatre has become for the Ukrainian émigré community not only a space of individual safety, but above all a site of communal sacrality: a practice devoted to preserving memory, identity, and belonging (Zernov 2025). The experience of forced displacement involves not only the loss of one's home, separation from loved ones, and the daily challenges of uncertainty, but also the risk of a gradual erosion of cultural identity. Adjusting to life in a new country often requires conforming to the norms of the host society, which may lead to the suppression of language, customs, and values. In the absence of support from institutions or the local community, this process can be especially acute and detrimental (Zernov 2025).

In this context, Playback Theatre becomes a form of resistance and a deliberate practice of caring for memory, language, and social bonds—a space in which identity can not only endure but also evolve. One of the key conceptual principles of the Ukrainian Playback Theatre in Krakow is the exclusive, consistent use of the Ukrainian language. This represents a deeply symbolic and identity-affirming gesture. In a war in which language has become a site of conflict, the choice of Ukrainian as the sole language of the stage constitutes an act of cultural resistance. As Olena Kalashnikova, accredited Trainer of Playback Theatre, Co-founder and Board Member of the Ukrainian Playback Theatre School, actress, and leader of Playback Theatre Vakhtery, emphasizes, for many forcibly displaced individuals, speaking Ukrainian—even if they previously used Russian as well—becomes a way to reclaim and reinforce their personal and cultural identity (Kalashnikova 2025).

Within Playback Theatre, this carries particular significance: the language in which a story is told shapes emotions, imagery, and

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8   "Ukrainian Playback Theater in Krakow," https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100090088677056 (accessed 29 July 2025).

relationships, and thus becomes an integral part of transforming trauma into a sense-affirming experience. The use of Ukrainian enables expression and creates a communal space rooted in culture, memory, and the struggle for survival. It becomes a shared code that connects individuals in collective contemplation of what has been lost, what is uncertain, and what remains possible. In this sense, language functions not merely as a narrative tool but as a constitutive element of communal cohesion, helping to create a secure environment for articulating, processing, and integrating traumatic experiences in the context of resettlement.

However, it is important to recognize that this choice brings certain tensions. While the exclusive use of the Ukrainian language promotes a sense of safety and agency in the group, it may simultaneously risk distancing the community at large. This paradox—whereby a tool that empowers the group internally may inadvertently reinforce its marginalization externally—remains largely unresolved within this practice. Maintaining the internal cohesion of the group becomes the priority, even if it limits opportunities for integration into Polish society. Whether this dynamic acts as a facilitator or a limitation depends on participants' individual goals and their stage of integration. Individual narratives begin to coalesce into what Vlad Zernov calls a collective narrative: participants become aware that "this is no longer their pain—it is ours, for their pain is also mine" (Zernov 2025). Personal suffering becomes recognizable as a shared experience, fostering a sense of communal identity.

Perhaps this is why the Ukrainian Playback Theatre in Krakow does not predetermine the theme of its performances. What experiences participants choose to share—and how far they wish to go—is never imposed. Each participant has complete freedom to choose which story to tell—speaking to whatever feels most significant in that moment. Even without a predefined theme, narratives of war, displacement, separation, and longing surface again and again. They arise spontaneously from the collective experience of a community living in the shadow of trauma. Through these recurring motifs— home, war, separation, loss, and hope—participants collaboratively construct a shared narrative, which enables them to regain a sense of belonging.

Because of this openness, the theatre becomes a space for authentic, unrestrained communal reflection, where every voice can be heard, whether it expresses suffering, hope, or the everyday challenges of life in exile. The first performance of the Ukrainian Playback Theatre in Krakow took place on March 12, 2023, at Scena Supernova. Since then, performances have been held relatively regularly in the form of intimate sessions. Each gathering follows a similar structure—typically, five to seven stories are told by audience members and subsequently enacted on stage by the actors. The events are open to all and free of charge, though prior registration is required. Attendees may also support the initiative through voluntary donations. The principal aim, as stated by the ensemble members, is to create a stable communal space for Ukrainians living in Krakow, where experiences can be shared, mutual support can be nurtured, and a sense of home, however provisional, can be reclaimed.

While the Ukrainian Playback Theatre engenders transformation through linguistic and cultural homogeneity, a second Krakow-based ensemble adopts a fundamentally different approach. Playback Theatre Esperanto was launched in 2024. Its founders—Anastaiya Kishko, Mariya Vasilevskaya, and Tina[9]—intentionally chose a model distinguished by linguistic openness and a more universal vision of community building. Unlike the Ukrainian Playback Theatre, which is oriented toward the needs of the Ukrainian refugee community and operates exclusively in Ukrainian, Esperanto embraces multilingualism. The theatre's name is deliberate, invoking Esperanto as a symbol of transnational communication, equality, and the ideal of understanding regardless of cultural boundaries.

Performances are conducted in Ukrainian, Russian, and Belarusian—the languages spoken by ensemble members and their audiences. As noted earlier, the choice of language is inherently political: in a context marked by identity tensions and national conflict, the ensemble prioritizes integration and shared experience among people from different cultural backgrounds rather than constructing community around a single national narrative. The performance space is thus inclusive and oriented toward dialogue and empathy. The ensemble is composed of individuals with migration experience

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9   Name withheld at the request of the artists.

(in addition to the founders, these include Natalka Morhun, Katsiaryna Ivanenka, Tetiana, and Vadzim[10])—emigrés from various countries united by a desire to build relationships, share experiences, and tell stories within a safe and supportive environment.

This fellowship is formed not through ethnic identity but through shared values of respect, empathy, and curiosity about others. One distinguishing feature of Playback Theatre Esperanto is the manner in which the ensemble formulates the themes for individual performances. To date, three performances have taken place, each preceded by an announced theme—unlike other Playback groups that rely on a fully spontaneous format. Previous events have centered on themes such as *"For the First Time," "Krakow Is…,"* and *"In a Hurry."* Although these themes appear neutral, they are highly capacious, inviting a wide range of personal stories—from lighthearted and humorous to deep and introspective. Their openness ensures that participants are not directly confronted with expectations to speak about trauma, war, or forced migration, though such narratives often emerge spontaneously.

This strategy—working with everyday, ambiguous, and open-ended themes—creates a safe space that encourages participation without pressure. The theme *"For the First Time,"* for example, might refer to the first day in a new country, but it could just as easily recall a first date, a first time performing on stage, or a first winter without snow. In this way, stories reveal what is shared and universal without being bound to frameworks of suffering. In contrast to theatres that work explicitly with migration- or war-related trauma, Esperanto constructs a narrative community around experiences of daily life, regional identity, relationships, and movement—with an emphasis on connection rather than difference. It is precisely these open, multi-layered themes that allow participants to build a shared field of meaning while still expressing individual experiences. As a result, the theatre fulfills its integrative function—not as a space solely for recounting "refugee stories," but as a place where one can experience oneself as a human being, not only as a migrant.

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10   Name withheld at the request of the artists.

Sustaining tensions: Playback Theatre as an integrated practice

In analyzing Playback Theatre practices, it is also important to consider one of the key works on socially engaged art by British art historian Claire Bishop—*Artificial Hells*. Discussing the most successful forms of participatory (or "relational") art, Bishop emphasizes that in socially oriented artworks, the primary material consists of participants' experiences, and the participants themselves become co-creators of the content (Bishop 2012: 284). The creative sphere thus becomes a form of lived practice. Yet the evaluation of participatory works necessitates the integration of both ethical and aesthetic criteria, reflecting their "double ontological status: it is both an event in the world, and at one remove from it" (Bishop 2012: 284). For Bishop, such art "is not a privileged political medium, nor a ready-made solution," but rather "as uncertain and precarious as democracy itself" (Bishop 2012: 284).

Although Playback Theatre does not constitute participatory art in the classical sense—participants contribute content but do not perform—it powerfully exemplifies Bishop's notion of a "mediating third term": an intermediary element that simultaneously connects and differentiates participants. The theatrical enactment of a story serves precisely this function. The narrator's account is acknowledged and honored, yet transformed through the actors' bodies and interpretive choices. The transformative potential of Playback Theatre does not stem from resolving the tensions among its pedagogical, therapeutic, artistic, and social dimensions, but from sustaining these dimensions in a dynamic and mutually reinforcing relationship.

Conclusion: Playback Theatre as a pedagogical response to exile

Examples from two Krakow-based ensembles—the Ukrainian Playback Theatre and Playback Theatre Esperanto—illustrate how this form of theatre can make use of divergent strategies in response to the varied needs of refugees and migrants. In the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the trauma of exile is not merely the consequence of physical relocation; it also involves the sudden loss of continuity in one's life, community, and sense of security. In such circumstances, cultural practices that support the recovery of

agency and the re-establishment of social relationships acquire particular significance. Playback Theatre, through its structure of listening, storytelling, and communal witnessing, facilitates precisely this type of process: not a return to a "former" identity, but the gradual reconstruction of identity in a new place and in response to new challenges.

In both cases, Playback Theatre acts as a conduit for transformation—personal, emotional, and communal. It is a practice rooted in trust, empathy, and attentiveness, while simultaneously carrying critical and political potential. In the contexts of war and forced displacement, the recovery of voice—both symbolic and literal—constitutes an act of reclaiming agency. Although Playback Theatre does not resolve conflicts, it functions as an educational space that cultivates the capacity to remain oneself while fostering community bonds in a new environment. In this way, it fulfills its role as a pedagogical tool for reconstructing identity in times of profound displacement.

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Shifts in Educational Smartphone Use among Ukrainian Adolescents during Migration

Zmiany w korzystaniu ze smartfonów edukacyjnych wśród ukraińskich nastolatków w czasach migracji

ABSTRACT

Migration and refugee movements have posed significant challenges for Europe in recent years. Earlier waves of migrants arrived from the Middle East and Africa, and since 2022 Europe has also received war refugees from Ukraine. Young people constitute a particularly important group among these populations. This article presents findings from a diagnostic study conducted in Poland in 2023 among young refugees from Ukraine, showing that their main strategies of using smartphones have remained largely unchanged. Leisure-related purposes and practical needs (e.g., navigation and location services) continue to dominate. Nevertheless, adaptation of digital content to the resources and conditions of the host country can be observed. Smartphones are used far less for voice calls than for

internet-based activities. According to the young refugees surveyed, smartphones play a limited role in formal education but constitute an indispensable tool for informal learning. The findings may provide valuable guidance for developing effective strategies to support the social integration of young migrants. Given the high level of digitalization in young people's everyday lives, social media and educational content delivered via smartphones can prove to be particularly effective at facilitating adaptation to a new cultural environment.

ABSTRAKT

Problem migrantów i uchodźców stał się wyzwaniem dla Europy już kilka lat temu. Kolejne fale migrantów napływały z Bliskiego Wschodu i Afryki, a od 2022 roku dołączyli do nich również uchodźcy wojenni z Ukrainy. Szczególną grupę stanowią wśród nich ludzie młodzi. Artykuł przedstawia wycinek badań diagnostycznych przeprowadzonych w roku 2023 w Polsce na grupie 128 młodych uciekinierów z Ukrainy, które potwierdzają, że główne strategie wykorzystania smartfona się nie zmieniły. Cele ludyczne i praktyczne potrzeby (np. lokalizacyjne) są na szczycie listy. Niemniej jednak obserwuje się adaptację cyfrowych treści do zasobów kraju docelowego. Telefon w dużo mniejszym stopniu jest wykorzystywany do rozmów głosowych niż do korzystania z internetu. Zastosowanie edukacyjne smartfona ma, w opinii młodych uchodźców, niewielki udział i małe znaczenie w systemie edukacji formalnej, jest on jednak nieodłącznym narzędziem edukacji nieformalnej. Wyniki badań mogą stanowić istotne wsparcie dla opracowywania skutecznych strategii integracji społecznej młodych migrantów. Biorąc pod uwagę wysoki stopień digitalizacji życia młodzieży, media społecznościowe i treści edukacyjne dostarczane za pośrednictwem smartfonów mogą okazać się niezwykle skutecznymi narzędziami wspierającymi proces adaptacji do nowego środowiska kulturowego.

Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the rapid development of mobile devices fundamentally transformed the "geography" of young people's everyday environments. Jean M. Twenge (2019) identifies 2007—the release of the first iPhone—as the starting point of a generation she terms iGen, for whom the smartphone is a constitutive element in shaping daily life. In the United States, between

2011 and 2017, the proportion of children under the age of eight who had access to smartphones rose to 90% (Rideout 2017). Young users are introduced to smartphones at a very early age, with the result that nearly the entire adolescent population, even in less developed countries, can hardly imagine life without a mobile phone. For migrants arriving in Europe from economically disadvantaged or war-torn regions of Africa or the Middle East, the smartphone is essential equipment (Fenton 2016). Notably, the African continent has developed its own original Android-based smartphone brand—Mara (Shapshak 2019).

Smartphones among migrants and refugees

Research on the role of smartphones in the lives of migrants and war refugees expanded significantly toward the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, alongside successive migration waves from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. The selfie became a symbolic marker of a new life, while the mobile phone served as both a guide and a means of maintaining contact with family members and other migrants. The literature on smartphone use among refugees is fragmented and sometimes contradictory. What appears to some as a "virtual transcultural space" may function for others as a "virtual ghetto" (Mancini et al. 2019). Numerous studies emphasize the importance of smartphones for maintaining contact with family and friends, although obstacles may arise from the need to adapt to the telecommunications infrastructure of countries encountered along migration routes. Smartphones are often described as a "virtual hub for managing relationships": both pre-existing ties and those formed during migration (Alencar et al. 2019; Pérez & Salgado 2020).

Mobile phones play an important role as navigational tools, thanks to applications that enable location tracking. They make it easier to survive along migration routes, transforming what might otherwise be chaotic journeys into more organized, deliberate, and planned experiences (Zijstra, van Piempt 2017; Alencar 2020). The significance of smartphones for migrants and refugees is underscored by the fact that they are often treated as essential as food and water. In some cases, access to a mobile phone has been decisive for survival during migration and even for saving lives (Awad, Tossel 2021).

There are relatively few studies on mobile phone use among war refugees from Ukraine, particularly adolescents. One notable contribution is the research conducted by Natalia Khvorostianov of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel, carried out in Poland in March 2022 among refugees aged 10–14. The war has led to the development of specific smartphone-use habits among young refugees. Mobile phones were used to maintain relationships, express emotions, and preserve a sense of identity. They proved useful both online and offline and served as an "emotional anchor" for young users, who often avoided distressing media content. According to Khvorostianov (2023), smartphones were also an essential tool for maintaining the autobiographical memory of young refugees.

However, research on mobile phone use among migrants and refugees has paid relatively little attention to the educational potential of these devices. This aspect has only recently begun to attract the interest of policymakers and practitioners responsible for receiving and supporting migrants and refugees in host countries.

The smartphone as an educational tool

Assessing the educational use of smartphone applications is not straightforward. Some studies demonstrate positive educational effects, while others fail to confirm such outcomes. Undoubtedly, mobile applications have educational potential, but the extent to which this potential is realized depends on many factors, including the user's age and the type of knowledge being conveyed (Griffith et al. 2020). The use of smartphones in the classroom creates a certain tension between established patterns of technology use and traditional pedagogical practices. Digital environments strongly engage young users, and depending on the context, this engagement may either support or hinder the teaching–learning process (Selwyn, Bulfin 2016). Many studies draw attention to the risks associated with smartphone use in noting that these devices can be distracting and make it difficult for teachers to manage the classroom. At the same time, strict bans on mobile phones have been shown to increase students' anxiety levels (Gajdics, Jagodics 2022).

The presence of mobile phones alone does not automatically improve the quality of teaching and learning, but it does create specific

educational opportunities. The educational value of smartphone use depends on how the device is employed, as well as on students' age and level of maturity. Equally important is the adequate training of teachers and the development of programs that integrate curricular content with digital competencies. According to Dan Bouhnik and Mor Deshen (2014), WhatsApp was the first digital technology to enter schools without dedicated training or preparation. It was not until the COVID-19 pandemic that a large-scale influx of digital educational tools was adopted by schools, often regardless of whether students and teachers were adequately prepared. Mobile technologies also make it possible to support learning beyond the classroom without reliance on desktop computers. Learners often combine educational activities with other tasks and are largely responsible for organizing their own time. As a result, mobile learning tends to be a highly fragmented experience (Stockwell 2013).

The involvement of smartphones in education should be taken seriously, particularly given their widespread adoption and the deep immersion of the younger generation in the digital world. Smartphones can function as educational tools through the use of specially designed applications (Altameemy 2017). Their popularity, however, is determined primarily by their attractiveness as opposed to any inherent cognitive advantage (Kolak et al. 2021). Examples of language-learning applications developed as part of the MOONLITE project demonstrate that this factor must be taken into account (Read, Martín-Monje 2021). For refugee populations, where access to educational resources is often limited, mobile learning is the simplest and most accessible solution (Drolia et al. 2022). Besides, offline smartphone use is also significant, as it allows users to construct a personal space and to disengage from information that may cause emotional distress or psychological strain (Lopatovska et al. 2022).

During the cyclical academic conference *The Mobile Learning* on education through mobile devices, a number of challenges related to their use were highlighted. Emphasis was placed on the need to analyze the entire educational process from the point of view of pedagogy, not solely from a technological one. Mobile devices can be used effectively in both formal and non-formal educational contexts (Kommers et al. 2023). The situation is becoming increasingly urgent and calls for decisive and carefully considered strategies in

light of the continuing influx of refugees. The UNHCR *Education Report* (2024) warns of the risk of leaving Ukrainian children and youth who have been forced to flee their country without access to education. Similarly, an OECD report (2023) highlights the arrival of large numbers of women with children from Ukraine, for whom educational provision must be ensured. In 2025, approximately 5.1 million refugees from Ukraine were still residing in OECD countries, with the largest populations in Germany, Poland, and Spain (OECD 2025). This situation is accompanied by growing challenges related to the integration of refugees, particularly children and adolescents, into new social environments (IDAC 2025). For refugee children and youth, access to education is essential for coping with an uncertain future, achieving economic independence, and finding their place in new communities (UNHCR 2025).

Research assumptions

At the conceptual stage of the project, it was assumed that the study would take the form of a diagnostic investigation supported by statistical analyses (Ferguson, Takane 2016; King, Minium 2003), situated mainly in the field of media pedagogy. Within the framework of the diagnostic survey method (Pilch, Bauman 2010; Skulicz 2010), a questionnaire was used as the primary research technique (Babbie 2016). To collect empirical data on mobile phone use among young people, an original survey questionnaire was developed. It consisted of two parts: (1) the first part gathered data on refugees who arrived in Poland after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, providing a basis for analyzing the environment in which they function, as well as for identifying relationships and differentiating factors relevant to the study; (2) the second part included a set of questions concerning the communicative and educational use of smartphones by adolescents—some of them open-ended to allow for free expression in both quantitative and qualitative terms (Rubacha 2008). The Ethics Committee for Research Projects at the Institute of Psychology of the University of Szczecin determined that the research project "Smartphone Use by Young War Refugees from Ukraine" complied with ethical research standards (consent no. KB 40/2023).

The empirical study, involving young Ukrainians living in Poland, was conducted in 2023 in Szczecin (June–July; 39.0% of respondents) and Zielona Góra (October–December; 61.0% of respondents). The study group consisted of 128 participants (53 girls and 74 boys) from towns of varying sizes: up to 2,000 inhabitants (8.9%); 2,000–100,000 inhabitants (39.8%); 100,000–500,000 inhabitants (22.0%); and over 500,000 inhabitants (29.3%). The surveyed adolescents came from various regions of Ukraine, representing nearly the entire country, with the exception of the city of Sevastopol and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The largest groups originated from Dnipropetrovsk Oblast (19.2%), Kherson Oblast (11.2%), and Kharkiv Oblast (9.6%). More than one quarter of respondents (27.9%) reported that the area in which they had lived was not directly affected by the war. However, a substantially larger proportion indicated that they had lived under Russian occupation or had experienced intense shelling (30.3%) or intermittent shelling (41.8%). The vast majority of participants (80.2%) arrived in Poland in 2022, including more than half (58.5%) who arrived in February, March, or April of that year. The remaining respondents arrived later, in 2023 (16.5%), or prior to the outbreak of the war, in 2021 (1.7%) or in 2017–2018 (1.6%). The age distribution of respondents ranged from 10 to 20 years (10—1.6%; 11—4.7%; 12—15.7%; 13—22.0%; 14—19.7%; 15—11.8%; 16—7.1%; 17—7.1%; 18—7.1%; 19—1.6%; 20—1.6%), with the majority (90.6%) aged between 12 and 18 years.

The environment in which the respondents function—namely, telecommunications infrastructure—was also analyzed. Access to mobile phones and the extent of mobile network use were examined. Almost all respondents (98.4%) reported using their own mobile phones, including seven individuals who also indicated that they sometimes use a family member's device. Only two respondents (aged 13 and 14) did not have their own phones and relied exclusively on devices belonging to family members or someone else. Nearly half of the respondents (45.1%) reported using both Polish and Ukrainian mobile networks. One third (33.1%) used only Polish networks, 12 respondents (9.0%) used mobile networks from countries other than Poland and Ukraine, and seven respondents (5.3%) used only Ukrainian networks. A small group—10 respondents (7.6%)—were unsure which network they used. Overall, these findings indicate that

young Ukrainians residing in Poland have almost unrestricted access to mobile ICT infrastructure.

Study results—interpretation

To determine the extent of mobile phone use for educational purposes among Ukrainian adolescents living in Poland, respondents were asked to estimate the daily time that they spent on phone calls and on using the Internet via a smartphone. Comparison of the results (Table 1) reveals a clear inverse pattern in smartphone use: the surveyed adolescents spent significantly less time on voice calls than on Internet activities. Nearly half of the respondents (45.2%) reported spending no more than one hour per day on phone calls, while 27.5% used the Internet via a smartphone for two to four hours per day, and as many as 40.8% reported spending more than four hours per day online.

The correlation coefficient between the categorized time spent on phone calls and Internet use was negative (r = –0.880). The calculated test statistic for the significance of the correlation was t = –3.214, which exceeds the critical value of the Student's t distribution (t_crit = –3.182) at the significance level α = 0.05 with (5–2) degrees of freedom. It can therefore be concluded that there is a strong and statistically significant inverse correlation between the two variables (Ferguson & Takane 2016; King & Minium 2003). Ukrainian adolescents primarily use smartphones as tools for Internet access, with voice calls appearing to be used mainly when Internet-based communication is unavailable.

Table 1. Approximate daily time spent by teenage war refugees from Ukraine on phone calls and Internet use via mobile phones (number and percentage distribution)

Item	Approximate daily time spent by teenage war refugees from Ukraine using a mobile phone	Telephone calls		Using the Internet on a mobile phone	
		N	%	N	%
1	up to 1 hour	57	45.2%	4	3.3%
2	from 1 to 2 hours	28	22.2%	12	10.0%
3	from 2 to 4 hours	7	5.6%	33	27.5%

Item	Approximate daily time spent by teenage war refugees from Ukraine using a mobile phone	Telephone calls		Using the Internet on a mobile phone	
		N	%	N	%
4	over 4 hours	8	6.3%	49	40.8%
5	hard to say	26	20.6%	22	18.3%
	Total	126	100.0%	120	100.0%

Source: Author's own study.

The respondents themselves reported numerous areas of mobile phone use. Most frequently, they indicated listening to music; this entertainment-related use of smartphones was reported by 78 respondents (23.2%). Games ranked second, with 60 responses (17.9%). Next, in order of frequency, respondents mentioned contact with friends—55 responses (16.4%); watching movies—46 (13.7%); contact with family—43 (12.8%); and voice calls—25 (7.4%). Educational use of mobile phones was selected by only 21 respondents (6.3%). Shopping was mentioned least often, by eight respondents (2.4%). Overall, it can be concluded that for young Ukrainians living in Poland, smartphones are used mainly for entertainment purposes: music, movies, and games together account for more than half of all responses (54.8%). Broadly defined communication (including voice calls and contact with family and friends) accounted for more than one third of responses (36.6%). Against this background, with educational use accounting for only 6.3%, it is difficult to speak of widespread smartphone use for educational activities. The war did not radically alter young users's smartphone-use strategies as leisure-related purposes continue to occupy a dominant position among motivations for using mobile phones.

The question concerning the use of educational platforms was answered by 86 respondents. Of the nine most popular platforms listed, respondents selected only 25 options in total (26.9%), while the remaining responses (73.1%) fell into the "other" category. The most frequently indicated platform was school.aplus, selected by 11 respondents (11.8%). This was followed by Tutlo—four responses (4.3%); Squla—three (3.2%); pipl.lyceum—three (3.2%); Babbel— two (2.2%); keiki.team—one (1.1%); and kazkozvuk—one (1.1%).

Other platforms mentioned included Classroom, Zoom, Moodle, Duolingo, and nz.ua. A substantial number of respondents (34) explicitly stated, "I don't use it," "I don't know," or "I don't use any." In addition, 14 respondents selected "other" without specifying the platform used. These findings suggest that leisure-oriented uses have become so dominant in smartphone practices that other purposes have been marginalized—particularly those requiring greater involvement and effort, such as education. This pattern may also be indicative of a more general aversion to school.

In the analyzed group of 121 young Ukrainians living in Poland, more than one third—44 respondents (35.2%)—reported that they do not use a mobile phone for distance education. Among those who do use a mobile phone for this purpose, the primary form of engagement, as declared by more than half of the respondents (69 individuals; 55.2%), involves connecting with a teacher in Ukraine. Only a small number of pupils—10 respondents (8.0%)—reported using a smartphone to connect with a teacher in Poland. Two respondents (1.6%) provided alternative explanations, stating: (1) "I don't learn online," and (2) "I use a laptop for distance education." It is difficult to determine whether smartphone use in this educational context reflects a voluntary and autonomous choice. It may instead result from pressure exerted by the Ukrainian education system or by parents, as well as from fears of losing a school year.

In response to the question "From whom do you most often learn about opportunities for online education?", a total of 139 responses were recorded. Most frequently—more than one third of responses—52 (37.4%) indicated parents, which may suggest that parents are perceived as authoritative and trustworthy sources of information. Teachers and peers ranked second and third, with similar proportions: 26 responses (18.7%) and 25 responses (18.0%), respectively. Only six respondents (4.3%) reported learning about online education from siblings. Four respondents (2.9%) indicated other sources, such as acquaintances, friends, or YouTube. Less than one fifth of respondents—26 individuals (18.7%)—reported that they do not use educational content available online and therefore do not seek information from others about online educational opportunities. This finding is consistent with the results of the previous question and

suggests that smartphone use for educational purposes may primarily stem from parental expectations.

More than half of the surveyed teenage war refugees from Ukraine—81 respondents (54.4%)—reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had the greatest influence on their use of smartphones for educational purposes. The war was mentioned as the second most influential factor, with 59 responses (39.6%) indicating that it significantly increased the perceived importance of smartphones as tools for supporting education. The remaining respondents (6.0%) expressed no opinion on this matter. These results reveal the particularly strong impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development of distance education, which, in the experiences of young Ukrainians, appears to outweigh the educational practices that emerged during the war.

Almost the entire surveyed population—108 Ukrainian adolescents (89.3%)—reported using their mobile phones to translate into Polish (e.g., with Google Translate). The remaining group—approximately one in ten respondents, 13 individuals (10.7%)—declared that they do not use their smartphones for translation into Polish. These findings help establish a hierarchy of smartphone uses among adolescents from Ukraine. Applications that meet leisure-related needs consistently occupy the top position, followed by those that serve immediate practical purposes.

Conclusion

The study results indicate that the strategies adopted by young refugees from Ukraine in their smartphone use do not differ substantially from those of their peers in other countries. Leisure-related purposes remain the primary function of mobile phones, followed by practical applications used to satisfy immediate needs. Consequently, the hypothesis that the war fundamentally reoriented smartphone-use patterns must be rejected. The ability to maintain contact with loved ones has likely gained importance; however, what has changed is primarily the quality rather than the nature of this contact. Overall, the changes observed are limited. This is evident, for example, in attitudes toward distance learning: respondents indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had a greater impact on its adoption than the war itself. In this context, it is useful to note differences

between the smartphone-use patterns of migrants arriving in Europe from Africa and the Middle East, for whom mobile phones often served as essential tools for survival along migration routes. Accordingly, ensuring constant access to a functioning phone was a priority. By contrast, immediately after crossing the Polish border, refugees from Ukraine could rely on receiving free Polish SIM cards, mobile phone top-ups, or power banks. As a result, they were able to maintain their preexisting smartphone-use habits.

Within the hierarchy of smartphone applications used to meet respondents' existential needs, education plays a relatively minor role (6.3% of responses). More than half of the respondents (51.6%) were unable to identify the educational platform they use, and 35.2% reported that they do not use a mobile phone for distance education. This points to the limited use of smartphones in formal education. At the same time, mobile devices—largely unconstrained by technical limitations—play an important role in meeting everyday needs, involving participation in informal, media-supported learning. This lifelong process often occurs without conscious awareness, which may explain why 18.7% of respondents declared that they do not use educational content on the Internet. Given the largely independent exploration of virtual environments, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of media literacy skills. Researchers studying hate speech and misinformation identify these skills as key tools in countering disinformation. In the context of hybrid warfare, Ukrainian adolescent refugees should be made aware of online bots, trolls, and fake news and educated about how algorithms—particularly on social media platforms—create information bubbles (Baron-Polańczyk 2019). This is especially important given that refugees from Ukraine constitute one of the primary targets of organized international disinformation campaigns.

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Future Competences and the Model of the Contemporary School: Proposals for Staffing, Curriculum, and Technological Changes

Przyszłe kompetencje i model współczesnej szkoły. Propozycje dotyczące kadry, programu nauczania i zmian technologicznych

ABSTRACT

The article examines the challenge of adapting contemporary schools to the demands generated by rapid technological advancement, socio-cultural transformation, and evolving labor market expectations. It takes as its point of departure the concept of *future competences*, defined as an integrated set of interdisciplinary, professional, and socio-emotional skills necessary for functioning in conditions of uncertainty and increasing digitalization. On this basis, the article proposes directions for change in three key areas: human resources, curriculum design, and educational technologies.

In the area of human resources policy, the article emphasizes the need to redefine recruitment procedures for teacher candidates and to strengthen their pedagogical and psychological preparation. Particular attention is given to the development of socio-emotional

competences, supported by the introduction of virtual reality (VR) tools and educational simulations in teacher education programs. These technologies create a safe environment for practicing interpersonal skills and responding to instructional and educational situations. In terms of curriculum design, the article argues for a shift in educational objectives toward competence-based learning rather than a narrow focus on subject-specific content. It highlights the importance of interdisciplinary problems, activating and student-centered teaching methods, and tasks that foster creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. With regard to educational technology, the article stresses the need for the systematic integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and virtual reality into the learning process, as these tools can support the simulation of complex phenomena, deepen understanding, and enable more personalized forms of instruction.

The article concludes that the effectiveness of the proposed reforms depends on the coordinated involvement of the school community, academic institutions, and educational policymakers, as well as on a willingness to adopt an innovative and future-oriented model of schooling.

ABSTRAKT

Artykuł analizuje wyzwanie, jakim jest dostosowanie współczesnych szkół do wymogów generowanych przez szybki postęp technologiczny, przemiany społeczno-kulturowe i ewoluujące oczekiwania rynku pracy. Punktem wyjścia jest koncepcja kompetencji przyszłości, które zawierają umiejętności interdyscyplinarne, zawodowe i społeczno-emocjonalne, niezbędne do funkcjonowania w warunkach niepewności i rosnącej cyfryzacji. W artykule zaproponowano kierunki zmian w trzech kluczowych obszarach: zasobach ludzkich, programach nauczania i technologiach edukacyjnych.

W obszarze polityki kadrowej podkreślono się potrzebę redefinicji procedur rekrutacji kandydatów na nauczycieli, a także lepszego ich przygotowania pedagogicznego i psychologicznego. Szczególną uwagę poświęcono rozwojowi kompetencji społeczno-emocjonalnych, wspieranemu przez wprowadzenie narzędzi VR i symulacji edukacyjnych do programów kształcenia nauczycieli. Technologie te tworzą bezpieczne środowisko do ćwiczenia umiejętności interpersonalnych i reagowania na sytuacje dydaktyczne i edukacyjne. W wymiarze programowym podkreślono konieczność reorientacji celów edukacyjnych w kierunku rozwoju kompetencji, a nie wyłącznie przekazywania treści przedmiotowych. Podkreślono znaczenie zagadnień interdyscyplinarnych, aktywizujących

i skoncentrowanych na uczniu metod nauczania, a także zadań, które sprzyjają kreatywności, współpracy i krytycznemu myśleniu. Odnosząc się do technologii, podkreślono konieczność systematycznej integracji sztucznej inteligencji i wirtualnej rzeczywistości z procesem uczenia się. Narzędzia te mogą wspierać symulację złożonych zjawisk, poprawiać zrozumienie i umożliwiać bardziej spersonalizowane formy nauczania.

W artykule stwierdzono, że skuteczność proponowanych reform zależy od skoordynowanego zaangażowania społeczności szkolnej, instytucji akademickich i decydentów edukacyjnych, a także od gotowości do przyjęcia innowacyjnego i zorientowanego na przyszłość modelu nauczania.

Introduction

Change in schools, and more broadly in education, results from the transition of specific elements of the education system from one state to another. In this context, the author's proposals for change presented in this article are analyzed. In particular, the need for change in the areas of human resources as well as curriculum and organizational structures is examined. This does not imply that necessary structural and infrastructural changes are less important; however, the limited scope of the article does not allow for a comprehensive discussion of all areas in which change is required.

There is no doubt that change is a prerequisite for school development. It may be a response to changes occurring in the school's immediate and wider environment (external motives), or it may express the autonomous aspirations of school staff, student councils, and cooperating parents (internal motives). In practice, external motives tend to dominate, including ongoing technical and technological developments, social and cultural transformations, and the expectations of employers and the labor market. Changes in educational law also constitute an external driver for schools, while in the case of vocational schools and technical institutions, changes in professional standards and working conditions play a particularly important role. When external motives are accompanied by internal motivation, there is a high probability of successful implementation. Otherwise, it is difficult to speak of success when changes are introduced against the will of teachers, school administration, student councils, and parents' visions of an appropriate school model for their children.

It should be emphasized that not every change, regardless of its source, leads to the desired development of a school. Educational practice shows that proposed changes that are not subject to thorough discussion may result in regression or, at best, stagnation. The changes of interest here should be considered in terms of a process with evolutionary characteristics. The starting point of this process is individual change, which, at the appropriate time and under suitable conditions, develops into group-level change, initially limited to a single level or selected type of school, and eventually into change encompassing the entire school system. A process understood in this way requires continuous evaluation and the skillful incorporation of findings as corrective factors for specific practical solutions. The contribution of pedagogical research conducted at particular stages of change is therefore difficult to overestimate.

Changes in the HR area

The analysis of the need for change in the personnel area begins with the postulate of reforming recruitment to teacher education programs. Under current regulations, access to pedagogical studies is open to all candidates, regardless of their predispositions for working with children and young people. As a result, kindergartens and schools may employ graduates of teacher education programs who, due to their personality traits, are ill-suited to work in educational settings. The proposed change involves introducing mandatory interviews and psychological tests for teacher candidates. Such a reform would enable more appropriate selection of future teachers capable of meeting the professional demands of the field.

Further proposed changes concern the pedagogical and psychological preparation of future teachers, which should be treated as a priority competence area at all levels of education. Meanwhile, as of July 2025, proposals are being considered to revise the requirements for teachers employed in kindergartens. These changes would allow the employment of individuals without adequate pedagogical preparation, which is an example of an unfavorable reform that may lead to regression.

Proposals for changes in the pedagogical preparation of teachers also concern the development and implementation in educational

practice of models for training subject-specific teachers in different types of schools—primary schools (Grades 4–8), general education schools, primary and secondary vocational schools, technical schools, post-secondary schools, and universities. In this context, the focus is on integrating disciplinary content (e.g., mathematics, physics, chemistry, electronics, computer science, economics, and finance) with pedagogical content (general pedagogy and the methodology of teaching science, technical, and economic subjects).

Particularly evident are deficiencies in methodological preparation, which largely determine learning outcomes. These shortcomings stem from rigid university education models that place emphasis on disciplinary goals and content while marginalizing methodological training. As a result, significant competence gaps emerge among university graduates who, for various reasons, enter the teaching profession. Resolving this issue would require introducing an obligation for academic staff to participate in discipline-specific pedagogical training and methodological workshops.

Other proposed changes relate to the conditions for entry into the teaching profession. These proposals focus on selecting the best-prepared university graduates for didactic and educational work with children and young people. The introduction of competitive selection procedures for teaching positions appears to be a natural solution. However, although such systems operate successfully in many countries, their effectiveness depends on offering competitive remuneration compared to employment in industry and non-educational service sectors.

The perceived shortage of science and technology teachers indicates the need to revise regulations governing the combination of school and university employment. Many university staff members do not hold full teaching loads. Therefore, it seems reasonable to create legal frameworks that allow university employees to supplement their income through teaching in schools.

The deficit discussed above results from the limited interest of graduates of technical universities in pursuing teaching careers. One way to change this situation would be the large-scale introduction of optional pedagogy courses in the later years of such programs. In this model, graduates would receive, alongside their degree, a certificate confirming their pedagogical preparation. This solution is not novel;

rather, it represents a return to practices in place several decades ago and thus exemplifies a change that draws on proven procedures that were later abandoned.

Changes in working conditions and opportunities for real professional development are also important in this area. Working conditions include the equipment of classrooms and subject-specific laboratories, as well as the provision of adequate staff recreation spaces. With regard to professional development, the most important proposed change involves the preparation of individualized plans for continuing education and professional growth, along with their consistent implementation in close cooperation with universities authorized to conduct programs in the relevant fields.

The implementation of these changes would enable a substantive discussion of the requirements set for teachers. These requirements are formulated by scholars in terms of necessary competences, with varying degrees of detail. For example, Kazimierz Denek identified the following core teaching competences:

- praxeological competences,
- communication skills,
- creative competences,
- moral competence,
- cooperation competences,
- IT and media competences (Denek 2000: 29).

Using a similar terminological framework, Wacław Strykowski presented a comprehensive system of teaching competences:

- substantive competences,
- psychological and pedagogical competences,
- diagnostic competences,
- competences related to planning and designing the educational process,
- didactic and methodological competences,
- media and technical competences,
- control and evaluation competences,
- competences in evaluating school curricula and textbooks,
- self-educational competences,
- communication competences (Strykowski 2007: 71–80; see also Mydłowska 2019: 106, 109–110).

The effectiveness of the teaching and educational process depends on teachers' professional preparation—defined as achieving a sufficiently high level of the competences listed above—as well as on socio-emotional competences, which are insufficiently represented in these models. Therefore, another proposed change is to place greater emphasis on socio-emotional content in university-based teacher education programs (lectures, classes, and workshops). The importance of these competences, which combine interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions, continues to grow in a contemporary world marked by uncertainty and poorly defined threats. The proposed content aimed at developing socio-emotional competences includes, in particular:

1. Self-awareness:
   - identification of emotions,
   - recognition of the relationship between emotions, thoughts, and behavior,
   - accurate identification of one's own strengths and weaknesses,
   - a sense of self-efficacy,
   - optimism.
2. Self-management:
   - regulation of emotions,
   - stress management,
   - self-control,
   - self-motivation,
   - setting and achieving positive life goals.
3. Social awareness:
   - taking different perspectives,
   - experiencing and expressing empathy,
   - demonstrating respect for otherness,
   - understanding social and ethical norms of behavior,
   - identifying potential sources of support and resources.
4. Interpersonal skills:
   - establishing and maintaining positive and mutually beneficial relationships,
   - communication skills,
   - collaboration,
   - problem-solving,
   - seeking and offering help.

5. Responsible decision-making:
- making decisions that take into account one's own well-being and that of interaction partners,
- awareness of the obligation to act in accordance with applicable ethical standards,
- being guided by safety considerations in the decision-making process,
- assessing the potential consequences of various behaviors,
- making constructive, thoughtful, and safe choices for all stakeholders (CASEL 2012: 9).

The consequence of broadly introducing content (modules) related to socio-emotional competences into teacher education curricula should be a shift in the approach to developing these competences. This shift requires the use of simulation-based methods employing virtual reality (VR). VR technology allows students to enter a three-dimensional learning environment generated by specialized computer programs. By using VR headsets, students gain the opportunity to interact with children in kindergarten or school settings. In the virtual environment, they can be immersed in simulated scenarios and respond in real time to didactic and educational situations.

These realistic simulations reflect reality in a multisensory manner, giving students a strong sense of immersion in the artificial environment. Importantly, they can also assume the role of a student with specific educational needs and view the school environment from that student's perspective. Through simulation, modern technology develops empathetic understanding of others (in this case, students) and enables participants to experience difficult situations from another person's point of view. Simulating emotionally demanding situations prepares future teachers to respond in crisis or confrontational moments, strengthens emotional resilience, and supports the development of stress-management and emotion-regulation skills (Bailenson 2018; UNESCO 2023).

Changes in the curriculum and organizational area

In this area, changes in the way learning objectives are conceptualized are particularly important. With a view to developing competences that will enable students to function effectively in the future

labor market, the following system—referred to as *future compet-ences*—has been proposed:

1. General competences acquired through formal education (the highest possible level of linguistic, mathematical, digital, social, and civic competences).
2. General professional competences (specific to formal education) shared across groups of professions, including designing and developing project implementation procedures, extensive use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, teamwork, the creation of teams, including multicultural ones, and team management.
3. General professional competences resulting from the need to perform professional tasks (initially developed within formal education and later through non-formal and informal education), with an industry-specific character.
4. Specific professional competences, involving the transformation of professional skills and the integration of knowledge and skills from different industries.
5. General social competences acquired through interaction with other participants in social and professional life (verbal and non-verbal communication, self-presentation, conflict resolution, social influence, negotiation, organization of one's own work, and the performance of social roles).
6. Specific social competences, including empathy, problem-solving, creativity, cognitive flexibility, emotional intelligence, moral maturity, ethics, courage, responsibility, openness to change, time management, learning ability, and leadership (Kwiatkowski 2020: 26–27).

Developing this type of competence requires a reconsideration of the core curriculum, in which learning outcomes are defined primarily in terms of competences, as well as significant changes in the learning process—particularly with regard to instructional forms and teaching methods.

The decision to adopt a single dominant form of education or a combination of instructional forms is usually driven by economic and/or organizational considerations. Individual forms, such as teacher–student collaboration, are significantly more costly than collective forms, in which one teacher works with a group of students. On the other hand, school-based forms—namely theoretical

and practical classes conducted in school buildings and using school laboratories and workshops—are relatively well established in educational law and school management practice. The situation is different for extracurricular forms, mainly practical classes conducted in workplaces and universities, which make use of advanced technologies and involve specialists from these institutions.

Such classes not only enable a more comprehensive implementation of educational objectives defined by the proposed competence framework, but also strengthen links between schools and their external environment—industrial, service, and academic. Institutions operating in the vicinity of schools have a vested interest in familiarizing students from various types of schools (not only vocational and technical schools) with the realities of professional and research work. This exposure may contribute to more informed and rational choices regarding future fields of study. Moving education beyond the walls of the school is still an unfulfilled goal of educational and career guidance and constitutes an important area for change in educational policy, requiring the removal of legal and organizational barriers.

Changes in teaching methods follow from changes in educational goals and forms. Adopting the proposed system of competence-based goals and expanding extracurricular learning necessitates the use of activating methods in joint teacher–student activities, with an emphasis on independence, creativity, and openness to change—key components of specific social competences. Activating methods, which encourage active student participation, also support the development of teamwork competences, including collaborative problem-solving. In this context, it is important for teachers to formulate interdisciplinary problems that mirror the realities of professional life, regardless of the type or unique profile of graduates' future employment. Effective problem-solving of this kind requires general, general professional, and general social competences, as well as—particularly in vocational and technical education—professional competences, both general and specific.

Creativity and cognitive flexibility, which belong to the category of specific social competences, are in turn prerequisites for the use of heuristic methods as part of activating approaches. These methods assume that students formulate hypotheses to solve problem-based tasks and develop strategies for their theoretical and empirical

verification. Heuristic methods introduce students to a world in which there are no ready-made solutions to technical and technological, social, or personal problems. As a result, they prepare learners to live and work in a society in which algorithmic solutions—based only on memorization and the application of predefined rules provided by the teacher—are increasingly insufficient (Kwiatkowski 2025: 168–173).

The widespread use of activating methods in schools is associated with the need for equally broad application of the already mentioned artificial intelligence and simulation methods based on virtual reality (VR). This certainly represents a qualitative shift in the area of educational resources. As in teacher education, these tools make it possible to explore worlds that would otherwise remain inaccessible—not only to observe them, but also to understand the underlying physical, chemical, or biological processes. Simulating such processes requires the development of appropriate software that enables the operation of models reproducing natural reality.

Conclusions

The analysis presented of the need for change in Polish schools can, of course, be expanded and supplemented by additional areas requiring transformation. However, regardless of the specific domain, it should be remembered that every change in schools—and more broadly in the education system—is a form of social change. Its success depends on how change is perceived by teachers and parents, as well as by educational authorities. In conclusion, it is worth drawing attention to several basic attitudes toward the proposed changes:
- definitely pessimistic,
- moderately pessimistic,
- neutral,
- moderately optimistic,
- definitely optimistic.

It hardly needs to be demonstrated that only the predominance of moderately and clearly optimistic attitudes offers real hope for the successful implementation of any change.

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Pedagogical Change from the South: The Emergence of Alternative and Decolonial Models in Ibero-America

Zmiana pedagogiczna z perspektywy Południa: Powstawanie alternatywnych i dekolonialnych modeli w Ameryce Łacińskiej

ABSTRACT

This article explores the emergence of pedagogical models (PMs) in Ibero-America that challenge traditional Eurocentric paradigms and articulate alternative, decolonial approaches to education. Based on a critical review of the 100 most cited documents in Spanish available on Google Scholar containing the term *modelo pedagógico,* the study identifies key characteristics, dimensions of change, and ruptures proposed by these models. The analysis adopts a qualitative content approach grounded in hermeneutic and deconstructive principles, allowing for the classification and critical examination of PMs as epistemic, social, and institutional constructs. The findings indicate that emerging PMs are rooted in contextual and situated knowledge, influenced by epistemologies of the South, and committed to social transformation and educational justice. These models advocate a shift away from vertical, standardized logics toward horizontal, participatory, and plural epistemic frameworks. However, tensions between discourse and practice persist, particularly with regard to

implementation, conceptual clarity, and the continued influence of Euro-centric frameworks. The article concludes by emphasizing the need for further research on locally grounded models and participatory method-ologies that legitimize diverse forms of knowledge and pedagogical practice in Ibero-America.

ABSTRAKT

W artykule poddano analizie powstawanie modeli pedagogicznych (MP) w Ameryce Łacińskiej, które podważają tradycyjne, eurocentrycz-ne paradygmaty i formułują alternatywne podejścia dekolonialne w edukacji. Na podstawie krytycznej analizy 100 najczęściej cyto-wanych tekstów w języku hiszpańskim dostępnych w Google Scholar, zawierających termin „modelo pedagógico", zidentyfikowano charak-terystykę i zakres zmian oraz „pęknięcia" proponowane przez te mo-dele. Badanie zostało oparte na jakościowej metodzie analizy treści, zainspirowanej zasadami hermeneutycznymi i dekonstrukcyjnymi, po-zwalającymi sklasyfikować oraz sproblematyzować modele pedago-giczne jako konstrukty epistemiczne, społeczne i instytucjonalne. Wyniki badań wykazują, że nowe MP są uwarunkowane wiedzą kontekstualną, pozostającą pod wpływem epistemologii Południa, oraz zaangażowa-ne w transformację społeczną i sprawiedliwość edukacyjną. Modele te proponują przejście od hierarchicznych i standaryzowanych logik do podejść horyzontalnych, uczestniczących i epistemicznie pluralistycz-nych. Niemniej jednak nadal utrzymują się napięcia między dyskursem a praktyką, zwłaszcza jeśli chodzi o wdrażanie tych modeli, ich kla-rowność koncepcyjną oraz oddziaływanie podejść eurocentrycznych. Artykuł kończy się zachętą do prowadzenia dalszych badań nad lo-kalnie ugruntowanymi modelami oraz metodologiami uczestniczącymi, które legitymizowałyby różnorodne formy wiedzy i praktyki pedago-giczne w Ameryce Łacińskiej.

Introduction

Although the origins of pedagogical models (PMs) are not clearly defined, Correa and Pérez (2022) suggest that their basic conception emerged between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries through the philosophical contributions of Herder, Hegel, Kant, and Her-bart. Their discursive and practical value has enabled the regulation of social life and has come to express the culture of a given time

and place. Given their significance, as well as the complexity of their dimensions and characteristics, PMs have raised questions regarding their implementation and evolution, particularly in light of factors such as digital technologies (DT), cultural diversity, and shifts in the social context.

In contemporary educational settings, PMs function not only as organizational frameworks for teaching but also as discursive constructs that encapsulate worldviews, epistemological approaches, and social projects. Traditionally associated with Eurocentric paradigms and hierarchical structures of knowledge, PMs have often perpetuated homogenizing logics in highly diverse contexts. However, in Ibero-America, a region shaped by historical processes of colonization, inequality, and exclusion, pedagogical alternatives have emerged that challenge these hegemonic frameworks and give rise to new educational rationalities.

These alternative models, although not always explicitly labeled "decolonial," are informed by epistemologies of the South, community-based knowledge, situated experiences, and critical pedagogies. Their transformative potential lies not merely in the incorporation of innovative methodologies but in their capacity to redefine educational aims, reconfigure pedagogical relationships, and interrogate the institutional structures of education systems. In this regard, emerging PMs constitute spaces of both symbolic and material contestation, in which differing conceptions of the subject, knowledge, and society are negotiated (De Sousa Santos 2010; Zuluaga 1987).

This article aims to analyze the characteristics, dimensions, and implications of emerging PMs in Ibero-America through a critical review of the 100 most cited Spanish-language documents on pedagogical models indexed in Google Scholar. The analysis seeks to shed light on the tensions between traditional models and those that foster transformation through decolonial, social, and epistemic approaches. This reflection is proposed as a contribution to ongoing debates on pedagogical change in Ibero-America, emphasizing that such change cannot be reduced to instrumental innovation but must instead be understood as an integral and situated reconfiguration of the educational act.

The article is organized into six sections. First, it presents the theoretical framework; next, it describes the methodology used for

the selection and analysis of documentary sources. The results section is divided into three subsections addressing the characteristics of alternative PMs, the dimensions of change they articulate, and the ruptures they introduce in relation to traditional models. This is followed by a critical discussion of the main findings. Finally, the article concludes with a reflection on the challenges, possibilities, and future lines of research concerning situated and decolonial PMs in Ibero-America.

Theoretical framework: Origins of pedagogical models

Pedagogical models (PMs) are representations of educational reality that link theory and practice. They constitute a discursive formation shaped by anonymous and historically situated rules specific to a given time and place, as described by Foucault (1969). The influence of historical periods and cultural contexts is essential in shaping PMs (Correa, Pérez 2022; Díaz 1986; De Zubiría 2007, 2010; Ortiz 2013), highlighting their evolution in response to social, political, economic, cultural, linguistic, and, consequently, epistemic transformations (Behar 2022). PMs aim to articulate contextual and conceptual elements, offering a theoretical explanation of educational practice (Zuluaga 1987) and giving rise to alternative pedagogies that propose different educational options with a forward-looking orientation.

The actors involved in PMs include institutions, individuals, roles, and practices (Foucault 1969), as well as learning objectives (Coll 1994), instructional content, and teaching methods (Ortiz 2013). These components are coordinated in a coherent manner and coexist in an organized structure (Gómez 2004). The outcome of a PM is the establishment of an educational code (Díaz 1986) that prescribes techniques, methods, dynamics, practices, and educational processes (Cardoso 2007; Correa, Pérez 2022; Fornaca 1991) aimed at shaping an ideal human being in accordance with the values of a given society (Zuluaga 1987). According to Carvajal (2006), PMs entail two essential interpretations: one concerning the possibilities of the subject being formed, and another concerning the cognitive input that, once acquired by the learner, constitutes their educational formation.

As a discursive formation, PMs respond to foundational questions that serve as guidelines for their development (Bernal 2004), such as What kind of individual is to be formed? What are the characteristics of the society in question? What is the identity of the students? How do they learn? What content and dimensions should be incorporated into education? What methodological strategies and learning environments are appropriate? De Zubiría (2007) further argues that PMs must address specific pedagogical questions, including why to teach, what to teach, when to teach, how to teach, and, similarly, what, when, and how to assess.

PMs have been classified from various perspectives: epistemic and historical (Lara et al. 2020), theoretical (Flórez 1994), organizational (Backer 2008), and structural (De Zubiría 2007, 2010). Despite their central role in education, there is a notable lack of comprehensive literature reviews on the topic in Spanish, with only a few exceptions (e.g., Hartman 2019). This gap underscores the need for a broad and critical review of the literature on the conceptualization, trends, and emerging forms of PMs from a decolonial perspective.

Decolonial epistemologies in the educational context

Decolonial epistemologies challenge Eurocentric knowledge systems and foreground alternative ways of knowing. They emerged from postcolonial and decolonial studies, which argue that colonialism persists in contemporary forms of domination (de Sousa Santos 2021). These approaches challenge the "coloniality of knowledge," asserting that Western epistemology has been imposed on the global periphery, thereby perpetuating sociopolitical domination (Chambers 2020).

In educational contexts, decolonial epistemologies have significantly influenced pedagogical practices in postcolonial educational systems in Latin America and Ibero-America. By challenging Eurocentric epistemologies, decoloniality seeks to dismantle entrenched colonial frameworks and champion intellectual diversity (Omodan 2024). Latin American universities, historically shaped by external narratives, are undergoing processes of decolonization through curricular reform and changes in teaching practices. This involves recognizing and integrating Indigenous knowledges to counter the

marginalization of non-Western perspectives (Goodell 2024). Student movements across Latin America have also played a crucial role in democratizing knowledge and education by advocating for pedagogies of emancipation.

Transforming pedagogical practices in universities involves disrupting established curricula to include diverse perspectives and moving away from the hegemony of Global English and colonial narratives embedded in national educational agendas. Additionally, decolonial education seeks to counter "science for domination" by challenging neoliberal values in mainstream science education (Kato et al. 2023). Active methodologies in higher education enhance practices for the resignification of learning and serve as tools for deepening understanding. The integration of Indigenous artisan community engagement in design programs exemplifies decolonial education and processes of knowledge co-production (Maya Tapiero et al. 2024). Another practice involves critical interculturality as a framework for understanding social relations, which contributes to decolonial studies in Latin America by valuing cultural diversity and addressing power imbalances and regional particularities.

Decolonial epistemologies have also had a considerable impact on educational systems. Initial teacher education programs increasingly link decolonial pedagogical practices with social, political, and insurgent interventions in public spaces. This involves moving away from Eurocentric epistemological logics while building technical and professional knowledge among university students (Moreno-Doña et al. 2019). Nevertheless, it is important to consider structural problems associated with social justice and human rights in order to improve educational leadership and promote equity.

Decolonial approaches return to local knowledge through a systematic perspective that revalorizes ancestral contexts in order to recognize and validate knowledge emerging from resistance to Eurocentric domination, promoting an "ecology of knowledge" that incorporates perspectives from marginalized groups (Radvanskei, Silva 2020). This approach seeks to overcome the limitations of dominant epistemologies and to foster a more inclusive understanding of human knowledge and experience.

Despite this progress, challenges remain in fully transforming educational systems; addressing academic colonialism and

marginalization requires careful engagement with postcolonial and decolonial debates. This involves integrating diverse theories and perspectives to create holistic and decolonizing learning experiences (Shabbar, Sorby 2025). In this line of thought, it is necessary to further explore how decolonial approaches are represented and discussed in the literature on pedagogical models.

Methodology

Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to examine how the concept of the "Pedagogical Model" (PM) is addressed in Spanish-language scholarly literature, with particular attention to how emerging PMs in Ibero-America shape forms of educational change that challenge traditional frameworks and promote new, contextually grounded pedagogical rationalities from a decolonial perspective.

The research questions guiding this inquiry are as follows:
1. What are the defining characteristics of alternative and decolonial PMs as identified in contemporary Ibero-American literature?
2. What dimensions of change—such as social, epistemic, or institutional—do these models articulate in response to contexts marked by inequality, exclusion, or emergency?
3. In what ways do these models represent a rupture with traditional pedagogical paradigms, and what implications do they hold for educational transformation in the Ibero-American region?

Literature review

Although this study does not adopt a systematic review protocol, it follows a structured literature review approach as proposed by Regmi (2023). This method allows for a more flexible systematization of sources, enabling the inclusion of valuable contributions that might otherwise be excluded by rigid methodological filters. In addition, the review focuses on the popularity and citation frequency of scholarly

articles, a strategy also adopted in previous studies (e.g., Castañeda, Tur 2020; Li et al. 2022). Popularity is used here as an indicator of relevance and theoretical influence, reflecting how frequently specific works are cited within a given thematic field. For this reason, Google Scholar was selected as the primary database for source retrieval, as it is widely used as an information search tool (Cathcart, Roberts 2014) and has seen increasing application in systematic literature reviews (Haddaway et al. 2015). Its open-access nature also makes it a widely accessible platform for literature selection (Di Martino et al. 2023).

Source selection

The keyword *modelo pedagógico* was used to search Google Scholar, yielding approximately 152,000 results. In line with the recommendations of Haddaway et al. (2015), particular attention was paid to the first 200 to 300 entries, which are typically the most cited and visible. For the purposes of this study, the 100 most cited documents were selected for in-depth review. No exclusion criteria were applied based on publication year, document accessibility, or inclusion in the Journal Citation Reports (JCR). Language, however, was considered. Since the study focuses on Spanish-language literature, three sources written in Portuguese were excluded. To maintain a total of 100 documents, three additional sources from the top 200 results were included as replacements (Table 1).

Table 1. Methodological steps for integrative review

Integrative review steps	Actual process followed for writing this paper
Step 1: Formulate the research purpose	To examine how emerging PMs in Ibero-America shape forms of educational change that challenge traditional frameworks and promote new, contextually grounded pedagogical rationalities from a decolonial perspective.
Step 2: Integrative literature search	Databases used: Google Scholar Search terms: "modelo pedagógico" Timeframe: unrestricted Selection: top 100 most cited references
Step 3: Literature selection and quality appraisal	Initial number of records: approximately 152,000 (from Google Scholar). After screening and applying inclusion/exclusion criteria (e.g., exclusion of non-Spanish texts), three documents were removed. To maintain the total sample size, three additional documents were selected from the initial search results, ensuring a final set of 100 documents.

Integrative review steps	Actual process followed for writing this paper
Step 4: Theme development	Coding was conducted using Atlas.ti 9. Key categories and subcategories were defined based on the research questions.
Step 5: Synthesis and finding	The analysis produced a synthesis of pedagogical models in relation to decolonial practices and emerging processes of educational transformation. These findings provide a basis for identifying the implications of PMs in the Ibero-America context.

Source: Author's own research.

Thus, the term PM was required to appear in the title, abstract, and/or keywords of each document. Data collection was conducted between March and July 2024, and the final selection of documents was completed on August 26 of the same year. Each document was then analyzed and classified according to its specific characteristics.

Analysis of results

To analyze the 100 documents selected for this review, a qualitative content analysis was conducted, guided by hermeneutic and deconstructive principles. This approach made it possible to identify the explicit definitions of PMs as well as the underlying tensions, omissions, and ideological orientations embedded in the texts. The analysis was aligned with the study's critical and decolonial perspective and involved a purposeful reading aimed at uncovering discursive practices that either reproduce or challenge traditional epistemic structures.

An analytical matrix was developed based on both emergent and deductive categories: type of document, educational level, discipline, integration of DT, explicit use of the term "pedagogical model," theoretical foundation, epistemological orientation, associated dimension of change (social, epistemic, or institutional), and the degree of innovation or rupture with traditional models. These categories were derived from previous literature (e.g., Correa, Pérez 2022; De Zubiría 2007; Flórez 1994) and refined following an exploratory reading of the first 20 documents. The analysis unfolded in three phases:

- Initial coding and segmentation: each document was read in full, and units of meaning related to the conceptualization,

implementation, critique, or proposal of PMs were identified. Relevant excerpts were coded to capture the characteristics, purposes, and structural components of the PMs discussed.

- Thematic grouping and synthesis: based on the coded data, thematic clusters were formed, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and singular cases. This phase made it possible to trace the emergence of alternative models, their relationship to epistemologies of the South, and their transformative potential in contexts marked by exclusion or inequality. In addition, documents were categorized according to the type of change proposed: technical, structural, symbolic, or epistemic.

- Interpretive analysis and argumentative construction: in the final phase, the findings were interpreted in light of the theoretical framework, linking the analysis to broader debates on critical pedagogy, decoloniality, and educational justice. Particular attention was paid to silences, ambiguities, and instrumental appropriations of the PM concept in order to avoid its fetishization or uncritical use.

This approach enabled the classification of the identified models as well as a critical examination of their construction and discursive circulation within the Ibero-American educational field. In addition, a complementary quantitative analysis was carried out to represent the frequency and distribution of variables such as country of origin, type of document, and academic discipline, thereby offering a panoramic view of the current state of the literature on PMs.

Results

General overview

The documents analyzed span the period from 1983 to 2021, with a notable concentration of publications between 2013 and 2019. The year 2007 also stands out as particularly prolific (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Year of publication of the analyzed documents
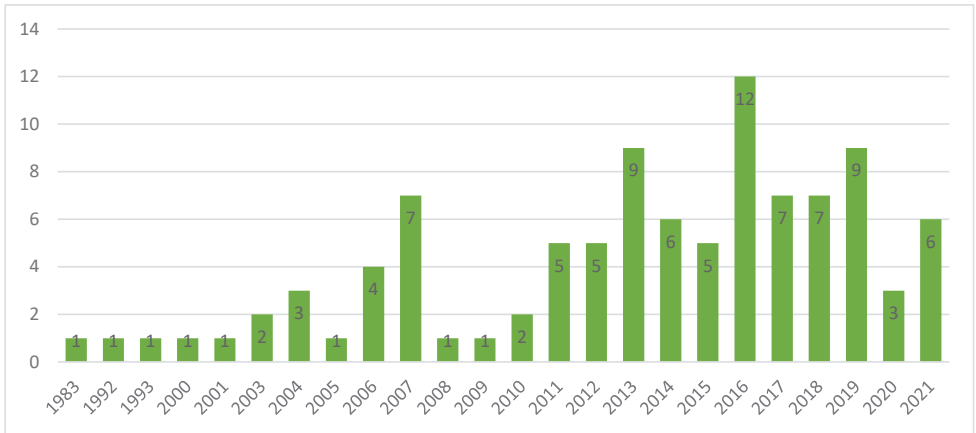
Source: Author's own research.

The countries with the highest number of publications are Colombia (n = 29), Spain (n = 17), and Cuba (n = 17). These data also include inter-institutional collaborative projects (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution by country of origin

Independent Productions	N	Collaborative Productions	N
Colombia	29	Colombia – Spain	2
Spain	17	Cuba – Mexico	2
Cuba	17	Argentina – Spain	1
Mexico	7	Chile – Cuba	1
Chile	5	Colombia – Cuba	1
Venezuela	4	Colombia – Venezuela	1
Ecuador	3	Costa Rica – España	1
Costa Rica	2	Ecuador – Perú	1
Perú	2	Spain – Argentina	1
Brazil	1	Argentina – UNESCO	1
		Mexico – Spain	1
		Germany – Costa Rica	1
Total	86	Total	14

Source: Author's own research.

Regarding the types of documents analyzed, theoretical (n = 48) and empirical (n = 42) studies predominate. In addition, there are reflective texts (n = 7), one essay, one state-of-the-art review on PMs and DT, and one book addressing diverse perspectives on PMs (Table 3). Master's and doctoral theses and reports account for 13% of the documents, while 5% are books. The remainder are academic journal articles.

Table 3. Types of documents on PMs

Type of document	Description (N)
Theoretical	Development and proposal of PMs (n = 11); PMs related to vocational education, higher education, meaningful learning, professional practice, holistic education, and didactics (n = 8); PMs in various disciplines (n = 7); PM concept (n = 5); methodology design (n = 5); document review (n = 4); PM descriptions (n = 2); theoretical foundations (n = 2); critical PM (n = 1); classification proposal (n = 1); PM management (n = 1); PM implementation (n = 1).
Empirical	Development of PMs (n = 15); characterization and conceptualization (n = 5); PM implementation (n = 5); PM proposals (n = 5); evaluation of PMs (n = 4); application of Flipped Learning (n = 2); teacher training and PMs (n = 1); student/teacher perceptions (n = 4); PMs and educational spaces (n = 1).
Reflective	Reflections on PMs (n = 3); conceptual analysis (n = 2); Jesuit PM (n = 1); implications for school dropout (n = 1).
Other	Essay (n = 1); state-of-the-art review on PMs and DT (n = 1); miscellaneous (n = 1).

Source: Author's own research.

Due to the specific purposes for which PMs are designed, they are often named according to their mode of implementation (e.g., virtual or hybrid) or pedagogical orientation (e.g., constructivist). Others are classified based on typologies proposed by researchers such as De Zubiría (2007) and Flórez (1994) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Most frequently referenced PMs (n = 52)
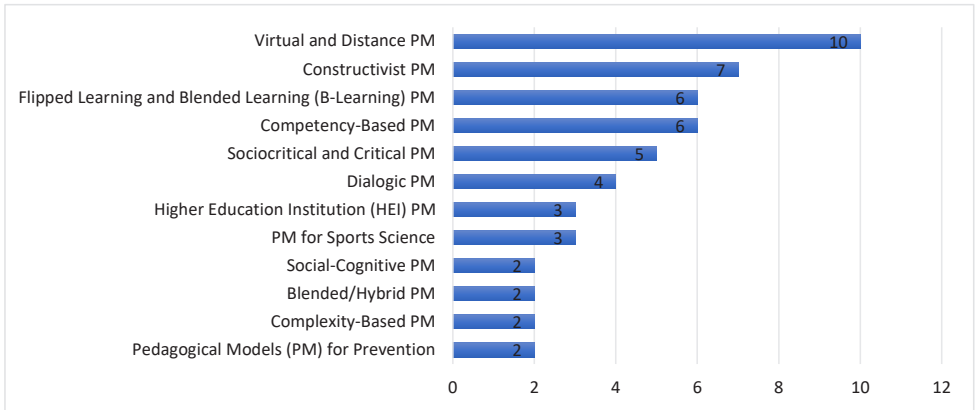
Source: Author's own research.

However, additional PMs were identified using other criteria, including the educational level at which they are applied (n = 6), the pedagogical approach (n = 8), the disciplinary field in which they are implemented (n = 10), the institution in which they are applied (n = 7), and the educational objectives they aim to achieve (n = 9). Notably, nine documents did not specify the name of the PM used or proposed (Table 4).

Table 4. Classification of PMs by Educational level, Pedagogical current, Discipline, Institution, and Objective (n = 39)

Classification	Model name (examples)
Educational level	Adult popular education PM, Non-formal education PM, Multigrade school PM, Preschool PM, Telesecundaria PM, Primary education motivation PM
Pedagogical currents	New School PM, Post-constructivist PM 2.0, Socio-constructivist and Connectivist PM, Traditional PM, New PM, Cognitive and Cultural PM, Southern Epistemology PM, Student-centered PM
By institution	UNA PM, Antonia Santos Institution PM, Jesuit PM, SaludARTE Program PM, Salesian PM, JAR PM, ISCED PM
Disciplinary	Legal Clinic PM, Computer Science PM, Environmental Education PM, Nursing PM, Obstetrics and Gynecology PM, Future Professionals' Training PM, Values Education PM, Life Project Education PM, Culturally Relevant Education PM, Inclusion PM
By objective	PM and Architectural Space Design, Student Empowerment PM, Cultural Identity PM, Youth Empowerment PM, Practice-based PM, Integrative PM, Pentadimensional PM, Conscious Processes PM, Axiological Transcendence PM

Source: Author's own research.

With respect to the integration of DT, 43% of the analyzed PMs do not incorporate any form of DT, whereas 56% do. This pattern points to the growing significance of DT in the design and implementation of PMs. Furthermore, the term PM is explicitly mentioned in 47% of the documents, while 52% do not refer to the concept directly. This observation may have important implications for the development of empirical, reflective, and theoretical proposals. Educational level also appears to be a determining factor in defining PMs (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Educational levels targeted by PMs.
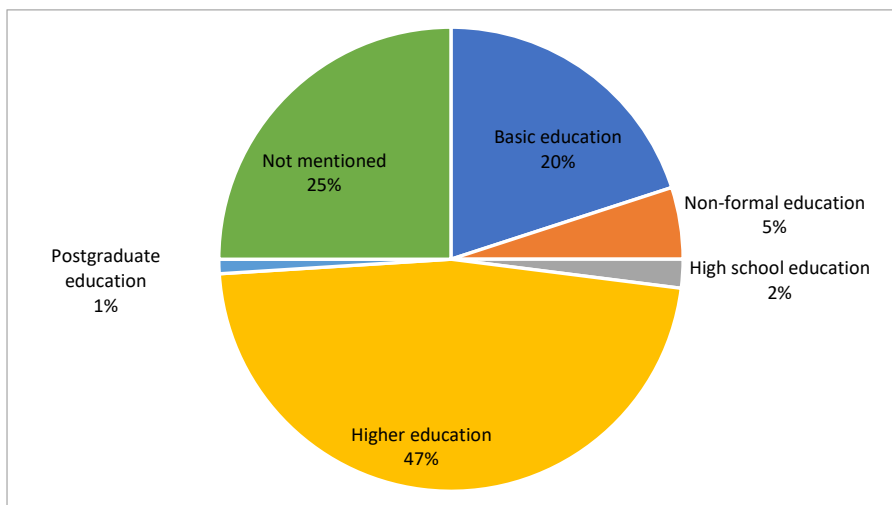
Source: Author's own research.

Disciplinary focus also plays a crucial role. While some PMs are linked to specific fields of knowledge, others are developed in a more general manner without a defined disciplinary emphasis (n = 54) (Table 5).

Table 5. Knowledge areas where PMs are applied

Knowledge area	Topics
Physical-Mathematical and Earth Sciences (n = 4)	Experimental Sciences (n = 2), Computer Science (n = 1), Mathematics (n = 1)
Health and Medical Sciences (n = 9)	General Health Sciences (n = 4), Nursing (n = 2), Medicine (n = 1), Pediatrics (n = 1), Obstetrics and Gynecology (n = 1)

Knowledge area	Topics
Humanities and Behavioral Sciences (n = 16)	Behavioral Sciences (n = 1), Civic Education (n = 2), Juvenile Justice (n = 1), Teacher Training (n = 4), Museums (n = 1), Music (n = 1), Pedagogy (n = 1), Virtual Pedagogy (n = 1), Active Pedagogy (n = 1), Life Project (n = 1), Popular Education (n = 1), Rural Education (n = 1)
Social and Economic Sciences (n = 15)	Accounting (n = 1), Legal Clinics (n = 1), Sports Sciences (n = 5), Graphic Design (n = 1), Intercultural Spaces (n = 1), Virtual Studies (n = 1), Equality and Inclusion (n = 1), English (n = 4)
Biotechnology and Agricultural Sciences (n = 1)	Environmental Studies (n = 1)

Source: Author's own research.

Characteristics of alternative and decolonial PMs in Ibero-America

The analysis of the 100 most cited Spanish-language documents on PMs reveals a set of proposals that, rather than reproducing traditional structures, configure critical, situated, and alternative frameworks. These models frequently go beyond the mere description of techniques or methods; instead, they are conceived as epistemic and political commitments in response to historical conditions of inequality, exclusion, and the colonization of knowledge (De Sousa Santos 2010; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, González-Faraco 2021).

Several models emerge from epistemologies of the South, centered on the re-signification of educational experience as a collective, contextual, and emancipatory process. These models reject technocratic or standardized approaches and instead assume an explicit commitment to social transformation and educational justice (Vásquez 2012; Castillo et al. 2008). For example, PMs grounded in community-based and popular education emphasize horizontal teacher–student relationships, the valorization of local knowledge, and active engagement with social issues (Merino 1993; Tedesco 1983). Among the shared characteristics of these models are:

i. the recognition of context as a structuring axis of teaching;
ii. the centrality of the subject as an active agent of change;
iii. an intercultural and decolonial perspective; and
iv. the integration of affective, ethical, and political dimensions into the learning process (Zuluaga 1987; Inocencio 2016).

These features contrast sharply with traditional PMs, which are often centered on content transmission and rely on homogenizing normative frameworks. Notably, many of these models are not explicitly labeled as "decolonial" or "emergent." Nevertheless, their theoretical and practical foundations indicate a clear rupture with the modern Western paradigm. Examples include the Cuban inclusive motivation model (Lozano 2015) and PMs aimed at cultural identity formation in Indigenous communities (Vives 2016), both of which incorporate elements of self-management, local worldviews, and ancestral practices.

Furthermore, these models are predominantly found in structurally marginalized contexts, such as rural areas, Indigenous communities, non-formal education settings, and critical literacy initiatives. Rather than conceiving change as a technical adjustment, these approaches understand pedagogical transformation as a historically situated response to systems of oppression (Dussán 2004; Cartuche et al. 2015). Finally, it is important to note that these models do not constitute a unified pedagogy but rather a constellation of heterogeneous approaches that engage with local, communal, and political realities. Their principal contribution lies in shifting the focus of pedagogical change from institutional structures to the lived experiences of educational subjects, thereby opening new horizons for educational reflection and intervention.

Dimensions of change articulated by emerging[1] PMs

The emerging PMs identified in Ibero-American literature propose new ways of conceiving teaching and learning and articulate a multilevel architecture of change encompassing three interdependent dimensions: social, epistemic, and institutional. These dimensions position PMs not as mere didactic reforms but as transformative

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1 They are termed "emergent" due to their disruptive and decolonial nature in contrast to hegemonic educational paradigms. Emerging from epistemic peripheries as responses to social crises and the coloniality of knowledge, they propose horizontal, situated, and emancipatory pedagogical frameworks. Their "emergence" reflects a struggle for recognition within a system that has historically marginalized them, though the term itself carries paradoxes: many of these models are ancestral in their contexts yet appear "new" to the dominant academy.

proposals aimed at reconfiguring the educational and cultural foundations that underpin teaching practices (Correa, Pérez 2022; Gutiérrez 2004).

a. Social change: Pedagogy as resistance and emancipation

In the social dimension, these models function as instruments of resistance to historical structures of exclusion. They promote forms of education that is committed to local realities and to the transformation of unjust social conditions. Rather than approaching contexts of rurality, migration, ethno-racial exclusion, or structural poverty through compensatory assistance, these models emphasize the construction of collective pedagogical power (Cartuche et al. 2015; Dussán 2004). Examples include models centered on popular education, community-based learning, and alternative educational spaces, which incorporate principles of justice, solidarity, and reciprocity as central pillars of the learning process (Castillo et al. 2008; Rodríguez, Robaina 2017).

b. Epistemic change: Decolonizing knowledge

One of the most disruptive contributions of these models lies in their capacity to articulate epistemic change. They challenge the monopoly of Eurocentric knowledge systems and represent a shift toward plural, relational epistemologies rooted in experience and collective memory (De Sousa Santos 2010; Medina, Herrera 2017). This transformation involves the integration of Indigenous, peasant, Afro-descendant, and popular knowledge into curricula and assessment practices, leading to a redefinition of what is considered "valid knowledge" within educational spaces. In this sense, emerging PMs not only reconfigure what is taught but also whose perspectives are privileged and for whose benefit knowledge is constructed (Tedesco 1983; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, González-Faraco 2021).

c. Institutional change: Reorganizing educational structures

Although in many cases these emerging models have not been fully institutionalized, they nonetheless propose a reconfiguration of the school order and the logics of educational management. They promote horizontal structures, participatory decision-making among teachers and students, qualitative assessment, self-directed learning, and collaborative curriculum design. These transformations,

documented in the experiences of community schools, rural educational projects, and critical university initiatives, signal a shift in pedagogical authority away from institutional apparatuses and toward educational actors and their territories (Labadi et al. 2016; Sobrino 2014). This type of change is important for understanding how alternative models function as forms of subversive institutional practice (Avendaño 2013; Klimenko 2010).

These three dimensions—social, epistemic, and institutional—do not function in isolation but in deep interdependence. Meaningful social transformation requires the decolonization of knowledge, while epistemic reform demands new forms of institutional organization. Taken together, these dimensions point toward a horizon of radical and systemic change that challenges the very foundations of the modern education system and paves the way for new pedagogical configurations guided by justice, dignity, and the recognition of diversity (Zuluaga 1987; Fernández-Río et al. 2021).

Rupture with traditional models and implications for educational transformation

The emerging PMs identified in this study represent not merely a discursive renewal but a structural rupture with the foundational principles that have historically sustained traditional PMs. This rupture is evident in how learning subjects, educational aims, and knowledge dynamics are conceptualized, implying a profound reconfiguration of the role of the school and educational institutions as a whole.

Whereas traditional PMs have privileged a vertical logic characterized by unidirectional knowledge transmission and the standardization of processes, alternative models are grounded in horizontality, the co-construction of learning, and epistemic plurality. This transformation is reflected in a shift from teaching-centered approaches to meaningful, contextual, and situated learning, in which students cease to be passive recipients and instead become political and cognitive agents in their own formative processes (Avendaño, Parada 2011; Bohórquez-Chacón, Amaya-Torrado 2005).

At the curricular level, these models challenge rigid structures of decontextualized content by promoting dynamic and flexible curricula that integrate community knowledge, local experiences, and non-Western epistemologies (Cartuche et al. 2015;

Rodríguez-Izquierdo, González-Faraco 2021). This curricular openness contests dominant epistemic hegemonies as well as affirms the right of communities to construct their own educational visions, grounded in their worldviews and life projects (Tedesco 1983; De Sousa Santos 2010).

Moreover, the practical implications of this rupture extend beyond the classroom, affecting institutional design, pedagogical relationships, and teacher education. Some studies describe experiences in which the PM is not imposed by academic authorities but instead emerges from collective dialogue among educational actors, including students, families, and communities (Labadi et al. 2016; Merino 1993). In such cases, pedagogical change becomes a means of democratizing educational spaces.

In the realm of educational policy, these proposals critique the tendency to adopt standardized reforms dictated by international agencies or neoliberal agendas. In contrast, emerging models advocate for pedagogies rooted in social context—models that acknowledge historical inequalities and seek to transform the structural conditions shaping the lives of educational subjects (Klimenko 2010; Vásquez 2012).

In summary, the rupture proposed by these models is not merely conceptual; it entails a restructuring of the relationships among knowledge, power, and subjectivity within the educational field. By advancing contextual, relational, dialogical, and emancipatory pedagogies, emerging models offer real possibilities for educational transformation—ones that not only respond to contemporary challenges but also anticipate them from an ethical, plural, and situated perspective (Correa, Pérez 2022; García-Cordero, Buitrago-López 2017).

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a fundamental tension within the PMs analyzed: while some reproduce traditional structures rooted in Eurocentric logics, others emerge as alternative and decolonial proposals that seek to transform educational practices in Ibero-America. This section offers a critical reflection structured around three central axes: the coloniality of knowledge in PMs, the gap between theory

and practice, and the challenges involved in constructing a genuinely emancipatory pedagogy.

First, with regard to the coloniality of knowledge and epistemic hegemony in PMs, the data show that while 56.12% of the models incorporate DT, 43.88% do not. This pattern may be interpreted as a form of resistance to technocratic homogenization (Selwyn 2019). However, the issue goes beyond technology. Most PMs are still grounded in Western paradigms, even when they are labeled as "emergent." As De Sousa Santos (2010) argues, the coloniality of knowledge manifests itself through the exclusion of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and popular epistemologies, thereby limiting the decolonial potential of these models. For example, only 8% of the identified models are explicitly linked to critical or decolonial pedagogical currents (as shown in Table 3), while theoretical approaches continue to dominate over empirical or reflective ones. It is important to note that coloniality is not merely a historical legacy but a prevailing structure that determines which forms of knowledge are legitimized in education.

Second, a gap is evident between decolonial discourse and pedagogical practice. Although the theoretical framework emphasizes the role of PMs as tools for emancipation (Zuluaga 1987; Correa, Pérez 2022), the findings reveal a significant conceptual dissonance: 52% of the documents do not define what is meant by "pedagogical model," which suggests a superficial appropriation of the concept. This points to a misrepresentation and dilution of the PM construct within the design and discourse of educational initiatives.

There is also limited institutionalization of decolonial models, such as community-based or Indigenous knowledge-centered models, which rarely extend beyond localized experiences (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, González-Faraco 2021). This reveals a paradox: while traditional models are criticized, hegemonic educational structures, such as rigid curricula and standardized assessment systems, continue to dominate. For instance, the Ignatian PM (Spadaro 2007) and other models developed in religious or university institutions (e.g., the UNA Model [Hernández-Ching 2018]) often reproduce hierarchical power relations, thereby contradicting the principle of horizontality central to the decolonial turn. Genuine decoloniality requires a departure from colonial institutional logics, a challenge that few

pedagogical models successfully meet. This may be partly explained by the close historical and cultural ties with Eurocentric countries such as Spain and collaborative projects that have been developed, as well as the strong academic links established through Latin American graduate students pursuing postgraduate studies in Spain.

On the other hand, the PMs analyzed demonstrate progress across three dimensions: social, epistemic, and institutional, but continue to face structural obstacles, including forms of decolonial tokenism. While many documents reference "interculturality" or "community participation," they rarely explain how these principles are concretely integrated into classroom practices. Only 10% of the models are disciplinary and explicitly linked to local knowledge. Moreover, although theorists such as De Zubiría (2007) and Flórez (1994) are frequently cited, their classificatory frameworks do not always challenge the underlying coloniality of education, indicating a continued reliance on Eurocentric paradigms.

Given that decoloniality entails a radical rejection of Western universals, including imposed educational models, truly transformative PMs must:
- incorporate epistemologies of the South in a non-tokenistic manner (e.g., quilombola, Mixe, or Andean pedagogies);
- decentralize knowledge production by giving voice to marginalized communities in the design of PMs (Argüello 2016);
- challenge educational neoliberalism, as many so-called "emergent" PMs are co-opted by reform agendas promoted by international agencies.

PMs in Ibero-America thus stand at a crossroads: while some continue to reproduce colonial logics, others, although in the minority, embody pedagogical practices that are truly disruptive. To achieve the goal of promoting new, contextually grounded pedagogical rationalities, it is necessary to deepen participatory research involving community actors, critically examine the fetishization of the "emergent" (since not all alternative models are decolonial), and advocate for educational policies that support situated models, such as those developed in rural or Indigenous contexts (Cartuche et al. 2015). Without a critical stance toward neoliberalism, decolonial PMs risk remaining marginalized.

At the same time, it is important to reflect critically on the role of technological monopolies. The decision to use Google Scholar (GS) as the sole data source for this literature review reveals a fundamental paradox in contemporary educational research: on the one hand, GS is the most widely used and accessible academic platform worldwide (Haddaway et al. 2015); on the other, its algorithms reinforce structural biases that render peripheral and situated forms of knowledge invisible. Searches for "pedagogical model" primarily retrieve what is most accessible in dominant visibility circuits and thereby exclude non-indexed knowledge. Many decolonial, Indigenous, or community-based models are not published in indexed journals but instead circulate in alternative formats such as reports, locally produced pedagogical materials, or oral traditions.

Despite being applied in Latin American contexts, many PMs continue to follow a Eurocentric rhetoric, with only occasional gestures toward epistemologies of the Global South that might revalue local knowledge. Nevertheless, emergent and decolonial PMs in Ibero-America offer a transformative proposal that challenges traditional educational paradigms by prioritizing context, epistemic plurality, and social emancipation. Although their diversity and conceptual richness constitute clear strengths, their implementation faces challenges related to systematization, scalability, and structural barriers. To consolidate their impact, it is essential to strengthen empirical research, promote teacher training in decolonial approaches, and foster educational policies that recognize the cultural and epistemic diversity of the region. These models reshape education as well as open pathways toward a more just and equitable society, in line with the aspirations of epistemologies of the South.

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to analyze how emerging PMs in Ibero-America shape forms of educational change that challenge traditional frameworks and promote new, contextually situated pedagogical rationalities from a decolonial perspective. The study found that in the most cited Ibero-American academic literature, there is a growing presence of PMs that, while not always explicitly labeled as "decolonial," function as critical and situated alternatives to

traditional models. These models are characterized by their contextual orientation, epistemic plurality, and commitment to social transformation. The analysis also revealed that the dimensions of change articulated by these approaches—social, epistemic, and institutional—do not operate in isolation but are interwoven in ways that question hegemonic educational structures and propose new ways of conceptualizing knowledge, teaching, and schooling.

Among the most significant findings is the diversity of theoretical foundations underlying emerging models, their connection to community-based pedagogies, and their grounding in resistance-driven educational experiences, particularly in rural, Indigenous, and marginalized urban contexts. These models represent a rupture with the vertical and technocratic logic of the modern education system, opening possibilities for reconfiguring curricula, teacher–student relationships, assessment practices, and institutional management. At the same time, a persistent tension was identified between critical discourse and practical implementation, as well as the continued reproduction of Eurocentric theoretical frameworks, even within proposals that present themselves as alternatives.

A limitation of this study lies in its exclusive reliance on Google Scholar as a data source. While this allowed access to highly cited and influential literature and made algorithmic biases visible, it also reproduced certain structural biases inherent in the academic field. Accordingly, future research on decolonial pedagogies should engage with situated pedagogical productions circulating in non-indexed spaces, such as community reports, non-conventional materials, or documents in Indigenous languages. Additionally, the absence of clear and consistent definitions of the concept of the "pedagogical model" in a significant portion of the analyzed documents limited the possibilities for comparative and critical systematization.

These findings open new avenues for research, including: (a) the systematization of decolonial educational experiences led by communities or non-institutional actors; (b) the analysis of decolonial teacher education and its relationship to emerging models; (c) the examination of these models' impact on curriculum development and educational policy; and (d) the design of critical methodologies for evaluating PMs that incorporate contextual, ethical, and community-based criteria.

In conclusion, emerging PMs in Ibero-America represent a true opportunity for educational transformation, provided that they are understood not as passing conceptual trends but as ethical, political, and epistemological commitments deeply rooted in their territories and the communities that sustain them. Although they face significant structural challenges, from institutional co-optation to epistemic erasure, their existence and expansion reflect an urgent need to rethink the purposes and the means of education in the region. As an exercise in critical reconstruction, this study seeks to denaturalize the concept of PMs, expose their colonial dimension when framed as universal, and contribute to the construction of a more just, plural, and emancipatory educational horizon.

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Art-Based Research in Pedagogy in the Context of Individual and Institutional Change: A Study on the Mandala as Expression of School Difficulties

Art-Based Research w pedagogice wobec zmiany indywidualnej i instytucjonalnej. Badania nad mandalą w kontekście wyrażania trudności szkolnych

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to explore how the process of creating mandalas can support young people in coping with school-related difficulties. The study considers this process at both the individual and institutional levels, focusing on students' emotional and reflective experiences as well as on its potential to enrich school-based support practices. Such phenomena can be captured thanks to the evocative nature of the Art-Based Research (ABR) framework, which is presented here as a new, creative research perspective in pedagogy.

The article discusses the role of the mandala in art therapy, including its Jungian interpretation, its use as a means of expression, and its function as an intermediary strategy for helping young people cope with difficulties in the school environment. The proposed research

model integrated various forms of artistic expression, including visual, poetic, musical, and movement-based forms. The study relied on participatory and projective methods, emphasizing the importance of artistic translation, recipients' responses, and the role of the researcher as both participant and interpreter of the process.

The results indicated the potential of art therapy using mandalas to reveal and organize inner experiences. The findings suggest that the process of creating a mandala by people facing difficulties in the school environment serves not only as a tool for self-understanding but also becomes a mediator in their process of coping with challenges. The creative, participatory, and reflective nature of ABR promotes knowledge of the studied reality and its transformation through a reciprocal process of evocation and strengthened dialogue between theory and practice.

ABSTRAKT

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest zbadanie, w jaki sposób proces tworzenia mandali może wspierać młodych ludzi w radzeniu sobie z trudnościami szkolnymi. Omówione w artykule badanie uwzględnia ten proces zarówno na poziomie indywidualnym, jak i instytucjonalnym, koncentrując się na emocjonalnych i refleksyjnych doświadczeniach uczniów, a także na potencjale wzbogacania szkolnych praktyk wsparcia młodych ludzi. Zjawiska te można uchwycić dzięki ewokacyjnemu charakterowi badań opartych na sztuce (Art-Based Research – ABR), które zostały ukazane w tym artykule jako nowa, kreatywna perspektywa badawcza w pedagogice.

Artykuł przedstawia rolę mandali w arteterapii, w tym jej jungowską interpretację, jej zastosowanie jako środek ekspresji oraz jako strategii pośredniczącej w pomaganiu młodzieży w radzeniu sobie z trudnościami w środowisku szkolnym. Proponowany model badawczy zakładał integrację różnych form ekspresji artystycznej – wizualnej, poetyckiej, muzycznej i ruchowej. Badania oparto na metodach partycypacyjnych i projekcyjnych, podkreślając znaczenie przekładu artystycznego, reakcji odbiorcy oraz roli badacza jako uczestnika i interpretatora procesu. Uzyskane wyniki wskazują na potencjał arteterapii z wykorzystaniem mandali w ujawnianiu i porządkowaniu doświadczeń wewnętrznych. Wnioski z badania wskazały, że proces tworzenia mandali przez osoby zmagające się z trudnościami w środowisku szkolnym służy nie tylko samopoznaniu, ale staje się także mediatorem w radzeniu sobie z trudnościami. Kreatywny, partycypacyjny i refleksyjny charakter

ABR sprzyja zarówno poznaniu badanej rzeczywistości, jak i jej trans-
formacji poprzez dwukierunkowy proces ewokacji i wzmacniania dia-
logu między teorią a praktyką.

Introduction

The creation of both art and scientific work is driven by the desire
to find meaning, order, and opportunities for creative expression.
Aspects that seem to separate these disciplines—such as the sub-
jectivity associated with art and the objectivity associated with sci-
ence—are, according to Frances Kaplan, not what should truly dis-
tinguish them. In Kaplan's view, subjectivity and objectivity should be
conceived of as existing on a continuum, and complete objectivity is
impossible to achieve despite scholars' efforts. Identifying the points
of convergence between science and art, as proposed by Kaplan
(2000: 14), makes it possible to integrate theory with art therapy
practice and to study the therapeutic process more comprehensively.

Among the new research approaches developed within pedago-
gy, one notable model is Arts-Based Research (ABR), proposed by
Patricia Leavy (2018a). According to Leavy, ABR brings together
multiple research traditions that share the use of art as a meaning-
ful component of the scientific process. Art may take various forms,
such as music, poetry, or film, which the researcher treats as distinct
methods (Leavy 2018b: 72–73). Because of their unique features,
these forms create and convey symbolism while also fostering critical
attitudes and raising awareness about a given topic. Leavy (2018a: 4)
and other scholars view ABR not only as a set of methodological
tools but as a new paradigm, which differs from both quantitative
and qualitative research.

From an ontological point of view, Meng Tian (2023: 12–13)
describes ABR in educational research as adopting a perspective sim-
ilar to relational materialism, in which the creative process is under-
stood as a space of cooperation between humans and non-human
elements—artistic materials, the school environment, tools, gestures,
and language. According to the author, meanings do not exist only
in the minds of participants but emerge through their engagement
in artistic activity, which becomes a tool for epistemic insight. From
Tian's (2023: 14) perspective, to address the increasingly complex

challenges in education, researchers can no longer rely on traditional methods, as their reductive nature makes it difficult to reveal how interdependent factors create meaning in institutional contexts.

This article presents an original concept of practicing ABR as an example of a methodological path for researchers interested in combining scientific reflection with the creative process. The proposed approach is illustrated through a study that seeks to answer the question of how young people coping with difficulties in the school environment experience the process of creating mandalas. Artistic creation can foster self-awareness and critical reflection among students, while its exhibition to a wider audience—namely, the school community—has the potential to inspire others by opening a space for understanding their experiences. In this way, the article demonstrates how ABR can support a transition from individual perspectives to institutional narratives.

Theoretical basis

Art can have an educational, formative, and therapeutic dimension. Paweł Skrzydlewski (2025) describes the educational and formative mission of art as becoming evident when the artwork itself—and the encounter with it—leads a person to catharsis. From his perspective, art can be considered part of culture and a tool of classical education only when it is based on the truth about the human person and oriented toward genuine good, not only toward entertainment. It engages the whole human being—intellect, will, emotions, senses, imagination, memory, and social relations—and thus offers a uniquely holistic educational experience (Skrzydlewski 2025: 24–25).

Art therapy, understood as therapy through art, is not easy to define, as the term can be interpreted in either a narrower or broader sense. Its meaning depends on whether it refers only to the visual arts or extends to other artistic activities. The most important aspect of art therapy, which unites all its forms, is that art is treated not as an end in itself but as a means of achieving positive change (Gładyszewska-Cylulko 2011: 8). The functioning of art therapy in school settings has been described, for instance, by Beth Gonzalez-Dolginko (2020), drawing on the experiences of eight practicing art therapists. These professionals used art to support students in recognizing

and expressing emotions, improving peer interactions, increasing acceptance of special education students, and strengthening a sense of community in the classroom. Notably, art therapy interventions also helped identify children with emotional, behavioral, and learning difficulties through the analysis of their artwork, which enabled early intervention, including referral to specialists and—in some cases—hospitalization.

One of the therapeutic tools used in art therapy is the mandala. The term comes from Sanskrit, meaning *circle*, considered in Indian beliefs to be a sacred space (Buchalter 2013: 11). It is also a composition whose center, according to Sarah Corey (2012: 15), can be perceived as radiating outward, creating a luminous effect. She emphasizes that many cultures recognize the center of the mandala as a symbol of the place from which all creation began, and therefore humans may metaphysically connect with it. The Jungian understanding of the mandala is the theoretical foundation and inspiration for the research project described in this article. Carl Gustav Jung (1975: 6114) regarded this symbolic structure as a work that gradually emerges through the use of active imagination in situations of psychological imbalance. In Jung's view, the mandala represents the central point of the psyche, which connects and organizes all its parts, and its creation fosters inner integration (Miller 2005: 166).

In art therapy, the mandala is treated as a safe way of expressing emotional states and beliefs, as its creators often feel comfortable working in a circular, clearly structured form (Buchalter 2013: 11). In mandala-based art therapy, Susan Buchalter (2013: 15) proposes various artistic techniques, such as drawing and three-dimensional collages made from feathers, film posters, beads, and CDs. This diversity of methods is indicative of the different purposes for which mandalas are used, such as reducing anxiety or building self-awareness, which Buchalter (2013: 109) understands as insight into one's desires, beliefs, values, strengths, and weaknesses.

Creating mandalas as a tool for self-discovery can support young people in coping with difficulties in the school environment. According to Elżbieta Talik (2011: 128–129), many young people experience stressful situations at school related to learning difficulties, lack of motivation, problems in teacher–student relationships, high expectations from guardians, and peer competition. Their coping strategies

may involve monitoring the activity of the stressor, seeking information about it, attempting to control it, distancing themselves from it, or reinterpreting difficulties and seeking support (ibid.: 129). These strategies can be supported through visual arts. In Jungian therapy, images express fundamental aspects of human experience and act as mediators between the person and their problem, creating psychological distance from individual difficulties (Edwards 2004: 33).

In the literature, several experimental studies demonstrate the impact of mandalas on reducing anxiety in young people. These include studies by Yufang Bi and Yongfang Liu (2019), Leslie Becerra et al. (2022), Nadezhda Kostyunina and Albina Drozdikova--Zaripova (2016), and Anahita Khodabakhshi Koolaee and Faezeh Darestani-Farahani (2020). These authors identified benefits of art creation such as reduced anxiety, improved social skills, and increased motivation. However, the predominantly quantitative approach of most studies does not reveal the full scope of the phenomenon associated with creating mandalas. While confirming the effectiveness of this symbolic form in art therapy, such studies fail to capture the creative process itself and the unique characteristics of this type of artistic expression. The original research described in this article and utilizing ABR may help fill this gap by providing a multidimensional analysis of students' mandala-creation process and offering researchers an innovative approach to scientific practice. Moreover, the context in which the artworks are presented will also be significant: students who often struggle with school-related difficulties will have the chance to share their creations with the entire school community, which may shape both how their work is received and how the research findings are interpreted.

Community-engaging art has been described by Dariusz Kubinowski (2015: 346–347) as a process of creative collaboration involving professionals as well as members of local communities. Their crucial role lies in the creative process itself, not just in its final outcome. According to Kubinowski, community art develops on three levels—geographical, relational, and identity-based—allowing participants to express their experiences and emotions in a group context. He also emphasizes the role of the community animator or artist as a facilitator of the creative process. This perspective closely parallels the principles of ABR, in which the researcher likewise

plays a supportive and interpretive role, enabling participants to construct meaning through artistic engagement.

Research methods and tools

The subject of research within pedagogy, according to Janusz Gnitecki (2008: 36), may include all activities, processes, and conditions that foster human development. This understanding of individual growth is associated with gaining greater insight into one's relationship with the world, as well as an increased sense of agency and control over one's own behavior. The original study focuses on supporting students' development through an art therapy intervention. The research problem, formulated as a question, involves understanding how young people experiencing school difficulties—who constitute the subjects of the research—experience the process of creating a mandala.

Each project developed using the ABR methodology has a unique structure and orientation, shaped by the researcher's individual communication style. The analyses generated within the project should not be viewed as separate, but as an organic and continuous flow of information that interacts with other research activities (Leavy 2018a: 10). It is important to note that the researcher does not *collect* data but *generates* it, as they actively participate in its creation through the research project (Leavy 2018b: 77). The original research project involved conducting and evaluating art therapy workshops. These workshops took place at a Kraków high school and consisted of two one-and-a-half–hour sessions. Their aim was to provide students with multidimensional self-exploration through various forms of artistic expression based on the mandala and to equip them with a tool to support coping with difficulties experienced in the school environment.

The applied research practices were based on visual arts and fell within the category of participatory methods. These include drawing, painting, photography, collage, puppetry, and many other activities (Leavy 2018b: 314). They were treated as data, providing access to tacit knowledge. Such knowledge, due to its symbolic character, reveals internal experience, enabling it to be understood and given meaning (Leavy 2018b: 340). The tools used in the research project

included art therapy interventions presented through various forms of artistic expression in the process of creating mandalas—based on movement and music, visual arts, and poetry. Additionally, relaxation, drawing, painting, assemblage, and blackout poetry techniques were employed. *Assemblage* involves the use of objects to create multidimensional collages (Rajna 2013: 96). *Blackout poetry* consists of obscuring words in a pre-existing prose text so that a poem emerges from the remaining visible words (Ramser 2020: 3).

An intensified and multimodal researcher presence was maintained during the observation of the students' creative process. His reflections were recorded in a research journal, guided primarily by intuition and moral sensitivity. Given the unique characteristics of the workshops, the following criteria for analysis were distinguished:

- the student's choice of mandala and its placement in the classroom—which could indicate what the student was feeling at that moment and what needs they had;
- the choice of objects used to create the assemblage and their arrangement—which could signal what was important to the student at the time;
- the symbolism of shapes, colors, and numbers in self-portraits and visualization exercises—which could suggest how the student perceived themselves and their relationship with their own body;
- identification of the lyrical subject in the poem and interpretation of its feelings—the emotions expressed by the lyrical subject could reflect the emotions of the student;
- determining a distinguishing feature for each participant through poetic exploration of a common motif across all their works—which could provide a new perspective on the participant's artistic output (Bułat 2024: 34).

The analysis of mandalas from a Jungian perspective utilizes criteria inspired by aspects identified by Ryszarda Bernacka and Ewa Turska (2011) and Susan Fincher (1994), who based their work on Jung's writings. These authors emphasize the significance of the colors and shapes used in a mandala, as well as their number.

To evaluate the workshops and gather feedback from participants on the process of creating mandalas, an exhibition of the students' works produced during the sessions was organized. The school

community took part in the vernissage. Visitors attached notes with comments to the exhibition space to share their reflections. The participant's encounter with others' responses to their creative process is an important element of Jungian art therapy. Jung introduced the concept of the *persona*, which reflects how individuals are perceived by others. The *persona* serves as a link between the subjective inner world and the objective external reality (Swan-Foster 2018: 61). Its dual function enables self-reflection and personal growth and fosters transformation at the institutional level by raising social awareness and empathy. According to Leavy (2018b: 368), the audience's reaction to a given artwork is an important criterion for the analysis and evaluation of a research project because art, through its evocative nature, has the capacity to elicit memories, evoke emotions, and provoke change. Moreover, it allows research findings to reach audiences beyond academia.

Additionally, the study employed the aesthetic criterion proposed by Leavy (2018b: 364–379), which concerns the extent to which a particular work captures the essence of the issue it addresses, allowing for a broader understanding of it and revealing its impact in the audience's response. Characteristic features were sought in the mandalas created by workshop participants through original poetic research. The use of this method corresponds with the creative strategies of artistic translation identified by Elizabeth Manders and Gioia Chilton (2013), in which one form of art is represented through another to add meaning and reveal the essence of the subject (Leavy 2018b: 293). Such a practice was used, for example, by Carolyn Jongeward (2018), who created visual portraits of her participants to convey the complexity of their personalities and experiences. Analogously, the intention in this study was to present the profiles of the workshop participants through original artistic creations.

In ABR, art should be present at every stage of the research process, from problem formulation, data generation, and analysis to interpretation and evaluation of results (Leavy 2018b: 108). Artistic activities are not merely illustrations or additions to scholarly content but an equal and integral component, helping to capture hidden meanings and experiences.

Research results

This section presents a summary of the most important research findings—those that most accurately reflect the issues under study. A complete and more detailed analysis, along with the artistic works of the participants subjected to scholarly reflection, is presented in the author's thesis (Bułat 2024). The school counselor assisted in selecting study participants. Seven girls took part in the workshops, and their artistic works were analyzed and interpreted. For anonymity, the participants were given new names and artistic pseudonyms. Below is a summary of the analysis and interpretation of the works of three students, the only ones who attended all workshop sessions.

Iwona (Safe Penguin)

To summarize the analysis and interpretation of Iwona's artistic works, their characteristic feature is the recurring theme of the need for autonomy and a sense of control. This motif was visible in the assemblage that she created, in which a helmeted penguin was moving beyond a designated area, suggested by the perspective that she chose to photograph her work; in the self-portrait, where a web was being woven, signaling the independent realization of a new project, and where a large eye symbolizing the "Self" was awakening; and in the mandala depicting visualization experiences, where a swing detached from the ground appeared.

> In her works, Iwona indicated her needs and expressed, through the assemblage with the helmeted penguin leaving the area, her readiness to cross boundaries and change, provided that she felt comfortable and safe. The motifs present in her work take on new meaning in light of her struggles with Tourette's syndrome. The tics she experiences may draw others' attention and heighten a sense of being observed, as conveyed through the self-portrait mandala. From her expressed need for autonomy, one may infer her desire to become independent and gain control over the disorder. Trust and care, symbolized by the green color used in most of her works, may relate to her feelings toward those who support her when tics occur. When symptoms of Tourette's appear at school, she may go to the nurse's office or visit the school psychologist and counselor, who provide her with support, as the researcher learned through conversations with these professionals. From the conclusion that Iwona illustrates the need for autonomy in the context of illness, one can infer

that art therapy activities based on mandalas—and using techniques such as assemblage, self-portrait, visualization experiences, and blackout poetry—may serve to reveal participants' needs and help them cope with their disorder. (Bułat 2024: 46, own translation)

Karolina (Colorful Jupiter)

Summarizing the analysis and interpretation of Karolina's artworks, her creativity—composed of a mandala, a self-portrait, and a visualization of herself as a tree—is characterized by the use of many colorful, vivid, and bright elements. From the complexity of her visual works and her assemblage, which included several objects representing her passions, one can infer her need to search for what fascinates her most and her attempt to combine different aspects of her personality into a whole. This suggests that art therapy activities involving mandala creation and techniques, such as assemblage, self-portrait, visualization, and blackout poetry, may help her make sense of the multiplicity that she discovers within herself. Karolina's poem revealed that the process of self-discovery is accompanied by fears, inferred from the lyrical subject who kept away from others out of fear of being hurt. This implies that art therapy activities involving blackout poetry may facilitate the expression of participants' fears regarding acceptance. (Bułat 2024: 54, own translation)

Julia (Tempted Tiger)

Summarizing the analysis and interpretation of Julia's works, her creativity is characterized by the use of sharp-edged shapes, visible in the mandala, the self-portrait, and the visualization of herself as a tree. Julia eagerly created and titled her works, but she rarely verbalized her experiences. However, through the creative process, she was able to express the intensely felt emotions that can be inferred from the titles she gave her pieces, such as *Explosion of Feeling, Hunger, Thirst, and Apathy,* and *I Was Afraid, and Then I Was Even More Afraid.* From Julia's works, such as the assemblage of personal objects showing a human restraining a tiger from temptations and the self-portrait featuring the motif of being tempted by a snake, one can infer that the intense emotions she experiences often have an ambivalent character, that she feels controlled, and that she must constantly restrain her desires. This leads to the implication that art therapy activities involving mandala creation may provide a space for expressing what is difficult to verbalize, either because it has a contradictory nature for the participant or because it evokes discomfort. (Bułat 2024: 62, own translation)

The recipients' reactions to the students' artworks, collected during the post-workshop exhibition, were categorized into four groups of associations: emotional, scientific, those related to objects/phenomena, and those expressing appreciation. To distinguish these categories, collages were created (see Figures 1, 2, 3, and 4).

Figure 1. Collage – emotional associations
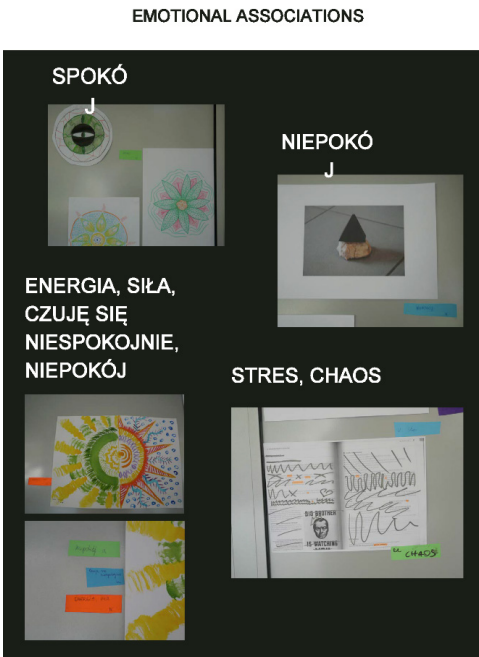
Figure 2. Collage – scientific associations
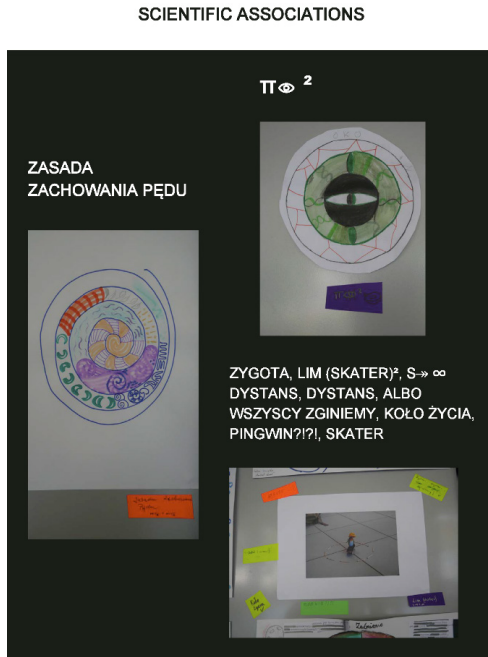
Figure 3. Collage – associations with objects/phenomena
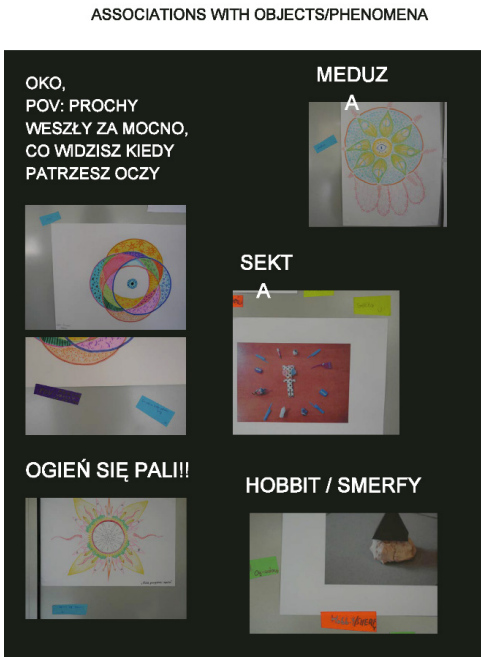
Figure 4. Collage – associations expressing appreciation
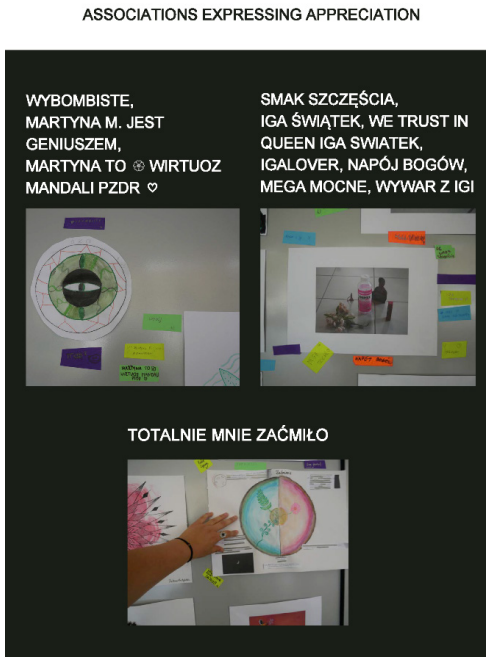
Through the translation made possible by the ABR methodology, poetry was created that offered a new perspective on the girls' works. Below is an example of a poem based on Julia's piece:

Radiant Art

She intensely felt
every ray
Was light-sensitive
and didn't want to darken
Like the tiger
striped with black.

Conclusions

Addressing the research question of how young people experiencing difficulties in school perceive the process of creating mandalas, the results indicate that this activity supports self-discovery and helps students cope with everyday school challenges. Through self-reflection, mediated by their artworks, the workshop participants gained a space to identify their needs, fears, and difficulties. Thus, creating mandalas became both a form of expression and a tool for understanding and working through these experiences.

Below is a summary of the most important conclusions emerging from the participants' work:

- what gives them comfort and a sense of safety,
- what gives them a sense of belonging and community,
- what is important to them,
- what helps them feel relaxed,
- what they are passionate about and whether it is easy for them to share themselves with others,
- whether they feel independent or controlled, and their need for autonomy,
- their sense of being different and fears related to being accepted by others,
- duality and variability of nature as part of their development,
- existential fear as an inseparable element of reality (Bułat 2024: 96–97).

The use of ABR made it possible to access content that often remains unexpressed in words yet may be crucial for understanding the participants' experiences, needs, and inner resources. Through artistic translation—in the form of research poetry—and through the exhibition of students' works, the project influenced both the creators and the audience, opening space for reflection and mutual inspiration in the institutional context. This demonstrates that the creative, participatory, and reflective nature of ABR promotes not only an understanding of the studied reality but also its transformation, strengthening the dialogue between theory and practice. I believe that schools should provide students with more opportunities for artistic expression and for presenting their work to a wider audience. Referring to Beth Gonzalez-Dolginko's (2020) research,

the presence of specialists trained to use art in therapeutic work significantly enhances the possibilities for pedagogical and psychological support in schools.

During the synthesis of the empirical material, a need arose for an additional and more substantial account of the participant's experiences—one that would be more than an analytical description. In line with the spirit of the ABR methodology, where creativity becomes a form of knowledge, a poem was created to summarize the work of all the participants, entitled "About 7 Flowers."

About 7 Flowers

Somewhere there was
that safe place
in the grass
among the leaves
sometimes in the sun
sometimes in the shade
and sometimes even
deep inside a shell
The search went on
water drops appeared
until a flower bloomed
And though this flower
could be picked
and tempted itself
it did not always wish to be
where it was
nor did it know why
it was
At last it found a way
to grow among many
without losing
its own color

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The Art of Healing with Laughter: The Transformative Potential of Humorous Interactions

Sztuka leczenia śmiechem. Transformacyjny potencjał humorystycznych interakcji

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes humorous interactions in hospitals as a deliberate psychosocial intervention that extends beyond the function of "entertainment" or momentary "distraction." The starting point is the recognition of a gap between the widely described benefits of such practices and their marginal status in clinical contexts. The aim is to explain how humor initiates change in the experience of hospitalization and what tools are employed to activate it. A qualitative analysis of the subject literature and practice-based accounts was conducted, embedding concepts within health psychology, drama therapy, and humor theories, while taking into account the specific characteristics of hospital-based interactional work.

The analysis demonstrated that humorous encounters modify the course of hospitalization in several dimensions: emotion regulation through legitimization and transformation; restoration of agency; bodily and behavioral activation; reinterpretation of hospital space; strengthening of child–parent–staff relationships; and facilitation of medical procedures. Importantly, the effects of humorous interactions

are long-term: visits are anticipated, remembered, and incorporated into coping strategies, creating a narrative "trace" in the patient's experience. The article proposes a conceptual framework for the transformative function of humor in hospitals, along with practical implications: integrating these interventions into standards of care, training medical staff in basic humorous communication, and granting systemic recognition to their role in emotional and relational support.

ABSTRAKT

Artykuł analizuje interakcje humorystyczne w szpitalu jako celową interwencję psychospołeczną, wykraczającą poza funkcję "rozrywki" czy doraźnego "odwrócenia uwagi". Punktem wyjścia jest rozpoznanie luki między szeroko opisywanymi korzyściami a marginalnym traktowaniem tego rodzaju działań w praktyce klinicznej. Celem jest wyjaśnienie, jak humor inicjuje zmianę w doświadczeniu hospitalizacji oraz jakimi narzędziami jest ona uruchamiana. Jako metodę badań przyjęto jakościową analizę literatury przedmiotu i opisów praktyk, z osadzeniem pojęć w psychologii zdrowia, dramaterapii i teoriach humoru oraz z uwzględnieniem specyfiki szpitalnej pracy interakcyjnej.

Przeprowadzona analiza pokazała, że humorystyczne spotkania modyfikują przebieg hospitalizacji w kilku wymiarach: regulacji emocji poprzez uprawomocnianie i przekształcanie, odzyskiwania podmiotowości, aktywizacji cielesno-behawioralnej, reinterpretacji przestrzeni szpitalnej, wzmocnienia relacji dziecko–rodzic–personel oraz ułatwiania procedur. Co istotne, efekty interakcji humorystycznych mają charakter długofalowy: wizyty są antycypowane, pamiętane i włączane do strategii radzenia sobie, tworząc narracyjny "ślad" w doświadczeniu pacjenta. Efektem opracowania jest propozycja ramowego ujęcia transformacyjnego działania humoru w szpitalu oraz implikacje dla praktyki: włączanie tych interwencji w standard opieki, szkolenie personelu w podstawach komunikacji humorystycznej i systemowe uznanie ich roli we wsparciu emocjonalnym i relacyjnym.

Introduction

Humor has accompanied humanity for centuries as a natural way of coping with illness, suffering, and stress. In health psychology and medicine, laughter is recognized as having therapeutic properties: it strengthens adaptive resources and opens space for deeper emotional

and cognitive transformations (Ford et al. 2011; Gelkopf 2011; Dionigi et al. 2012; Lalantika, Yuvaraj 2020; Wojtaszak 2014). As early as the mid-20th century, the scientific foundations of these observations were established by the pioneers of gelotology—Norman Cousins (1979) and William F. Fry (1992)—who described the psychophysiological mechanisms of laughter and its therapeutic potential.

In clinical practice, humor-based activities take multiple forms—from subtle wordplay, to playful exchanges, to performative interactions—and may be initiated by artists, therapists, volunteers, or medical staff. Since the early development of such practices, two traditions have emerged that continue to coexist and intersect: one associated with the work of professional clowns or volunteers (Finlay et al. 2013; Raviv 2014), and the other inspired by Hunter "Patch" Adams, in which doctors and nurses incorporated humor into everyday practice (Adams 2002; Leef, Hallas 2013).

The hospital clowning tradition remains the most extensively documented. By creating situations that evoke laughter and joy, hospital clowns carry out interventions that empower patients and their families while reshaping perceptions of the hospital environment (Koller, Gryski 2008; Linge 2008, 2013; Ford et al. 2014; Dionigi, Canestrari 2016; Sato et al. 2016; Karnieli-Miller et al. 2023). Research shows that such practices support patients across diverse contexts—from pediatrics, oncology, and psychiatry to palliative care and field hospitals (Sato et al. 2016; Ofer, Keisari 2022; Savage et al. 2017). The presence of performers and volunteers is evident not only in hospital rooms but also in emergency wards, waiting areas, rehabilitation units, invasive examinations, and surgical procedures (Dionigi, Canestrari 2016).

Despite abundant empirical evidence of their positive outcomes (Dionigi, Canestrari 2016; Xin et al. 2024), humor-based interventions are still frequently treated as an "addition" to care— enjoyable, yet secondary to "real" medical work (Gray et al. 2021; Savage et al. 2017). Scholarly and clinical discourse has long highlighted the lack of full recognition for these forms of support. Although the impact of clowns on patients is well documented, they often operate at the margins of healthcare structures—perceived as guests, entertainers, or a colorful presence on the ward, rather than legitimate members of the therapeutic system (Glasper et al. 2007; Langemeijer 2012;

Ford et al. 2014). As many as 38.9% of clowns have reported a low level of professional recognition (Barkmann et al. 2013), while some medical staff remain skeptical, prejudiced, or insufficiently informed about the role of clowning as an intervention (Ford et al. 2014; van Venrooij, Barnhoorn 2017; Karnieli-Miller et al. 2023).

In the Polish context, this lack of recognition is particularly evident. As Przemysław Grzybowski (2012: 13) notes, laughter therapy is often reduced to an ephemeral "fashion" following the film *Patch Adams* and has not secured a lasting place in academic reflection. Hospital clowns are sometimes perceived as "a group of enthusiasts" acting intuitively, without solid theoretical foundations—a perception that, in the eyes of some medical professionals, undermines the legitimacy of such work. At the same time, the author's own experiences highlight the profound meaning of these practices: encounters with patients and staff reveal the scale of emotional burden and the effort undertaken by clowns, showing that humor can become a vital resource in confronting suffering (Grzybowski 2012).

This ambivalence—between well-documented outcomes and insufficient recognition—reveals an important research gap. Previous studies have primarily examined whether clowning produces benefits beyond momentary amusement. Much less attention has been devoted to how the process of change unfolds and what mechanisms enable humorous interactions to transform the patient's experience. Their transformative qualities remain underexplored—often eluding traditional medical measurement tools, yet proving essential for patients' well-being, communication, and sense-making during hospitalization (Koller, Gryski 2008; Pendzik, Raviv 2011).

The purpose of this article is to examine the dynamics and richness of the experiences generated by humorous interactions in hospitals. The focus is not solely on outcomes but on the mechanisms and tools of change—the ways in which even brief and ephemeral moments of laughter can initiate profound transformations in the emotional, cognitive, and relational dimensions of illness. The article proposes an approach that goes beyond describing the phenomenon of clowning, concentrating instead on the transformative processes taking place within these unique humor-based interactions.

Humorous interactions in hospitals as a form of intervention

Before addressing the transformative potential of humor, it is important to examine humorous interactions themselves—their definitions, theoretical foundations, and the hospital context in which they occur. Such grounding enables a more nuanced understanding of this form of activity and its embeddedness within broader interactional practices.

In the literature, humorous interactions in hospitals are defined as planned yet flexible activities in which humor—expressed through jokes, wordplay, physical play, or symbolic role enactment—serves as a tool for supporting patients in the context of hospitalization (Koller, Gryski 2008; Linge 2011; Dionigi et al. 2012). These interactions are most often described under the concept of "medical clowning," a specific psychosocial intervention conducted in healthcare institutions worldwide and regarded as a paramedical practice (Raviv 2012, 2014; Finlay et al. 2014; Dionigi, Canestrari 2016). Contrary to popular assumptions that reduce the clown's role to "entertaining patients" (Strollo et al. 2015), the literature indicates that these are complex practices that combine humor and laughter with empathy, sensitivity, and co-presence within medical spaces (Koller, Gryski 2008; Linge 2011; Pendzik, Raviv 2011).

Clowning involves creating an alternative format of encounter, based on the logic of play, absurdity, improvisation, and minimal verbal communication (Linge 2008; Pendzik, Raviv 2011; Dionigi et al. 2012; Gray et al. 2021). Unlike traditional acting, the clown does not perform a predetermined role but develops the character in dialogue with the environment, drawing inspiration from the physical and psychological nuances of the situation (Dionigi et al. 2012; Langemeijer 2012). In this sense, clowning is more a form of communication than of performance—a co-created action with the patient and their surroundings, engaging spontaneity, a childlike perspective, and exaggerated responses to stimuli (Sato et al. 2016). As researchers emphasize, the clown "is able to establish a different quality of interaction, in which human aspects hidden during hospitalization are revealed" (Sato et al. 2016: 133).

The theoretical foundations of humorous interactions are interdisciplinary. They stem from gelotology—the study of laughter and

its health functions (Fry 1992; Cousins 1979); positive psychology, which emphasizes the role of positive emotions in adapting to stress (Grzybowski 2012); art therapy (Blain et al. 2011); drama therapy, which employs improvisation, symbolic roles, and bodily expression (Pendzik 2008; Pendzik, Raviv 2011; Grinberg et al. 2012; Gordon et al. 2017); brief crisis intervention (Karnieli-Miller et al. 2023); and humor theories analyzing its social and cognitive functions (Gelkopf 2011).

Thus, humorous interactions in medicine combine psychological, pedagogical, medical, and artistic perspectives, while philosophy, anthropology, and aesthetics further contribute to understanding the phenomenon (Grzybowski 2012; Sato et al. 2016; Savage et al. 2017; Wojtaszak 2014). Humor also appears in numerous studies concerning nursing practice and everyday interactions with patients (Allen 2014; Macdonald 2004; Strean 2009; Woodbury-Fariña, Antongiorgi 2014). The inclusion of references to art therapy and drama therapy allows clown therapy to be situated within a broader group of creative therapies which—similarly to the work of clowns—offer an alternative and safe means of supporting patients in crisis or emotionally challenging situations (Pendzik 2008; Pendzik, Raviv 2011).

What makes clown-initiated humorous interactions distinctive is their unique context—the hospital, saturated with suffering and uncertainty (Dionigi et al. 2012). Hospitalization entails frustration, isolation, and subordination to institutional norms and hierarchies for both patients and families (Ford et al. 2011; Kingsnorth et al. 2011; Barkmann et al. 2013; Finlay et al. 2014; Sato et al. 2016; Kristensen et al. 2019; Gray et al. 2021). Children must cope with pain and fear while also learning the rules of ward life, where they have minimal control over their bodies and circumstances (Ford et al. 2011; Gray et al. 2021). Hospital admission often involves painful procedures and surgeries, the specter of health or life loss, and operations that alter appearance and identity (Ofer, Keisari 2022). The complexity of this environment is further intensified by triadic interactions—typical in pediatrics—engaging the child, parent, and medical staff, which complicates communication and limits the child's expression (Gray et al. 2021; Ofer, Keisari 2022; Karnieli-Miller et al. 2023). Within such conditions, humorous interactions create an alternative space for freer communication and different relational experiences.

The transformative potential of humor: processes of change and tools of healing

Existing research indicates that humorous interactions in hospitals generate consequences that extend beyond momentary amusement or distraction. Humor, presence, and symbolic play may serve as catalysts for transforming the experience of hospitalization—although the nature of these processes remains difficult to fully capture. The literature emphasizes their ambiguous and multidimensional character, encompassing emotional as well as relational and existential dimensions (Langemeijer 2012; Sato et al. 2016; Ofer, Keisari 2022).

In this section, I attempt to describe this transformative potential. The analysis considers both the processes of change initiated by humorous interactions and the tools through which they are activated.

1. From sadness to joy: The release of emotions

One of the most recognizable effects of an encounter between a patient and a clown is a shift in mood—from sadness, tension, or fear toward relief, relaxation, and often even joy and laughter. Studies show that such transformations can be sudden, striking, and surprising, standing in sharp contrast to the emotional weight of illness (Koller, Gryski 2008; Langemeijer 2012). Yet this is not merely a fleeting humorous reaction; rather, a deeper process of emotional regulation and the symbolic transformation of suffering into hope (Linge 2008).

The clown does not dismiss difficult emotions but acknowledges and validates them (Linge 2008, 2013). Instead of neutralizing them, the clown amplifies them theatrically—crying louder than the child, exaggerating fear, or acting out clumsiness (Sato et al. 2016). As Lotte Linge (2008, 2013) notes, the clown becomes a mirror of the patient's emotions, embodying their intensity in a visible and symbolic form, thereby creating space for recognition and transformation. A similar mechanism was described by Orit Karnieli-Miller et al. (2023: 29), who observed clowns reenacting patients' words, gestures, and postures—such as the slow movements of a child in pain or an expression of disgust toward a procedure—exaggerating

them humorously ("It's torture!"—"Absolute torture!"). In this way, patients' emotions were not only noticed but also acknowledged and named.

This mechanism operates not only on a symbolic level but also on a physiological one. Patients show reduced muscle tension, more stable breathing, and decreased perceived pain (Barkmann et al. 2013). Accounts describe situations in which a child who had been crying and refusing contact suddenly began to engage in dialogue or play with a clown. Humor acts as an emotional reset—disrupting a state of distress or withdrawal and enabling a transition into active interaction (Linge 2008; Langemeijer 2012).

A case study by Sigalit Ofer and Shoshi Keisari (2022) demonstrates that this effect also extends to emotions related to loss and helplessness. A five-year-old girl undergoing rehabilitation, through regular encounters with a clown, was able to express fear and sadness through repeated rituals, songs, and symbolic play. Predictable forms provided a sense of safety while simultaneously allowing her to explore difficult emotions and gradually restore emotional resources through symbolic processing in a dramatherapeutic space.

Mechanisms of emotional release in hospital clowning suggest that humor serves as a means of symbolically and bodily processing experiences—often those that cannot be directly verbalized. The clown enacts pain or tension through symbolic action, gag structures, ritual, or embodied empathy (Strollo et al. 2015; Karnieli-Miller et al. 2023). In this way, the patient is no longer confined to the role of a suffering individual but gains the opportunity to work through emotions in a safe, symbolic form.

2. From passivity to engagement: Regaining agency

Hospitalization often entails a loss of control: the patient becomes subject to the ward's rules, the schedule of procedures, and the decisions of medical staff. As scholars point out, this context often positions the patient as a passive recipient of others' actions (Karnieli-Miller et al. 2023). Humorous interventions create opportunities to reverse this logic and challenge the hierarchy: the patient becomes a partner in play, a co-creator of the encounter, an initiator, and even

a leader of the interaction (Raviv 2012; Ford et al. 2014; Gray et al. 2021; Xin et al. 2024).

Studies show that patients particularly value situations in which they can decide whether the clown enters the room, approaches the bed, determines the course of the meeting, or ends the interaction (Dionigi et al. 2012; Langemeijer 2012; Karnieli-Miller et al. 2023). This transfer of decision-making restores a sense of agency in an environment where choices are typically made by others. The phrase "the child is the boss" is used in the literature to describe this reversal of hierarchy, through which the patient regains a voice that is often silenced in the institutional logic of illness (Langemeijer 2012: 34).

By embracing "clumsiness" and deliberately positioning themselves as less competent, prone to mistakes, and open to ridicule, clowns symbolically invert hierarchies and empower the patient to step into the role of the stronger, more influential participant in the interaction (Grinberg et al. 2012; Langemeijer 2012; Raviv 2012; Sato et al. 2016; Gordon et al. 2017; Karnieli-Miller et al. 2023). Observing the clown's failure or tumble has a cathartic effect—helping patients reframe their own experiences of humiliation or loss of control as amusing episodes, thereby reducing tension and restoring balance (Sato et al. 2016; Gordon et al. 2017). The "power of foolishness"—the willingness to appear weaker, imperfect, and ridiculous—transforms humor into a space for patient empowerment (Sato et al. 2016; Gray et al. 2021).

Humor also enables playful role reversals. When the patient assumes the role of doctor and the clown plays the patient, the hierarchical relationship between patient and institution is rebalanced. This opens a pathway toward a more agentic identity, in which the patient can act, make decisions, and experience competence (Linge 2008, 2012; Ofer, Keisari 2022). Such shifts between passive and active roles broaden the patient's repertoire of identities, allowing the expression of traits associated with activity, control, and strength. Ultimately, this facilitates the integration of helplessness and agency, contributing to the restoration of safety and self-trust (Ofer, Keisari 2022).

3. Bodily and behavioral transformation

Humorous hospital interactions rarely follow a fixed script—they arise from observation, attentive listening, and sensitive responses to the patient's current condition. Encounters may begin with silence, a gesture, or a single sound, gradually leading to change: from passivity to initiative, from withdrawal to openness (Langemeijer 2012). This process—initiated through music, singing, movement, or playful touch—stimulates interaction, sparks the desire for movement, and fosters participation (Linge 2012; Sato et al. 2016).

Research indicates that humor and laughter also influence physiological processes—breathing rhythm, muscle tension, and body posture—thereby reducing pain and enhancing mobility (Kristensen et al. 2019). Studies also show that laughter activates mechanisms that support physical health: it reduces the level of stress hormones (such as cortisol), helps the body restore balance after intense tension, and strengthens the immune system by increasing the activity of cells that combat viruses and pathologically altered cells (the body's natural "defense" cells), as well as by raising antibody levels (Berk et al. 2001; MacDonald 2004; Wojtaszak 2014).

In a context where the body is often treated primarily as an object of medical procedures, humorous interactions reclaim it as a medium of expression and social contact. Children begin to gesture, dance, and sing—their bodies regain their role as instruments of play and communication (Linge 2012; Sato et al. 2016). Laughter and muscle relaxation further contribute to reduced tension, improved well-being, and enhanced physical functioning (Barkmann et al. 2013). These effects are consistent with findings in psychoneuroimmunology, which demonstrate that the physiological responses associated with laughter may support the healing process at both hormonal and immunological levels, adding another dimension to bodily transformation (Berk et al. 2001; Provine 1996).

Charlotte Langemeijer (2012: 35) describes cases in which minimal stimuli—soap bubbles, a gesture, or a fragment of melody—triggered transitions from withdrawal to curiosity and openness. The example of a girl who, after a coma, began singing along with clowns illustrates the process of regaining selfhood through bodily and vocal expression. Similarly, patients who had previously resisted activity

became more likely to initiate contact, engage in play, and participate in interactions after clown visits (Linge 2012). In these encounters, music and rhythm act as triggers for movement, emotional expression, and readiness to interact with others (Sato et al. 2016).

Humorous interventions have also been shown to improve eye contact, increase emotional and communicative responsiveness, and enhance willingness to participate in rehabilitation, even among patients with severe limitations (Kingsnorth et al. 2011). Humor directs attention to the "healthy part" of the patient, functioning as an activating stimulus that expands the repertoire of behaviors and supports the healing process (Dionigi et al. 2012: 217). Bodily and behavioral transformation initiated by the clown thus involves a shift in focus—from the sick, painful, passive body to an active one capable of movement, expression, and co-creation. In doing so, it opens space for reclaiming energy, agency, and relational engagement.

4. From formality to familiarity: Transforming space

Hospital spaces—dominated by silence, sterility, and strict order—can overwhelm patients, amplifying feelings of strangeness and fear. Humorous interventions introduce an entirely different order—one of color, absurdity, sound, and movement (Linge 2008, 2013; Dionigi et al. 2012; de Camargo Catapan et al. 2019). Such disruptions of routine create room for relief and breathing space, while simultaneously domesticating an otherwise alien environment (Pendzik, Raviv 2011; Langemeijer 2012).

The clown, rooted in a tradition of disrupting social order, confronts the logic of medicine—serious, rational, and rule-bound—with the logic of carnival, characterized by spontaneity, laughter, play, and connection (Raviv 2014). Humorous interactions parody the language as well as the logic of medicine, allowing patients to distance themselves from procedures and medical jargon (Dionigi et al. 2012). Any element of hospital equipment—from a stethoscope to a syringe—may become a prop in play, and the entire space can be transformed into a stage. By subverting conventional roles tied to adult authority and challenging hospital hierarchies, the clown makes the environment feel more familiar and less intimidating.

In this way, the patient acquires a new interpretation of place: not solely as a space of illness and procedures, but also as one of encounter and play (Langemeijer 2012; Sato et al. 2016). This revaluation extends to parents and staff as well—the previously anonymous and oppressive space, through the clown's presence, takes on qualities of humanity, warmth, and vitality (Sato et al. 2016).

5. From resignation to mobilization: Restoring meaning

Prolonged hospitalization often leads to a loss of purpose and resignation. Humorous interactions introduce into this stagnation an element of anticipation and narrative that extends beyond the present moment, constructing an alternative story of life beyond the "here and now" of illness. As Mariana Sato et al. (2016) note, the expectation of the clown's next visit, the recollection of past encounters, or the planning of future interactions serve as impulses for action, forms of future orientation, and ways of restoring meaning.

Humor and play become tools of mobilization—providing rhythm and purpose to daily life, which might otherwise be perceived exclusively through the lens of suffering and limitation. The patient gains something to look forward to, something to share, and something that becomes part of their personal narrative of illness. Humor thus builds a bridge between present and future, between helplessness and the possibility of action. The patient regains a sense of having plans, dreams, and hopes ahead (Sato et al. 2016: 132).

6. From silence and isolation to dialogue: Relational transformation

Perhaps the most significant dimension of humorous interactions is their ability to create and strengthen bonds. These are not therapeutic relationships in the classical sense—with clearly defined frames, contracts, and hierarchies—but affective, reciprocal, responsive, and authentic encounters. They are relationships that, as Sato et al. (2016: 131) stress, "transform both parties." The clown neither diagnoses nor evaluates; instead, they bring honesty, spontaneity, and imperfection, allowing individuals to meet as people rather than as roles—patient, doctor, or parent.

Research (e.g., Barkmann et al. 2013; Ford et al. 2014) shows that the clown's presence restores and reinforces a sense of community within families as well as in patient–staff interactions. Shared laughter, jokes, and participation in moments of absurdity are not merely entertainment but also group-binding acts that ease tensions and facilitate cooperation. The experience of "being together" emerges in a space that usually divides—staff from patients, children from adults, and health from illness. Helle Kristensen et al. (2019) describe this phenomenon as the "WE-experience"—an affective sense of "we-ness" that transcends a single act of joking. Even brief humorous interactions, when repeated, can initiate a micro-community—transforming not only the patient's mood but also the ward's dynamics, the family atmosphere, and staff–patient relationships.

In this space, the patient regains identity—no longer solely "the sick child," but also a child, pupil, play partner, or initiator of jokes (Dionigi et al. 2012; Langemeijer 2012; Sato et al. 2016). Humor reorganizes the emotional landscape of the ward, reshaping roles: the child-patient and mother-guardian become co-participants in play, reducing stress and tension (Dionigi et al. 2012). Parents may step out of the role of vigilant overseer, trusting that their child is safe and joyful (Barkmann et al. 2013). In this way, children become more open and parents calmer, reclaiming the experience of their child not merely as "ill," but as "a child who was sick and suddenly becomes a playing child who happens to be ill" (Langemeijer 2012: 38).

Relational transformation also extends to staff. Clown interventions positively affect staff well-being, the workplace atmosphere, and the course of procedures (Blain et al. 2011; Barkmann et al. 2013). Remaining outside the institutional hierarchy while being strongly present in everyday ward life, the clown introduces elements of normalization and absurdity—a form of emotional release that facilitates cooperation and offers distance from routine stressors.

7. The "magical space" as a transcendent experience

One of the key dimensions of humorous interactions is the creation of a "magical space": a transitional area suspended between reality and imagination, in which the transformation of the hospitalization experience becomes possible (Linge 2008, 2012; Langemeijer

2012). Play and imagination generate a safe field where new modes of functioning and meaning-making can emerge. The experience of illness can thus be creatively reinterpreted, opening a pathway to deeper existential transformation (Sato et al. 2016; de Camargo Catapan et al. 2019; Ofer, Keisari 2022).

The "magical room" described by Linge (2008, 2013) can be understood as a form of liminality—a "world in-between" where contradictions coexist. It is a space of transcendence, where individuals experience the tension between inner and outer worlds, the encounter of conscious and unconscious, private and social, bodily and symbolic dimensions (Gordon et al. 2017). In this space, patients gain access to imagination and symbolic processing, transitioning from the role of the ill person to that of a child, play partner, or creator of situations. This flexibility suspends institutional routines and opens room for experiencing the self in entirely new configurations. By playing with roles, shifting between identities, and introducing paradox, the clown acts as a catalyst for this process (Pendzik, Raviv 2011).

This is not, however, an escape from reality. Clowning does not detach patients from their "here and now," but enables them to view their situation from a different perspective, allowing for new interpretations (Linge 2008; Sato et al. 2016). Transcendence occurs through the suspension of opposites and the reconstruction of meanings, enabling symbolic integration and transformation of experience (Gordon et al. 2017).

Dramatherapy scholars describe a similar process through the concept of "dramatic reality"—embodied imagination in action, allowing inner content to take form through gesture, ritual, or improvisation (Pendzik 2008; Pendzik, Raviv 2011; Grinberg et al. 2012). Imagination here becomes a healthy psychological force, capable of shaping one's experience of the world. Through dramatic reality, it is concretized in physical space and thus legitimized, becoming an area for exploration and transformation. The clown activates these resources in ways that allow them to remain accessible even after the interaction ends (Pendzik, Raviv 2011).

Humorous play and improvisation thus evoke dramatic reality, opening a field in which patients can experience themselves in new and fuller ways. The clown, as an archetype, embodies paradoxes—child and adult, coward and brave, vulnerable and confident (Gordon

et al. 2017). They become a guide through this "in-between world," introducing elements of transgression and paradox and enabling patients to experiment with alternative identities and transcend the limitations of institutional everyday life.

8. From non-compliance to engagement in treatment

Humorous interventions prove particularly effective in situations where patients resist medical procedures. Expressions of anger, crying, or refusal to take medication can be transformed into active participation through the introduction of play and competition (Dionigi et al. 2012). As shown in the study by Karnieli-Miller et al. (2023: 30), clowns create an "environment of success," strengthening patients' motivation to adhere to treatment plans. They use cheering, applause, or exaggerated gestures of approval, and in more challenging situations initiate playful competitions in which the child can symbolically "win"—for instance, by taking the medication faster than the clown. By reframing the situation, coercion is transformed into an experience of triumph and a sense of competence.

In rehabilitative contexts, clowns also serve as mediators—they repeat the therapist's instructions while framing them as part of a game ("just two more times"), simultaneously reducing tension through jokes or playful movement. In this way, patients undertake tasks voluntarily, with a sense of choice and control. Clowns are also able to negotiate therapeutic conditions by combining distraction with imagined rewards, which fosters cooperation and reduces tension.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that humorous interactions within the hospital setting constitute a complex interactional practice that extends well beyond momentary amusement and fundamentally transforms the experience of hospitalization. Empirical studies indicate that encounters with clowns alleviate pain and fear while leaving a lasting imprint on patients' experiences—becoming part of their personal narratives, an emotional and symbolic resource, and at times

a coping strategy (Linge 2012; Langemeijer 2012; Lalantika, Yuvaraj 2022). The regularity and repetition of clown visits generate expectations and memories that reconfigure hospitalization with a new temporal and emotional structure (Sato et al. 2016).

The mechanisms underlying this transformation are multifaceted; it is not achieved through a single "magical gag," but rather through a combination of tools and techniques: relational presence, affective responsiveness, mirroring, improvisation, symbolic language, and the use of the body, music, and props (Linge 2008, 2013; Strollo et al. 2015; Kristensen et al. 2019; Karnieli-Miller et al. 2023). Through spontaneous, co-created presence, transformation becomes possible on multiple levels—emotional (from tension to relief), bodily (from inhibition to expression), relational (from isolation to community), and existential (from resignation to meaning-making) (Pendzik, Raviv 2011; Ofer, Keisari 2022).

The clown, as an interactional figure, thus becomes a mediator of change. Through comic clumsiness, a readiness to fail, and authentic presence, the clown disrupts the logic of the medical institution—the logic of control, procedures, and the objectification of the body—and restores the patient's subjectivity (Dionigi et al. 2012). Humorous interactions may therefore be understood as a form of interactional work within the hospital, whose transformative potential lies in reshaping the experience of illness and hospitalization—from passivity to agency, from helplessness to empowerment, and from the role of patient to the role of child. The transformative power of humor renders this form of intervention a unique and undervalued component of healthcare.

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Factors Limiting the Effectiveness of Prisoner Resocialization

Czynniki ograniczające skuteczność resocjalizacji więźniów

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes weaknesses in the rehabilitation process, with particular attention to the various barriers that limit its effectiveness under conditions of isolation. The author points to difficulties related to both individual and group-level change, which significantly affect the effectiveness of the actions taken by Prison Service staff. Despite intensive efforts, it is not always possible to prevent the continuation of criminal careers among some inmates.

The article seeks to identify key barriers that hinder the assessment of the corrective potential of the rehabilitation process and impede the prevention of recidivism. These include, among others, problems related to inmates' motivation to change, deficits in social competences, the negative influence of the penitentiary environment, and limitations resulting from the distinctive nature of custodial institutions. The author also discusses issues related to insufficient human resources and difficulties in implementing individualized rehabilitation plans that would take into account the unique needs of each inmate.

These considerations aim to contribute to a better understanding of the factors underlying the lack of expected change and to formulate recommendations for improving the quality of rehabilitation interventions, with particular emphasis on the importance of both group-based and individual activities in the rehabilitation process.

ABSTRAKT

Artykuł koncentruje się na analizie słabych stron procesu resocjalizacji, zwracając szczególną uwagę na bariery ograniczające jego skuteczność w warunkach izolacji. Autorka wskazuje na trudności związane ze zmianami zarówno indywidualnymi, jak i grupowymi, które znacząco wpływają na skuteczność działań podejmowanych przez pracowników Służby Więziennej. Pomimo intensywnych wysiłków nie zawsze udaje się zahamować rozwój kariery przestępczej części osadzonych.

W artykule podjęto próbę identyfikacji kluczowych barier utrudniających oszacowanie potencjału naprawczego procesu resocjalizacji i zapobiegania recydywie. Przeanalizowano między innymi problemy związane z motywacją osadzonych do zmiany, z deficytami kompetencji społecznych, wpływem negatywnego oddziaływania środowiska penitencjarnego oraz z ograniczeniami wynikającymi ze specyfiki instytucji izolacyjnej. Autorka omawia również aspekty związane z brakiem odpowiednich zasobów ludzkich oraz trudnościami we wdrażaniu indywidualnych planów resocjalizacji, uwzględniających indywidualne potrzeby każdego osadzonego.

Celem rozważań jest lepsze zrozumienie czynników determinujących brak oczekiwanej zmiany osadzonych oraz sformułowanie rekomendacji dotyczących poprawy jakości oddziaływań resocjalizacyjnych, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem znaczenia działań grupowych i indywidualnych w procesie resocjalizacji.

Introduction

Polish scholarship on penitentiary systems has long confronted substantial difficulties in analyzing and addressing the rehabilitation of socially maladjusted individuals in custodial settings. Barriers to effectively "correcting defective human adaptation to generally accepted social requirements" and to "adapting the environment to the specific needs of socially maladjusted people"[1] are frequently discussed in academic discourse and among correctional staff. Identifying these barriers is particularly important given the psychocorrective nature of rehabilitation, which is widely understood as a complex and demanding educational process—especially when applied to

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1 Interpretation of social rehabilitation according to Jaworska (2012: 225 ff.).

adults whose personality structures are already relatively consolidated (Chojecka, Muskała 2021).

This complicates the identification of positive motivational strategies capable of encouraging incarcerated individuals to engage in prosocial activities and to make choices that support departure from maladaptive life patterns, referred to in the literature as a "reconstruction of value orientation" (Porowski 1985: 170). Changes in attitudes among incarcerated persons, both at the individual and group levels, represent a precondition for successful reentry and social reintegration. When the objectives of rehabilitation are not achieved, inmates remain unable to satisfy one of the most fundamental human needs: the need for belonging, as conceptualized in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs (2009).

At the same time, empirical research points to the low effectiveness of correctional rehabilitation in shaping inmates' identities, pointing to factors such as prisonization, deprivation of psychosocial needs, and immersion in deviant prison subcultures (e.g., Bernasiewicz, Łukasiewicz, Noszczyk-Bernasiewicz 2024; Kopczyńska-Wisz 2019; Machel 2006). Therefore, it is worth analyzing the reasons why many incarcerated individuals fail to benefit from the rehabilitation pathways offered in correctional institutions, which ultimately contributes to persistent recidivism.

Psychocorrective objectives of correctional rehabilitation

The commonly held rationale for custodial sentencing is based on the assumption embedded in legal norms that imprisonment can bring about changes in an incarcerated person's personality that reduce or eliminate social maladjustment. These changes are expected to facilitate recognition of wrongdoing, evoke remorse, encourage restitution, and a decision to comply with the legal order (Rajewska de Mezer 2001). Achieving such outcomes presents a particular challenge when incarcerated individuals display entrenched patterns of irrational violence, purposeless aggression, and other antisocial behaviors that require intensive prevention and decisive intervention.

Accordingly, Article 67 § 2 of the Executive Penal Code emphasizes the need to select rehabilitation methods that, through individualized interventions—implemented under the statutory framework

and through a system of structured programming—support the achievement of educational and rehabilitative goals. These approaches are intended to take into account inmates' psychological immaturity, limited life experience, and heightened susceptibility to negative social influences (Kalitowski et al. 2000). Given the interdisciplinary nature of correctional rehabilitation, the objectives of correctional education are pursued through several primary modes of intervention:

- Situational interventions, which involve structuring environments and experiences that discourage negative behaviors and reinforce constructive attitudes, for example, through appropriately designed systems of incentives and sanctions;
- interpersonal interventions, based on authority, credibility, and trust in the practitioner–client relationship;
- social interventions, focused on modeling prosocial attitudes through group processes and the institutional and social environment.

The above methods must be based on strengthening self-control and self-awareness, that is, on principles supporting self-directed learning and personal development (Pytka 2002: 7). A key objective is to help build among incarcerated individuals the conviction that a custodial sentence does not deprive them of future life prospects or of the possibility of functioning satisfactorily after release. Closely related to this is the need to raise awareness of the importance of strengthening self-confidence and trust in the effectiveness of rehabilitation, as well as overcoming the belief that incarceration necessarily condemns a person to permanent social marginalization.

This process also involves developing the capacity for social functioning and coexistence, as well as reducing or eliminating common tendencies toward alcohol abuse and substance dependence, which are criminogenic factors. Accordingly, correctional rehabilitation must include corrective measures whereby "correction" is understood as compensating for specific deficits and addressing limitations that burden incarcerated individuals. Such deficits usually include a lack of practical life skills, insufficient education, limited knowledge of prevailing social norms and principles, or an inability to understand and apply them (Adamczyk 2015).

As a result of these deficits, incarcerated individuals often struggle to make effective use of social support resources—commonly

described as the principle of "giving the fishing rod, not the fish"—and have difficulty independently solving personal problems and life dilemmas. They may also show reluctance to make use of available psychological services, legal assistance, or counseling programs. The objectives of rehabilitation in custodial settings are therefore particularly significant, as they underscore the necessity of change at both the individual and group levels. Special emphasis should be placed on strengthening individuals' belief in the possibility of maintaining life prospects and effecting lasting improvements in their social situation following release.

Corrective interventions—understood as efforts to reduce deficits and build competencies—play a particularly important role in this process. At the same time, the development of social competences is widely recognized as a key condition for successful individual change and group-based reintegration. Rehabilitation programming must also take into account complex issues such as addiction, which constitute significant criminogenic factors and require individual and group-based therapeutic and corrective approaches.

In discussions of the psychocorrective goals of rehabilitation, two basic objectives are commonly distinguished, differing in scope and effectiveness: a minimum goal and a maximum goal. The minimum goal refers to achieving a level of personal functioning that allows an individual to live in society without violating legal norms. While attainment of this goal reduces the risk of recidivism, it does not necessarily prevent violations of moral norms and may be insufficient to overcome stigmatization, thereby increasing the likelihood of reoffending. On the other hand, the maximum goal encompasses not only desistance from crime but also the capacity to organize one's life in accordance with fundamental social standards, maintain distance from past deviant behavior, and strengthen prosocial attitudes (Kalinowska 2020).

As is evident from the foregoing discussion, psychocorrective goals in correctional rehabilitation involve raising awareness among incarcerated individuals—particularly younger ones—that everyone possesses the capacity to adapt, provided they actively develop and realize their own potential. This process enables them to adopt an approach to social reality in which situations are perceived as manageable and solvable instead of overwhelming or threatening. Central

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to this is the cultivation of positive interests and constructive habits that create opportunities for personal development, promote a sense of self- confidence, reinforce belief in the value of one's actions, and enhance feelings of security. In this context, special attention should be paid to meeting psychological needs in ways that create genuine opportunities for role change, allowing incarcerated individuals to move beyond the position of passive recipients of rehabilitation programming and instead to become active participants capable of initiating, or at least cooperating in the implementation of, concrete projects and activities.

Another psychocorrective goal of rehabilitation interventions is to encourage incarcerated individuals to make better and more effective use of their free time. This aim underlies the growing interest in creative rehabilitation anchored in cognitive psychology, which is seen as offering opportunities to stimulate self-development and positive personality change. These approaches seek to motivate convicts to analyze and understand the sources of their maladaptive social attitudes, to recognize the legitimacy of others' reactions to their behavior, and to activate an internal desire for self-change—processes that are necessary for modifying key aspects of individual identity (Konopczyński 2014: 20ff.). Accordingly, another goal of correctional education is the consistent and explicit grounding of rehabilitation efforts in a clearly defined system of values that is compatible with prevailing social norms. Equally important is reinforcing the understanding that correctional institutions exist to support individuals deemed socially maladjusted as a result of violating social rules and norms by assisting them in overcoming difficulties and addressing life problems (Iwański 2017).

As Marek Konopczyński notes, because the strategic goal of rehabilitation is the transformation of an individual's identity, it is first necessary to modify existing life priorities—which is a relatively permanent change—and only then to initiate the process by prioritizing developmental and creative potentials (Konopczyński 2014: 23). In order to act effectively, we should be aware of barriers in rehabilitation interactions in order to eliminate the limitations they cause. This applies in particular to individuals serving long-term prison sentences, who often experience heightened psychological strain stemming not only from having committed a serious offense and from

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fear related to criminal liability and court proceedings, but also from the prolonged duration of criminal trials and appeal processes. Individuals serving long sentences are often anxious about the prospect of release and fearful of what awaits them outside prison—whether they will be accepted by the community to which they must return, among other concerns.

An additional dimension of this issue arises from the fact that the psychophysical characteristics of some offenders, combined with the nature of their crimes, significantly limit the prospects for effective rehabilitation, particularly in the case of inmates serving life sentences. These circumstances pose serious challenges for prison staff. For this reason, it is worth examining the barriers present in both the planning and implementation of rehabilitation processes in order to enhance their effectiveness. While these barriers may take on institution-specific forms, it is nevertheless possible to identify factors that are common to all penitentiary institutions.

Barriers to the effectiveness of rehabilitation interventions

Analyzing barriers in rehabilitation processes is essential for both theory and correctional practice. Such analysis makes it possible to identify factors that hinder the achievement of educational and rehabilitative goals, as well as to design corrective measures that enhance the effectiveness of interventions. Although each correctional facility operates under specific conditions, it is possible to identify universal barriers that occur in most prisons and therefore require a systemic response. From the perspective of correctional practice, these barriers can be grouped into three main categories: institutional, personal, and structural.

Institutional barriers stem from the systemic and organizational constraints of prisons. These most commonly include outdated and non-functional infrastructure, chronic staff shortages, excessive overtime among correctional officers, prison overcrowding, and the demoralizing effects of excessive unstructured time combined with limited access to work opportunities during incarceration. Prison facilities themselves are often characterized by monotonous, gray environments that lack adequate sensory stimulation, which may impair cognitive functioning and reduce engagement in rehabilitative

activities. In addition, the poor technical condition of many facilities necessitates substantial financial investment. High costs associated with renovating aging buildings—many of which are protected as historical sites—repairing infrastructure, and adapting detention facilities to European standards for the execution of custodial sentences place significant strain on institutional resources and negatively affects rehabilitation efforts (Wójcik 2016: 43).

Overcrowding further restricts access to equipment and spaces used for rehabilitative and therapeutic programs, which can generate tensions between incarcerated individuals and correctional staff. In some cases, these tensions have contributed to legal disputes, including adverse judgments against Poland before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Overcrowding generates a range of negative consequences, including an increase in conflict among prisoners, which hinders the development of pro-social behavior among inmates and is felt particularly strongly by those serving long-term sentences.[2] A high number of people confined to a limited space causes prisoners to lose their sense of personal separateness, leading to violations of interpersonal boundaries. This, in turn, exposes egoistic attitudes among inmates, which generates discomfort and an accumulation of conflicts related to cooperation, obedience, and the performance of duties.

This situation translates into a reduced quality of work by Prison Service officers who, under conditions of overcrowding, are unable to properly fulfill their responsibilities, especially with regard to ongoing intervention in cases of irregularities. Overcrowding also makes it difficult to apply the principle of objective relevance essential to rehabilitation, which assumes that undertaken actions should translate into functioning outside prison walls. In practice, this means implementing activities that model practical solutions, behaviors, and situations that a convict may encounter after release, which is often impossible under overcrowded conditions. As a result, officers

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2 The statutory minimum standard for the floor area of a residential cell in Poland is 3 m² per person. During its most recent inspection in 2004, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) identified several deficiencies in Polish prisons and detention centres, including overcrowding. The Committee also noted that the 3 m² standard is insufficient and recommended increasing it to 4 m² per person (Hołda 2009: 119–120).

are forced to limit their efforts to meeting inmates' basic needs and to rely on schematic simplifications, which prevents the implementation of the principle of individualization and the creation of an educational environment. The aim of such an environment is to assign and group prisoners in ways that minimize opportunities for mutual antisocial influence or aggression. The inability to implement these assumptions in practice violates the principle of professionalism—crucial to the rehabilitation process—which presupposes that penitentiary staff should support, not limit, rehabilitative efforts.

Another important institutional barrier concerns the professional preparation of correctional staff. Effective rehabilitation requires personnel who possess comprehensive theoretical and empirical knowledge and who, beyond formal education, demonstrate personality traits commonly expected of professionals working closely with others, especially with a population as demanding as prisoners. These qualities include empathy, strong communication skills, the ability to function under difficult and stressful conditions, patience, consistency, creativity, and a strong sense of responsibility. Responsibility is crucial for implementing one of the core principles of correctional practice: professional accountability. Performing assigned tasks without careful reflection on which methodological procedures are likely to be effective for a specific individual—and which individuals are likely to benefit from intensive intervention versus those for whom such measures may be ineffective—can lead to outcomes described in the literature as follows: "rehabilitation conducted under conditions of isolation is very often reduced to custodial service, while activities such as therapy, correction, or support recede into the background" (Migdał 2018).

Awareness of inmates' needs alone is insufficient. A lack of knowledge regarding appropriate methods, techniques, and tools for influencing socially maladjusted individuals, as well as imprecise identification of rehabilitation goals, leads to unsuccessful intervention (Bonta & Andrews 2023: 47ff.). For example, errors made at the diagnostic stage not only hinder the individualization of rehabilitation programming but may actively impede the rehabilitation process itself. As early as the 1980s, Brunon Hołyst drew attention to deficiencies in staff competencies, noting that "shortcomings and errors in correctional rehabilitation policy include, among other things, inappropriate inmate classification and grouping. These practices fail to

recognize that behavior within a group depends on how authority and influence are distributed" (2012: 36). As these observations suggest, no method—regardless of its theoretical soundness—will be effective if implemented by personnel who lack substantive professional skills and the personal dispositions necessary for this work. Ultimately, the effectiveness of rehabilitation depends on the practitioner. Desired qualities include professional competence, moral integrity, authority resulting from fair and respectful treatment of all incarcerated individuals, and good physical and mental health (Iwański 2017). If the correctional professional responsible for rehabilitation is unable to individualize interventions, which is an essential condition for effectiveness, lacks experience with diverse case profiles, or cannot apply methods and tools flexibly in response to specific situations, effective rehabilitation cannot be achieved.

An additional difficulty frequently noted in the literature concerns the significant distance between correctional facilities and prisoners' places of residence, which often makes regular contact with family members difficult or, in some cases, impossible. As a result, incarcerated individuals experience heightened frustration, which creates yet another barrier to achieving intended rehabilitative outcomes. In particular, it may undermine motivation to undertake any work that fulfills an important corrective and re-adaptive function— namely, the development and consolidation of skills necessary for lawful self-sufficiency after release (Łuczak 2016: 105–114).

Conversely, when incarcerated individuals come from family environments affected by unemployment, alcohol abuse, drug dependence, prostitution, or other forms of social dysfunction, family contact may itself hinder effective rehabilitation. In such cases, these relationships can reinforce feelings of hopelessness or skepticism about the possibility of functioning in society without addiction or criminal behavior. Moreover, awareness of the need to return to such environments often strengthens expectations of stigmatization and rejection in more socially integrated settings, which may increase the temptation to return to criminal activity.

The accumulation of these barriers, which delay or obstruct the achievement of rehabilitative goals, contributes to the phenomenon of prisonization. This process consists of the internalization of informal norms, language, and behavior patterns prevailing in the

correctional facility. These norms both officially sanctioned and enforced by inmate subcultures and informal hierarchies. Through assimilation and identification with other incarcerated individuals, prisoners may experience a reduction in the psychological burdens of imprisonment; however, adaptation is accompanied by an increasingly uncritical acceptance of criminal values. As a consequence, inmates become more prone to recidivism, which creates a serious obstacle to effective rehabilitation.

Personnel-related barriers concern the participants in the rehabilitation process themselves, particularly incarcerated individuals. In this area, a fundamental barrier is the limited availability of employment opportunities in correctional facilities, combined with prisoners' reluctance to pursue education or vocational training. As my previous research indicates, although external vocational examinations confirm the high quality of preparation among those who complete programs in prison-based schools, inmates engaged in any form of formal education account for only approximately 4.5% of the total incarcerated population in detention centers and prisons (Mydłowska 2019).

Personal barriers include the fact that individuals beginning a term of imprisonment usually enter custody with established personality traits, life experiences, a formed character, and a defined awareness of their relationship with the social environment from which they have been removed. Deprivation of liberty usually becomes a source of multiple frustrations—the inability to satisfy biological and psychological needs is tantamount to deprivation, which evokes a sense of injustice and negative emotions such as anger, hatred, fear, sadness, despair, and helplessness. These emotions generate conflict situations that adversely affect the psychophysical condition of inmates (Waligóra 1984).

If this is compounded by an insufficient number of therapeutic—resulting from staffing shortages as well as limited access to specialized interventions, such as addiction treatment—many core principles of rehabilitation are marginalized or effectively abandoned, including the principle of individualization. This situation frequently encourages participation in informal inmate groups and facilitates the spread of prison subculture. In such groups, beliefs are promoted that participation in rehabilitation programs is pointless, and that environments

guided by conventional norms such as diligence, honesty, truthfulness, and punctuality are associated with weakness or failure. In contrast, values perceived as worthy of "real men" are defined in terms of ruthlessness, aggression, insolence, and cunning, while indicators of prestige include the nature of the offense, length of incarceration, physical strength, and material resources (Kędzierski 2022).

Young incarcerated individuals are particularly vulnerable to these demoralizing influences. Under the pressure of more "experienced" and higher-status peers in the criminal milieu, they may be encouraged to disengage from institutional programs or even abscond from facilities. When combined with poorly organized educational provision or the absence of a supportive family environment to which a young person can return after release, these influences contribute to the consolidation of maladaptive and pathological attitudes (Bernasiewicz, Łukasiewicz, Noszczyk-Bernasiewicz 2024: 10). Special attention should therefore be paid to the risk of entrenching maladaptive behavioral patterns that undermine readiness for change at both the individual and group levels. A particularly serious problem is that values widely regarded as prosocial—such as honesty and industriousness—are rejected within prison subculture and replaced by norms based on aggression and domination, which may block constructive attitudinal change. Young convicts are especially susceptible to these influences, which reinforce negative group norms and the internalization of maladaptive individual attitudes.

Correctional staff often report the limited effectiveness of various cultural and educational initiatives. This is largely attributable to the barriers discussed above, as well as to additional factors that inhibit incarcerated individuals' participation in such activities. The vast majority of inmates take part in cultural programming only passively; active involvement is usually limited to those with specific interests or artistic talents. Use of prison libraries is relatively rare, with most inmates preferring to watch television or listen to radio broadcasts. In some facilities, closed-circuit television systems have been introduced to provide access to satellite programs. Physical activity is generally the most popular form of engagement among inmates; however, its development is significantly constrained by the specific conditions of correctional facilities, particularly architectural limitations that

restrict the construction of sports fields or the proper equipping of spaces designated for physical exercise (Hołyst 2012: 1365–1366).

The consequence of the above is another obstacle to achieving the intended rehabilitation outcomes: an excess of unstructured free time, which leads to frustration and destructive behavior. When inmates have too much idle time, they are more likely to engage in actions that violate prison rules. Failure to fill free time with productive activities makes it difficult to cultivate a work ethic, a sense of duty, and responsibility among inmates. It also deprives them of opportunities for consistent educational influence, for shaping attitudes and personality, for preventing further erosion of pro-social attitudes, and for counteracting the negative manifestations of prison subculture and the effects of long-term isolation (Dubiel 2009).

The problem is particularly acute in the case of inmates who, prior to incarceration, lacked positive models for spending their free time, have no ideas for organizing it constructively, and display independent, influence-resistant personality traits that foster indifference to prison norms and regulations. In this context, a lack of humility among inmates constitutes a particularly serious barrier to effective rehabilitation. This attitude is associated with an absence of guilt, undermines the function of punishment as a just response, and generates a sense of grievance that significantly impedes the rehabilitation process. As a result, the inmate rejects reflection on the consequences of their actions, avoids taking responsibility, and attributes blame to external factors.

Cognitive distortions are frequently observed among inmates and manifest in a distorted self-image, the minimization of harm caused by their own antisocial behavior, and, consequently, the transfer of responsibility for their actions onto others (Niewiadomska 2007). Such attitudes negatively affect both the individual and group dimensions of penitentiary interactions, preventing the effective initiation of cognitive and moral change. As responsibility is shifted to the social environment, individual reflection and readiness to take part in constructive rehabilitation activities are significantly reduced. At the group level, this phenomenon reinforces negative norms within the prison subculture, perpetuating maladaptive behavioral patterns and making it difficult to achieve lasting attitudinal changes conducive to social readaptation and reintegration.

When considering barriers to effective rehabilitation, it is impossible to overlook financial constraints, which may be classified as structural barriers. Public funding allocated to the operation of correctional facilities is insufficient to support many planned initiatives. Due to a persistent lack of resources for renovating aging buildings, maintenance needs often take priority, while rehabilitation programs are forced to operate within limited financial capacity. As a result, rehabilitation planning frequently requires compromises between the needs identified by correctional educators and actual financial resources.

Administrators of individual correctional facilities often attempt to secure additional funding or to arrange free support for incarcerated individuals through specialized external service providers. However, according to a report by the Supreme Audit Office of Poland (NIK),

> support institutions most often provide only ad hoc assistance, which reinforces a sense of entitlement and does not contribute to changes in individuals' attitudes toward their own lives. […] There is no system in place for monitoring the post-release paths of people leaving prison that would allow for the development of effective rehabilitation interventions. […] Current regulations and the actual operational capacities of institutions—including formal and material constraints—do not permit comprehensive support for incarcerated individuals in the process of social reintegration. In addition, assistance is fragmented across multiple institutions and agencies, which often discourages inmates from taking action to change their attitudes and behaviors. (NIK 2015: 23–24)

An additional challenge in implementing rehabilitation initiatives is excessive bureaucratization. The administrative burden created by redundant documentation requirements affects not only administrative staff but also correctional practitioners. Examples include the duplication of records maintained both in individual case files and electronic management systems, as well as the obligation to produce extensive statistical reports and analyses for central authorities. These demands slow the implementation of interventions and, in some cases, lead to the abandonment of planned projects.

As a consequence, delays occur in the delivery of change-oriented activities at both the individual and group levels, which may ultimately result in the cancellation of certain rehabilitation initiatives. Correctional staff frequently report a lack of time for thorough

diagnostic assessments of the factors leading to criminal behavior, for the effective delivery of interventions, or for systematic evaluation of educational and rehabilitative programs. This concern is corroborated by the above-cited NIK report on the social reintegration of individuals serving long-term sentences, which found that as many as 44% of rehabilitation programs lacked any analysis of the effectiveness of correctional interventions or their impact on preparing incarcerated individuals for social reintegration (NIK 2015: 10–12, 32–33). These findings clearly indicate the need for systematic reform of administrative procedures and a reorientation toward substantive, evidence-based support for individual and group rehabilitation processes.

Summary

Assessing the effectiveness of a rehabilitation program is not a straightforward task. It requires answering the question of whether a given program adequately prepares individuals for social reintegration, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of various rehabilitation interventions in relation to an individual's responsiveness to specific forms of treatment. Nevertheless, as the above analysis demonstrates, it is possible to identify key problems that prevent the basic objectives of correctional rehabilitation under custodial conditions from being effectively achieved. Ensuring the durable abandonment of a criminal lifestyle requires consistent and systematic interventions capable of producing substantive change in incarcerated individuals that allow them to reinterpret their past from a different angle. Such interventions should help inmates recognize that there is no place for former patterns of behavior in their present lives and encourage them to explore new possibilities, broaden their thinking, and expand their cultural horizons as part of personal development. Changes in attitudes, both at the individual and group levels, depend on sustained and structured efforts that promote reflection and the reconstruction of value systems.

It is particularly important for socially maladjusted individuals to be activated in ways that foster autonomy and enable them to cope independently with problem situations. Ideally, rehabilitation would be implemented under conditions that allow regular and meaningful

contact between incarcerated individuals and people from outside correctional facilities—for example, through joint projects conducted in open settings and involving representatives of local communities, such as employees or volunteers of nongovernmental organizations. Such arrangements would make it possible to more fully realize the potential for both individual and group-level change. At the same time, the role of correctional staff must not be overlooked and requires particular attention. This issue has become increasingly important given the specific nature of correctional work, which is characterized by high levels of stress, emotional strain, and a heightened risk of occupational burnout. The literature emphasizes the need for comprehensive prevention strategies to effectively support the mental health of this professional group. A fundamental component of such strategies is the provision of broadly defined psychological support, implemented through on-site access to psychologists as well as regular individual and group consultations. These measures can facilitate reflective discussion of difficult professional and personal situations, help alleviate emotional tension, and promote constructive problem-solving.

It is also important to provide regular psychoeducational training aimed at developing competences in stress and aggression management. The literature points to the value of mindfulness-based techniques (Klon, Waszyńska 2020: 204–211), relaxation exercises, and interpersonal skills training, all of which can significantly enhance the psychological resilience of correctional staff. Another extremely important area of intervention involves improving working conditions, including both the physical reorganization of workspaces to support effective recovery and regeneration, and the rational planning of work schedules to reduce excessive overtime, which often leads to chronic fatigue. Organizational culture also plays a crucial role. Building an atmosphere of mutual trust and open communication, along with the introduction of regular mental health screenings for staff, facilitates early identification of stress-related difficulties and timely intervention in emerging crisis situations. In addition, appropriate support from management is vital. This support should be expressed through regular informational and reflective meetings as well as through recognition of employees' efforts and the implementation of systematic reward mechanisms. Taken together, these measures can strengthen correctional staff's sense of professional

value, enhance job satisfaction, and significantly reduce the risk of occupational burnout.

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Changes in Behavior Self-reported by Minors Residing in Youth Educational Centers

Zmiany w zachowaniu zgłaszane przez nieletnich przebywających w Młodzieżowych Ośrodkach Wychowawczych

ABSTRACT

This article examines the effectiveness of social rehabilitation interventions targeted at minors residing in Youth Educational Centers (YECs). The issues addressed focus on the extent to which gender, age, and length of residence differentiated the changes that minors reported observing in their behavior since placement in youth educational centers. The study was conducted on a representative sample of 506 minors using a paper-and-pencil survey administered in direct contact with respondents.

The results indicate that most minors observed changes in their behavior, with this tendency being particularly pronounced among girls. Respondents reported the greatest changes in their functioning in the roles of student and child, while considerably smaller changes were noted in the role of peer and in problem behaviors. Younger respondents reported changes in problem behaviors less frequently than older ones. Improvements in relations with parents and in school performance were more often reported by minors who had been in

the institution for an average length of time. No age-related differences were found in respondents' functioning in the role of peer or in their engagement in problem behaviors. However, younger respondents were less likely than older ones to notice changes in their problem behaviors.

ABSTRAKT

Artykuł porusza kwestię skuteczności interwencji resocjalizacyjnych skierowanych do nieletnich w Młodzieżowych Ośrodkach Wychowawczych (MOW). Omawiane w nim zagadnienia dotyczą tego, jak silnie płeć, wiek i długość pobytu różnicują zmiany w zachowaniu, jakie wychowankowie obserwowali od momentu umieszczenia w Młodzieżowych Ośrodkach Wychowawczych. Badanie przeprowadzono na reprezentatywnej próbie 506 nieletnich, metodą ankiety papier-ołówek, w bezpośrednim kontakcie z respondentami. Wyniki badań wskazują, że większość nieletnich zaobserwowała zmiany w swoim zachowaniu, ze znaczną przewagą tej tendencji u dziewcząt. Respondenci zaobserwowali największe zmiany w funkcjonowaniu w rolach ucznia i dziecka, znacznie mniejsze zmiany w roli rówieśniczej i w zachowaniach problemowych. Młodsi uczniowie rzadziej niż starsi zgłaszali zmiany w zachowaniach problemowych. Poprawę relacji z rodzicami i lepsze wyniki w nauce częściej zgłaszali nieletni, którzy przebywali w placówce przez średni okres. Nie stwierdzono różnic ze względu na wiek w funkcjonowaniu respondentów w roli rówieśniczej i w angażowaniu się w zachowania problemowe. Młodsi uczniowie rzadziej zauważali zmiany w zachowaniach problemowych niż starsi.

Introduction

The objective of social rehabilitation is to improve the psychosocial functioning of minors through care, educational, and therapeutic measures aimed at bringing about desired changes in their development. This is necessary because of the varying levels of social maladjustment, which manifest in deficient functioning in the social roles assigned by the social system (Pytka 2000: 102). Consequently, "manifestations of adolescents' social maladjustment include negative and inappropriate responses to the demands and expectations inherent in the social roles assigned to them—as a child in the family, a friend in a peer or play group, and a student at school" (Pytka 2000: 91, translation mine).

Another important indicator of maladjustment is problem behavior, such as lying, truancy, substance use, running away from home, suicidal behaviors, risky sexual behaviors (including prostitution), violence, aggression, fighting, theft, and other crimes and offenses. These behaviors elicit a social response because they pose a threat to the healthy development of individuals and society. It should be stressed, however, that engagement in both asocial and antisocial behavior is strictly related to the cognitive sphere (beliefs), which generates the emotions experienced and, together with them, behavioral responses (Ellis 2008).

Evidence for such a relationship is provided by the phenomenon called criminal thinking (Walters 2006: 88), and research findings confirm that in minors the decision-making processes associated with it act as a trigger for problem behaviors. Both boys and girls residing in social rehabilitation facilities display strong indicators of criminal thinking; however, girls tend to "engage in cognitive processes characterized by impulsiveness, hostility, and emotionality, whereas in boys the predominant patterns of thinking support planned and goal-oriented antisocial behaviors" (Rode 2021: 122, translation mine).

According to the classical perspective, rehabilitation should aim to change adolescents' antagonistic and destructive (antisocial) attitudes toward the norms that define the proper performance of social roles. This involves organizing situations that encourage them to modify and abandon destructive behavior in favor of socially approved conduct, in view of the benefits involved. The goal is to create an internal conflict in the teenager's consciousness, consisting of a clash between two equally attractive goals; the educator's task is to motivate the minor to choose prosocial behavior more frequently and to abandon antisocial behavior. One recommended intervention technique is conversation with the young person, aimed at making them aware of the consequences of a particular choice (Czapów 1978: 188–190).

The underlying assumption is that engaging in activities that conflict with existing beliefs, especially when those activities require considerable effort, produces cognitive dissonance which, under certain conditions (personal responsibility and freedom of choice), leads to changes in the remaining components of attitude, namely emotions and beliefs (Böhner, Wänke 2004: 175–195). Moreover, according to

the concept of creative rehabilitation, creating appropriate conditions and motivating minors to engage in artistic or sports activities can lead to favorable changes in self-perception and in the emergence of a personal identity that is alternative to a deviant identity (Konopczyński 2006, 2014).

In contemporary social rehabilitation theory, increasing emphasis is placed on the idea that change is not only about correcting diagnosed deficits but, above all, about developing the potential of socially maladjusted youth. This approach is reflected in the concept of fostering adolescents' mental well-being through the use of social rehabilitation methods based on their personal and social resources, which equip them with new competencies to independently overcome difficulties and safely meet developmental needs. Research shows that such a strategy effectively motivates minors to introduce positive changes in their thinking and behavior and contributes to a stronger sense of agency (Dąbrowska 2023). This trend also includes the Good Lives Model (GLM), which assumes that the rehabilitation of minors should aim to develop personality strengths and the abilities necessary to attain goods that ensure a sense of life satisfaction (Purvis et al. 2011). One key resource that conditions proper social functioning is the ability to regulate emotions in a safe manner, which educators can effectively develop in the process of resocializing youth (Chomczyński 2017).

Behavioral change is an observable indicator of the effectiveness of rehabilitation; however, it should be remembered that it may also reflect only superficial change. This is usually the case when such change is imposed through excessively strong external control or when it is a form of manipulation used by teenagers to obtain more favorable treatment from educators. By contrast, when change is the result of a sufficiently long process in which systematic interventions are tailored to the level of intrinsic motivation and to the young person's current needs and resources, it is more likely to be genuine and lasting.

In the transtheoretical model (Prochaska, DiClemente 1982), change results from completing tasks that lead to the achievement of goals specific to a given stage of the overall process. This is difficult because of resistance, which stems from individuals' embeddedness in dysfunctional relationships in their community and from the

operation of defense mechanisms. Consequently, an important role in overcoming such resistance may be played by "turning points" in the course of life that enable individuals in crisis situations to break with the past through the social support received in a new and unexpected context (Laub, Sampson 2003). For socially maladjusted adolescents, such a "turning point" may be a court-ordered placement in a youth educational center (YEC).

In most institutions of this type, rehabilitation relies on behavioral influence and operates through a token economy system (Pospiszyl 1998), which involves the use of rewards and sanctions for behavior that deviates from institutional regulations. In the institution, minors pursue compulsory education under the supervision of teachers and educators. After classes, they participate in special interest groups (focused on sports, arts, music, tourism, theatre, etc.), as well as in prevention-oriented and sociotherapeutic activities, the scope and intensity of which vary across institutions (Kamiński et al. 2016: 89–100).

However, minors residing in these institutions often report that staff devote more attention to matters such as maintaining order and discipline than to building interpersonal relationships. This observation is supported by research findings indicating that in many YECs the social climate is unfavorable—described as controlling and restrictive (Staniaszek 2018) or controlling and paternalistic (Granosik et al. 2015). Factors contributing to this include:

- neglect of the educational value of free time (Kupiec 2014),
- a flawed system for establishing and enforcing rules,
- inconsistent and error-prone disciplinary practices,
- the absence of a shared strategy for conflict resolution,
- (psychological) violence among pupils and in staff–pupil relationships,
- limited cooperation with institutions operating in the local community (Granosik et al. 2015: 68–71).

Additional barriers limiting the effectiveness of the rehabilitation of minors include:

- failure to individualize interventions and tailor them to young people's needs and problems,
- a lack of specialized psychological and therapeutic interventions,

- superficial diagnosis of residents, including inadequate preparation and implementation of Individual Educational and Therapeutic Programs,
- negligence in supporting adolescents' transition to independence and in maintaining contact with them after they leave the institution,
- cases in which group sizes exceed the acceptable number of residents per group (Supreme Audit Office of Poland [NIK], 2017).

In light of the above, it is reasonable to expect limited rehabilitation outcomes. Nevertheless, the majority of juveniles residing in such institutions, regardless of age, gender, or length of residence, report either a high (32%) or moderate (37%) overall level of motivation to make constructive changes in their behavior, while fewer than one-third indicate no such need (Kupiec 2019: 312–313).

The practical application of the principles of desistance theory offers a chance to bring about lasting change in juveniles' current behavior. The theory emphasizes that change depends on aligning specialized interventions with the intrapsychological and social factors that determine an individual's willingness to abandon a deviant identity and the associated behavioral trajectory. Most of these factors are linked to the acquisition of valuable personal resources, including the ability to form constructive and satisfying social relationships. Strengthening such connections helps reduce feelings of loneliness and overcome isolation, thereby significantly enhancing psychological well-being and self-esteem.

Crucial in this process is the importance that individuals attach to the changes they begin to observe in their behavior and the way these changes influence their reevaluation of their self-image, sense of meaning, and life goals. Accordingly, supportive interventions should adapt resocialization goals to the minor's current life situation and identified needs and, above all, motivate them to develop the personal and social resources necessary to achieve these goals. It is crucial to build dialogical relationships that most effectively strengthen residents' sense of agency and capacity for reflection.

It should also be noted that developing minors' personal capital, which is the main catalyst for constructive change, requires enabling and supporting them in better fulfilling social roles in their natural

environment. This process also includes making amends to society for the harm caused and repairing the damage done (McNeill 2006).

Methodological assumptions of the study

The study aimed to identify the areas in which minors perceive changes in their behavior after being placed in a social rehabilitation institution. The following research problem was formulated:

To what extent do gender, age, and length of residence differentiate the changes that minors perceive in their behavior since placement in youth educational centers?

In accordance with the adopted theoretical framework of social maladjustment, the general problem was divided into the following research questions:

1. To what extent do minors residing in YECs perceive changes in their functioning in the roles of child, student, and peer, as well as in their engagement in problem behaviors?
2. To what extent does the gender of minors residing in YECs differentiate their perception of changes in their functioning in the roles of child, student, and peer, as well as in their engagement in problem behaviors?
3. To what extent does the age of minors residing in YECs differentiate their perception of changes in their functioning in the roles of child, student, and peer, as well as in their engagement in problem behaviors?
4. To what extent does the length of minors' residence in YECs differentiate their perception of changes in their functioning in the roles of child, student, and peer, as well as in their engagement in problem behaviors?

Given the diagnostic nature of the study and the lack of access to prior research addressing the issue under investigation, I formulated no hypotheses. Instead, a quantitative strategy was adopted to establish empirical facts concerning the population of minors residing in youth educational centers (Rubacha 2008). To this end, I employed a diagnostic survey method, as it is suitable for identifying opinions held by members of large populations.

The survey technique was based on a questionnaire that I developed to measure changes in behavior. The questionnaire consisted of

items grouped into four subscales relating to minors' functioning in the roles of child, student, and peer, as well as their engagement in problem behaviors, both before and after placement in a YEC. For each item, respondents indicated a YES or NO response.

Reliability, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, was α = .71 for the overall measure. For the individual subscales, reliability coefficients were as follows: α = .79 for *Functioning in the Role of Child* (16 items), α = .70 for *Functioning in the Role of Student* (18 items), α = .73 for *Functioning in the Role of Peer* (19 items), and α = .81 for *Engagement in Problem Behaviors* (11 items).

The study was conducted in November 2018 on a sample of 506 adolescents, representative of the population of 4,902 juveniles residing in Poland's YECs at that time. I used a stratified sampling scheme, preserving the gender ratio (75% boys and 25% girls), with the social rehabilitation institution serving as the sampling unit. In total, 12 YECs were selected. After excluding incorrectly completed surveys, 450 questionnaires were included in the final analysis.

The study procedure involved respondents completing paper-based questionnaires after class, exclusively in the presence of a pollster. The research was conducted with the consent of YEC authorities; minors and their legal guardians were informed about who was conducting the study and for what purpose. Participation was voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any time without providing a reason. Respondents completed the questionnaires anonymously, under conditions ensuring the confidentiality of their responses, with each person seated at a separate desk. After completion of the survey procedure, the collected empirical material was secured for further analysis, and incorrectly completed questionnaires were destroyed.

Results

The results of the study indicate that after placement in a youth educational center, most minors noticed changes in their behavior compared with their functioning prior to being court-ordered to a social rehabilitation institution. At the same time, statistically significant differences were found between boys and girls in their assessments of changes observed in all areas of functioning (Table 1).

Table 1. Changes in the behavior of minors residing in YECs by gender

Function-ing in the role of:	Gender	Level of change								Statistical test
		none		moderate		substantial		total		
child	boy	86	25.8%	213	64.0%	34	10.2%	333	100%	$\chi^2 = 9.2$
	girl	14	13.1%	75	70.1%	18	16.8%	107	100%	$df = 2$
	total	100	22.7%	288	65.5%	52	11.8%	440	100%	$V = .145$ $p = .01$
student	boy	99	29.6%	176	52.7%	59	17.7%	334	100%	$\chi^2 = 9.3$
	girl	19	17.8%	57	53.3%	31	29.0%	107	100%	$df = 2$
	total	118	26.8%	233	52.8%	90	20.4%	441	100%	$V = .146$ $p = .01$
peer	boy	185	56.1%	121	36.7%	24	7.3%	330	100%	$\chi^2 = 22.0$
	girl	39	36.1%	46	42.6%	23	21.3%	108	100%	$df = 2$
	total	224	51.1%	167	38.1%	47	10.7%	438	100%	$V = .224$ $p < .001$
problem behaviors	boy	125	38.2%	162	49.5%	40	12.2%	327	100%	$\chi^2 = 21.3$
	girl	18	16.7%	63	58.3%	27	25.0%	108	100%	$df = 2$
	total	143	32.9%	225	51.7%	67	15.4%	435	100%	$V = .221$ $p < .001$

Source: Author's research.

Adolescents reported the greatest changes in their functioning in the role of student (52.8% moderate and 20.4% substantial change), with girls expressing this view considerably more often (17.8% no change, 29.0% substantial change) than boys (29.6% no change, 17.7% substantial change). The second most frequently reported area of change was minors' functioning in the role of child (65.5% moderate change, 11.8% substantial change), with this tendency again being more pronounced among girls (13.1% no change, 16.8% substantial change) than among boys (25.8% no change, 10.2% substantial change).

Respondents reported changes in their behavior toward their peers much less frequently after placement in a YEC (38.1% moderate, 10.7% substantial), with a clear gender difference indicating that girls reported such changes more often (36.1% no change, 21.3% substantial) than boys (56.1% no change, 7.3% substantial change). The majority of residents also believed that their engagement in problem behaviors had decreased (moderately according to 51.7%, and substantially according to 15.4%). This perception was more common among girls residing in YECs (16.7% no change, 25.0% substantial

change) than among boys (38.2% no change, 12.2% substantial change). These findings indicate a clear gender difference among YEC residents in the changes that they perceived in their behavior following placement in the institution. Girls reported changes more frequently than boys in all analyzed areas of functioning.

By contrast, no statistically significant age-related differences were found in perceived changes in functioning in the roles of child, student, and peer. The bivariate distribution (Table 2) shows that, regardless of age, most respondents reported moderate or substantial changes in their functioning in the family, at school, and in peer relationships. An exception was engagement in problem behaviors (χ^2 = 13.5, p = .04): younger respondents (aged 13–15) reported such changes less frequently than older respondents (aged 16–18).

Table 2. Changes in the behavior of minors residing in YECs by age

Function-ing in the role of:	Age	none		moderate		substantial		total		Statistical test
child	13–14	14	31.8%	31.8%	27	3	6.8%	44	100%	χ^2 = 3.8 df = 6 V = .067 p = .70
	15 yrs	14	18.4%	18.4%	52	10	13.2%	76	100%	
	16 yrs	27	20.8%	20.8%	87	16	12.3%	130	100%	
	17–18	41	22.9%	22.9%	116	22	12.3%	179	100%	
	total	96	22.4%	22.4%	282	51	11.9%	429	100%	
student	13–14	15	33.3%	33.3%	24	6	13.3%	45	100%	χ^2 = 4.4 df = 6 V = .072 p = .62
	15 yrs	24	31.6%	31.6%	39	13	17.1%	76	100%	
	16 yrs	31	24.0%	24.0%	66	32	24.8%	129	100%	
	17–18	48	26.7%	26.7%	95	37	20.6%	180	100%	
	total	118	27.4%	27.4%	224	88	20.5%	430	100%	
peer	13–14	28	63.6%	63.6%	13	3	6.8%	44	100%	χ^2 = 4.7 df = 6 V = .076 p = .56
	15 yrs	35	46.1%	46.1%	33	8	10.5%	76	100%	
	16 yrs	64	49.6%	49.6%	52	13	10.1%	129	100%	
	17–18	90	50.6%	50.6%	65	23	12.9%	178	100%	
	total	217	50.8%	50.8%	163	47	11.0%	427	100%	

Function-ing in the role of:	Level of change								Statistical test
	Age	none		moderate		substantial		total	
problem behaviors	13–14	23	51.1%	51.1%	18	4	8.9%	45	100%	$\chi^2 = 13.5$ $df = 6$ $V = .125$ $p = .04$
	15 yrs	28	36.8%	36.8%	42	6	7.9%	76	100%	
	16 yrs	37	29.4%	29.4%	66	23	18.3%	126	100%	
	17–18	51	28.8%	28.8%	94	32	18.1%	177	100%	
	total	139	32.8%	32.8%	220	65	15.3%	424	100%	

Source: Author's research.

It is also worth noting that, despite the absence of statistically significant differences among age groups in the remaining domains of functioning, a clear pattern emerges: the youngest respondents (aged 13–14) reported changes in their functioning in the roles of child (31.8% reported no change), student (33.3% no change), and peer (63.6% no change) considerably less often than their older peers residing in such institutions.

The results of the present study also indicate that, regardless of length of residence in a YEC, the majority of adolescents reported a moderate or substantial level of behavioral change in all the specified areas of functioning (Table 3). However, more detailed analyses revealed that length of residence in a YEC significantly differentiated the level of change minors perceived in their functioning in the roles of child ($\chi^2 = 11.8$, p = .02) and student ($\chi^2 = 9.8$, p = .04).

Based on the bivariate distribution, improvements in functioning in relationships with parents were most often reported by teenagers with a moderate length of residence in the institution (17.6% no change, 16.5% substantial change), and less often by those who had been in the institution for a shorter period (1–5 months; 19.2% no change, 7.7% substantial change). The fewest minors reporting changes in their behavior were those who had spent the longest time in a YEC (over 15 months): 29.1% no change, 9.0% substantial change.

Table 3. Changes in the behavior of minors residing in YECs by length of residence

Func-tioning in the role of:	Length of stay	Level of change								Statistical test
		none		moderate		substantial		total		
child	1–5 mos.	20	19.2%	76	73.1%	8	7.7%	104	100%	$\chi^2 = 11.8$ $df = 4$ $V = .119$ $p = .02$
	6–15 mos.	31	17.6%	116	65.9%	29	16.5%	176	100%	
	> 15 mos.	39	29.1%	83	61.9%	12	9.0%	134	100%	
	total	90	21.7%	275	66.4%	49	11.8%	414	100%	
student	1–5 mos.	25	23.6%	66	62.3%	15	14.2%	106	100%	$\chi^2 = 9.8$ $df = 4$ $V = .109$ $p = .04$
	6–15 mos.	47	26.7%	82	46.6%	47	26.7%	176	100%	
	> 15 mos.	41	30.8%	67	50.4%	25	18.8%	133	100%	
	total	113	27.2%	215	51.8%	87	21.0%	415	100%	
peer	1–5 mos.	65	61.3%	34	32.1%	7	6.6%	106	100%	$\chi^2 = 7.8$ $df = 4$ $V = .097$ $p = .10$
	6–15 mos.	81	47.1%	69	40.1%	22	12.8%	172	100%	
	> 15 mos.	61	45.5%	56	41.8%	17	12.7%	134	100%	
	total	207	50.2%	159	38.6%	46	11.2%	412	100%	
problem behaviors	1–5 mos.	34	32.1%	53	50.0%	19	17.9%	106	100%	$\chi^2 = 3.2$ $df = 4$ $V = .062$ $p = .52$
	6–15 mos.	51	29.7%	91	52.9%	30	17.4%	172	100%	
	> 15 mos.	47	35.9%	69	52.7%	15	11.5%	131	100%	
	total	132	32.3%	213	52.1%	64	15.6%	409	100%	

Source: Author's research.

A similar pattern was observed with respect to changes that respondents reported in the performance of school duties. The greatest changes in this domain were reported by minors with an average length of residence in the institution (26.7% no change, 26.7% substantial change). Changes in functioning in the role of student were also noted by adolescents with the longest length of residence (30.8% no change, 18.8% substantial change) as well as by those with a shorter period of residence in a YEC (23.6% no change, 14.2% substantial change). On this basis, it can be concluded that both short and long periods of residence in a YEC are associated with a lower perception of change in functioning in the roles of child and student, compared with minors who had spent an average amount of time in this type of social rehabilitation institution.

Further analysis showed that length of residence did not significantly differentiate perceived changes in relationships with peers or in engagement in problem behaviors. It is therefore warranted to conclude that, regardless of how long residents had been in a YEC, most reported changes in their behavior in these domains, and that only about one-third of respondents in each group reported no such changes.

Discussion and conclusions

The results obtained are subject to several limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, behavioral change was assessed exclusively on the basis of juveniles' self-reports, without the use of additional triangulation methods. Given the strong need for social approval characteristic of individuals residing in rehabilitation facilities, this may introduce bias that inflates the reported extent of change in the fulfillment of social roles. However, for organizational reasons, it was not possible to obtain comparative assessments of juveniles' behavior from educators or to conduct behavioral observations during the one-day data collection in each center. Second, in light of the values of Cramer's V coefficient, which ranged from 0.14 to 0.22, the statistically significant differences by gender, age, and length of residence should be interpreted as indicating only weak differentiation in behavioral change. Similarly, the observed differences in the performance of specific social roles and in problem behaviors, although statistically significant, should be considered small in magnitude ($\chi^2 = 111.0$, df = 6, $p < .001$, V = .178).

For socially maladjusted adolescents, court-ordered placement in a social rehabilitation institution is a sudden and radical change in environment—one in which institutionally organized interventions train them to function in social roles in ways substantially different than before. Concurrently, an equally strong catalyst for change is activated: awareness of the loss of personal freedom combined with the hope of regaining it through improved behavior. A third factor facilitating behavioral change is providing YEC residents with opportunities to develop their interests and skills, which is made possible in some facilities by high-quality infrastructure and the strong professional competence of teaching staff.

Considering the influence of these three factors alone, it becomes easier to understand why, over time, most young people residing in YECs begin to notice positive changes in their behavior resulting from functioning under conditions governed by new, different rules. In light of the results obtained, several patterns in the changes reported by YEC residents warrant closer attention.

First, behavioral changes in all specified areas of functioning were reported more often by girls than by boys. This may be attributable to girls' greater sensitivity to social control interventions and their stronger experience of separation from the family. Girls tend to place greater importance on social approval than boys, which may explain why they are more likely to respond to external control and to modify their behavior more readily. Moreover, girls residing in YECs generally demonstrate more developed social skills than boys, which makes it easier for them to meet the standards of social role performance expected by educators (Kupiec, Zięciak 2024: 62–63).

Further evidence of the relationship between openness to change and psychosocial development is provided by the finding that younger teens (aged 13–15) reported noticing changes in their behavior less often than older teens (aged 16–18). This is because behavioral change requires a capacity for reflection, which is largely determined by the uneven maturation of different brain regions during adolescence. Research has shown that brain structures associated with sensation seeking mature more rapidly, whereas those responsible for attention control, outcome prediction, delayed gratification, and reflective decision-making develop more slowly (Steinberg 2004). As a result, younger adolescents tend to display greater emotional sensitivity and reactivity, along with a lower capacity for emotional and behavioral self- regulation. In older adolescents, this imbalance gradually diminishes as the frontal lobes continue to mature.

Second, the group that reported markedly greater changes in their behavior toward parents and in their functioning in the role of student consisted of adolescents with an average length of residence in the institution (6–15 months). This finding may be interpreted as follows. Immediately after placement, adolescents usually typically exhibit the strongest reluctance to cooperate, which stems from feelings of resentment and perceived injustice regarding the court's decision, as

well as from the anxiety and stress associated with entering a new and unfamiliar environment, initially experienced as hostile.

It usually takes several months for adolescents to adapt to the requirements and rules governing life in the institution, made particularly difficult by their previous lifestyles and generally low levels of trust and social competence. Consequently, it is only after this initial period that most begin to reassess their prior behavior in light of their current circumstances. At this stage, they weigh the costs and benefits of abandoning asocial habits and learning new, socially accepted behaviors. If, with appropriate support from staff, they resolve the resulting internal conflict in a positive way, they begin both to introduce and to notice changes in their behavior.

This mechanism likely weakens among minors who have remained in the institution for an extended period (over 15 months). In such cases, either responsiveness to feedback may diminish, or adaptation to educators' expectations may become so complete that teens no longer encounter new challenges or receive the support needed to meet them. It may therefore be surmised that after a period of intensive change during the middle phase of residence (between 6 and 15 months), a phase of stagnation sets in as residence lengthens. This pattern applies specifically to changes related to youth's functioning in the roles of child and student and thus requires separate interpretation.

Third, the results indicate that the greatest behavioral changes among minors concern their functioning in the roles of student and child, whereas changes related to peer relationships and involvement in problem behaviors are considerably less pronounced. Given the importance that minors attach to regaining the trust of their parents and the feelings of guilt they experience over the deterioration of those relationships, their openness to change in this regard is easier to understand—especially since parents are the main source of support that most YEC residents rely on to help them leave the institution as soon as possible.

Taking into account the most important developmental task of adolescence, which is the formation of one's own identity, it can be assumed that by changing their attitudes toward parents, teenagers seek to demonstrate their need for parental support in the process of destigmatization. Also noteworthy is the fact that contact with

parents during residence in a YEC is largely limited to daily phone calls and occasional home leave, which may facilitate adaptation to parental expectations and potentially lead young people to overstate the extent of change in this area of functioning.

A similar situation applies to changes in functioning in the role of student, the emergence of which is largely driven by compulsory education in a school located at the YEC and by a consistently applied system of supervision and sanctions. It should also be noted that the educational system in YECs takes into account individual needs, deficits, resources, and abilities as specified in each resident's Individual Educational and Therapeutic Program. For this reason, the young people who have previously experienced difficulties in education can expect individualized support from educational staff and greater understanding from teachers. Consequently, achieving change in these areas of functioning may appear easier than in other domains.

Difficulty in making changes related to the role of peer may stem from the fact that, after being placed in a YEC, a minor remains in the sphere of influence of their more or less deviant peers. Although institutional educational staff attempt to weaken this negative influence, its primary source continues to be the socially maladjusted youth residing in the facility. These peers are guided by subcultural norms that define what behavior is expected of a "good" friend. This is especially true given that adolescence is characterized by a high degree of conformity to peer expectations, aimed at confirming one's attractiveness and status in relationships. Furthermore, isolation from the external environment limits opportunities to make social choices that would allow for experimentation with alternative patterns of behavior.

The presence of these "alternative life" rules in social rehabilitation institutions makes it extremely difficult—and at times even impossible—for minors to change their engagement in problem behaviors. It should be noted that this situation is partly attributable to the passivity and inertia of educators and, in some cases, even to their deliberate actions (Wolan 2013). However, the main cause of difficulty in achieving change in this area lies in the complex etiology of problem behaviors and the equally complex mechanisms that perpetuate them. Consequently, appropriately managing these behaviors

requires cooperation with specialists (psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists), for which the current organizational model of youth educational centers generally fails to provide adequate conditions.

Nevertheless, despite the limitations noted above, the results of the present study justify cautious optimism regarding the effectiveness of rehabilitation carried out in youth educational centers. They indicate that most minors notice changes in their behavior since their placement in this institution. Although these findings do not allow conclusions to be drawn about the durability of the behavioral changes reported by youth, similar doubts have been raised in relation to results reported by other authors.

A report by the Supreme Audit Office of Poland (NIK 2017) showed that approximately 30% of former YEC residents violated the law and that this proportion increased to 60% over time after leaving the institution. These trends were confirmed by other studies, which found that over a five-year follow-up period as many as 71% of former YEC pupils were convicted of criminal offenses. In the first year after leaving the institution, 43.4% of former YEC residents committed an offense; in the following year, this figure increased by 21 percentage points to 64.3%. Only after former YEC residents reached the age of 20 did the proportion of those convicted decrease, to 5.1%. It should also be noted that 80% of these individuals committed offenses more than once (Bartkowicz, Chudnicki 2015: 141–145).

In seeking explanations for this unfavorable trend, attention should be paid to the dominant methods used to induce and maintain behavioral change in social rehabilitation institutions for minors. Most importantly, these methods rely heavily on strong external control exercised by educators. Adolescents residing in such institutions are rarely granted wider autonomy or opportunities to make independent choices and to take responsibility for them (Zięciak 2020: 164–171). Yet this is precisely the key condition for the development of self-control based on intrinsic motivation to resist the temptation to violate social norms.

In the scholarly literature, this capacity is referred to as self-regulation, and its development depends on adolescents having a sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. Autonomy, in this context,

does not mean unrestricted freedom to disregard others' expectations, but rather taking responsibility for one's choices in accordance with one's will and with respect for others. Equally important is the presence of emotional and social bonds, which form the basis of mutual trust in interpersonal relationships. Self-regulatory capacity is also strengthened by belief in one's own abilities, which emerges from a sense of agency developed through experience—more specifically, through improving skills in the course of purposeful activity.

Satisfying these three basic psychological needs in the process of upbringing contributes to the internalization (adopting as one's own) and integration (incorporating into one's self-concept) of socially approved goals, thereby supporting optimal individual development (Ryan, Deci 2000). In this way, self-regulation becomes the ability to direct one's own life, a skill which takes shape during adolescence (Oleszkowicz, Senejko 2013: 121).

However, in the resocialization systems that systems operate in most YECs, pupils decide to change their previous behavior mostly because doing so allows them to obtain rewards that are important to them or to avoid punishment—mechanisms predicated on external control. Their actions less often arise from personal initiative and are less frequently motivated by a disinterested desire for self-development associated with a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As a result, after leaving the institution, when the influence of external control gradually weakens and adequate social support is lacking, former residents, despite sincere declarations that they intend to maintain positive behavioral changes, often relapse into previously harmful habits.

On the basis of the findings obtained, several practical recommendations can be proposed. Given the fluctuation of behavioral change among minors during their stay in YECs, it is necessary to conduct systematic observation of their behavior and to engage them in conversations that encourage self-reflection. If the changes young people achieve are to be lasting, educational staff should dedicate more attention to developing intrinsic motivation for change rather than relying primarily on external control. This goal can be pursued by granting adolescents greater autonomy combined with responsibility for their choices, by strengthening relational bonds with them, and by enhancing their skills and sense of agency.

The results of this study indicate that most minors placed in social rehabilitation institutions by court order want to change their behavior and recognize the benefits of doing so, but they require professional support from specialists to ensure that the positive effects achieved do not fade after they leave the institution. It may therefore be beneficial for educators to employ methods aimed at developing minors' individual and social resources, which makes it easier to cope with life's difficulties and contribute to improved mental well-being (Dąbrowska 2023).

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Research reports

Raporty z badań

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Subjective Predictors of Emotional Intelligence in People with Physical Disabilities and Their Significance for the Institutional Context

Subiektywne predyktory inteligencji emocjonalnej u osób z niepełnosprawnością fizyczną i ich znaczenie dla kontekstu instytucjonalnego

ABSTRACT

Institutional support plays a crucial role in the social participation of individuals with physical disabilities. Emotional intelligence (EI) is a key personal resource that enhances adaptive responses, interpersonal relationships, and engagement in social roles.

The objective of this study is to examine the relationships between emotional intelligence and adaptive responses, self-esteem, a sense of coherence, and value preferences among people with physical disabilities. The study analyzed predictors of EI—adaptive reactions, self-esteem, a sense of coherence, and preferred values—in a sample of 204 participants aged 16–65 with physical disabilities living in southeastern Poland. Regression analysis and structural equation

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modeling indicated that shock negatively predicts EI, whereas moral–ethical self-concept, externalized hostility, and a sense of manageability are positive predictors. A preference for values such as personal security, family, social harmony, and order was also associated with higher EI. These findings demonstrate that the development of emotional intelligence depends on both individual characteristics and the institutional environment, which can provide support, inclusion, and targeted interventions. The results suggest that institutions can enhance EI by addressing early-stage adaptive reactions, strengthening personal and social resources, and promoting inclusive values.

ABSTRAKT

Wsparcie instytucjonalne odgrywa kluczową rolę w uczestnictwie społecznym osób z niepełnosprawnością fizyczną. Inteligencja emocjonalna (IE) jest kluczowym zasobem osobistym, który wzmacnia reakcje adaptacyjne, relacje interpersonalne i zaangażowanie w role społeczne.

Celem badawczym artykułu jest określenie związku między inteligencją emocjonalną a reakcjami przystosowawczymi, samooceną, poczuciem koherencji oraz wartościami preferowanymi przez osoby z niepełnosprawnościami fizycznymi. W niniejszym badaniu przeanalizowano predyktory IE — reakcje przystosowawcze, poczucie własnej wartości, poczucie koherencji i preferencje wartości — u 204 uczestników w wieku 16–65 lat z niepełnosprawnością fizyczną z południowo-wschodniej Polski. Modelowanie regresji i równań strukturalnych wykazało, że reakcja szoku osłabiała IE, podczas gdy moralno-etyczna samoocena, uzewnętrzniona wrogość i poczucie zaradności wiązały się z nią pozytywnie. Preferowanie takich wartości, jak bezpieczeństwo osobiste, rodzina, harmonia społeczna i porządek również wiązało się z wyższym IE. Wyniki te podkreślają, że rozwój IE zależy zarówno od cech indywidualnych, jak i od środowiska instytucjonalnego, które zapewnia wsparcie, integrację i ukierunkowane interwencje. Sugeruje to, że instytucje mogą wzmacniać IE poprzez reagowanie na wczesne reakcje adaptacyjne, wspieranie zasobów osobistych i społecznych oraz promowanie wartości inkluzyjnych.

Introduction

Individuals with physical disabilities, particularly those with motor impairments, often face challenges in accessing support groups

due to mobility limitations. Institutions play a critical role in their social functioning, not only by defining but also by reinforcing their belonging to the category of people with disabilities (Masłyk 2021). Promoting institutional practices based on the biopsychosocial model of disability is therefore essential, as it strengthens both the internal and external resources of individuals with disabilities (Petasis 2019). Research indicates that internal resources, such as self-esteem, self-efficacy, and a sense of coherence, alongside external resources like social support and environmental accessibility, play a significant role in self-assessment and overall adaptation (Peter et al. 2015; Post, van Leeuwen 2012; Kristofferzon, Engström, Nilsson 2018; Samsari, Soulis 2019). Institutional contexts can either enhance or constrain these resources.

Emotional intelligence represents a key internal resource that enables individuals to understand and regulate their own emotions, facilitating problem-solving and influencing the emotions of others (Salovey, Mayer 1990; Reis et al. 2007). Higher emotional intelligence is associated with greater social competence and improved academic and professional outcomes (Bar-On 2007; 2010). Accordingly, institutions play a pivotal role in fostering emotional intelligence, as the implementation of equality measures alone does not automatically change stereotypical perceptions of individuals with disabilities (Masłyk 2021). Strengthening emotional intelligence contributes to improved functioning across multiple areas of social life, promoting long-term benefits for both individuals and society. Every person is in a constant relationship with their environment, which shapes their functioning and can contribute to its modification.

The role of emotional intelligence in the social participation of individuals with disabilities

As society evolves, the situation of individuals with disabilities also changes, as reflected in legal instruments guaranteeing social participation, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as in indicators such as higher levels of education, increased employment rates, and improved quality of life. The experience of coping with disability is not solely an individual one

but also a social process, as a person with a disability must navigate a range of complex social tasks and, in doing so, may receive cognitive, emotional, and physical support from family members, friends, and co-workers (Kosciulek 2007; Nario-Redmond, Noel, Fern 2012). According to Kosciulek (2007), the most important social tasks include maintaining a sense of normalcy, adapting to changing social relationships and social roles, coping with stigma, and preserving a sense of control. Every person remains in a constant relationship with their environment, which both shapes their functioning and can contribute to its modification.

These tasks, however, are being reshaped in contemporary contexts—not only by expanding the understanding of normality to include the concept of diversity (Davis 2013; Andrews 2020), but also through self-advocacy efforts aimed at improving the situation of people with disabilities, leading to lower levels of disability-related stress (Bogart 2015) and the development of a positive self-image (Dunn, Burcaw 2013; Bogart 2014). In parallel, the concept of stigma has expanded to include the need to cope with microaggressions experienced by people with disabilities, even in communities characterized by high levels of inclusivity (Jammaers, Fleischmann 2024).

However, it is important to note that the experience of disability continues to be associated with an elevated risk of loneliness, isolation, exclusion, discrimination, distorted social perceptions, and exposure to microaggressions (Rokach, Lechcier-Kimel, Safarov 2006; Sim, Hugenberg 2022). Individuals experiencing loneliness may appear to have poorer social skills than they actually possess (McDonald et al. 2018). These negative experiences contribute to reduced self-esteem and negative emotional states and may also lead to health problems (Rokach, Lechcier-Kimel, Safarov 2006; MacDonald et al. 2018). Emotional intelligence integrates multiple dimensions of the disability experience—social, psychological, and biological. Empirical research supports this by examining the relationships between emotional intelligence and various aspects of functioning in individuals with disabilities:

(1) biological dimension: research on emotional intelligence and its impact on health (Bar-On 2007; Fernández-Abascal, Martín-Díaz 2015), as well as on chronic pain in disability (Costa et al. 2017; Doherty et al. 2017);

(2) psychological dimension: studies examining perceived psychological well-being (Gallagher, Vella-Brodrick 2008; Fernández-Berrocal, Extremera 2016) and depressive symptoms (Downey et al. 2008; Ahmadpanah et al. 2016; Sergi et al. 2021), including the protective role of emotional intelligence in the process of self-stigmatization (Trigueros et al. 2020);

(3) social dimension: research studying functioning in education (Parker et al. 2009; Mushtaq, Asghar, Bakhtawar 2019), employment (Desti, Shanthi 2015; Miao, Humphrey, Qian 2017), as well as in the contexts of entrepreneurship (Bar-On 2007) and leadership (Gómez-Leal et al. 2021).

Thus, the research objective of this article is to identify predictors of emotional intelligence in the following areas: adaptive responses, self-esteem, sense of coherence, and value preferences among people with physical disabilities.

Psychosocial responses to functional loss and chronic illness are characterized by temporality and can therefore be classified as short-term, intermediate-term, or long-term. They may be adaptive or maladaptive (Livneh 2001; 2022). The psychosocial reactions to the acquisition of a disability or chronic illness most frequently cited in the literature include shock, anxiety, denial, depression, hostility, and adaptation. The final stage involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components (Livneh et al. 2004). Successful adaptation reflects the integration of physical and sensory changes into a transformed body image and enhanced self-esteem. In contrast, unsuccessful adaptation is associated with the persistence of physical and psychological symptoms, including chronic anxiety and depression, psychogenic pain, chronic fatigue, and cognitive distortions.

The importance of changes in the hierarchy of values during the adjustment process to acquired disability was already noted by Wright (1983). She linked the mechanism of compensation to emotional involvement, combined with a shift in value orientation and a transformation of self-image in which aspects of humanity not directly tied to physical functioning are emphasized. Similar conclusions have been confirmed in subsequent studies (Keany, Glueckauf 1993; Smedema, Bakken-Gillen, Dalton 2009; Barclay-Goddard et al. 2012; Dunn, Burcaw 2013). Ongoing research on the internal resources of people with disabilities indicates that these resources

may be diminished due to the specific challenges associated with the disability experience (Moein, Houshyar 2015).

The development of self-esteem in people with physical disabilities proceeds differently depending on whether the disability is congenital or acquired. In the case of congenital disabilities, self-esteem is closely linked to body image, as demonstrated by research on the development of children and adolescents with disabilities. Schmidt et al. (2015) emphasize that, regardless of developmental stage or the country in which the studies were conducted, physical self-concept is strongly correlated with global self-esteem in both boys and girls. This relationship is not determined only by the level of physical activity, although it is associated with physical appearance and motor skills.

Acquired motor disability, by contrast, is associated with adaptive responses to disability, among other factors. The lost ability is gradually integrated into the individual's self-image and is accompanied by emotional acceptance of the functional consequences of the impairment, along with behavioral adaptation and social reintegration (Livneh, Antonak 1990). Additionally, it is worth noting that factors positively influencing the self-esteem of people with disabilities include social activism, which fosters social identification with one's own disability as well as with others in similar life situations (Nario-Redmond, Noel, Fern 2012).

Sense of coherence, in turn, is defined as a sense of comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness (Antonovsky 1987). It typically develops around the age of 33 and remains relatively stable throughout adulthood, although it may change when a person is confronted with difficult experiences. A high level of this resource facilitates better coping with unpredictable stressors, especially in situations involving severe stress. Disability can be viewed as a chronic stressor that individuals may face throughout their lives (Livneh 2001). On the one hand, disability and its consequences may weaken a person's sense of coherence; on the other hand, as a psychological resource, sense of coherence can buffer against the harmful effects of disability (Jahnsen et al. 2002; Dymecka et al. 2022). A strong sense of coherence is associated with higher quality of life, as demonstrated by reviews conducted within the salutogenic model of health (Eriksson, Lindström 2007), as well as by other studies on the relationship

between sense of coherence and disability (Chumbler et al. 2013; Broersma et al. 2018; Moen et al. 2019).

Emotional intelligence, when examined in the context of adaptation to disability and chronic illness, is a dynamic phenomenon; it develops gradually through a person's efforts to cope with an experience (Livneh 2022). It is also shaped by internal resources which, according to the biopsychosocial model of disability, encompass adaptive responses, self-esteem, sense of coherence, and values. Accordingly, the research hypothesis assumes that adaptive reactions in the form of shock and hostility (so-called short-term reactions) are associated with lower emotional intelligence, whereas higher levels of internal resources—manifested as elevated self-esteem and sense of coherence, along with a preference for values not tied to physical condition—are conducive to higher emotional intelligence.

Method

The study employed a diagnostic survey method using the following research instruments: the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (INTE) by N.S. Schutte, J.M. Malouff, L.E. Hall, D.J. Haggerty, J.T. Cooper, Ch.J. Golden, and L. Dornheim (Polish adaptation: Ciechanowicz, Jaworowska, Matczak 2000); the Questionnaire of Adaptive Reactions (RIDI) by H. Livneh and R.F. Antonak (Polish adaptation: Byra, Kirenko 2016); the Self-Esteem Scale (TSCS) by W.H. Fitts (Polish initial adaptation: Kirenko 1998); the Life Orientation Questionnaire (SOC-29) by A. Antonovsky (Polish adaptation: Koniarek, Dudek, Makowska 1993); the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ-R2) by S. Schwartz (Polish adaptation: Cieciuch 2013); and an interview questionnaire. The reliability and validity of the instruments were supported by the results of the present study, justifying their use in this research.

Participants

The study included 204 individuals with mobility disabilities, comprising 86 women (42.16%) and 118 men (57.84%). Participants were recruited in southeastern Poland using a snowball sampling

method (Babbie 2004). All applicable ethical standards for conducting scientific research were observed. Participants ranged in age from 16 to 65 years, with a mean age of 36.22 years. The sample included individuals with upper or lower limb amputations (44; 21.57%), spinal cord injuries (41; 20.10%), cerebral palsy (41; 20.10%), multiple sclerosis (37; 18.14%), and motor disabilities of other etiologies (41; 20.10%). The majority of participants were classified as having Group I disability, which was the most frequently diagnosed category (126 individuals; 61.77%). The duration of disability ranged from birth to 54 years, with a mean duration of 31.68 years. Most participants were unmarried (92; 45.10%), followed by those who were married (79; 38.72%), separated or divorced (23; 11.27%), and widowed (10; 4.90%). Most participants lived in urban areas (117 individuals; 57.35%). Regarding self-rated health status, 144 participants (70.59%) described it as good, 43 (21.10%) as very good, and the remaining 17 individuals (8.33%) as poor or unsatisfactory.

Results

To identify predictors of emotional intelligence among participants with physical disabilities, stepwise multiple regression was initially applied to the global emotional intelligence score. Subsequently, to determine more precisely which predictors from the groups of independent variables—adaptive reactions, self-esteem, sense of coherence, and values—had explanatory power for the dependent variable, structural equation modeling techniques were used. Because the distributions of the variables deviated significantly from normal distribution, analyses were conducted using the asymptotically distribution-free method. High indices of model fit were obtained, including a χ^2/df ratio below 2, GFI and AGFI values above 0.9, and RMSEA values of 0.8 or lower. Detailed results are presented in Table 2 and Figure 1. However, prior to this analysis, a correlation matrix of the study variables was constructed using Pearson's r (Table 1).

Table 1. Correlation matrix of variables from the data of people with disabilities studied

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
1 Inte	–																											
2 S	–.34	–																										
3 N	–.28	.81	–																									
4 W	–.11	.41	.48	–																								
5 D	–.30	.82	.76	.35	–																							
6 According to	–.33	.78	.74	.31	.76	–																						
7 Wr	–.18	.79	.72	.31	.68	.70	–																					
8 A	–.02	.20	.12	.41	.15	.11	.14	–																				
9 P	.09	–.26	–.22	.12	–.30	–.24	–.23	.50	–																			
10 pzr	.21	–.39	–.42	–.20	–.37	–.36	–.35	.02	.29	–																		
11 pz	.28	–.49	–.47	–.14	–.44	–.42	–.41	.05	.31	.75	–																	
12 ps	.28	–.43	–.44	–.04	–.46	–.41	–.35	.15	.46	.67	.79	–																
13 koh s.	.28	–.48	–.49	–.14	–.46	–.43	–.41	.08	.39	.90	.93	.89	–															
14 Ks	.02	–.08	–.09	.10	–.06	–.13	–.05	.13	.11	.12	.23	.24	.22	–														

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
15 St	–.11	–.05	.05	.10	–.04	–.04	–.02	–.11	.03	–.04	–.03	–.06	–.05	.62	–													
16 H	–.16	.00	.10	.08	.02	.03	.10	–.08	–.02	–.12	–.05	–.11	–.10	.55	.71	–												
17 O	–.07	.03	.06	.17	–.01	–.07	.01	.06	.14	–.01	.02	.14	.05	.69	.59	.51	–											
18 Wł	–.16	.13	.23	.24	.14	.07	.10	.04	–.02	–.12	–.12	–.10	–.13	.51	.57	.57	.58	–										
19 U	.01	–.17	–.16	.15	–.10	–.14	–.26	.15	.15	.25	.32	.40	.35	.45	.17	–.00	.32	.17	–									
20 Ż	.14	–.26	–.27	.12	–.23	–.29	–.32	.20	.26	.28	.37	.47	.40	.48	.10	.01	.38	.08	.69	–								
21 Pr	.02	–.14	–.13	.13	–.06	–.08	–.23	.14	.19	.25	.38	.36	.36	.40	.08	–.01	.32	.12	.78	.78	–							
22 T	–.04	–.06	–.07	.27	–.00	–.05	–.20	.16	.10	.25	.21	.23	.25	.21	.01	–.19	.08	.09	.68	.56	.63	–						
23 B	.13	–.08	–.07	.11	–.02	–.03	–.13	.03	.04	.07	.18	.24	.18	.49	.23	.13	.39	.24	.71	.57	.70	.51	–					
24 KA	.11	.26	.26	.04	.25	.26	.23	.11	–.16	–.30	–.23	–.18	–.26	–.05	–.04	–.10	–.02	.06	.02	–.13	.02	–.12	.22	–				
25 KB	.27	.03	–.03	.04	.06	.01	.00	.16	.07	.08	.11	.11	.11	–.09	–.22	–.26	–.13	–.16	.12	.13	.13	.22	.11	.30	–			
26 KC	.08	.07	.04	–.06	–.00	.08	.15	.02	–.08	.05	.04	.08	.06	.05	.09	.02	.02	–.03	.04	.06	.03	–.08	.12	.31	.30	–		
27 KD	.24	.04	–.03	–.10	–.02	–.01	.06	.02	–.06	.06	.02	.11	.07	–.01	–.10	–.18	.01	–.16	.05	.17	.11	.06	.22	.33	.33	.35	–	
28 KE	.12	.15	.10	–.02	.17	.11	.21	.07	–.07	–.08	–.12	–.11	–.11	–.05	–.07	–.07	–.04	–.01	.06	.03	.05	.05	.13	.47	.63	.43	.46	–

Source: Own study.

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Among the independent variables reaching statistical significance, the regression model explaining 31% of the variance in the dependent variable—emotional intelligence (Table 2)—shows that the strongest influence comes from preferences for values related to personal security, family, friends, and nation, as well as harmony and social order. Emotional intelligence is also shaped by an indirect adaptive response referred to as externalized hostility, which is expressed by individuals with physical disabilities or chronic illnesses toward other people, objects, or situations. This response emerges when individuals begin to resist the physical limitations that they experience, obstacles encountered during treatment or therapy, and their perceptions of themselves in relation to moral values, attitudes toward God, a sense of being a "good" or "bad" person, and the extent to which they perceive available resources as sufficient to meet the demands posed by stressful stimuli.

Table 2. Results of multiple regression analysis for the explained variable *Emotional Intelligence* (Inte) and independent variables

Predictors	b*	Std. dev. with b*	B	Std. dev. with b	t(187)	P
Absolute term			61.11	17.53	3.49	.001**
Shock	−.39	.12	−1.35	.42	−3.23	.001**
Moral-ethical self	.26	.08	.87	.27	3.20	.002**
Hostility	.28	.11	1.02	.39	2.63	.009**
Hedonism	−.17	.07	−.68	.28	−2.46	.015*
Pz	.18	.07	.31	.13	2.41	.017*
Security	.33	.10	1.09	.33	3.26	.001**
R = .60; R2 = .31; F(16.187) = 6.69; p < .000***.						

Source: Own study.
* p < .05; ** p < .001; *** p < .000.

Diagram 1. Path model for the predictors of Emotional Intelligence of the people with disabilities studied
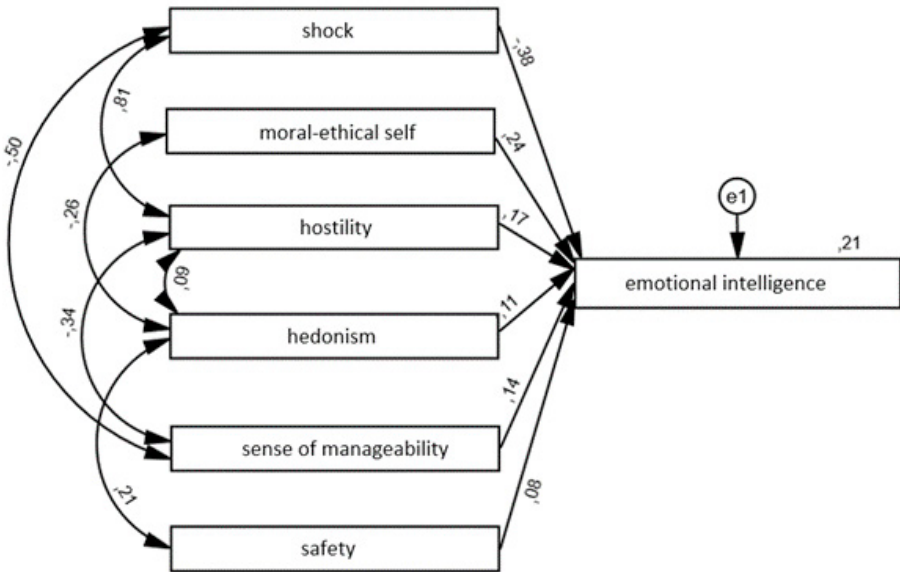
In contrast, the presence of a panic shock reaction—particularly one that emphasizes the significance of physical damage, setbacks, and events, as well as the perceived magnitude of their future consequences—together with a lack of reflection and a focus on experienced loss or the pursuit of pleasure and the satisfaction of basic needs, significantly inhibits the development of emotional intelligence. The path model further refines this set of predictors of emotional intelligence in individuals with physical disabilities by excluding indicators of hedonism and security due to their lack of statistical significance. This confirms the predictive importance of the remaining factors, with shock emerging as the strongest indicator; its high negative value markedly weakens emotional intelligence. By contrast, positive indicators—moral-ethical self-concept, externalized hostility, and a sense of manageability—significantly strengthen the analyzed variable.

Discussion of results

Emotional intelligence is a resource that aligns with the phe-
nomenological assumptions of the model of adaptation to life with
disability and chronic illness. It creates an interactive relationship
between subjective elements (the individual's self-awareness) and
indicators of adaptation to disability across intrapersonal, interper-
sonal, and non-personal dimensions—that is, those related to the
living environment of a person with a disability (Livneh 2022). This
perspective assumes that the process of adapting to life with a dis-
ability may be initiated by a sudden experience or diagnosis and is
therefore associated with efforts to cope with that experience. The
process has a certain structure which, despite its heterogeneity, con-
tains shared and recurring features.

In the multivariate stepwise path models constructed on the basis
of regression analysis, the identified predictors were statistically sig-
nificant, although their predictive configurations differed in mean-
ingful ways. This was primarily due to the nature of intragroup corre-
lations. Among respondents with motor disabilities, the strongest and
most consistently negative predictors of emotional intelligence were
adaptive reactions in the form of shock. These reactions are interpret-
ed as "raw" responses following a traumatic event and are viewed as
reactions to life-threatening injury or the diagnosis of a chronic con-
dition that disrupts prior life patterns. Such reactions, unlike clinical-
ly diagnosed symptoms, are considered normative responses (Livneh
2022). Failure to adapt is associated with persistent symptoms such
as anxiety and depression, psychogenic pain, chronic fatigue, social
withdrawal, and cognitive distortions (Livneh et al. 2019).

Another statistically significant variable was the hostility stage
of adjustment, indicating that people at this stage of adaptation to
disability exhibit higher levels of emotional intelligence. This finding
is also related to the time required to process difficult experiences
(Livneh, Antonak 1990; Antonak, Livneh 1991; Livneh et al. 2019).
The configuration of variables explaining higher levels of emotional
intelligence supports the assumption that emotional intelligence is
related to the duration and stage of living with disability or chronic
illness experience. These results also partially confirm the hierarchical
nature of responses to disability acquisition—partial in the sense that

they confirm only the first two stages, showing that individuals who have reached the stage of hostility demonstrate a higher emotional intelligence quotient (Antonak, Livneh 1991).

A critical perspective on the adaptation process points to its dual nature. On the one hand, successful adaptation reflects the integration of physical and sensory changes associated with transformations in body image and self-esteem. On the other hand, empirical findings emphasize the role of temporality, suggesting that the duality of the adaptation experience stems from the need to process traumatic consequences, with more realistic and constructive interpretations of experience emerging over time (Livneh et al. 2019).

Self-esteem is also related to the process of adapting to disability, as an individual's self-concept and identity are closely linked to body image. Visible disability can affect the value component of self-image, which may erode its positive dimension and result in a negative self-perception (Livneh 2001). High self-esteem has beneficial effects across many domains of human functioning, including relationships, education, work, and mental and physical health. These benefits are largely independent of age, gender, and race. People with higher self-esteem tend to have better social relationships because, being confident in their own competence and attractiveness, they are better able to initiate and manage social interactions (Orth, Robins 2022). Self-esteem also serves as a protective buffer against anxiety (Pyszczynski et al. 2005; Extremera, Fernández-Berrocal 2006; Hulme, Hirsch, Foot 2012; Cejudo et al. 2018), which is particularly important for people with disabilities.

With regard to the relationship between emotional intelligence and self-esteem, positive correlations have been identified, as self-esteem is associated with positive emotional states. Studies conducted among individuals without disabilities have demonstrated this relationship (Schutte et al. 2002, 2010; Cheung, Cheung, Hue 2014). Despite strong theoretical support in the literature, the hypothesis that higher levels of internal resources in the form of self-esteem would predict emotional intelligence was not confirmed in the present study, as other variables proved to be more statistically significant. Similar findings—showing adequate levels of emotional intelligence alongside lowered self-esteem due to a reduced sense of control—were reported by Gómez-Díaz and Jiménez-García (2018)

in a study of people with physical disabilities. In contrast, research conducted among students with physical disabilities found that higher self-esteem was associated with higher emotional intelligence (Suriá-Martínez et al. 2019).

Another internal resource influencing adaptation is sense of coherence, which may be weakened by the experience of disability. At the same time, the present findings indicate that higher levels of this resource are associated with lower levels of disability in mental domains (Vegard et al. 2019). Similar conclusions emerge from studies on individuals with spinal cord injury, which show that a stronger sense of coherence is linked to better mental health and greater long-term well-being (Kennedy et al. 2010). By contrast, research examining the quality of life of people who acquired a disability as a result of severe brain injury found that their levels of sense of coherence were comparable to those of people without disabilities; however, these outcomes were also influenced by emotional factors and levels of social participation (Jacobson et al. 2011). Moreover, studies have shown that individuals who acquired a disability and reported higher levels of sense of coherence twelve weeks after spinal cord injury experienced significantly better psychological well-being one year later (Kennedy et al. 2010). Thus, the hypothesis that higher levels of sense of coherence are associated with a higher emotional intelligence quotient was confirmed.

People with disabilities often need to develop their own hierarchy of values, one that is not concentrated around physicality. Wright (1983) notes that individuals with disabilities tend to extend the perceived effects of disability beyond its actual consequences, resulting from the sense of loss associated with the experience of disability. Changes in the value systems of people with physical disabilities participating in logotherapy groups, in which discussions focused on values such as meaning in life and responsibility—have been shown to produce positive effects in all spheres of functioning (Moein, Houshyar 2015). Working on a sense of life purpose has also been linked to improved quality of life after injury and to better adjustment to living with a disability (Thompson et al. 2003). The hypothesis was confirmed, as participants' preference for hedonistic values was associated with a lower emotional intelligence quotient.

Limitations of the study

The study's findings have several limitations, which may also provide guidelines for future research. First, the study relied on self-report measures; therefore, emotional intelligence and the other variables were assessed based on participants' subjective evaluations (Schutte, Malouff 1998). Another limitation concerns the composition of the research sample, which was internally heterogeneous in terms of age as well as the presence of congenital versus acquired disabilities. While the study identified predictors of emotional intelligence among individuals with physical disabilities, the lack of differentiation between congenital and acquired disabilities limits the ability to capture differences between these groups. Moreover, the Polish adaptation of the questionnaire did not yield fully consistent results when applied separately to people with congenital and acquired disabilities (Byra, Kirenko 2016). It should be noted, however, that the questionnaire was originally designed for use with both congenital and acquired disability populations (Livneh, Antonak 1990).

Theoretical and practical implications

Previous research has extensively emphasized the importance of social support and internal resources in the functioning of people with disabilities (Gómez-Zúñiga et al. 2023; Livneh 2022). Existing studies have demonstrated that emotional intelligence is a crucial internal resource that enhances social skills, adaptation, and overall well-being among individuals with disabilities (Bar-On 2007; Hodzic et al. 2017; Livneh 2022). Prior research also reveals that social support, environmental accessibility, and targeted training (e.g., in social skills or emotional regulation) play a significant role in reducing marginalization and promoting inclusion (Gómez-Zúñiga et al. 2023; Jensen et al. 2014). Neuroscientific evidence further indicates that individuals with higher levels of emotional intelligence activate brain regions associated with interpersonal relations, suggesting distinct adaptive benefits (Reis et al. 2007). Taken together, this body of literature provides a solid foundation for understanding how emotional intelligence and contextual resources shape the biopsychosocial experience of disability.

Based on the findings of the present study, several practical implications can be proposed. Particular attention should be paid to the shock stage of adaptation, as this phase is associated with the lowest levels of emotional intelligence. Individuals at this stage require systematic and personalized institutional support. Institutional interventions should not be limited to structural accessibility but should also incorporate programs aimed at strengthening internal resources. These may include individual-level activities (such as therapy, coaching, and mentoring), as well as group-based initiatives (support groups, peer mentoring, and workshops). Emotional intelligence training, as suggested by previous research, should be complemented by interventions identified in the present study, particularly at the early stages of adaptation. This integrated approach may enhance both intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning. Complementary activities, such as art therapy (Năstasă 2016) or design-thinking workshops (Menon et al. 2023), may serve as innovative ways of building emotional intelligence and entrepreneurial competences, thereby expanding opportunities for social participation.

Therefore, social skills training supplemented by activities aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence may be crucial, given the need to effectively utilize social support (Jensen et al. 2014). Social support is an element of the social networks in which individuals are embedded, influencing their actions, beliefs, and attitudes (Kirke 2007). Individuals with disabilities, due to their health situation, require multiple forms of support, both instrumental and emotional. This constitutes one of the key conditions for increasing the independence of people with disabilities, thereby enabling them to make their unique contributions to social life (Kowalik 2018). Such contributions may be particularly significant in an era of liquid modernity, in which belonging to social groups is increasingly threatened and often replaced by substitute forms of participation. Belonging itself becomes a privilege that is not equally accessible to all individuals (Bauman 2006).

In addition to therapeutic and educational implications, it is important to emphasize the need for changes in the environments of people with disabilities, as these environments are not merely physical constructs but also encompass sociocultural influences (Dunn 2015). The promotion of values that support the inclusion of people with disabilities in the community is particularly important (Wright

1983; Brown 2003), as it enables them to fulfill meaningful social roles and to establish and sustain significant social relationships. Ultimately, strengthening internal resources should be recognized as a key institutional responsibility. Promoting inclusive values and facilitating meaningful social roles is consistent with the biopsychosocial model of disability and enables individuals to make distinctive and valuable contributions to social life.

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Mental Health of Students as a Contribution to Change in Higher Education

Kondycja psychiczna studentów jako przyczynek do zmian w edukacji akademickiej

ABSTRACT

This article examines students' mental health as a key indicator of the need for change in higher education. The main objective of the study is to analyze and assess the mental health of the study population, with particular attention to various aspects of psychological well-being and experienced difficulties, as well as to examine differences across sociodemographic variables. The focus of the study is students' overall mental health during the past 12 months.

The research is diagnostic in nature and is based on survey data addressing two main questions: the general mental health of students and its variation in the study population. The discussion begins with a theoretical reflection on the concept of change from philosophical and sociological perspectives, followed by a review of national reports on students' mental health (Commissioner for Patients' Rights, NZS and PSSiAP, Ministry of Science, CBOS).

The authors' original research, conducted with a sample of 232 students, revealed a high prevalence and wide range of mental health problems, including anxiety, depressed mood, low self-esteem,

feelings of loneliness, as well as suicidal thoughts and self-harm. The most important finding is a statistically significant difference in mental health status by gender, with men reporting significantly better mental health than women and people who identify as non-binary or other genders.

The conclusions and recommendations point to an urgent need for fundamental, systemic changes in higher education. Practical implications include recognizing mental health as a strategic priority for universities, expanding and professionalizing psychological support services, providing systematic training for academic staff on basic mental health issues, and regularly monitoring and evaluating implemented measures. Students' mental health is emphasized as a crucial factor in both academic success and social functioning.

ABSTRAKT

Niniejszy tekst analizuje kondycję psychiczną studentów jako kluczowy desygnat potrzeby zmian w edukacji akademickiej. Celem naukowym artykułu jest analiza i ocena kondycji psychicznej badanej grupy, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem różnych aspektów samopoczucia psychicznego i doświadczanych trudności, a także zbadanie jej zróżnicowania ze względu na zmienne socjodemograficzne. Przedmiotem badań jest ogólna kondycja psychiczna studentów w ciągu ostatnich 12 miesięcy.

Badania sondażowe mają charakter diagnostyczny, problematyka koncentruje się wokół dwóch głównych pytań o ogólną kondycję psychiczną studentów oraz jej zróżnicowanie. Wywód rozpoczyna się od teoretycznego ujęcia pojęcia zmiany w perspektywie filozoficznej i socjologicznej, by następnie przejść do przeglądu ogólnopolskich raportów dotyczących zdrowia psychicznego studentów (Rzecznik Praw Pacjenta, NZS i PSSiAP, Ministerstwo Nauki, CBOS).

Badania własne, przeprowadzone na grupie 232 studentów, ujawniły wysoki poziom i szeroki zakres problemów psychicznych, w tym lęku, obniżonego nastroju, niskiej samooceny, poczucia samotności, a także myśli samobójczych i samookaleczeń. Najważniejszym wynikiem jest istotne statystycznie zróżnicowanie kondycji psychicznej ze względu na płeć, gdzie mężczyźni wykazują istotnie lepszą kondycję psychiczną niż kobiety oraz osoby identyfikujące się jako „inna" płeć.

Wnioski i postulaty wskazują na pilną potrzebę gruntownych, systemowych zmian w edukacji akademickiej. Implikacje dla praktyki obejmują: uznanie zdrowia psychicznego za strategiczny priorytet uczelni, rozbudowę i profesjonalizację systemu wsparcia psychologicznego,

systematyczne szkolenie kadry akademickiej w zakresie podstawowych zagadnień zdrowia psychicznego oraz regularne monitorowanie i ewaluację wdrażanych działań. Podkreśla się, że zdrowie psychiczne studentów jest kluczowe dla ich sukcesu edukacyjnego i funkcjonowania społecznego.

Introduction

One of the most frequently cited maxims holds that the only certainty in life is change. Contemporary times offer ample evidence to support this claim. We are witnessing rapid social, cultural, economic, and technological transformations. As Zuzanna Wojciechowska (2018) notes, the reality of modern human life undergoes many intense changes in the relatively short span between birth and death. These transformations have significant implications for education. The issues discussed in this article focus on students' mental health as an indicator of the need for change in higher education.

Change: Understanding the concept

The *PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language* defines change as: (1) the fact that someone or something becomes different than before, and (2) the replacement of one thing with another (*Słownik języka polskiego* PWN 2025). From a philosophical perspective, the concept of change was defined, among others, by Aristotle, who identified three forms of change: from nonexistence to existence, from existence to nonexistence, and from one state of existence to another. The first two forms concern creation and destruction, while the third involves changes in quality, quantity, or movement. Aristotle thus defined change as a transition from one state to its opposite in these respects (Aristotle 2013).

Contemporary philosopher Mariusz Grygianiec distinguishes six types of change: quantitative, qualitative, compositional, substantial, locational, and temporal. In doing so, he emphasizes the multifaceted nature of the concept of change (Grygianiec 2018). Wojciechowska also notes that humans can be both the subjects and objects of change. Changes occurring within people as well as in their environment are conditioned by both internal and external forces. Humans

may therefore act as agents, causes, and creators influencing both external reality and their own inner world (Wojciechowska 2018).

On a sociological basis, Barbara Szacka points out that change can affect many phenomena and situations. According to the author, the key distinction is between changes at the microsocial level (concerning small communities characterized by close relationships), the macrosocial level (concerning large communities with complex structures), and the mesosocial level (intermediate between the two previously mentioned). Accordingly, changes can be understood as micro-changes, taking place at the level of individuals or small social groups, and macro-changes, taking place at the level of entire organizations or large social groups (Szacka 2003).

Stanisława Sokołowska (2009) distinguishes several criteria for classifying changes. The first is the cause of change, which may be internal (the person as the subject of change) or external (the person as the object of change). The second criterion concerns the predictability of change; here, we can identify planned changes (introduced in a timely manner in anticipation of future and expected events) and adaptive changes (responses to existing circumstances or emerging events). The third criterion highlighted by the author is the depth of change. In this respect, one can distinguish between profound changes (which strongly transform the existing state of affairs and have long-term consequences) and superficial changes (which are very general and result from the need to adapt to changes in the environment).

Another criterion is the speed of change, which allows us to differentiate between rapid changes (requiring an immediate response) and slow changes (unhurried in nature). The researcher also points to the manner in which change occurs, distinguishing between imposed changes (introduced from above or from outside) and agreed-upon changes (reviewed and accepted by all parties affected by the change). The final criterion concerns the area of impact of change. The author distinguished five types of change: psychological, professional, political, cultural, and economic.

Psychological change is related to processes of individual development or regression in terms of emotions, cognitive structures, and conscious and unconscious mechanisms of human behavior. Professional change concerns work and transformations in professional life (such as a change of job, responsibilities, profession, or retirement).

Political change refers to changes in attitudes and axiological and ideological orientations. For the author, cultural change is synonymous with cultural transformation, and the attainment of a more advanced stage of cultural development. The final category, economic change, refers to transformations in the economic sphere (Sokołowska 2009).

Another sphere in which change can be examined is education. Educational change is one of the key subjects of pedagogical reflection in contemporary education systems. Rapid social, technological, and cultural development means that educational institutions operate under conditions of constant transformation, requiring the redefinition of practices and the implementation of new ways of working. In systemic terms, change is not a single act but a process unfolding over time, encompassing both individual and organizational levels (Ekiert-Oldroyd 2006).

Keith Morrison (1998) views educational change as a dynamic and continuous process of development involving the reorganization of institutions' responses to changing needs. He therefore emphasizes that change occurs through the interaction of internal and external factors, transforming the values, practices, and outcomes of an organization's activities. Michael Fullan (1991), by contrast, stresses the non-linear and unpredictable nature of change, as well as the importance of organizational culture and cooperation as conditions for lasting transformation. The literature distinguishes between two basic types of change: natural (gradual) and planned (deliberate) (Ekiert-Oldroyd 2006). The former results from bottom-up adaptations to new conditions, while the latter involves intentional reform measures that may disrupt the existing order. Both types coexist in educational practice and influence the functioning of participants in the system.

The mental condition of students

The mental condition of Polish students has become a subject of growing research interest. Over the past five years, numerous studies have been conducted on this issue. In this paper, I refer to several nationwide reports on student mental health. The first, published in 2020, concerns the mental health of young people studying before the COVID-19 pandemic. The report, commissioned by

the Commissioner for Patients' Rights, indicates that mental health problems are becoming increasingly common among students.

Survey results from Polish academic centers show that students experience low self-esteem, stress, suicidal thoughts, anxiety and depressive disorders, neuroses, adaptation difficulties, and personality disorders. Moreover, students report numerous relationship crises, loneliness, and difficulties in interpersonal communication. Problems related to eating disorders, addictions, exhaustion, and lack of concentration were also identified. The Commissioner for Patients' Rights report highlights the growing prevalence of mental health problems among students, including stress, low self-esteem, anxiety and depressive disorders, adjustment difficulties, and relationship crises (Rzecznik Praw Pacjenta 2020).

A research report on student mental health prepared by the Independent Students' Association (NZS) and the Polish Association of Psychology Students and Graduates (PSSiAP) provides a broader view of the mental well-being of young people in higher education. Most students have a negative opinion of the availability of professional and free psychological assistance in Poland. According to the findings of the report, there is a strong need to organize psychological support for students in academic centers (as reported by students: long waiting times for appointments under the National Health Fund [NFZ] and the high cost of private psychological services). In a nationwide survey, almost half of the students surveyed reported having used the services of a psychologist, and 37% of them had done so more than once. The surveyed students also indicated that they mainly sought psychological assistance outside their universities, and more than half of the respondents (56%) did not know whether their university employed a psychologist. Moreover, most respondents considered mental health problems to be real and common in the academic environment. They reported a need for increased access to information and support related to mental health at universities, as well as for workshops and meetings focused on self-improvement.

It is also worth noting the mental well-being of students. Age, degree level and mode of study, as well as the use of psychological assistance, are important factors differentiating students' mental well-being. The highest level of well-being was observed among students aged 20, followed by a decline with increasing age. Master's

degree students reported higher levels of well-being than undergraduate students. In addition, full-time students demonstrated higher levels of well-being than part-time students. It is also worth noting that people who regularly sought psychological help reported lower levels of well-being than those who did so less frequently or not at all (Centrum Analiz NZS and PSSiAP 2021).

The most recent report commissioned by the Ministry of Science points to a number of problems related to mental health and quality of life in the academic environment. The findings presented in the report indicate that student mental health in the Polish academic context requires special attention. Among students, the report identifies problems related to high levels of stress (experienced regularly by more than half of both female and male students), as well as moderate and severe symptoms of depression and anxiety (23% of students met the criteria for depressive disorder, including 4% for severe depression; moreover, women were more prone to depression than men). An important problem identified by the authors concerns insomnia and difficulty falling asleep, which affected 51% of students and occurred significantly more often among women.

The use of psychoactive substances also proved to be a highly significant problem (94% of students reported using at least one stimulant in the three months preceding participation in the study). Among the students surveyed, the majority regularly consumed alcohol (67%), and it was also observed that female students were more likely than male students to use alternative tobacco products, such as e-cigarettes. It is also worth noting that many students struggle with educational burnout (chronic stress related to the process of studying), which is caused, among other factors, by institutional conditions (e.g., the organization of studies), social circumstances (e.g., perceived social support), and individual factors (e.g., personality traits).

The report also highlights issues related to access to psychological assistance. Students rated the availability of free psychological support and the preventive measures undertaken by universities to support students' mental health as low. More than half of the respondents (67%) assessed university activities in this area as ineffective, and more than 55% indicated that their universities had not taken any measures in this regard. Forty-one percent of the surveyed students expressed interest in psychological assistance organized by the

university, but 70% of them had never used such services (Piotrowski et al. 2024).

The latest CBOS report on the mental health of young Poles also provides valuable data. It presents the results of a study conducted on a representative sample of individuals aged 18–29 and 30–44. The comparative perspective on mental health in these two age groups is particularly important. Younger people (aged 18–29) experience both positive and negative emotional states more frequently than older Poles. Members of this age group feel more overwhelmed by the number of tasks, decisions, demands, and life adversities than those aged 30–44, and they also experience loneliness to a greater extent. Moreover, they stand out from the adult population as a whole in their greater tendency to experience negative emotional states, whereas individuals aged 30–44 are characterized by the best mental well-being.

Members of Generation Z (aged 18–29) are more likely than older Poles to assess their mental health as worrying. There is also a gender difference in this group in self-assessments of mental health: women are more likely than men to report frequently experiencing various mental states, especially negative ones (such as feelings of helplessness, irritability, overwhelm, as well as loneliness, anger, and unhappiness). The strongest correlate of respondents' well-being is their financial situation, with individuals in poorer financial circumstances reporting more frequent negative mental states. In addition, respondents from Generation Y (aged 30–44) who assessed their financial situation as good generally reported better well-being.

The respondents' personal situations also influenced their self--assessments of mental health. People in relationships, especially married couples, stood out for their better well-being. Being single was associated with lower well-being scores, a pattern that was more pronounced in the older generation. The lowest well-being scores were observed among single women from Generation Z (aged 18–29), while the highest scores were recorded among married men from both generations. Mental health was also analyzed in relation to respondents' sexual activity. The study results indicate that poorer well-being was more common among individuals who had not had sex in the previous twelve months, particularly women from Generation Z.

A relationship between mental health and friendships was also identified. Respondents with no friends or only one friend reported poorer well-being, with this correlation being stronger in Generation Z. People from Generation Y with five or more friends reported better well-being, as did respondents from Generation Z with seven to ten friends. The relationship between mental health and social media use was also examined. Respondents who spent at least three hours per day on social media reported poorer well-being. Associations between mental health and political views and religious practices were also explored. Generation Z respondents with left-wing views reported slightly poorer well-being. In both generations, individuals who did not participate in religious practices reported poorer well-being.

The final correlate of mental health examined was values. Better mental well-being among respondents was associated with attaching greater importance to values such as professional work, family, maintaining good health, and patriotism. For the younger generation, the pursuit of fame was also important, whereas for older respondents, development and self-fulfillment were more highly valued. In both generations studied, placing a high value on peace of mind was associated with poorer self-assessments of mental health (Feliksiak 2025).

A review of the literature indicates that the mental health of children and young people is deteriorating as a result of complex social, environmental, and institutional factors. A document on youth mental health highlights the growing emotional burdens associated with functioning under conditions of chronic stress, excessive academic demands, and sociocultural instability. Crisis situations, both individual (e.g., sudden loss of security, traumatic events) and environmental (e.g., pandemics, peer conflicts, changes within the family), lead to increased anxiety, low mood, difficulties in emotion regulation, and adjustment disorders. The quality of peer and family relationships as key moderators of mental health is also emphasized: social support functions as a protective factor, while social isolation and peer violence, including cyberbullying, contribute to the deterioration of young people's well-being (Januszkiewicz, Socha 2022).

The second key factor affecting the mental health of young people is the tension resulting from the functioning of educational institutions. Bartosz Atroszko (2019) points out that the Polish education

system is characterized by chronic instability, pressure for change, and a significant level of superficial activity, which generates a sense of unpredictability and insecurity among young people. Constant reforms, performance pressure, increasing demands, and a lack of adequate institutional support increase the risk of mental overload and educational burnout. In addition, young people function in an environment saturated with pressure to succeed, social comparison, and intense digitalization, which exacerbates feelings of loneliness and emotional tension. As a result, the deteriorating mental health of young people is the consequence of both macro-social factors (cultural change, crisis situations, and systemic pressure) and micro-social elements of the school environment (relationships, demands, and sense of security), which reinforce one another's impact.

Main objectives of the study

The main objective of the research is to analyze and assess the mental health of the study group, with particular emphasis on various aspects of mental well-being and experienced difficulties. The mental health of students is also examined in relation to sociodemographic variables (gender, age, place of residence, family structure, and time spent online). The subject of the research is the general mental condition of students over the past 12 months.

The following research questions were posed in the study:

1. What is the overall level of mental health in the study group over the past 12 months?
2. Do sociodemographic variables (gender, age, place of residence, family structure, and time spent online) differentiate students' mental health?

Due to the diagnostic nature of the research, no research hypotheses were formulated. The study employed a proprietary psychometric questionnaire designed to measure students' mental health over the past 12 months. The instrument was based on contemporary models of mental well-being and took into account affective, cognitive, and behavioral components, which allowed for the operationalization of mental health through nine items reflecting key elements of the construct. These included anxiety related to social interactions, low mood, feelings of worthlessness, a perceived lack of control over one's

life, difficulties in regulating emotions and needs, thoughts of death, self-aggressive behavior, feelings of loneliness, and general dissatisfaction with life. The selection of items ensures the content validity of the scale and its consistency with the definitional scope of the concept of mental health.

Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale (1—strongly disagree/do not feel at all; 5—strongly agree/feel to the highest degree). Higher values indicated greater difficulties in the area of mental health. Prior to formal testing, the instrument was evaluated for content validity by two experts in psychology and pedagogy, who assessed the consistency of the items with the theoretical construct and their linguistic clarity. The experts' suggestions were incorporated into the final version of the questionnaire. The reliability analysis of the scale demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency of the measured items (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78), which indicates that the instrument is sufficiently homogeneous and can be used as a one-dimensional indicator of mental health. This value falls within the range considered acceptable in the literature for exploratory studies and research conducted in natural populations, where the complexity of the construct influences a moderate level of inter-item dependence.

The demographic section included sociodemographic variables acting as potential moderators and covariates of the analyzed relationships: gender, age, place of residence, family structure, and average time spent on the internet. These variables enabled a multidimensional analysis of variation in the results. The study was conducted as an anonymous online survey using the Survio platform. The link to the questionnaire was distributed through student councils, which reduced the risk of researcher bias and increased respondents' sense of freedom in answering. The self-report format and complete anonymity encouraged honest responses, which is particularly important when measuring constructs related to sensitive aspects of mental health.

The study used non-random purposive sampling aimed at recruiting students from two major academic centers in the Kuyavian--Pomeranian region: Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz and Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. The inclusion criteria were first- or second-cycle student status and active participation in the classes during which the study was conducted. The final sample

consisted of 232 students who voluntarily and anonymously completed the questionnaire.

The sample was purposive and included students from two universities in the Kuyavian-Pomeranian region, which made it possible to account for diverse institutional contexts and academic environments. Despite the lack of random selection, the structure of the sample (gender, level of study, and fields of study) was similar to population data from both universities, which allows it to be considered functionally representative of the student population in this region.

The mental condition of students in light of the authors' own research

A total of 232 students from Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz and Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń took part in the study. The vast majority of respondents were women (65.52%). Most participants were 19 years old, and the mean age of the entire group was 22.78 years. Slightly more respondents came from rural areas (52.16%) and from two-parent families (80.6%). The largest proportion of respondents reported spending between 3 and 4 hours per day online (40.95%). Table 1 presents the characteristics of the study sample.

Table 1. Characteristics of the study sample

Variable	Category	N	%	Cumulative %
Gender	Female	152	65.52	65.52
	Male	66	28.45	93.98
	Other	14	6.03	100.00
Age	19	89	38.36	38.36
	20	17	7.33	45.69
	21	21	9.05	54.74
	22	26	11.21	65.95
	23	16	6.90	72.84
	24	7	3.02	75.87
	25	10	4.31	80.18
	26	2	0.87	81.05

Variable	Category	N	%	Cumulative %
	27	3	1.29	82.34
	28	7	3.02	85.36
	29	11	4.74	90.10
	30	4	1.72	91.82
	31	6	2.59	94.41
	32	7	3.02	97.43
	33	6	2.58	100
Place of residence	Rural area	121	52.16	52.16
	City	111	47.84	100.00
Family structure	Two-parent	187	80.60	80.60
	Single-parent	45	19.40	100.00
Time spent online	Less than an hour	12	5.17	5.17
	1–2 hours	47	20.26	25.43
	3–4 hours	95	40.95	66.38
	5 hours or more	78	33.62	100.00

Source: Author's own research.

Before proceeding with the main analyses, the quality of the collected data and their suitability for statistical analysis were verified. In the first stage, the reliability of the scale measuring mental health was assessed, yielding a satisfactory Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.78. This result indicates good internal consistency of the items and allows the scale to be treated as a one-dimensional indicator of mental health. In the next stage, the distribution of the dependent variable was analyzed. The Shapiro–Wilk normality test indicated that the distribution deviates from perfect normality; however, skewness and kurtosis values fell within ±1, which in social science research is generally considered acceptable for the use of methods based on a linear model. Moreover, given the sample size ($N > 200$), and in accordance with the central limit theorem, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was assumed to be sufficiently robust to moderate violations of normality.

The assumption of homogeneity of variance was also tested using Levene's test. The results did not reveal any statistically significant differences in variance between groups ($p > 0.05$), which confirms the appropriateness of using analysis of variance to compare mean

mental health indicators in groups defined by sociodemographic variables. In addition, an outlier analysis was conducted using a criterion of ±3 standard deviations from the mean. No observations exceeded this threshold, indicating the absence of responses that could significantly distort the results. An analysis of missing data did not indicate a need for imputation, as missing values accounted for less than 1% of the data and were random in nature. The first issue examined in this study was the general mental health of students over the past 12 months. Table 2 presents the percentage distribution of responses illustrating respondents' mental health.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of responses regarding students' mental health over the past 12 months

Aspect of Mental Condition	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neither agree nor disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)	Total (%)
Anxiety caused by other people's behavior	16.38	20.69	14.66	23.28	25.00	100
Significant decline in mood	22.41	17.24	27.59	19.83	12.93	100
Feeling that you mean nothing and can do nothing	21.55	22.84	18.10	16.81	20.69	100
Sense of lack of control over one's own life	12.93	29.31	13.79	21.98	21.98	100
Sense of lack of control over emotions and needs	27.59	20.69	14.22	20.26	17.24	100
Feeling of wanting to die	21.55	24.14	12.93	22.85	18.54	100
Self-harming/self-inflicted pain	19.83	23.28	20.69	19.83	16.38	100
Feeling of loneliness and lack of loved ones	25.00	26.29	17.67	15.52	15.52	100
Dissatisfaction with one's own life	15.52	22.41	23.28	19.83	18.97	100

Source: Author's own research.

An analysis of the data presented in the table indicates a high prevalence of anxiety related to the behavior of other people, as well as difficulties in controlling one's own life. Among the surveyed students, responses varied with regard to low mood and self-esteem.

In the case of a pronounced decline in mood, although 12.93% of respondents reported experiencing it to the highest degree, the largest group (27.59%) had difficulty assessing their mood unequivocally. With respect to feelings of insignificance and inadequacy, responses were relatively evenly distributed, suggesting that this problem affects a substantial proportion of the student population to varying degrees. The surveyed group also reported challenges in the emotional and relational sphere. Difficulties in controlling one's emotions and needs were reported by over 37% of respondents (the combined total of "agree" and "strongly agree" responses). Feelings of loneliness and a lack of close friends were strongly expressed by 15.52% of students, and more than 31% experienced this problem to some extent.

Particularly alarming are the findings related to the mental health of the surveyed students, especially data concerning thoughts of ending one's life. Almost one-fifth of respondents (18.54%) strongly agreed with this statement, and more than 40% (the combined total of "agree" and "strongly agree" responses) reported experiencing such thoughts during the past year. Similarly, experiences of self-harm or intentionally inflicting physical pain were reported by over 36% of students (the combined total of "agree" and "strongly agree" responses), which indicates serious difficulties in coping with emotions. Moreover, almost one-fifth of students (18.97%) reported being strongly dissatisfied with their lives; when combined with those who were "rather dissatisfied" (19.83%), this suggests that a significant proportion of students are not satisfied with their lives.

The data presented reveal a broad spectrum of difficulties. Students struggle with emotional problems (anxiety, low mood, and difficulty managing emotions), cognitive problems (low self-esteem, feelings of insignificance), behavioral problems (self-harm, suicidal thoughts), and social problems (loneliness). These findings are consistent with earlier nationwide reports, which have also indicated an increasing prevalence of mental health problems among students, including stress, anxiety and depressive disorders, as well as adjustment difficulties. In summary, the level of mental health problems among students is high, and their scope is broad, encompassing nearly all key areas of mental well-being. The results may serve as a warning and underscore the urgent need for comprehensive preventive and support measures at universities.

The second issue analyzed in the study was variation in students' overall mental health over the past 12 months as a function of socio-demographic variables. The results of the analysis of variance are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Analysis of variance (ANOVA)—variation in the overall mental health of students by sociodemographic variables

Effect	SS	df	MS	F	p
Gender	**531.066**	**2**	**265.533**	**10.741**	**0.000037**
Age	418.067	13	32.159	1.300	0.218522
Place of residence	13.916	1	13.916	0.563	0.453856
Family structure	16.488	1	16.488	0.667	0.414777
Time spent online	53.479	4	13.370	0.541	0.705663
Error	5293.992	214	24.738		
Expression Free	**203875.021**	**1**	**203875.021**	**8241.670**	**0.000000**

Source: Author's own research. Statistically significant correlations are highlighted in bold in the table. SS: sum of squares, df: degrees of freedom, MS: mean square, F: F-statistic, p: p-value.

Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that gender is the only variable that differentiates students' mental health over the past 12 months. In order to identify differences in overall mental health between gender groups, Tukey's post hoc test was conducted; the results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Tukey's post hoc test for the variable "Gender" (differences between groups)

Group 1	Group 2	Difference Mean	p-value (adjusted)	Low Boundary of Confidence interval	Upper Boundary of Confidence Interval
Female	Male	**2.9799**	**0.0054**	**0.7297**	**5.2302**
Female	Other	−2.5806	0.2858	−7.3486	2.1873
Male	Other	**−5.5606**	**0.0097**	**−9.9961**	**−1.1251**

Source: Author's own research. Statistically significant relationships are highlighted in bold in the table.

In the study sample, men reported significantly better overall mental health than women. Although women in the sample reported

better overall mental health than respondents who identified as "other," this difference was not statistically significant. Men also reported better overall mental health than respondents who identified as "other," and this difference was statistically significant. Overall, the analysis indicates that in the study group, men reported significantly better overall mental health than both women and people who identified their gender as "other."

The mental condition of students as a manifestation and requirement for change

The results of the study confirm worrying trends in the mental health of Polish students that have been clearly evident in nationwide assessments of academic youth well-being for several years. The study group reported numerous emotional, cognitive, and behavioral difficulties, including anxiety related to interactions with others, low mood, a sense of powerlessness, difficulties in regulating emotions, loneliness, as well as self-aggressive behavior and thoughts of ending one's life. These results are consistent with the findings of the Commissioner for Patients' Rights Report (2020), which highlighted the growing prevalence of anxiety and depressive disorders, adjustment difficulties, and relationship crises among students. In both cases, problems related to low self-esteem, stress, mood instability, and an increasing sense of loneliness predominate.

Convergence with broader research is also evident in the intensity of negative emotional states. In this study, nearly 40% of students experienced problems related to a lack of control over their lives and emotions, which corresponds with data from the NZS and PSSiAP reports (2021), in which students frequently reported feeling overwhelmed by tasks, having difficulties coping with academic demands, and a sense of incompetence in dealing with emotional problems. Similarly to the reports cited above, the study group also demonstrated high levels of loneliness and deficits in social support, indicating the recurrence of this phenomenon in the student population.

The results of the present study correspond particularly closely with the report commissioned by the Ministry of Science (Piotrowski et al. 2024), which indicated a high prevalence of moderate and

severe depressive and anxiety symptoms among students. In the analyzed sample, as many as 40% of respondents reported experiencing thoughts of ending their lives, and more than 36% reported self-aggressive behavior. These values are alarming and consistent with the broader picture of a growing number of suicide crises in the academic environment. According to the 2024 report, a similar pattern is especially evident among female students, a finding also confirmed by the present data, in which gender proved to be the only variable that significantly differentiated mental health. Women reported significantly lower mental well-being than men, which is consistent with the findings of both Piotrowski et al. (2024) and the latest CBOS report (Feliksiak 2025), both of which emphasize a marked increase in negative emotional states among young women aged 18–29.

Importantly, the CBOS study reveals the multifactorial nature of declining mental well-being in this group, pointing, among other factors, to high emotional disorganization, greater susceptibility to stress, loneliness, low self-assessments of mental health, and a strong dependence of well-being on the quality of social relationships. The findings of the present study, in which more than 31% of students reported loneliness and a lack of close friends, corroborate this interpretation and suggest that the academic environment does not always provide adequate mechanisms of social support.

It is also worth noting differences in the amount of time spent on the internet. In the present study, this variable did not differentiate overall mental health, whereas the CBOS findings (Feliksiak 2025) indicated that people who spend at least three hours per day on social media report poorer well-being. This lack of consistency may be due to several factors: the measurement in this study covered total time spent online rather than specific social media use; moreover, the relationship may be more complex and conditioned by other variables, such as the type of online activity, coping style, or need for affiliation.

However, there is full agreement with the NZS and PSSiAP reports (2021) and the analysis commissioned by the Ministry of Science (2024) regarding assessments of the availability of psychological support. The results obtained reveal a high prevalence of emotional problems among the surveyed students, which confirms the validity of conclusions repeatedly emphasized in national reports concerning the need to strengthen support systems.

In summary, the results of the present study are highly consistent with nationwide assessments of the mental health of Polish students. In particular, they corroborate growing emotional and adjustment difficulties, significant gender differences, a high prevalence of self-aggressive behavior and suicidal thoughts, an increasing sense of loneliness, and a lack of systemic support in the academic environment. Observed discrepancies, such as the absence of a relationship between time spent online and mental health, point to directions for further research that take into account more precise indicators of digital activity.

The modern world is characterized by permanent, dynamic change, which Wojciechowska (2018) aptly describes as a series of intense transformations occurring in a relatively short period of an individual's life. In philosophical discourse, the phenomenon of change is a constitutive element of reality: it was conceptualized by Aristotle as a transition from one state to its opposite, and by Grygianiec as multifaceted quantitative, qualitative, compositional, substantial, locational, and temporal processes. The sociological perspectives of Szacka and Sokołowska further emphasize that such changes may affect both the microsocial level (individuals and small groups) and the macrosocial level (entire organizations), that their causes may be internal or external, and that their effects may be profound or superficial. In this context, the mental condition of students emerges as one of the most striking manifestations of contemporary psychological change, defined by Sokołowska (2009) as a process of individual development or regression in emotional functioning, cognitive structures, and conscious and unconscious mechanisms of action. Importantly, regression in this area is not only an individual experience but a collective phenomenon that necessitates far-reaching changes in the structure and philosophy of academic education.

In the face of such an acute psychological crisis among students in higher education, academic education must undergo transformation, becoming not only a site for the transmission of knowledge but, above all, an environment that supports comprehensive development, including mental well-being. This shift requires fundamental, systemic changes at multiple levels. The first involves a reorientation of priorities: student mental health must become a strategic priority for universities. This may require the allocation of appropriate financial

and human resources, the development of supportive policies, and the integration of mental well-being into the everyday functioning of institutions. Another major challenge for academic education in this context is the expansion and professionalization of psychological support systems at universities. It is necessary to establish accessible, free, and comprehensive psychological support in academic centers. Such a system should include immediate crisis intervention (rapid psychological assistance in emergency situations), long-term therapy and counseling, cooperation with public health services, and preventive and educational initiatives (e.g., workshops on coping with stress, emotion regulation, building mental resilience and social skills, as well as information campaigns aimed at reducing stigmatization).

Another important component of this transformation is the training of academic staff. Faculty members and administrative personnel should receive systematic training in basic mental health issues. They should be able to recognize signs of psychological crisis, know where to refer students for help, and be aware of the impact of their own actions on students' mental well-being. This requires building competence in empathic communication and responding to difficult situations. In the context of changes related to student mental health, it is also important to evaluate the impact of implemented measures and to monitor them on an ongoing basis. Universities should regularly conduct research on students' mental well-being to identify emerging problems, assess the effectiveness of existing programs, and adapt support strategies to evolving needs.

In light of the research presented, students' mental health can be understood as a clear manifestation of profound psychological change, which in many cases is regressive and leads to significant suffering. The prevalence of mental health problems indicates that this is not a marginal issue. Rather than expecting students to adapt to systemic demands on their own, the academic education system must undergo transformation to better support and protect their well-being. This is not only a personal matter but also a pragmatic one, as students' mental health directly affects academic performance, engagement in academic life, and future functioning in society. Ignoring these signals would further deepen the crisis, with serious consequences for individuals and the academic community as a whole.

When analyzing students' mental health, it can be observed that the academic environment—which forms part of the education system—is itself subject to rapid and often unpredictable change. The structure of academic programs, the nature of teaching relationships, instructional methods, access to psychological support, and expectations placed on young adults are all evolving. In light of the findings of the present study, which revealed a wide range of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral difficulties (including high levels of loneliness, suicidal thoughts, and self-harming behavior), it is reasonable to link students' mental health to the quality of educational institutions and their capacity to adapt to change.

According to Fullan (2007), institutions that fail to implement support systems, promote cooperation, and a culture of care expose participants in educational settings to an increased risk of overload and burnout. Similarly, Morrison (1998) argues that change must respond to the real needs of participants in the system; otherwise, it leads to frustration and confusion. The findings of the present study indicate that female students experience significantly poorer mental health than male students, which is consistent with nationwide assessments (Piotrowski et al. 2024; Feliksiak 2025). Persistently high levels of stress, adjustment difficulties, and limited access to professional psychological support suggest that academic environments do not fully meet the needs of young adults.

Dysfunctional or insufficient educational change—such as chaotic reforms, lack of organizational stability, curriculum overload, or inadequate institutional support—can constitute a significant source of stress in students' functioning. In this sense, educational change is not merely an organizational process but a phenomenon with tangible psychological consequences. The ability of institutions to implement change in accordance with principles of planning, collaboration, and individual support (Fullan 2007) therefore becomes crucial for the well-being of those involved in the educational process. The findings of our study, which indicate a high prevalence of emotional difficulties among students, demonstrate that the academic environment requires actions aimed at building a culture of support, flexibility, and responsiveness to changing conditions—in line with the concept of a "learning organization."

In summary, theories of educational change provide a valuable interpretive framework for understanding the functioning of contemporary academic institutions and their impact on the mental health of young adults. These theories suggest that the quality of change—its purposefulness, predictability, cultural embeddedness, and capacity to respond to students' needs—can serve as either a protective factor or a risk factor for mental well-being.

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Reprezentacje męskości i kobiecości w podręcznikach do zajęć „Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie"

Representations of Masculinity and Femininity in Textbooks for Classes "Family Life Education"

ABSTRACT

School textbooks are elements of the educational process that promote dominant ideologies and normalize certain practices, including those related to gender. For the purposes of this article, the aim of the analysis was to identify representations of masculinity and (interacting with them) representations of femininity appearing in textbooks for the subject "Family Life Education" approved for educational use since 2017. The method of text analysis was Critical Discourse Analysis, together with Theo Van Leeuwen's research proposal (Social Actor System Network), which allows us to determine which social actors practice power and domination over other groups and what the consequences of such practices are. The results of the study indicate that textbook authors frequently use the masculine gender in a general, conventional sense, representative of both sexes, with inconsistent identifications of women and men and inconsistency in assigning active and passive roles to them. However, it should be borne in mind that the reflective presentation of contextualized behavior patterns of both genders can become part of school classes through the use of content as a tool for generating alternative thinking.

ABSTRAKT

Podręczniki szkolne są elementami procesu edukacyjnego, które promują dominujące ideologie oraz normalizują określone praktyki, również te związane z płcią. Na potrzeby artykułu celem analiz stało się wyłonienie reprezentacji męskości oraz (pozostających w interakcjach z nimi) reprezentacji kobiecości pojawiających się w podręcznikach do zajęć „Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie" dopuszczonych do realizacji praktyk edukacyjnych od 2017 roku. Metodą analizy tekstów stała się Krytyczna Analiza Dyskursu wraz z propozycją badawczą Theo Van Leeuwena (Sieć Systemu Aktorów Społecznych), która pozwala na określenie, którzy aktorzy społeczni praktykują relacje władzy i dominacji nad innymi grupami i jakie są konsekwencje takich praktyk. Wyniki badań wskazują na częste sięganie przez autorki podręczników po rodzaj męski w znaczeniu ogólnym, konwencjonalnym, reprezentatywnym dla obu płci, na niespójne identyfikacje kobiet i mężczyzn oraz na niekonsekwencję w przypisywaniu im ról aktywnych i pasywnych. Należy jednak mieć na uwadze, że refleksyjne ukazywanie skontekstualizowanych wzorców zachowań obu płci może się stać częścią zajęć szkolnych dzięki zastosowaniu treści jako narzędzia do generowania alternatywnego myślenia.

Wprowadzenie

Podręczniki szkolne są elementami procesu edukacyjnego, które stanowią „kamień węgielny" w kontekście transmisji wiedzy, kształtowania umiejętności i postaw. Uznawanie ich za niezawodne i neutralne źródło wiedzy jest potwierdzone przez resort edukacji, wydawców, autorów i recenzentów. Teksty te, jako konstrukcje będące czyimś wytworem i pewną konkretną całością (zob. Jarnicki 2014: 18; Jagiełło i in. 2014), promując dominujące ideologie, włączają i wyłączają normalizację dla określonych praktyk społeczno-kulturowych, również tych związanych z płcią (Mahboob 2017; Wang i in. 2023). Wybór wiedzy, jaka ma trafić do podręcznika, jest poprzedzony swoistą walką o zdefiniowanie tego, co (i czyja wiedza) jest tym/tą właściwym/ą (zob. np. Apple, Christian-Smith 1991). Na przestrzeni ostatnich lat w obszarze nauk społecznych badania nad płcią i językiem próbowały wydobyć na światło dzienne sposoby reprezentacji określonych podmiotów. Analizy dotyczyły przede wszystkim tego,

w jaki sposób obecny w tych tekstach język konstruuje i wzmacnia normy płciowe, kształtuje role płciowe i tożsamość płci (zob. np.: Gupta, Yin 1990; Kalinowska 1997; Lesko 2000; Sunderland 2004; Skowrońska 2004; Pauluk 2005; Chomczyńska-Rubacha 2005; Foroutan 2012; Chmura-Rutkowska i in. 2015; Dec-Piotrowska, Walendzik-Ostrowska 2015; Jamrozowicz 2018a; Al-Qatawneh, Al Rawashdeh 2019). Jednak wśród wymienionych badań niewiele z nich dotyczyło *stricte* męskości, szczególnie w interakcjach z kobiecością (Lesko 2000; Dec-Piotrowska, Walendzik-Ostrowska 2015).

W niniejszym artykule celem badań stało się określenie tego, jakie reprezentacje męskości pojawiają się w podręcznikach do zajęć „Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie" dopuszczonych do realizacji praktyk edukacyjnych od 2017 roku. Nie mniej istotne okazało się odkrycie tego, jak te reprezentacje męskości oddziałują na pojawiające się w analizowanych tekstach reprezentacje kobiecości. Taka konstrukcja celów wynika z przyjęcia faktu, że płeć jest relacyjna, a wzorce męskości są społecznie zdefiniowane w przeciwieństwie do jakiegoś modelu kobiecości (zob. Bourdieu 2004; Connell, Messerschmidt 2005: 848). Zakładam, że właśnie grupa podręczników tworzona na potrzeby zajęć „Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie" jest istotnym źródłem informacji o męskości z uwagi na wybór, kontrolę oraz ustalanie dla niej priorytetów i w konsekwencji zarządzanie praktykami, które są dedykowane mężczyznom i mogą być potencjalnie przez nich realizowane. Przyjęte normy prowadzą z kolei do włączania i wykluczania określonych wariantów męskości (oraz, paradoksalnie, także kobiecości). W prowadzonych rozważaniach punktem wyjścia staje się dla mnie feminizm poststrukturalistyczny, który występuje przede wszystkim w kontrze do retoryki niezróżnicowania, a dalej również podaje w wątpliwość istnienie męskiej normy (por. Gajewska 2014). Dostrzegać różnicę, która dotyczy płci, to również dostrzegać to, że rodzaj męski jest łączony z uniwersalnymi formami gatunkowymi, co utrudnia zaistnienie kobiecej podmiotowości. W tym kontekście dopiero proces dekonstruowania podręczników może ujawnić działanie różnych elementów w języku, ponieważ wiąże się z interpretacją tekstu poprzez ujawnienie tego, co jest zwykle tłumione. W związku z tym metodą analizy tekstów będzie Krytyczna Analiza Dyskursu, w ramach której konstrukcje męskości będą traktowane jako punkt wyjścia do dalszych analiz, a ich prowadzenie pozwoli

ujawnić ideologie, ukryte przejawy kontroli, nadużycia władzy czy procesy dyskryminacji zarówno w stosunku do mężczyzn, jak i kobiet (zob. np. Fairclough 2003; Wodak 2006).

Niewątpliwie w podręcznikowym dyskursie można odnaleźć dwie zróżnicowane grupy społeczne: funkcjonujące wewnątrz tej grupy i poza grupą (Van Dijk 2005, 2008). Odwołując się do teorii tożsamości społecznej (Tajfel, Turner 1979), można konsekwentnie przyjąć, że łączy się to z polaryzacyjnym ujęciem i podziałem na „my" (ci, których cechy, postawy czy zachowania wartościujemy pozytywnie) oraz „oni" (ci, których charakterystyki, postawy czy sposoby postępowania wartościujemy mniej lub bardziej negatywnie). W przypadku relacji międzypłciowych zwiększanie podobieństw w „naszej" grupie może oznaczać jednocześnie negowanie i odrzucenie „innych", co z kolei może się wiązać z seksizmem. Nawet jeśli czytelnicy nie czytają tekstów w sposób, w jaki robią to analitycy, to są oni jednak zaangażowani w konstruowanie znaczeń, a same materiały edukacyjne, które są stronnicze ze względu na płeć, niekorzystne oddziałują na procesy upodmiotowienia w edukacji (por. Koniewski, Mazelanik 2018).

Metody i narzędzia badawcze

Celem podjętych analiz było wyłonienie reprezentacji męskości oraz (pozostających w interakcjach z nimi) reprezentacji kobiecości w podręcznikach do zajęć „Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie". Mam na myśli podręczniki towarzyszące uczniom w całym cyklu dydaktycznym (tzn. od IV klasy szkoły podstawowej aż do zakończenia szkoły średniej), dopuszczone do realizowanych praktyk edukacyjnych od 2017 roku (https://podreczniki.men.gov.pl/). Do korpusu badawczego zostało włączonych osiem podręczników – wyłącznie tych, które przeszły ministerialną weryfikację (Załącznik 1). Za szczególnie interesujące badawczo uznałam te fragmenty podręczników, w których postacie męskie są umiejscawiane w interakcjach z postaciami kobiecymi. Na potrzeby badań kluczowe okazało się włączenie Sieci Systemu Aktorów Społecznych – propozycji badawczej Theo Van Leeuwena (1996). Ta perspektywa analityczna wspiera wyodrębnienie aktorów społecznych/aktorki społeczne, którzy

praktykują relacje władzy i dominacji nad innymi grupami, oraz określenie jakie są możliwe skutki takich praktyk.

W Sieci Systemu Aktorów Społecznych wskazuje się na następujące kategorie i podkategorie (Van Leeuwen 1996):

1. **Wykluczenie – włączenie**
   1.1. Radykalne wykluczenie: wyklucza zarówno określone podmioty, jak i ich działalność.
   1.2. Tłumienie: tłumi podmioty wykonujące określone działania lub osiągające określone cele.
   1.3. Tło: wspomina o podmiotach działających w określonej roli w tle.

2. **Przypisywanie ról aktywnych lub pasywnych**
   2.1. Aktywizacja: podmioty społeczne są prezentowane jako inicjatorzy działania, zdecydowani, dynamiczni; działanie leży w zakresie ich możliwości i może być przez te osoby kontrolowane.
   2.2. Ubiernienie: podmioty społeczne są prezentowane jako receptywne; podporządkowane (komuś/czemuś) w działaniach i procesach.

3. **Generycyzacja – specyfikacja**
   3.1. Generycyzacja: umiejscawia podmioty jako część klasy lub grupy społecznej.
   3.2. Specyfikacja: przedstawia podmioty jako konkretne osoby, których tożsamość pojawia się w dyskursie.

4. **Nominacja – kategoryzacja**
   4.1. Nominacja: przedstawia podmiot jako osobę o unikatowej tożsamości.
      a. Formalizacja: prezentacji podmiotu towarzyszy nazwisko (w uprzejmym lub nieuprzejmym tonie oraz z szacunkiem lub bez niego).
      b. Semiseksualizacja: podmioty przedstawiają swoje imiona i nazwiska.
      c. Informalizacja: podmioty są obecne w narracji z udziałem ich imienia.
      d. Nominacje z procedurami uprzejmości lub w formie afiliacji: aktorzy są nazwani z honorami (Pan, Pani itp.) lub przy podkreśleniu ich związków (na przykład rodzinnych: ciocia, wujek itp.).

4.2.   K a t e g o r y z a c j a: podmioty są przedstawiane na podstawie ich funkcji w stosunku do innych (pracowników, matek, nauczycieli itp.).

5. **Funkcjonalizacja – identyfikacja**

5.1.   F u n k c j o n a l i z a c j a: podmioty są prezentowane w odniesieniu do pełnionych funkcji (zawodu, roli lub działalności).

5.2.   I d e n t y f i k a c j a: podmioty są definiowane przez to, kim są.

a. K l a s y f i k a c j a: charakterystyka podmiotu jest tworzona na podstawie wieku, płci, klasy społecznej itp.

b. I d e n t y f i k a c j a   r e l a c y j n a: charakterystyka podmiotu wynika z interakcji rodzinnych, pracowniczych itp.

c. I d e n t y f i k a c j a   f i z y c z n a: charakterystyka podmiotu jest tworzona na podstawie cech fizycznych.

Na potrzeby prowadzonych analiz przeanalizowałam zdania, frazy i słowa, pozwalające zidentyfikować w dyskursie, którzy aktorzy społeczni/aktorki społeczne są częścią relacji władzy i dominacji oraz na czym polega ich specyfika. Badania przeprowadzono za pomocą programu MAXQDA, co pozwoliło na uporządkowanie złożoności praktyk analitycznych wokół wyodrębnionych wyżej kategorii i podkategorii.

Męskość – konstrukcje i (re)interpretacje

Płeć to coś, czego doświadczamy stale, to prymarna rama dla relacji społecznych (West, Zimmerman 1987; Connell 2005, 2009; Ridgeway 2009). Dynamika tych relacji łączy się z wcielaniem akceptowalnych oraz uznanych za właściwe dla przedstawicieli określonej płci społecznych zasad i oczekiwań. Normy odnoszące się do funkcjonowania w rolach płciowych – bo o nich mowa – są wytwarzane i reprodukowane w procesie socjalizacji (Bem 1981). Pozostają one zagnieżdżone w umyśle, osadzone w formalnych i nieformalnych instytucjach oraz są odtwarzane poprzez interakcje społeczne. Tak rozumiane normy odgrywają rolę w kształtowaniu (zarówno u mężczyzn, jak i u kobiet) możliwości artykułowania własnych potrzeb czy dostępu do cenionych społecznie zasobów. Kształt tych norm

wymaga nie tylko określenia, które z danych zachowań są męskie i/lub kobiece, ale i uznania, które z nich mogą zostać utrwalone, a którym należy się sprzeciwić (West, Zimmerman 1987). Wiele społecznych konstruktów norm odnoszących się do funkcjonowania w rolach płciowych łączy się z założeniem, że aby być „prawdziwym" mężczyzną, należy mieścić się w heteronormie, być twardym, dominującym, pozbawionym emocji, samowystarczalnym, gotowym do podjęcia ryzyka i zaangażowania się w procesy rywalizacyjne (zob. np.: Heilman, Barker, Harrison 2017; Leone i in. 2018). Dodatkowo w wielu obszarach życia społecznego widzimy przykłady zrównywania męskości z władzą i kontrolą (Katz 2012: 419). Charakterystyki te wpisują się w koncepcję h e g e m o n i c z n e j m ę s k o ś c i (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005), przyczyniającej się do homofobii i heteroseksizmu, podporządkowania kobiet i do legitymizacji patriarchatu. Należy mieć tu na uwadze, że nie dotyczy to wszystkich mężczyzn, którzy funkcjonują również w relacjach podporządkowania, współudziału i marginalizacji (Connell 2005). Normy odnoszące się do funkcjonowania w rolach płciowych w danym społeczeństwie nie mają też charakteru statycznego (podlegają licznym modyfikacjom, mogą również zostać zakwestionowane). Niemniej różnego rodzaju praktyki społeczne, reguły, symbole czy gesty, premiując dominację mężczyzn, przyczyniają się jednocześnie do jej „naturalności" i „braku widoczności" (Bourdieu 2004).

Koncepcja męskości hegemonicznej, choć szeroko stosowana w badań społecznych, podlegała także krytyce (zob. szerzej: Howson 2006; Hirose, Pih 2010). Należy mieć również na uwadze, że podczas omawiania znaczenia mężczyzn w inicjowaniu i utrwalaniu przemocy seksualnej i ze względu na płeć (Harrington 2020) hegemoniczną męskość opisuje się niekiedy w kategoriach „problematycznej". W dyskursie społecznym ostatnich dziesięcioleci pojawiają się jednak nowe podejścia. Chodzi o koncepcję „zdrowej" lub „wrażliwej" męskości oferowanej mężczyznom jako „lepsza alternatywa" (Waling 2019a, 2019b) czy o koncepcję męskość troski (Hanlon 2012), której częścią jest: intensywne zaangażowanie w czynności opiekuńcze, docenienie i wyrażanie emocji w ich szerokim spektrum, a także negowanie oraz odrzucanie męskiej władzy i dominacji (Wojnicka 2025: 28). Różnorodność ekspresji norm przypisywanych męskości

łączy się również niejednokrotnie z promowaniem praw dziewcząt i kobiet (zob. np.: Connell, Messerschmidt 2005; Mahalik i in. 2007).

Reprezentacje męskości i kobiecości w podręcznikach szkolnych do zajęć „Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie" — wybrane egzemplifikacje

Celem podjętych analiz było wyłonienie reprezentacji męskości w podręcznikach do zajęć „Wychowanie do życia w rodzinie" oraz, co nie mniej ważne, oddziaływania tych reprezentacji na pojawiające się w analizowanych tekstach reprezentacje kobiecości. Już pobieżna analiza podręcznikowych tekstów ukazała częste sięganie przez ich autorki po rodzaj męski w znaczeniu ogólnym, normatywnym, reprezentacyjnym dla obu płci. Dodatkowo w podręcznikowej narracji można spotkać opisy dotyczące „stawania się", przekraczania „stopni wtajemniczania" do stania się mężczyzną, które pozostają w sprzężeniu zwrotnym z wieloma podmiotami (w tym kobietami) i zjawiskami. Dyskursy na temat męskości i kobiecości w podręcznikach zostaną poniżej sprowadzone do wybranych egzemplifikacji stanowiących autorską propozycję uporządkowania materiału badawczego w oparciu o opisaną w części metodologicznej kategoryzację van Leeuwena (1996). Konsekwencją tego uporządkowania są opisane niżej praktyki językowe.

1. *Łącząc światy rozdzielone — włączenia, wykluczenia i ich niespójności*

Wśród analizowanych kategorii pojawia się w y k l u c z e n i e – w ł ą c z e n i e, co pozwala na wyodrębnienie reprezentacji kobiecości i męskości przy uwzględnieniu pominięć przedstawicieli/przedstawicielek określonej płci. W podręcznikowych treściach autorki zapewniają, że: „[…] płeć nie jest […] nieprzydatnym podziałem na świat k o b i e c y i m ę s k i" (WKD 1, s. 51) – wymieniając kobiety na pierwszym miejscu, automatycznie wzmacniają ich status. Sprzeciw wobec sztywnej segregacji płciowej i próbę wymyku w odniesieniu do polaryzacyjnego ujęcia płci można zauważyć również w następującym fragmencie:

[…] żyjemy w świecie, który chętnie dzieli ludzi na lepszych i gorszych, wprowadzając między nimi nieustanną rywalizację […] określenia relacji między kobietami i mężczyznami kojarzą się z walką. Mówimy, ze chłopcy „podrywają", „zdobywają", a dziewczyny powinny się „bronić" i „nie ulegać". Język sugeruje, że płcie przeciwne są dla siebie przeciwnikami, że chcą zwyciężać, dominować. Ktoś więc wygrywa, a ktoś przegrywa, ktoś się podporządkowuje, ktoś triumfuje. Tym sposobem związki d a m s k o – m ę s k i e zaczynamy postrzegać jako zjednoczone przez walkę, nie przez miłość. A można i warto spojrzeć inaczej (WKD 1, s. 55–56).

Dodatkowo autorki podkreślają, że:

Na szczęście w ostatnich latach coraz częściej mówi się o partnerstwie jako o równości oraz godności k o b i e t i m ę ż c z y z n. Dla wielu stało się jasne, że za wychowanie dzieci odpowiedzialni są i matka, i ojciec […], że nie tylko mężczyźni, ale również kobiety pragną zaspokajać swoje potrzeby seksualne, że praca zawodowa kobiet może być wielką wartością (Tamże).

Dziewczęta są więc w prowadzonych narracjach wyzwalane z „wyłącznie reprodukcyjnego" przeznaczenia, a dalej – z podrzędności w stosunku do mężczyzn. Praktyka ta nie jest jednak konsekwentna w przytoczonej wypowiedzi, bowiem, jak kontynuują autorki:

[…] trzeba […] uważać, aby nie wpaść z deszczu pod rynnę – byłoby zabawne, gdyby rządzący oczekiwali, ze połowę górników czy strażaków będą stanowiły kobiety, bo jasne jest, że pewne zawody w n a t u r a l n y s p o s ó b częściej wybierają chłopcy, inne zaś dziewczęta (WKD 1, s. 60).

Myśl ta nie jest dalej kontynuowana, nie jest zatem jasne, czego w zasadzie dotyczy prezentowany porządek naturalny, a wraz z nim i g e n e r y c y z a c j a chłopców w danej grupie zawodowej oraz potencjalne t ł u m i e n i e wyborów dziewcząt, które (z punktu widzenia obowiązującej w tekście perspektywy analitycznej) można uznać za dyskusyjne (Butler 1990). W podręcznikowych narracjach wiele uwagi poświęca się również charakterystykom rozwoju dziewcząt i chłopców w toku dorastania do kobiecości i męskości. Choć autorki podkreślają, że: „[…] nie ma sztywnego podziału na cechy typowe dla kobiet oraz wyłącznie męskie. Każda z cech psychicznych może występować u obu płci, a ich natężenie jest sprawą indywidualną" (WKD 8, s. 42), to jednak proponowany kierunek narracji nie jest konsekwentny. Wskazuje się zatem na brak sztywności w podziale

ról na kobiece i męskie w przypadku młodszego pokolenia, przy ukazaniu stereotypowych działań podejmowanych przez dorosłych w tle, co interesująco pokazuje poniższy fragment:

> Dziewczynki chętnie pomagają mamie w kuchni, a chłopcy wspólnie z tatą naprawiają rower. Wielu chłopców również interesuje się przyrządzaniem potraw, komponowaniem sałatek i deserów. Potrafią zadziwić domowników inwencją przy organizowaniu przyjęć. Podział ról ze względu na płeć uległ przeobrażeniom, dlatego nie powinno też nikogo dziwić, ze córka pomaga ojcu myć samochód lub odkurzać tapicerkę. I dobrze, że tak jest, ponieważ współczesność postawi przed młodymi ludźmi rozmaite obowiązki, których nie będzie można rozdzielić na męskie i żeńskie (WKD 4, s. 29).

2. (Nie) tylko u mężczyzn, (nie) wyłącznie u kobiet – stopniowalność i identyfikacje

Stereotypy są formacjami ideologicznymi, które są przedstawiane czytelnikowi/czytelniczce tak, jakby reprezentowały zdrowy rozsądek; wiedzę, która wydaje się być „naturalna" lub oczywista. Jak podkreślają autorki, stereotypy: „[…] stają się przyczyną krzywd, zranień, niezrozumienia" (WKD 1, s. 58), jednak autorki nie uciekają od nich również wtedy, gdy do głosu dochodzą kwestie związane z wyborem partnera/partnerki oraz identyfikacja cech, które mogą stać na przeszkodzie w budowaniu szczęśliwej relacji. Tak oto: „[…] zdarza się, że zakochana dziewczyna nie zauważa chamstwa i alkoholizmu, rozpoznając w nich jedynie znamiona siły i towarzyskość narzeczonego" (WKD 3, s. 25), a „[…] zakochany chłopak nie widzi, że jego wybranka jest zaborcza i złośliwa, a jej zaskakujące zachowania tłumaczy np. zmęczeniem" (WKD 3, s. 26).

Co istotne, cechy chłopców są prezentowane w opozycji do cech dziewcząt, choć jest zauważalny stopniowalny charakter nasilenia określonych charakterystyk, a (np. w poniższych fragmentach) i d e n - t y f i k a c j i   f i z y c z n e j   towarzyszy   i d e n t y f i k a c j a   r e l a c y j n a :

> […] mężczyźni mają zazwyczaj w i ę k s z ą   s k ł o n n o ś ć   do podejmowania ryzyka, […] i postrzegają rzeczywistość b a r d z i e j   praktycznie (WKD 8, s. 21).

> (…) chłopcy są wzrokowcami i zazwyczaj w pierwszej kolejności koncentrują się na wyglądzie dziewczyny. Z reguły są b a r d z i e j   s t a n o w - c z y   i   z d e c y d o w a n i   niż   d z i e w c z ę t a . Nie zawsze chętnie okazują

uczucia – czasem uważają, że to „niemęskie". U chłopców s z y b c i e j niż u dziewcząt dochodzi do pobudzenia seksualnego (WKD 8, s. 22).

Różnice psychiczne są też widoczne w sferze życia seksualnego, rozwoju uczuć, pożądaniu, planach życiowych. Mężczyźni b a r d z i e j reagują na bodźce wzrokowe, a kobiety są podatne na bodźce dotykowe i słuchowe. Pobudzenie seksualne kobiety narasta wolniej i wolniej wygasa. Mężczyźnie trudniej jest wyrażać swoje uczucia dotyczące sfery intymnej, jest b a r d z i e j z a m k n i ę t y w sobie, choć jego potrzeby seksualne są z w y k l e w i ę k s z e i satysfakcja w tej sferze życia jest dla niego bardzo istotna. Dla obojga jednak pragnienie zbliżenia seksualnego jest uwarunkowane istnieniem więzi emocjonalnej i psychicznej, gdyż akceptacja, czułość i wierność w związku daje im poczucie bezpieczeństwa (WKD 1, s. 58).

Tymczasem:

Kobieta pragnie spotkać mężczyznę, który byłby mężem i ojcem jej dzieci – dobrym, opiekuńczym, wiernym. Zwykle ma też s i l n i e j r o z w i n i ę t y zmysł opiekuńczy […] (WKD 1, s. 57).

[…] kobiety i n t u i c y j n i e szybciej niż mężczyźni rozpoznają nastroje innych ludzi. Ł a t w i e j nawiązują nowe relacje, ale też c z ę ś c i e j doświadczają wahań nastroju (WKD 1, s. 57).

Co interesujące, autorki jednoznacznie wskazują na określone potrzeby, działania i intencje podmiotów w toku interakcji:

[…] jeśli młodzi ludzie nie wiedzą o […] różnicach, łatwo mogą się nawzajem skrzywdzić: dziewczyna – powodując w sposób niezamierzony podniecenie chłopca, chłopak – nakłaniając dziewczynę do działań seksualnych, których ona nie chce i nie potrzebuje (WKD 7, s. 39).

W podręcznikowych treściach nie ukazuje się odstępstw od opisanego „wzorca", pomijając zróżnicowanie przedstawicieli określonej płci, nie wzmiankuje się również o związkach jednopłciowych czy o niebinarności. Omówione tu fragmenty ściśle łączą się z k l a s y f i k a c j ą podmiotów jako męskich lub żeńskich.

3. *Bierna i wierna versus decyzyjny i kontrolowa(l)ny – niekonsekwentne przypisywanie ról aktywnych i pasywnych*

Postrzeganie podmiotów jako a k t y w n y c h i/lub p a s y w n y c h stanowi kolejny obszar, który wyraźnie przyczynia się do zakreślania

dlań pola działania. Jak pokazują poniższe przykłady (którym towarzyszy także f u n k c j o n a l i z a c j a), w treściach podręczników to mężczyźni są ukazywani jako aktywni liderzy:

> Silny mężczyzna zawsze przewodził grupie (także rodzinie) i dbał o bezpieczeństwo słabszych (żony i dzieci). Jego ramiona także dziś dają oparcie, kojarzą się też z odwagą i siłą fizyczną. To nie oznacza jednak, że – jak śpiewa Muniek Staszczyk – „chłopaki nie płaczą". Nie są przecież zaprogramowani na przeżywanie tylko z góry określonych emocji i reagowanie zawsze w ten sam sposób. Jednak intuicyjnie czujemy, że pewne sprawy mężczyźni załatwiają inaczej niż kobiety. Często lubią pracować w skupieniu i samotności. Z reguły nie dzielą włosa na czworo, ale są nastawieni na szybkie wymyślanie konkretnych rozwiązań. To wszystko pomaga im być d o b r y m i o j c a m i (WKD 6, s. 66–67).

Przedstawianie mężczyzn jako siły napędowej rozwoju społecznego jest powracającym wątkiem w analizowanych podręcznikach szkolnych – tak, jak ma to miejsce w poniższym przykładzie:

> Powszechnie uważa się, że mężczyźni sprawniej podejmują decyzje […], szybciej podnoszą się po porażkach, by znowu, może w innej dziedzinie, spróbować swoich sił (WKD 1, s. 57–58).

Esencjalizacja seksualności i generalizacja jej przejawów w odniesieniu do wieku dotyczy co prawda przedstawicieli obu płci, ale charakterystyki kobiet są częściej p r e z e n t o w a n e w t l e wobec mężczyzn. Dotyczy to na przykład napięcia seksualnego, identyfikującego (jak się wydaje) przede wszystkim chłopców i szczególnie dla nich dotkliwego:

> Dla wielu m ł o d y c h l u d z i masturbacja jest problemem: przyznają, że czują się z tym źle i chcieliby umieć się od niej powstrzymać. Warto ująć ten problem w kategorii zadania: „Wiem, że jest to zachowanie niedojrzałe, chcę osiągnąć dojrzałość, więc podejmuję trud uporania się z nim" […]. Samoopanowanie i kontrola nad własnym ciałem jest w życiu każdego człowieka niezwykle ważną umiejętnością – czyni go p a n e m samego siebie (WKD 7, s. 35).

Wydaje się też, że również omawiane tu napięcie seksualne prowadzi chłopców do częstszego kontaktu z pornografią, która: „[…] krzywdzi kobiety, traktując je jako przedmioty do zaspokajania seksualnych potrzeb mężczyzn. Krzywdzi też mężczyzn, przedstawiając ich jako osoby pozbawione uczuć wyższych" (WKD 6, s. 74). W powyższym fragmencie kobiety wydają się przedmiotem

w „rękach" mężczyzn. Podobnie rzecz ma się w przypadku podjęcia decyzji o rozpoczęciu współżycia wyłącznie z uwagi na napięcie seksualne, jako że chłopiec myśli, iż to napięcie musi: „[…] być rozładowane, a istnienie popędu usprawiedliwia podjęcie działań seksualnych" (WKD 8, s. 57). Jednak, jak przestrzegają autorki, to działanie: „[…] przyniesie jedynie rozładowanie tego napięcia: da w efekcie przyjemne co prawda, ale płytkie, niedojrzałe przeżycie, w dodatku najczęściej wiążące się z krzywdą wyrządzoną dziewczynie, która inaczej te sprawy przeżywa" (WKD 7, s. 34). W treściach podręcznika przeznaczonego dla ósmej klasy autorki niuansują wcześniejsze twierdzenia, zauważając, że z naciskiem na podjęcie współżycia najczęściej spotykają się dziewczęta: „[…] bywa jednak, że dziewczyna wywiera presją na chłopca, nakłaniając go do kontaktów seksualnych" (WKD 8, s. 57).

Ubiernianie kobiet jest wyraźnie kontynuowane i wpisywane w nowe konteksty, między innymi związane z decyzjami dotyczącymi zawarcia związku małżeńskiego, bowiem:

> […] żaden chłopak nie prosi dziewczyny o rękę, mając w głowie scenariusz, że za kilka tygodni się rozstaną. Podobnie żadna kobieta nie przyjmuje oświadczyn, jeśli nie traktuje chłopaka poważnie (WKD 3, s. 24).

Opozycja między ubiernianiem a aktywizacją nabiera szczególnego wyrazu, gdy w grę wchodzi kontrola zachowań seksualnych przejawianych przez chłopców w stosunku do dziewcząt, co znajduje swój szczególny wyraz w następującej wypowiedzi:

> Wyobraźcie sobie, że chłopiec w czasie tańca pozwala sobie na zbyt śmiałe gesty. Dziewczyna, zażenowana tą sytuacją, odsuwa jego ręce z uśmiechem zmieszania, myśląc: „Daję mu znak, żeby przestał". On natomiast myśli: „Droczy się ze mną, widać jej się to podoba!" Gdyby dziewczyna powiedziała stanowczo, bez uśmiechu: „Przestań, nie chcę, żebyś się tak zachowywał" – komunikat byłby jednoznaczny (WKD 8, s. 58).

W tym fragmencie mocno zaznacza się funkcjonalizacja dziewcząt – są one częścią niechcianych zalotów seksualnych, a nakładana na nie odpowiedzialność łączy się z asertywnym zniechęcaniem, kontrolowaniem, ograniczaniem aktywności seksualnej mężczyzn. Dziewczęta stoją więc „na straży" (rozumianej w kontekście abstynencji) moralności seksualnej chłopców (Jamrozowicz 2020: 201). Normalizuje się tu nierównowagę sił w związkach między kobietami

i mężczyznami – częścią roli kobiety jest „opieranie się" mężczyznom, którzy przekraczają granice seksualne, przy czym to one są przedstawiane jako odpowiedzialne za przebieg tego zdarzenia, nawet jeśli nie zawsze mają nad nim kontrolę (nierównowaga siły fizycznej itp.). Wydaje się więc, że te fragmenty, które dotyczą relacji seksualnych, prezentują szczególnie stronnicze i stereotypowe poglądy na temat płci, utrwalając nierówność w tym obszarze (zob. Sunderland 2004), a nawet wprowadzając cichą aprobatę dla „kultury gwałtu". Działania dziewcząt nabierają niebagatelnego znaczenia w kontekście „przyzwolenia" na relację z „nieodpowiednim" partnerem:

> […] jeśli pierwszy chłopak, z którym dziewczyna chodzi, jest kulturalny, czuły i delikatny, dziewczynce wdrukowują się dobre przeżycia i pozytywne nastawienie do sfery seksualnej […]. Jeśli jednak ten pierwszy chłopak był wulgarny, egoistyczny i brutalny, jej negatywne doświadczenia i przeżycia związane ze sferą seksualną mogą się utrwalić i budowanie przyszłych związków będzie znacznie utrudnione (WKD 8, s. 42).

Poza gotowością do interwencji ze strony dziewczyny, chłopiec powinien identyfikować siebie jako potencjalnego i przyszłego ojca, a jest to: „[…] bardzo poważna sprawa, dlatego decyzje związane z aktywnością seksualną muszą być odpowiedzialne i wymagają dojrzałości" (WKD 4, s. 38). W przytoczonym fragmencie to właśnie chłopiec (mężczyzna) może odegrać kluczową rolę w kontrolowaniu i ograniczaniu zagrożeń związanych z niechcianym rodzicielstwem, co wyjątkowo dobitnie zawarte jest w kolejnej części podręcznika, gdzie wzmacnianiu stereotypu mężczyzn jako seksualnie „obsesyjnych" i niekiedy obojętnych w kontekście prokreacyjnej odpowiedzialności towarzyszy następująca wypowiedź:

> […] wielką niesprawiedliwością byłoby głoszenie tezy, że całkowitą winę za samotne macierzyństwo, aborcje i inne ludzkie tragedie ponoszą niedojrzali ojcowie. Jednak nierzadko przyczyną tych dramatów jest […] brak odpowiedzialności, rozsądku i odwagi mężczyzn (WKD 2, s. 91).

Tak oto czyjeś (męskie) działania lub zaniechanie jakichś praktyk może naruszać prawa indywidualne kobiet i/lub wręcz zagrażać społecznemu porządkowi.

Wnioski

W prowadzonej narracji autorki mogły zastosować dwa podejścia: albo sięgać po polaryzację albo wprowadzać relatywizujące ujęcie. W tej serii podręczników częściej mamy do czynienia z drugim podejściem: zmienność posiadanych przez chłopców i dziewczęta charakterystyk jest postrzegana jako niehierarchiczna. Nie powinna mieć ona wpływu na sposoby traktowania chłopców/dziewcząt czy ich dostęp do praktyk realizowanych w sferze prywatnej i publicznej. Również relacje męsko-damskie nie są najczęściej w tekstach postrzegane jako gra o sumie zerowej, w której to, co jest korzystne dla dziewcząt, musi być niekorzystne dla chłopców (i odwrotnie). Jednak w proponowanych narracjach postacie kobiece są znacznie bardziej pasywne niż postacie męskie, zwłaszcza gdy sprawa dotyczy aktywności związanych z nawiązywaniem relacji (także seksualnych). Można zauważyć brak równowagi w prezentowanych normach kobiecości, a także pewne nieścisłości w przedstawianiu norm (dla) męskości.

Kształt podręcznikowego dyskursu może zależeć również od braku określonych słów, zwrotów, zdań, jak również od nieobecnej argumentacji lub jej intensyfikacji, a dalej także od pomijania czy niedostrzegania określonych praktyk i podmiotów. W tym kontekście prezentowane normalizacje nie pozwalają na uznanie niejednoznaczności lub ambiwalencji w toku dorastania do męskości i kobiecości. Na marginesie należy dodać, że podobnie rzecz miała się w przypadku wcześniejszych wersji tego samego zestawu podręczników konstruowanych i weryfikowanych, a następnie dopuszczonych do użytku szkolnego dla szkół gimnazjalnych i ponadgimnazjalnych między 1999 a 2014 rokiem (Jamrozowicz 2018a). Pojawiały się w nich sprzeczne informacje na temat sposobu funkcjonowania kobiet i mężczyzn w życiu rodzinnym, przy zachowaniu pozorów równego traktowania płci i kreowaniu modelu mężczyzny jako kierującego się (wszechwładnym) popędem seksualnym i podatnego na nałogi (zob. też: Skowrońska 2004: 207; Szybalska-Taraszkiewicz 2012; Pauluk 2005, 2006; Pankowska 2005a, 2005b).

Takie wizje świata społecznego (poparte autorytetem systemu edukacji) mogą wydawać się obiektywne i naturalne (por. Chomczyńska-Rubacha, Pankowska 2011). Tymczasem niedostateczna reprezentacja może sprawiać, że alternatywne modele męskości

i kobiecości, które odbiegają od tradycyjnego wzorca, są dewaluowane. Rodzi się więc pytanie, w jaki sposób młodzi odbiorcy i młode odbiorczynie, nieidentyfikujący się z dominującym wzorcem płci obecnym w analizowanych tekstach, stopniowo mieliby zyskiwać władzę nad sposobami określenia siebie „w swojej" płci?

Niewątpliwie ze swej natury podręczniki zawierają nie tylko wiedzę przedmiotową, ale także normy społeczne, wartości i ideologie kulturowe oraz polityczne. Jak zauważają niektórzy badacze (Stromquist, Lee, Brock-Utne 1998), podręczniki powinny być szczególnym obszarem troski w podejmowanych strategiach modyfikacji programu nauczania. Częścią tego procesu winno się stać podważanie stereotypów i ukazywanie skontekstualizowanych wzorców zachowań męskich (oraz kobiecych), poddawanie ich refleksji czy umiejętne nimi kierowanie. Jednak nawet jeśli podręczniki zawierają stronnicze reprezentacje, nauczyciele i uczniowie nie muszą pozostawać w nich uwięzieni; mogą ich używać jako narzędzi do generowania alternatywnego myślenia, kształtowania krytycznej refleksji, a także demokratycznego doświadczania świata przez wszystkich uczestników procesów edukacyjnych (Czerepaniak-Walczak 2006: 192). Praktyka taka może wspierać tworzenie bardziej integracyjnego i sprawiedliwego środowiska szkolnego dla uczniów i uczennic. W innym wypadku pozostaniemy w miejscu, którego integralnym elementem są podwójne standardy w procesach konstrukcji tożsamości rodzajowych – dotyczy to posiadania lub braku naturalnych zdolności (różnice intelektualnego potencjału), kreatywności oraz jej braku (różnice potencjału twórczego) czy ostatecznie różnic w dyspozycjach osobowościowych (pewność siebie, śmiałość, odwaga, aktywność/pasywność w komunikacji itp.) (Kopciewicz 2007: 268).

Należy zauważyć, że kwestie związane z męskością mogą się stać przedmiotem dyskusji w ramach zajęć szkolnych w kontekście osobistego i społecznego dobrobytu mężczyzn i kobiet.

W powyższe rozważania interesująco wpisują się teorie dotyczące „pozytywnej" i „zdrowej" męskości, które skupiają się na jej mocnych stronach, a nie deficytach, podkreślając znaczenie wspierania męskiej sprawczości poprzez rozwój umiejętności społecznych i emocjonalnych. Michael Flood (2021) proponuje, by zdrowe konstrukcje męskości były:

1. ulokowane w równości, w trosce o innych, w niestosowaniu przemocy (i gotowości do jej zapobiegania), odniesione do partnerstwa, a nie dominacji;
2. zdrowe dla samych mężczyzn i chłopców: oparte na samoopiece, empatii, celu i wewnętrznej sile;
3. różnorodne i otwarte na różnorodność.

Flood podkreśla również, że nie można przedstawiać wizji męskości, która sugerowałaby, że pożądane cechy są dostępne tylko dla mężczyzn i chłopców, a nie również dla kobiet i dziewcząt. Chodzi więc o to, by imię spójności społecznej podejmować wysiłek objaśniania i neutralizacji wiążących się z męskością i kobiecością rozbieżności (Śmieja 2024). Taki sposób interpretacji męskości może się stać podstawą do rozwoju świadomości co do zarzewia konfliktów między przedstawicielami danej płci, a dalej może pozwolić na wskazanie potencjalnych obszarów stronniczości ze względu na płeć. Oznacza to również odejście od języka, w którym – jak zauważa Iwona Chmura-Rutkowska (2012: 44) – męskość, władza oraz przemoc są prezentowane jako połączenia „wiadome", „naturalne" czy „ogólnodostępne".

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Załącznik 1: Wykaz podręczników poddanych analizie

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Editorial plans

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