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## Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Cooperation of Children at Primary School No. 83 Named After Emilia Waśniowska “Łejery” in Poznań

Kreatywność, myślenie krytyczne, komunikacja i współpraca dzieci w Szkole Podstawowej nr 83 im. Emilii Waśniowskiej „Łejery” w Poznaniu

### KEYWORDS    ABSTRACT

creativity,  
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communication,  
collaboration,  
children at Emilia  
Waśniowska

This study aims to present ways to support the development of students in grades 1–3 of the non-standard, yet universal, Primary School No. 83 named after Emilia Waśniowska in Poznań, “Łejery.” This school, unique in Poland due to its pedagogical experiment: “Theatre as a Means of Comprehensive Development – Entrepreneurship Education,” is celebrating its 35th anniversary this year. Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas founded it for children who desire to develop creatively. The author used an individual case study based on source analysis and participant observation techniques, which she implemented during the 2023/2024 school year. The research concentrated on the following variables: ways to support the development of students at Primary School No. 83 in Poznań, social relations within the social space of Primary School No. 83 in Poznań, and the use of art in the education of children at Primary School No. 83 in Poznań. As a result of the analysis of the research material, it was noticed that the students in the institution are consistently supported in the development of future competences, and the success of education in this area is proven not only by the fact that the “Łejery” children achieve many educational and social success, but also by the fact that the first adult graduates of the school hold positions of public trust.

## SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

kreatywność,  
krytyczne myślenie,  
komunikacja,  
współpraca,  
dzieci ze Szkoły  
Podstawowej  
nr 83 im. Emilii  
Waśniowskiej  
w Poznaniu

Celem opracowania jest przedstawienie sposobów wspierania rozwoju uczniów klas 1–3 niestandardowej, choć powszechnej Szkoły Podstawowej nr 83 im. Emilii Waśniowskiej w Poznaniu „Łejery”. Szkoła ta, unikatowa w skali Polski ze względu na realizowany w niej eksperyment pedagogiczny: „Teatr jako środek wszechstronnego rozwoju – nauka przedsiębiorczości”, obchodzi w bieżącym roku 35-lecie istnienia, a założona została przez Jerzego Hamerskiego i Elżbietę Drygas dla dzieci, które pragną rozwijać się w sposób twórczy. Autorka posłużyła się metodą analizy indywidualnego przypadku z zastosowaniem techniki analizy źródeł oraz obserwacji uczestniczącej realizowanej do roku szkolnego 2023/2024, która koncentruje się przede wszystkim na następujących zmiennych: sposoby wspierania rozwoju uczniów SP nr 83 w Poznaniu, relacje społeczne w przestrzeni społecznej SP nr 83 w Poznaniu, zastosowanie sztuki w edukacji uczniów SP nr 83 w Poznaniu. W wyniku analizy materiału badawczego dostrzeżono, że w placówce uczniowie wspierani są konsekwentnie w zakresie rozwoju kompetencji przyszłości, a o powodzeniu edukacji w tym obszarze świadczy nie tylko fakt uzyskiwania przez „łejerskie” dzieci wielu sukcesów edukacyjnych i społecznych, ale także piastowanie przez pierwszych dorosłych absolwentów szkoły funkcji zaufania publicznego.

## Introduction

The Polish preschool and early school education continues to be characterised by a directive model of education, in which teachers focus on imparting knowledge contained in textbooks and on developing academic skills such as reading, writing, and arithmetic. These skills are acquired through training by completing various tasks, most often in an exercise book tailored to the so-called “average” (within the scope of developmental capabilities) of the entire class. Despite successive educational reforms, pedagogical practice still ignores the social and emotional competencies of students. Children’s active participation in the educational process is limited, and so-called “content” related to these areas is scarce in approved government textbooks. As Dorota Klus-Stańska (2009) points out:

In Polish early childhood education, social studies as an area of children’s competence development is marginalised. It occupies little space in the curriculum, and where it does appear, it is often reduced to moralizing and persuasive norms of politeness, stereotypically presented social roles, banal genre images, typical stories from well-known everyday life, or, conversely, exotic but extremely superficial images from cultures other than our own (p. 15).

The “curriculum-centric” teaching methods prevalent in Poland drive teachers to rush to implement the content of “ready-made” teaching aids, often selected by school principals. Children, in turn, adapt to expectations and quickly make sure they are expected to provide the “only correct” answers. Meanwhile, the world that students in the lowest grades of primary school increasingly consciously enter is not a fixed concept but a changing one; it is not pre-existing but constructed, so even the most thoroughly developed textbook should not dictate the teacher’s actions; they should observe and transform the world together with the child. A child’s future success will be determined primarily by competencies related to functioning in interpersonal spaces, because it is there that, “by entering into relationships with others, we construct meanings” (Bałachowicz, 2017, p. 32).

The purpose of contemporary education is not “solely to provide the economic world with qualified employees” (Delors, 1998, p. 81), and education itself is not intended “for the human being as an economic factor, but as a goal of development” (Delors, 1998, p. 81). While

[...] we can imagine a person devoid of above-basic mathematical or chemical knowledge, someone whose social knowledge remained solely at an elementary, ‘perceptual’ level would be doomed to daily failures, would be a source of constant conflict and difficulties, and would be even less capable of meaningfully engaging in activities for the benefit of others (Klus-Stańska, 2009, pp. 15–16).

The competencies of the future – creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration – are four competencies of the area of social competencies. They are the ones that determine success in the further educational path and the life of an individual in a changing world, because, as Józefa Bałachowicz (2017) notes: “only an active, reflective, creative person who can make himself or herself a subject, both in the field of personal development and active participation in the public sphere, can effectively change his or her situation” (p. 14).

An example of a school that, from the very beginning, opposed training and reconstructive “teaching” of children along the so-called “track” is Primary School No. 83 in Poznań named after Emilia Waśniowska, known in the Poznań community as “Łejery.” In this institution, often called the “wings rental” (Hamerski, 2020), the concept of education is understood more broadly than just teaching – children, parents, and teachers together create not only the school culture but also coexist in the so-called “group,” “family,” because the concept of “Łejery” pedagogy is a concept of education through art, but with scouting and democratic traditions (Sadowska, 2024b).

This study aims to present ways to support the development of students in grades 1–3 of the non-standard, yet universal, Primary School No. 83 named after Emilia Waśniowska in Poznań, “Łejery.” This school, unique in Poland due to its pedagogical experiment: “Theatre as a Means of Comprehensive Development – Entrepreneurship Education,” is celebrating its 35th anniversary this year. It was founded by J. Hamerski and E. Drygas for children who desire to develop their creative abilities. The research was based on an individual case study. The author approached with a source analysis and participant observation techniques, which she conducted during the 2023/2024 school year. The research concentrated on the variables: ways to support the development of children, social relations and the use of art in the education of students at Primary School No. 83 in Poznań.

## A Proprietary Program and Pedagogical Experiment Implemented at Primary School No. 83 in Poznań

“Łejery” is an expression from the Poznań dialect that denotes a child’s wonder at the world (an exclamation expressing the same thing as “oh my!” or “oh my!”). “Łejery” pedagogy is a concept developed by J. Hamerski since 1975. It combines elements of aesthetic education, democratic education, scouting, and education “in dialogue” with the child (Sadowska, 2025). Many of the “Łejery” postulates draw on the pedagogy of Janusz Korczak, especially the child’s right to respect. Back in the 1970s, J. Hamerski founded the then-controversial “Otwarci” scout troop, which included young people attending Primary School No. 76 on Sierakowska Street in Poznań. The name was not accidental, as Hamerski described the tribe’s educational program as “Four Keys to Man” (Hamerski, n.d., p. 9).

The first “key” was meant to open hands – it was the “key” to establishing interpersonal relationships and seeking what unites people despite their diversity. The second “key” opened hearts – it was meant to awaken sensitivity to the fate of others. The “third” key served to open minds for intellectual development, awakening the need for reading and inquiry (Hamerski, n.d., p. 9). The fourth “key” opened eyes – it signified critical thinking. These keys seem to be a kind of analogy to the 4C competencies, as they focused on creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking, which, in those times, still dominated by a totalitarian system, were an important educational postulate for rebellious and innovative educators.

Primary School No. 83 in Poznań represents a systemic solution to the concept of “Łejery” pedagogy, and its creation was made possible because of the cooperation of J. Hamerski and E. Drygas. At the dawn of Poland’s political transformation, both educators “dreamed” of a “school with soul” (Sadowska, 2024a), something they lacked

in their childhoods. Drygas and Hamerski developed their curriculum and began their activities by establishing a “theatrical preschool,” located in the Youth Cultural Centre No. 2 at the Poznań Citadel. In the initial phase of its operation, the institution was based on the guidelines of the Order of the Minister of National Education of November 1989 regarding the principles of conducting innovative activities in schools (Zarządzenie..., 1989). Because the founders wanted their students to be immersed in democracy from the very beginning, the school in question, at its inception, began working with the children and their parents to create a “Little Łejery Constitution” which continues to guide the school’s activities. At the school, the power relationship between teachers and students is being replaced by social participation. Student recruitment to the school is conducted through a competitive process. In practice, this means that candidates are invited to creative workshops, and children particularly gifted in this area become first-grade students (currently, the school does not have a “0” class). Since 2019, the school has been conducting a pedagogical experiment accredited by the Ministry of National Education, entitled “Theater as a Means of Comprehensive Student Development – Teaching Entrepreneurship” which focuses on the use of theatrical methods in supporting a child’s comprehensive development (and is expected to be implemented by 2039).

Primary School No. 83 is in the building of a former Dutch school on Brands-taetter Street in Poznań since 1995. The building was transported from Mierło on 13 trucks as a volunteer effort by parents and teachers (Czekąła, 2016, pp. 318–319). Currently, the school has ten classes (grades one through eight), with 25 students in each class. The school has a public school status and is free of charge. The school resembles a theatre – instead of a school hall, there is a “foyer” furnished with theatre seats, a historic piano, and a cage with two parrots. The space is filled with props obtained from the Nowy Theatre, the Animation Theatre, and other cultural institutions. The walls are decorated with distorted mirrors and photographs of the entire “Łejery” community (children, staff, and friends of the school). Students move freely throughout the school, and there are no bells. In 2013, a professional theatre was added to the building – the “Common Stage”, run by three entities: the “Łejery” Association, Primary School No. 83 “Łejery” and the “Children’s Art Centre”.

The pedagogical experiment is aimed at students with exceptional sensitivity, rich imagination, and emerging artistic talents. The authors of the study are Anna Zawadzka (drama teacher), Karol Sarna (school principal), E. Drygas, and J. Hamerski<sup>1</sup>. The experiment aims to “improve students’ competences and knowledge, as well as

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1 Pedagogical experiment “Theatre as a means of comprehensive development of students – entrepreneurship education” in force at Primary School No. 83 in Poznań, co-authored by Anna Zawadzka, Karol Sarna, Elżbieta Drygas and Jerzy Hamerski, obtained in pdf form from the resources of Primary School No. 83 in Poznań (Zawadzka et al., n.d.).

develop their emotional and social intelligence, which should be demonstrated by [...] noticeable pro-social activity in various areas of school, family, and professional life” (Zawadzka et al., n.d.). The experiment is being conducted at all levels of education. In grades 1–3, children are inspired to engage in creative activities, both during compulsory drama classes and during early childhood education. In grades 4–6, students move from the inspiration stage to the “creation of ideas” stage, while in grades seven and eight, the focus is on implementing these ideas. All teachers are required to work closely with theatre teachers, and two teachers are assigned to each class. As part of the experiment, the school not only features theatre education but also volunteer work, cross-class projects, and cross-curricular projects. Conflicts are resolved through a list of issues or with the participation of a constitutional “judicial authority” composed of students, teachers, and parents.

### Creativity in Children's Education at Primary School No. 83 in Poznań

A space that encourages children to engage in creativity, perceived in the institution as the ability to generate new and original ideas, concepts, or solutions that lead to the creation of something new, valuable, and useful, is created by teachers from the moment a child enters school. Parents (actively participating in the children's education) also demonstrate creativity. They, along with teachers, discuss their children's plans and support their initiatives, including, for example, furnishing the space, sewing puppets, and providing materials necessary to implement their ideas. Fostering children's creativity is achieved through the following activities, traditional for this school:

- Morning reading in a circle, with which the teacher and children in grades 1–3 begin each day (the reading ritual begins at 8:00 a.m. and lasts approximately half an hour. The children then eat breakfast, and only from 9:00 a.m. do they begin the next scheduled activities. This activity is linked to a puppet theatre that accompanies the children throughout the school year (The books are linked to a class puppet, e.g., Pippi, Lamelia the Happy, or other characters.) The teacher's presentation is interspersed with a conversation with the children, who pose and answer questions and draw conclusions based on the discussion.
- Establishing a hero (the mentioned puppet) of the year and working with the stage puppet. Several special events take place throughout the school year around the character represented by the puppet (Zawadzka & Sypniewski, 2019/2020); the puppet most often becomes the inspiration for theatre activities (three times a week in smaller groups in each class).

- Paratheatrical forms in early childhood education. Theatrical inspirations are implemented both during drama classes and during early childhood education (including Polish, mathematics, natural and social sciences, as well as computer science and English). They are most often initiated by children who, encouraged by the teacher, independently propose, negotiate, and then implement specific inspirations. Students, with the non-interfering accompaniment of an adult, create their own stories, performances using drama techniques, write invitations, letters, diaries (e.g. a “weekend” diary of a stage puppet’s stay at their place of residence), books, create elements of theatrical set design, costume elements, design and create posters, while learning to write, they make their notebooks of letters, giving them a personal meaning, they also prepare dictionaries of “difficult” words in terms of spelling, they independently invent mathematical problems, they visually document various experiences, prepare tickets for performances and special events, create names (including neologisms) that they think are necessary to describe the phenomena they experience, they discuss poems and prose that accompanies them every day at school, etc. (Drygas, 2014);
- Volunteering, which is part of the “Łejery” pedagogy (Drygas, 2024), in which children not only raise funds independently (e.g., by preparing concerts or selling their resources), but also by producing material goods during various workshops, such as sewing, cooking, DIY, etc. Each class at Primary School No. 83 is responsible for the educational adoption of a child from Madagascar. Each class cares for the next eight years, providing them with the funds needed for their school education. Children come up with ways to get money. It is also worth mentioning that “Łejery” organises special collections dictated by current events in need. All aid initiatives are an opportunity not only to shape the creativity of the school’s youngest students but also to sensitise children to the needs of others.
- Free play, which is part of the “Łejery” pedagogy. Both in the garden and in the common room, students do not engage in so-called “guided play,” and all the play they engage in is free-form. Children most often play in a “group” (the most common theme in play is theater), build together using blocks available from the school’s resources, play board games, including a typical “Łejerska” game called button ball (on specially prepared mats), and have complete freedom to choose and pursue physical activity (they jump, run, dance, and teach each other acrobatics, including in the common room, which is located between the lower-grade classrooms and is an open space equipped primarily with a large carpet and physical activity aids). Children are not silenced or restricted in their motor skills, and teachers accompany them, assuming the role of silent observers;
- School special events, which require children (often including parents) to design not only the physical space but also the most important elements of the event

(Hamerski, 2011). Some of these events stem from school traditions, such as “No-cowanka” (Nightshake Night), “Dzionki Szalonki” (held on April 1st), “Zajaczek” (Easter Bunny), “Christmas,” and “Family Day.” Some events also stem from themes related to stage puppetry. There are also other occasions, which are often spontaneous and result from the observation of specific needs by children and teachers.

“Łejery” creativity has many dimensions and also translates into the work of teachers, who prepare many teaching aids themselves based on work with each child. An example of such creativity is a student’s notebook, in which teachers differentiate tasks prepared for children according to their individual needs and abilities. Children in the same class are assigned different tasks, teachers make separate entries in notebooks for each student, and address a separate request to each student to complete a specific task (e.g., they write down words that the teacher believes require consolidation for a given child, and then ask the child to write, for example, five sentences on a chosen topic, specifying that these words should be used in their speech).

Parents participate in school events, in lessons, and, when teachers encourage this, design the physical space of the classrooms, co-create set designs, theatre costumes, etc.

## Critical Thinking and Social Cooperation in “Łejery” Early Childhood Education

Critical thinking is one of the most important principles in the school described here, as from first grade, children are required to make many decisions independently, evaluate their actions, and reflect on ways to improve the world in a broad sense. Responsibility for oneself and for functioning effectively within a “group” is one of the guiding principles, which can be seen upon entering the school, which is open (children move freely throughout the school). When describing ways to support the development of critical thinking at “Łejery,” it is important not only to refer to the activities already described in the description of supporting the development of creativity, as all the highlighted forms of supporting this competence are also related to critical thinking, but also to the fact that everyone, regardless of age, functions within the same building. As mentioned, there are no bells at the school, so students keep an eye on their time for play and learning and are responsible for not being late. The school has so-called “timeouts.” Social contracts named by the founder of “Łejery”: “gentlemen’s agreement”, i.e. contracts based on trust (Drygas & Hamerski, 2024). Older students are obligated to care for younger ones (each seventh-grade student is cared for by one first-grade student, who is then cared for by eighth-grade students



as well). The school implements inter-class projects, there is no isolation or selection, and the entire student community gets to know each other perfectly.

At the beginning of the school year, each class draws up a contract between students and their teachers. This contract also contains several obligations imposed on the teacher, as it is co-created by the students in partnership with their “friend” or “girlfriend.” As the founders of the school point out:

Most often, such a contract, especially in the older grades, is drawn up during a ‘sleepover’, a period of several hours spent at school with the teacher, combined with an overnight stay, during which educational activities, games, shared meal preparation, etc., take place. In younger grades, drafting a contract can take up to several days (with breaks). As I begin working on the contract, I remind the children that certain standards must apply everywhere. Otherwise, cooperation would be impossible. To demonstrate this, I ask them to close their eyes and imagine a situation where there are no traffic rules whatsoever. Everyone can drive as they please – right or left – without observing road signs or regulations about who has the right of way. The students unanimously respond that this causes numerous accidents and massive traffic jams that practically make driving impossible. Classroom life must also have certain rules to avoid disasters. And we ask the children to create such rules (Hamerski, 2020).

According to E. Drygas and J. Hamerski, the contract aims to ensure “a safe classroom, no one gets hurt, everyone can learn as much as possible in a pleasant atmosphere, we feel good together, we feel good with the teachers” (Hamerski, 2020).

Children work on individual points in groups, preparing their proposals. The rules apply to both student and teacher conduct. Preschool and first-grade students draw their suggestions, and older children write them down. After developing proposed rules for each point, the groups present them in turn. There is time for discussion, negotiation, acceptance or rejection of the proposals. After all the points are approved, they are written on a large sheet of paper, read again, and formally signed by the children and teacher. The contract is then hung in a visible place in the classroom.

Adherence to the contract stems from the internal motivation of each community member, as “Łejery” is guided by the principle of respect for the needs of others (Drygas & Hamerski, 2024, p. 23).

All conflicts are resolved through a “to-do list,” which is written down by the children (and in the case of first grade, written down at the children’s request by the teacher or presented graphically in a way that the child expresses problems).

As J. Hamerski recounts the origins of the “to-do list” concept:

“From the very first days, the biggest educational problem was complaining: ‘I ask the girls, I ask the boy, and he punched me, and she’s fighting...’” And so a list of things emerged, which we devised in self-defence. The children learned that there would be no

complaining or constant running to the companion (teacher). Instead of complaining and getting offended, we'd write things down on a special board. When Piotrek kicked Marta, she wouldn't run to us; she'd write "M/P" on the board (Piotrek has a line on her). And when Marta got over it during the day, or Piotrek apologised, she'd draw a smiley face next to "M/P." There was also an opportunity to express thanks. A heart would then appear between the first letters of each person's name. Each day ended with a circle meeting. Kasia would then sit across from Jacek and, looking into his eyes, say, "Jacek, I'm angry with you because you kicked me." Now, Jacek had to explain it, and most often, he apologised, while we watched from the sidelines. The children would decide among themselves "who started it" and find a solution. They also learned to express not only their regrets, but their feelings, for example: "I felt sad when you made fun of me" or "It hurt when you pulled my hair." When this method was consistently implemented, "smiley faces" usually dominated the board. The children handled matters on their own, without our help (Hamerski, 2020).

All matters on the list are considered very carefully, and children have the right to argue their positions. Each case is resolved in such a way that, as Janusz Korczak used to say, "forgiveness" (Rogowska-Falska 1928, pp. 33–34). In difficult cases, the class may decide to refer the matter to a tribunal. It operates on principles similar to Janusz Korczak's peer tribunals and it is also the third and independent judicial authority in the school (alongside the president/principal and the Sejm and Senate).

Critical thinking and teamwork are reflected in a tendency to support the development of children's autonomy and a sense of responsibility for their decisions. As mentioned, "Łejery" students undertake many initiatives, which are often discussed in class or group discussions. They frequently face the need to modify their ideas and are also exposed to criticism. At the same time, teachers ensure that any criticism is constructive and that children don't become discouraged if their ideas are not implemented.

Because a "Łejery" school is a school where children constantly perform on stage, critical thinking is fostered through numerous rehearsals and performances in front of an audience. Students are required to participate annually in a recitation competition, which is participation of the entire school community. Each child independently selects a text, seeks sources of inspiration, and critically analyses their personal choices.

A common task for students in the first classes is a public presentation of their chosen reading material, and each choice must be well-reasoned.

Children are also encouraged to research a variety of information. Among the tasks they are required to perform are many that require analysing information from acquired sources. Starting in first grade, teachers initiate projects in which students conduct research and interviews, both independently and in groups, where they often select information.

Critical thinking and collaboration are also developed in the process of preparing for theatre performances – children are not always given tasks they are comfortable with; they often have to abandon their ideas and adhere to certain rules of the game.

Among the “Łejery” values, tolerance for differences is often emphasised, perceived as openness to innovation and a willingness to co-create and, as mentioned, provide assistance (Drygas & Hamerski, 2024, p. 23). A child is fully convinced that if they seek help from an older student, a cleaning “teacher,” or a “friend” responsible for, for example, maintaining the school garden, they will receive assistance. Every person associated with the school is obligated to respect the child’s right to respect (Drygas & Hamerski, 2024, p. 23), and every person must care for the dignity of others.

“Łejery” is a school where “children’s individualities are nurtured” (Drygas & Hamerski, 2024, p. 23). In practice, this means that the facility is a place where “the courage to express one’s own opinion and creative disagreement constitutes an educational and organisational value” (Drygas & Hamerski, 2024, p. 23).

## “Łejery” Communication

“Łejery” is a lesson in democracy (Drygas & Hamerski, 2024, p. 23), so at the communication level, there are no “ladies” or “gentlemen,” and each child addresses adults using the words “druh” or “druhna” (“companion”). A specific linguistic etiquette also applies to adult communication. Parents and teachers most often address each other by their first names, but in the presence of children, they use the same terms as children. Respect dominates in “Łejery” communication; every so-called “school instruction” is expressed through a request, and polite words are embedded in the language culture both in lessons and during play. Teachers formulate all information with care, ensuring that their requests are justified, bearing in mind that they are role models for the children. Every student has the right to discuss the validity of these requests and can express their opinion on any topic, but must do so in a manner. Statements that violate personal dignity are reported to the “case list” or, in more drastic cases, to the tribunal.

Maintaining a culture of communication is a key element of theatre classes, where children are often encouraged to practice drama techniques. In a safe environment, conflicts and misunderstandings are simulated, attention is paid to how others perceive words and gestures, and the reception of messages by other group members is analysed.

Each educational lesson is conducted with the utmost care and always focuses on current issues identified by the teacher and children in the classroom or school.

Because there are two teachers, there is a chance of the lesson being cancelled (if one teacher is absent, the other teacher will lead the lesson).

The “Łejery” communication, due to the postulate of “pознаńness”, i.e. shaping attitudes of local patriotism (Drygas & Hamerski, 2024, p. 22), is rich in phrases borrowed from the Poznań dialect, but also in many neologisms, the aim of which is to build a school culture in which everyone should feel like in one big family, like in a warm, friendly home.

Hence, instead of a staff room, there’s a “druhówka”; instead of a cafeteria, there’s a “jadalka”. There are also “fejernie” - theatre rooms. This naming convention aims to make school the facility’s space, moving away from the rigid framework of Polish education. For example, “Behind the movable wall lies the ‘mizdrzalnia’, where the girls have a mirror, a dressing table, a collection of hats, and a screen to shield them from prying eyes” (Gajdzińska, 1997, p. 8).

Assessment at Primary School No. 83 in the youngest grades (including the upper grades) is expressed through friendly, relatively short, and substantive feedback. Students first learn what they have achieved, and then the teacher identifies areas for improvement. Because first-grade students cannot read fluently, the information provided by the teacher is verbal. If the assessment is recorded, the parent is asked to read it to the child at home. It always begins with the child’s name (e.g., Tosiu! Adasiu!), and only then does the body of the information emerge, followed by, for example, congratulations or requests for work on certain areas. Formative assessment encourages children to develop a sense of self-worth. Children have the motivation to make an effort. Frequent use of their first names allows them to feel a close emotional bond with the teacher.

“Łejery” communication is often heard in performances; children “play” with words, searching for synonyms and homonyms, which they use in everyday situations and during theatrical performances. Because art is a leading educational tool at Primary School No. 83, the school boasts a vast literary and musical repertoire. Works for the “Łejery” have been written by Wanda Chotomska, Emilia Waśniowska, Grzegorz Przewoźniak, and other authors (Hamerski, 2011; Drygas & Hamerski, 2008; Drygas & Hamerski, n.d.; Chotomska, 2005). Children in grades 1–3 eagerly engage with the “Łejery” repertoire, and E. Waśniowska’s poems and the lyrics of “Łejery” songs become a kind of linguistic dictionary for them, which they use with pleasure in everyday life – the children are immersed in literary works of high artistic quality. Communication, in its specific form, also occurs through theatre, which is often created by children and accompanied by a theatre teacher.

Children’s community theatre, as the leading institution in the school in question, fosters effective communication and broadly understood comprehensive education, as it is perceived by “Łejery” educators as an educational means rather than a goal

achieved through hours of repetition, arduous rehearsals, or re-creative work led by a directive director. Theatre in the “Łejersy” institution aligns with the principles of theatre pedagogy described by Aleksandra Denkowicz (2022) as: “creative dialogue [...] around topics that are considered difficult or controversial, through theatrical-pedagogical techniques enabling reflection on the issues raised in performances, critical reception of performances, and the process of naming what happens in the confrontation between theatre and reality” (p. 53). In “Łejery” theatre, an act of communication characteristic of educational theatre occurs, which can be considered on several levels and planes. The first level of communication is “verbal contact, the second is non-verbal means” (Kalinowski, 2001, p. 29).

Educators of “Łejery” theatre seem to be well aware that the first challenge posed by education through theatre is, as Daniel Kalinowski (2001) points out, verbal communication. “In educational theatre activities, one must devote considerable time to building a common language with the participants” (p. 29), building effective verbal communication requires special consideration and sensitivity, because the people with whom one works are people “with different expectations and perceptions [...] and all work in the same workshop group” (pp. 29–30). Non-verbal communication is also crucial in the pedagogy of “Łejery” theatre, perceived in theatre pedagogy as “non-verbal communication, more closely related to the art and the stage” (Kalinowski, 2001, pp. 29–30).

## Conclusion

In contemporary Poland, regardless of the institution children attend (whether it’s a nursery, preschool, or school), the prevailing model of formal education is one with a strong emphasis on teacher, instructor, or caregiver-led activities and the development of work plans with predetermined learning outcomes. Meanwhile, curriculum orientation (of upbringing and teaching) is always external to children’s needs, wills, interests, and aspirations (Klus-Stańska, 2019, p. 271). At Primary School No. 83, as in Jan Korczak’s pedagogy, the “experts” are the children (Kirchner, 2013, p. 171). “Łejery” is an example of a non-standard school where, from the very beginning, the founders aimed to “break stereotypes” (Drygas & Hamerski, 2024, p. 22). From the very beginning of his teaching career, J. Hamerski noticed that competences such as creativity, cooperation, critical thinking and communication are key in the life of a conscious person.

This extraordinary “school, not a school” (Drygas & Hamerski, 2024, p. 1) is a place that the youngest students often compare to *Mr. Kleks’s Academy* (Brzechwa, 2018), and the art, kindness, and atmosphere of agency surrounding it equip them

with competencies that, over the years, lead them to achieve many successes. This is evidenced by the fact that subsequent “Łejery” graduates go on to prestigious secondary schools, are laureates of numerous competitions, and “Łejery” children are laureates of the “Odyssey of the Mind” competition. As the school’s founders say about their graduates:

They are often class presidents. They have organisational skills. They establish theatres or cabarets. When someone needs to be sent to the principal to deal with difficult matters, they send “the Łejer”. And finally, they are not afraid of public speaking [...]. They are not afraid to have their own opinions and defend them to the bitter end (Drygas & Hamerski, 2024, p. 40).

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