

**Vol. 10, 2021/2 No. 20**

**Multidisciplinary  
Journal of  
School Education**

**Special Needs  
in Various Educational Systems**

**Thematic Editor**

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## **Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education**

Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education is a biannual scholarly journal co-edited by the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow and the Abat Oliba CEU University in Barcelona.

Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, Faculty of Education, Institute of Educational Sciences  
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The publication of this Journal Issue was co-financed by the statutory funds of the Faculty of Education, Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow and the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education (Grant No. DNK/SN/464237/2020).

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**ISSN** 2543-7585

**e-ISSN** 2543-8409

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#### **Typesetting**

Piotr Druciarek

*Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education* is published semi-annually.

The original version is the electronic version.

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Anti-plagiarism policy: all articles have been checked for originality with iThenticate.

Information for Authors and Reviewers: <https://czasopisma.ignatianum.edu.pl/jpe>

Print run of 40 copies

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## Editorial

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This issue of the Multidisciplinary Journal of School Education delivers a large group of articles divided into three sections. The first section, of a thematic nature, examines Special Needs In Various Educational Systems and deals with topics such as creativity in children with dyslexia, the use of the Internet by young people with hearing problems, the attitudes towards the elderly prevailing among pedagogy students, neurodiversity and academic inclusion of people on the autism spectrum, and the way Italian schools coped with Covid-19. In the second section, various articles are collected that help to reflect on the educational task entrusted to all teachers, such as the choice of school and segregation, the knowledge that university students have of the institution where they study, secular ethics in elementary Finnish education, the relationship between the education of children in Pope Francis and Thomas Aquinas, and the pedagogical reflections of Janusz Korczak. The last section, Miscellaneous Articles, contains three papers: on proactive coping by adolescents and the elderly, on prevention of sexual abuse at school, and on e-learning and blended learning in the experience of Polish students.

The journal begins with the article entitled "Creativity in Children and Pupils with Dyslexia" (Jan Viktorin), which is a meta-analysis of several articles on creativity in children with dyslexia. The result is not conclusive, but it seems to indicate that there is some creative superiority in the child with dyslexia. It is interesting to discover that dyslexia not only has disadvantages for those who suffer from it (which we already knew), but that it can be advantageous in other areas of life (something that most people are unaware of). The detailed analysis to which the author submits the ten articles selected for the meta-analysis, covering several hundred children, stands out. Although the results are somewhat ambiguous, as some studies show greater creativity in children with dyslexia

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while others do not, the author suggests some hypotheses to explain this disparity. For the advancement of scientific knowledge, both the cases that confirm hypotheses and those that refute them are important, since Karl Popper's distinction between science and ideology is at stake.

The second article is entitled "Hearing and Hearing-Impaired Adolescents and the Use of the Internet: A Report From Research Conducted in Poland" (Anna Michalczyk). This is a survey on the use of the Internet among 150 adolescents between 15 and 20 years old with and without hearing problems, according to sex, in order to determine their intrapersonal and interpersonal attitudes, self-image, self-esteem, and the relationships of others towards the individual and vice versa. The initial part of the theoretical foundation is noteworthy. The instrument is a poll and its conclusions are varied, although predictable. For example, we discover that the feeling of loneliness compels adolescents to engage in risky behavior and addictions; girls with hearing problems had the lowest values in almost all the questions (and when the values were high, it was for negative items such as the level of loneliness). In boys it was the opposite; nevertheless, they scored worryingly high in risky Internet use. In general, people with hearing problems tended to score higher on feelings of loneliness and negative emotions. This is consistent with other research and suggests the likelihood of addictions in the future, hence the importance of working on elements such as self-esteem and prevention rather than a cure.

The third article devoted to special needs also involves the elderly and is entitled "Attitudes Towards the Elderly Among Students of Pedagogy" (Katarzyna Jas). This is the analysis of what 66 pedagogy students think about the elderly. It is often thought that the elderly have a stereotypical, generally negative image of the young, just as young people have a stereotypical and negative image of the elderly, but this is not entirely the case because the results of the survey indicate that although the students considered the elderly a source of knowledge, they nevertheless would not like to work with them in the future. The opinions of the pedagogy students were ambiguous: they saw the elderly as wise, but being scared by physical problems. Attitudes have to do with elements that



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are cognitive (positive or negative stereotypes), emotional (good or bad), and behavioral (how one acts). The conclusion is that promoting inter-generational contact between the students and the elderly may be mutually beneficial.

The fourth paper, by Ryszarda Cierzniewska and Dorota Podgórska-Jachnik, discusses neurodiversity as a fairly recent umbrella term encompassing autism spectrum disorder, Asperger syndrome, dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD in the context of academic inclusion of young people with autism spectrum disorder.

The fifth one, by Bogdan Stańkowski, shows the influence of Covid-19 on the functioning of the Italian school system. The author concludes that Italian schools managed to survive the suspension of normal functioning by introducing online classes. However, serious adverse effects of the isolation of children during the school lockdown are also highlighted, as well as the need to develop a more strategy for the future.

The second section, *Reflections on Teaching*, begins with the text “Neighborhood, Segregation, and School Choice” (Zoë Elisabeth Antonia Schreurs and Shu-Nu Chang Rundgren). It is a meta-analysis that recalls that assigning schools according to the parents’ place of residence creates a strong connection with the neighborhood, but entails the segregation that the neighborhood itself maintains with respect to other neighborhoods (something that detractors of free choice tend to forget). There are three factors: segregation by residence; the parents’ choice of a school; and the schools’ choice of their students. School choice is defended by arguments of freedom (parents choose freely), equity (it can better help certain minority schools), and efficiency (it works better, as in the market); the argument for denying free choice is usually segregation, but the fact is that segregation is not only involved with school choice, but also residential segregation or a school choosing their students. In the 13 articles under analysis, it is highlighted that segregation by choice of school is not so clear: for some, the school choice reduces particular segregation; for others, it produces it. It therefore appears that studies should expand to examine the types of segregation that occur both as a result of residential segregation and as a result of free school choice.

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The second article is entitled “The Level of Knowledge About the University Building Among the Academic Community in the Context of Place Attachment” (Witold Warcholik). It presents a simple and interesting investigation on the knowledge that 150 students have about their own university. The depth of the first part is particularly noteworthy. It was found that the students at the university where the survey was carried out hardly knew anything about the historical roots or important figures of the university. This cannot be generalized to the entire world’s university community, but it does give us an idea. The author reveals to us that people connect with places through knowledge or affection; modern life, however, is full of non-places – airports, gas stations, or banks – where the familiar is opposed to the foreign, the named to the anonymous, the static to the dynamic, the permanent to the ephemeral, etc. Perhaps universities are becoming non-places. This especially shocks us because a university is an institution with strong ties to tradition and its past, though it fits into a contemporary university seen more and more as a service provider, and the student as a client.

The third article is entitled “Ethical Education for Grades 1 and 2 in Finland from the Values Perspective” (Arleta Suwalska). It is an article that, on the one hand, studies the underlying values in the curriculum of elementary school children, and on the other, it analyzes the values of ethics – the curricular alternative to religion classes. In Finland, in 2015, 95% of the students studied Lutheran religion; only 5% choose ethical values. Secular ethics have values such as democracy, human rights, non-violence, and positive multiculturalism. The basic curriculum in Finland entails four areas: the unique character of the student, cultural diversity, equality and democracy, and a sustainable lifestyle. Finland presents moral education as progressive and something in which the entire educational community must be involved.

The fourth article is entitled “The Education of Children in *Amoris Laetitia* in Light of Thomist Philosophy” (Rodrigo Bulboa). According to the author, Benedict XVI warned of an educational emergency. Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, Chapter VII, speaks of the education of children as a response to this emergency. This can be supplemented by reference

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to Thomist philosophy, considering that the Pope did not quote Aquinas here at all: the importance of parents in education, the work of the state, the love with which one is educated, the end of education as the full development of the virtues of the student that make the person freer, etc. The work is a good demonstration of the background continuity in the educational postulates of the Catholic Church.

The last article in the section is entitled "Determinants of an Old Text in the Field of Pedagogy on the Example of *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] by Janusz Korczak" (Bożena Sieradzka-Bazir). As a study of a text from the beginning of the 20th century by the pedagogue Janusz Korczak, it analyzes the text's pedagogical content by comparing it with the style of today's scientific articles. Although Korczak's book does not meet today's standards for a scientific text, it is still useful in pedagogical practice. The text is entitled "Children's right to respect" and it is a small book in five parts. The appearance of terms related to "education," "upbringing," and "care" is analyzed. Contrary to what is done today, Korczak extensively used the first person plural to involve the reader and the second person to give a dialogical style. In addition, a wide range of emotions appears. Although the text is 100 years old and would not be called scientific, it is an example of the search for truth in education and childcare.

The present issue of the journal is concluded by the Miscellaneous Articles section, which contains three articles.

The first one is entitled "Proactive Coping in Youth and Old Age as an Indicator of Identity Formation in an Anormative Context" (Ryszarda Cierzniewska and Aleksandra Błachnio). This is a study that forms part of a larger project and examines how adolescents or the elderly use proactive coping strategies. Adolescents prefer proactive coping and emotional support, while the elderly also prefer emotional, but reflective support and preventive coping. It highlights the theoretical contextualization of our postmodern and liquid society, where excess opportunities introduce ambiguity in individual choice. Proactive coping arises in the face of reactive coping and is part of the collective imagination of our world, where successful life for both young and old is marked

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by individualism, emotionalism, a focus on effectiveness, and the estheticization of life and the body. The study covers 300 adolescents and 1,500 elderly people; both groups obtained high scores in proactive strategies, although the elderly, who preferred emotional support, scored lower. Perhaps it would be desirable to better distinguish the self-perception of a person's proactivity (adolescent or elderly) from the real proactivity they have when facing changes.

The text authored by Krzysztof Biel addresses the sensitive and important question of sexual abuse at school and practical measures taken to prevent it. Last but not least, it is worth reading the paper by Marzena Chrost and Sławomir Chrost, who discuss the question of elearning and blended learning and present the results of a research project conducted among Polish students.

We hope that reading these papers will be helpful and will contribute to the fascinating task of educating, because, as Korczak said, "Years of work have made it ever more clear that children deserve respect, trust, and kindness."

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# Thematic Articles

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## Creativity in Children and Pupils With Dyslexia

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### Abstract

This literature review analyzes ten specialized papers which focus on the issue of higher creativity among children and pupils with dyslexia. The aim of the article is to determine the level of creativity in this group, what may might affect the level of creativity among them, and whether there are significant differences in some areas between children and pupils with dyslexia and intact (typically developed) children and pupils. In connection with dyslexia, its possible advantages – and not only disadvantages – are beginning to be discussed, which are developing in the context of possible shortcomings. In children and pupils with dyslexia, increased creative potential and excellent visualization skills have been reported. Based on foreign research, a significantly higher level of creativity was not clearly demonstrated in children and pupils with dyslexia in comparison with intact children and pupils.

*Keywords:* literature review, creativity, dyslexia, originality of thinking, positive aspects

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## Introduction

Dyslexia is a limited ability to learn to read despite normal intelligence, satisfactory mental and physical health, adequate motivation and education, and the efforts of the individual in question. The disorder is caused by a disruption of neural brain structures, due to which abnormal connections between neurons in the cerebral cortex are formed. There are differences in the structure of the brain; in the different organization of cerebral activities in the processing of verbal information, the structure of the cells of the left and right hemispheres changes. These differences are especially noticeable in the cerebral cortex. The ratio of grey matter to white matter is higher in the left hemisphere than in the right. Deviations can also be observed in the cerebellum. Functional deficits in the cerebellum can result in fluctuations in fluency and the interplay of free movements, disturbances in balance, changes in muscle tension, disturbed perception of rhythm, disturbed time estimation, or problems in the automation of motor and cognitive processes. Dyslexia has a linguistic, cognitive, and perceptual dimension (Guyer, 2007; Lerner & Johns, 2015; Wajuihian & Naidoo, 2012). According to Helmuth (2001), dyslexic difficulties are manifested in the speed of reading (deciphering letters, spelling, disproportionately long syllables or, conversely, conjecture of words/end of sentences), errors (exchanging sounds and similarly-shaped letters in the analytical/synthetic method of reading, the persistent habit of double reading, which in the long run can cause difficulties in combining syllables into words and sounds into syllables), and in comprehension of texts (dependent on agile decoding and synthesis of individual letters). In contrast to intact pupils, pupils with dyslexia have executive functions that affect visual and verbal functions, working memory, and problem-solving skills (Hargreaves, 2008; Nicolson & Fawcett, 2008; Reiter et al., 2005).

In addition to the above deficits of dyslexia, certain positive aspects can also be mentioned. Davis and Braun (2010) outlined the basic abilities of all pupils with dyslexia: they strongly understand the value of the environment, they can use their mental ability to create and change



perception (primary ability), they are more inquisitive than average pupils, instead of words they think especially in pictures, they perceive and think multidimensionally (through all the senses), their experience is very real, and they have vivid imagery. These eight abilities, if they are not neglected, suppressed, or thwarted by the educational process or parents, will be represented by two characteristics: extraordinary creative abilities and higher intelligence. The gift of dyslexia can thus become a gift of mastery, which can be developed in various ways and in many areas. There are certain general characteristics that pupils with dyslexia usually have in common, namely, developed intuition, nonverbal thinking, and a rich potential for creativity. Compared to intact pupils, pupils with dyslexia have a much stronger creative drive; multidimensional thinking, intuitive thinking, curiosity, and image thinking increase the creativity of pupils with dyslexia (Berninger & Wolf, 2009; Reid, 2016). Everatt (1997) conducted a research study mapping the differences in the results of thinking creativity tests between individuals with dyslexia and intact individuals. Both groups were tested by word processing tests targeting auditory synthesis ("spelling test") – notation based on dictation, quick naming with interference, comprehension, spatial abilities, and creativity (which included verbal and drawing tasks). The results showed a significant difference between the experimental and control groups with a tendency for individuals with dyslexia to score higher in creativity tests (verbal tasks:  $p = 0.04$ ; drawing tasks:  $p = 0.02$ ).

Creativity represents an extensive area of human abilities that is specifically examined in psychology and other scientific disciplines. Creativity is perceived as a process of creating something valuable and original. Creativity can be defined as originality that is adapted to a problem and at a certain point in time appropriate to a certain group of people (Hong & Milgram, 2010). Claxton et al. (2005) described creativity as the opposite of stereotypical activity, which is repeated by inertia, and as the opposite of traditional thinking and the rigid use of previously tested methods. Creativity can be described as a complex ability that is the result of a successful combination of cognitive abilities, personality, and other motives. Creativity is an essential component of specifically human

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potential, helping everyone to adapt while contributing to the information explosion (Runco, 2014).

Extraordinary creativity, which is necessary to create a certain revolutionary invention, comes from the same source as everyday creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). In this sense, creativity can be evaluated on two levels. On an individual level, creativity is a new mental combination that appears in the world. Creativity at the sociocultural level is a period of product development that is classified as innovative, beneficial, and at the same time valuable for a certain social group. Then this product is useful on an individual and societal scale (Sawyer, 2012). Creativity is one of the skills that can be further developed. A certain degree of hypothetical creative abilities is typical for each pupil, although some pupils may be more creative than others. Recently, there has been more and more discussion of the specific abilities of pupils with dyslexia, not only in connection with the widely known deficits and symptoms. Generally, the following specific abilities of pupils with dyslexia are mentioned: logical thinking, excellent visualization skills, insight, an innovative approach to problem-solving, and higher creativity in everyday life and in artistic and professional activities (Barlett et al., 2010; Sternberg, 2006; West, 2008).

## **Methodology**

The literature review represents a basic tool or means of research in special education. It is a method that is essential for the further development of science in inclusive and special education. Another benefit of the literature review is the fact that no current research can be left without a detailed analysis and mapping of what has been found and how researchers have done it before. Through literature reviews, it is possible to orient oneself in the areas of research that are planned to be continued. A form of narrative (traditional) review was chosen for this literature review, which summarizes a wider range of studies on a given topic for a selected period. In this review, the selected research questions or aspects are observed. The literature review describes the findings of

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previous research, summarizing and identifying differences in the published results and opinions of previous researchers. Thus, literature reviews may contain conclusions and recommendations of a more general nature (Bearman et al., 2012; Ridley, 2012).

This literature review deals with the positive aspects of dyslexia, specifically the higher creativity of children and pupils with dyslexia. We have defined two basic thematic criteria: creativity of thinking and children and pupils with dyslexia. We searched for titles in the Web of Science, ERIH+, and SCOPUS databases. The collection and study of professional literature of foreign origin was carried out at the beginning of 2021. We tried to approach the chosen topic in a comprehensive way. We decided to determine through analysis and synthesis of the findings the level of creativity in children and pupils with dyslexia, what may affect the level of creativity in children and pupils with dyslexia, and whether there are any significant differences in certain areas between children and pupils with dyslexia and intact children and pupils.

The criteria for including the study depended on specific definitions and guidelines. Firstly, to be able to choose a study with children and pupils with dyslexia, the definition of dyslexia (the diagnostic criteria according to ICF-10) had to have been met. Secondly, to be selected for this review, a study in which creativity was objectively evaluated had to include standardized testing to evaluate creativity. The psychological, neuropsychological, and pedagogical treatment of children were not considered in the selection of studies. Thirdly, for a study containing a control group of intact children and pupils to be selected for this review, the definition of intact children and pupils had to have been met. Finally, all studies selected had to be written in English and published in peer-reviewed journals between 1995 and 2020.

From the initial search results, studies in which the research was presented in the form of letters, non-original articles, or case studies – rather than peer-reviewed research – were excluded ( $n = 38$ ). Furthermore, studies were excluded where the authors used non-standardized tools (qualitative tests) to measure creativity. After narrowing down the selection, we worked with the resulting 10 empirical studies. Based on the criteria

established for selecting texts and according to the analysis, we synthesized the findings from the relevant studies into the literature review. In the bibliographic review, we tried to analyze the individual papers, to briefly describe their characteristics, to distinguish and highlight their differences, to evaluate their contribution to theory and practice, and to include the knowledge about the topic of higher creativity of children and pupils with dyslexia. Table 1 provides the general overview of the selected studies.

**Table 1. Overview of the Selected Studies  
on the Higher Creativity of Children and Pupils With Dyslexia**

Author(s)	Title	Year, country	Sample	Results
LaFrance, E. B.	The Gifted/Dyslexic Child: Characterizing and Addressing Strengths and Weaknesses	1997, Canada	90 pupils (gifted with dyslexia, gifted, and with dyslexia), aged 9–14 years	The pupils with dyslexia and gifted pupils with dyslexia were more prone (significant differences) to intuitive aspects of creative thinking than gifted pupils.
Everatt, J., Steffert, B., & Smythe, I.	An Eye for the Unusual: Creative Thinking in Dyslexics	1999, United Kingdom	17 pupils with dyslexia and 16 intact pupils, aged 7–9 years; 20 pupils with dyslexia; and 25 intact pupils, aged 11–13 years	No significant difference was demonstrated in the scores of pupils with dyslexia versus the intact pupils.
Cockcroft, K. & Hartgill, M.	Focusing on the Abilities in Learning Disabilities: Dyslexia and Creativity	2004, South Africa	36 pupils (10 girls and 26 boys) with dyslexia, aged 10–14 years	The pupils with dyslexia were significantly better (statistical differences) than the intact pupils in generating many ideas.
Çorlu, M., Özcan, O., & Korkmazlar, Ü.	The Meaning of Dyslexic's Drawings in Communication Design	2009, Turkey	A group of pupils with dyslexia and a control group: both groups had 50% girls and 50% boys and the average age was 9 years	The pupils with dyslexia were more creative and imaginative (statistical differences).
Tafti, M. A., Hameedy, M. A., & Baghal, N. M.	Dyslexia, a Deficit or a Difference: Comparing the Creativity and Memory Skills of Dyslexic and Nondyslexic Students in Iran	2009, Iran	26 pupils with dyslexia and 26 intact pupils, average age 9 years	The pupils with dyslexia performed better (statistical differences) in tasks of visual memory and creativity (limited to originality).

Alves, R. J. R. & Nakano, T. C.	Creativity and Intelligence in Children with and Without Developmental Dyslexia	2014, Brazil	13 pupils (8 boys and 5 girls) diagnosed with developmental dyslexia, aged 9–11 years, and 13 pupils (4 boys and 9 girls) without reading and writing difficulties, aged 10–11 years	There were no significant differences in creativity between the group of pupils with developmental dyslexia and the group of pupils without reading and writing difficulties.
Bigozzi, L., Tarchi, C., Pinto, G., & Donfrancesco, R.	Divergent Thinking in Italian Students with and Without Reading Impairments	2016, Italy	95 pupils with dyslexia (67 boys and 28 girls), aged 9–13 years, and 95 intact peers (67 boys and 28 girls), aged 9–13 years	The pupils with dyslexia surpassed their intact peers in the overall creativity score and in three sub-scores: processing, titles, and originality.
Cancer, A., Manzoli, S., & Antonietti, A.	The Alleged Link between Creativity and Dyslexia: Identifying the Specific Process in which Dyslexic Students Excel	2016, Italy	Study I: 19 pupils with developmental dyslexia, aged 12–15 years, and 33 intact pupils, aged 12–15 years	The pupils with developmental dyslexia performed significantly better in the connecting task; most pupils with developmental dyslexia scored below the average of the control group of intact pupils.
			Study II: 10 pupils (5 girls and 5 boys) with developmental dyslexia aged 10–13 years	No significant correlations were found between creativity and attention and working memory.
Kapoula, Z., Ruiz, S., Spector, L., Mocerovi, M., Gaertner, C., Quilici, C., & Vernet, M.	Education Influences Creativity in Dyslexic and Non-Dyslexic Children and Teenagers	2016, France	91 pupils (27 girls and 64 boys) with dyslexia and/or other dysfunctions, aged 8–15 years, and 26 intact pupils (14 girls and 12 boys), aged 12–15 years	The pupils with dyslexia may show significantly higher creative tendencies compared to the intact pupils much earlier than in adulthood.
Martinelli, V. & Camilleri, D.	Creative Giftedness and Dyslexia	2016, Malta	38 pupils (16 girls and 22 boys) diagnosed with dyslexia, aged 12–14 years, and 38 intact pupils (16 girls and 22 boys), aged 12–14 years	Despite the slightly higher score of pupils with dyslexia compared to the intact pupils, there were statistically insignificant differences in creativity.

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## Results of the Review

LaFrance (1997) described a study from Ontario on how gifted pupils with dyslexia compared to age-matched adolescents who were dyslexic or gifted, but not both. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, cognitive and creative differences in thinking were analyzed in 90 pupils aged 9 to 14 years. The results of this study provide information in four areas: intellectual, academic, social/emotional, and creative thinking. The intellectual profile differed in all three groups of pupils. Although academic difficulties were similar for the dyslexic pupils and gifted dyslexia pupils, the gifted dyslexia pupils were stronger in expressing humor, problem-solving, capturing the essence of an idea, and synthesizing different concepts. In their writing, this group also expressed the feeling that they had everything under control; in their drawings, they expressed other positive and negative feelings towards themselves and the future. Like the pupils with dyslexia, the gifted pupils with dyslexia were more prone to intuitive aspects of creative thinking. In addition, they were more open to new ideas and more willing to accept ambiguity. The group of gifted pupils was the strongest in all the cognitive and physical aspects of creative thinking. Interestingly, originality as a factor did not differentiate the groups, being the same in the pupils with dyslexia, the gifted pupils, and the gifted pupils with dyslexia.

Everatt et al. (1999) examined the relationship between developmental dyslexia and creativity. The research sample consisted of 17 pupils with dyslexia and 16 intact pupils, aged 7–9 years, and 20 pupils with dyslexia and 25 intact pupils, aged 11–13 years. The research assessed the originality of the pupils' drawings, which each pupil created during art lessons in the same year and which were evaluated by three independent jurors (art teachers) who did not know about the nature of the study or the pupils who had created the drawings, only the school grade of each pupil. Separate analyses based on each juror's evaluations did not show any difference between the pupils with dyslexia and the intact pupils. The subjects were tested in smaller groups. As part of data collection for this research, the pupils received written examples and verbal descriptions

of the task and a time limit of 15 minutes. Two independent evaluators then assessed the originality of each drawing on a five-point scale; the number of drawings created within the period was also taken into account. For the purposes of analysis, the evaluations were averaged across the drawings and evaluators for each pupil. The results showed a minimal difference ( $p = 0.46$ ) between the pupils with dyslexia and the intact pupils, regardless of whether creativity was evaluated by the number of drawings produced or by the originality of the drawings.

Cockcroft and Hartgill (2004) investigated whether pupils with dyslexia were more creative than intact pupils of the same age. The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking were administered to a group of 36 pupils with dyslexia (10 girls and 26 boys) in grades 4 through 7 who attended the same private special school in Gauteng, South Africa. The scores obtained on these tests by pupils with dyslexia were then compared with those obtained by the normative sample. The results showed that the pupils with dyslexia in all grades were significantly better than the respective intact group at generating many ideas. The pupils with dyslexia in the sixth grade also produced significantly more original answers than the intact sample, while the intact fourth grade group received significantly higher scores in the dimension of abstractness of titles than the group of pupils with dyslexia. All grades of the intact sample, except for the seventh grade, were significantly better than their dyslexic counterparts in the dimension of elaboration. No significant difference was found in this dimension between the two samples of the seventh grade. The dimension of resistance to premature closure was not statistically different for any grade, either, except in the sixth grade, where the intact sample scored higher than the group with dyslexia. The frequency dimension was related to the abstractness of the titles, while elaboration was related to both originality and resistance to premature closure. The pupils with dyslexia in the study may have above-average abilities in certain dimensions of creativity and these abilities can be linked to their education.

Çorlu et al. (2009) examined pupils with dyslexia in primary school (with a control group) regarding their communication design ability. The difference between the frequency of using navigation markers to express

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destinations and using different symbols for them was compared. The percentage of female and male participants was 50% each and the mean age was 9 years in both groups. Each group included two left-handed pupils. The participants were tested directly through a design proficiency test; the tests were then evaluated by a panel of jurors with extensive experience in evaluating the performance of communication design. During the test, a control group of pupils with dyslexia was asked to create drawings in response to 20 different notional concepts on a blank A4 sheet of paper. These verbs included the interaction terms used in computer interface design (open, close, zoom in, zoom out, go forward, go back, delete, copy, carry, and call) as well as the concepts of everyday activity that can be used in communication design (listen, look, talk, draw, stop, eat, feel, drink, look, and ask for help). Frequent use of “navigational signs” was found, strongly in favor of the dyslexia group (45% in the dyslexia group versus 5% in the control group). In addition, 70% of the group of pupils with dyslexia produced various symbols for questions concerning opposition (open–close, zoom in–zoom out, or go forward–go back). Only 40% of the control group created new symbols. Also, the pupils with dyslexia responded faster and the jurors noted that they were more imaginative and creative.

Tafti et al. (2009) examined the positive and negative aspects of dyslexia in Iran. This study compared 26 pupils with dyslexia with 26 intact pupils in second through fifth grades in Tehran elementary schools. The participants were girls and boys with an average age of 9 years, who came from a similar socioeconomic background. The Torrance Test of Creative Thinking (Image Subtest) and the Cornoldy Working Memory Test (Visual-Spatial and Verbal Memory) were used. First, the pupils’ test creativity (i.e., fluency, flexibility, originality, and processing skills) was evaluated, followed by their verbal and image memory (recognition and processing), using two tasks, one spatial (recognizing the location of images and words in a matrix) and the other verbal (processing words/images that were shown to them). Thus, each participant received two scores for the final test. The intact pupils significantly outperformed the pupils with dyslexia in the visual and verbal memory of words for specific



concepts and abstract concepts and in the auditory-verbal memory of words for abstract concepts. There was no significant difference between the two groups of pupils in the auditory-verbal memory of words for specific terms. The pupils with dyslexia achieved significantly better results in the visual and auditory memory of specific words than in that of abstract concepts. Their visual-spatial memory was better than their visual-semantic memory, and their visual (nonverbal) memory was also better than their verbal memory. In terms of creativity, the pupils with dyslexia scored higher in overall creativity and all its subscales, except for processing skills. However, only their superiority in originality and synthesis reached statistical significance.

Alves and Nakano (2014) investigated whether the creativity of pupils with developmental dyslexia differs from that of pupils without reading and writing difficulties. Furthermore, the authors investigated how creativity can relate to intelligence. The sample consisted of 26 participants: 13 pupils (8 boys and 5 girls) diagnosed with developmental dyslexia, aged 9 to 11 years, and 13 pupils (4 boys and 9 girls) without reading and writing difficulties, aged 10 to 11 years. The group of pupils without reading and writing difficulties consisted only of pupils from public schools. Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices and the Children's Figural Creativity Test were applied in both groups of pupils. This creativity test consists of three activities. First, the pupil is asked to create a drawing based on a poorly defined stimulus; then, the pupil is asked to create pictures based on 10 incomplete stimuli; and in the third activity, the pupil is asked to create as many pictures as possible based on 30 repeated stimuli. Thus, it is possible to process a total of 41 answers in the form of images. Based on these images, 12 creative characteristics are evaluated: fluency, flexibility, processing, originality, expression of emotions, imagination, movement, unusual perspectives, inner perspective, use of context, extension of boundaries, and expressive names. These characteristics are made up of four factors: enrichment of ideas, emotions, creative preparation, and cognitive aspects. And these factors make it possible to identify stronger and weaker areas of the pupil's creative potential. There were no significant intergroup differences in creativity, although the group of pupils

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without reading and writing difficulties had higher overall creativity scores and higher average scores for most of these dimensions, except for the “emotions” factor. In the group of pupils without reading and writing difficulties, the majority received an average score in the factors for “enrichment of ideas,” “emotions,” and “creative preparation,” as well as for overall creativity. Average, below average, and lower scores were obtained in the dimension of “cognitive aspects.” The majority of the pupils with developmental dyslexia received an average score in the factors for “enrichment of ideas” and “cognitive aspects” and for overall creativity. Most got a higher score in the “emotions” dimension and a lower score in the “creative preparation” factor. Strong and significant correlations were found between intelligence and creativity in both groups.

Bigozzi et al. (2016) addressed the creativity of dyslexic pupils and their intact peers. The study involved 190 Italian pupils between the ages of 9 and 13 years, of whom 95 had dyslexia (67 boys and 28 girls) and 95 were intact (67 boys and 28 girls). Williams’ Test of Divergent Thinking was used to evaluate their creativity. First, the pupils were asked to examine a series of 24 incomplete drawings, more specifically, frames containing lines and/or shapes. They were then asked to complete the frames by drawing objects and interesting characters in an original way. In the end, the pupils had to create a clever and captivating name for each frame. The tests were evaluated by two independent jurors who had undergone training. Overall, the agreement between the jurors was 92%; the disagreements were resolved by discussion. Pupils were assessed for all creative skills (fluency, flexibility, originality, processing, and titles) and overall creativity scores. The results showed that the pupils with dyslexia outperformed their peers in the overall score and in the sub-scores of originality, processing, and titles, while no differences were found in the sub-scores of fluency and flexibility.

Cancer et al. (2016) sought to identify the alleged link between creativity and dyslexia. The research involved two different studies. In the first study, the WCR Creativity Test was administered to 52 Milan public school pupils aged 12–15; 19 of them were diagnosed with developmental dyslexia and the remaining 33 of whom made up the control

group. This test makes it possible to identify three basic skills of creative thinking: the ability to expand, the ability to connect, and the ability to reorganize. The test consists of nine items, which are made up of visual (pictures of objects, geometric shapes, and sketches) and verbal stimuli (words or short phrases). No time limit was set during the test administration. Before the test itself, the pupils received an information booklet explaining the unmarked nature of the test. The test was administered and all questions were scored by a researcher who had previously been trained to use the test. The results showed that the pupils with developmental dyslexia performed significantly better in the connecting task, which was to convey an unusual combination of ideas. Most pupils with developmental dyslexia scored below the average of the control group. These findings were supported by a second study involving 10 pupils with developmental dyslexia (5 girls and 5 boys), ranging in age from 10 to 13 years. The pupils were admitted as patients of the neuropsychiatric units of two institutions in Milan. Their overall intelligence quotient ranged between 86 and 128. The testing conditions were the same as in the first study. Due to the limited number of pupils in the study, non-parametric correlations were calculated. Regarding general intelligence, no significant correlation was observed between the WCR Creativity Test score and the overall intelligence quotient. The reading performances measured by different tests (reading texts, words, and pseudo-words) proved to be coherent with each other. There were some significant positive correlations between reading speed and accuracy, especially between word speed and word accuracy, word speed and pseudo-word speed, word speed and text speed, word accuracy and text speed, pseudo-word speed and text speed, and pseudo-word accuracy and text accuracy. However, there was a significant negative correlation between connecting skills and reading skills (reading accuracy and reading speed); that is, lower reading performance corresponded to higher skills in connecting different elements. Finally, no significant correlations were found between the WCR Creativity Test and the attention and working memory scores. Therefore, it seems unlikely that attention and working memory could be involved in the relationship between reading and creativity.

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Kapoula et al. (2016) addressed the degree of creative ability in pupils with dyslexia and/or other dysfunctions versus intact pupils. The research was aimed at pupils in three schools – one in Brussels, Belgium and two in France (Paris and Oise) – which educate pupils with dyslexia and offer specially adapted curricula. The pupils were included in this research after a comprehensive diagnosis of dyslexia, which was based on an extensive examination of psychological, neurological, and phonological skills. It included measuring reading skills, writing, attention, and memory. The inclusion criterion was a standard level of intellectual abilities, no lower than the standard range. In Paris, the study included pupils with dyslexia ( $n = 54$ ) and those with other dysfunctions (dyspraxia, dysphasia, attention deficit disorder, dysgraphia, difficulty with written language, difficulty with reading language, and cognitive inhibition [ $n = 12$ ]) in the age range of 11–14 years. In Brussels, 15 pupils with dyslexia and 26 intact pupils, aged 12–15 years, were included in the study; in Oise, they study group was pupils with dyslexia ( $n = 4$ ) and pupils with dyslexia associated with comorbid dysfunctions (dysphasia, attention problems, and dyscalculia [ $n = 6$ ]) in the age range of 8 to 12 years. The research sample consisted of 91 pupils (27 girls and 64 boys) with dyslexia and/or other dysfunctions and 26 pupils (14 girls and 12 boys) from the intact population. In a research survey, the Torrance Figural Test of Creative Thinking was chosen as a diagnostic tool. The test consisted of three tasks, each lasting 10 minutes. All tasks required the creation of unusual drawings starting with standard shapes, such as a pair of lines or an oval. The results were analyzed by three authors who are students of psychology and are trained in the analysis of this test. The scores provided four different cognitive components of creativity: fluency, flexibility, originality, and processing. The pupils with dyslexia in Brussels achieved statistically better results in all areas of the Torrance Figural Test of Creative Thinking compared to the control group. A comparison of the three schools showed statistically better results for pupils with dyslexia in Brussels than for those in Paris. The participants with dyslexia in Oise scored, apart from one cognitive component of creativity – processing, significantly higher than the pupils with dyslexia in Paris. The educational approach had an impact on

the creativity of pupils with dyslexia. The resulting creativity scores did not differ significantly between the pupils with dyslexia and/or other dysfunctions in the research sample.

Martinelli and Camilleri (2016) determined the creativity of pupils with dyslexia, measured by a standardized test battery (Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking) in comparison with their intact peers. The study involved 38 pupils (16 girls and 22 boys) diagnosed with dyslexia and 38 intact pupils (16 girls and 22 boys) between the ages of 12 and 14 from three different schools in Malta. All 38 participants with dyslexia had average intelligence quotients (85–115). The participants of the group with dyslexia were compared with the group of intact participants in terms of age, socioeconomic status, abilities, and the type of school attended. Although there were clear indications that the pupils with dyslexia rated themselves as less creative than their intact peers, they did better in most of the subscales of the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking. Despite the slightly higher scores of the pupils with dyslexia, the differences in the creativity were not statistically significant. The hypothesis that pupils with dyslexia perceive themselves as highly creative was not confirmed. In the context of this study, dyslexia was not associated with increased nonverbal creativity.

## Conclusion

Based on research on the relationship between dyslexia and creativity, it can be stated that the results of the studies were rather mixed. Some studies found a more significant relationship between the creativity of pupils with dyslexia and their creative abilities (Everatt et al., 2008; McManus et al., 2010; Wolff & Lundberg, 2002). LaFrance (1997) pointed to a higher propensity for the intuitive aspects of creative thinking in both dyslexic and gifted dyslexic pupils. Cockcroft and Hartgill (2004) came to a similar conclusion, when their survey showed significantly better results in generating many ideas in pupils with dyslexia compared to the intact group. Çorlu et al. (2009) noted that the pupils with dyslexia in their study

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were more creative and imaginative, responding much more quickly to the tasks assigned to them. The pupils with dyslexia performed better in the roles of visual memory and creativity (limited to originality) in the study by Tafti et al. (2009). Bigozzi et al. (2016) reported that pupils with dyslexia surpassed their intact peers in the overall creativity score and in the three sub-scores of processing, titles, and originality. A similar evaluation was reported by Cancer et al. (2016), namely, that pupils with developmental dyslexia performed significantly better in the connecting task and that most pupils with developmental dyslexia scored below the average of the control group of intact pupils.

In contrast, Everatt et al. (1999) did not show significant differences in the scores of dyslexic and intact pupils. Alves and Nakano (2014) also found no significant differences in creativity between the pupils with developmental dyslexia and those without reading and writing difficulties, but strong, significant correlations were found between creativity and intelligence in both groups of pupils. Although Kapoula et al. (2016) reported that the resulting creativity scores did not differ significantly in pupils with dyslexia and/or other dysfunctions in the research sample, they also pointed to a possible higher creative tendency in pupils with dyslexia compared to intact pupils much earlier than in adulthood. Despite the slightly higher score of pupils with dyslexia compared to intact pupils, no statistically significant differences were found in creativity in the survey by Martinelli and Camilleri (2016).

Thus, it is possible that the creative potential of a dyslexic individual develops gradually in the context of social situations and problem-solving, and that specific peculiarities may then manifest to different degrees at a certain stage of development. In childhood, the increased creative tendency of people with dyslexia may not be clearly visible, but in adolescence the differences may become more pronounced and adults with dyslexia may show significant differences in creative thinking compared to intact individuals.

Torrance's Figural Test of Creative Thinking was not primarily designed to work with individuals with dyslexia. It is therefore possible that such individuals could be at a disadvantage compared to their intact

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counterparts in working with a fixed time allowance for each of the tasks. Therefore, we cannot rule out that the slower work pace observed in people with dyslexia compared to the intact population – which is probably the result (or real manifestation) of their deficit – may be a significant handicap due to the limit of 10 minutes imposed on processing each test task. This could then be reflected in all four mapped areas, but above all in the elaboration.

One possibility for verifying the results in a follow-up study would be to increase the number of participants in individual groups so that a significant difference between them would be more likely to be found and the indicated tendency of individuals with dyslexia to score higher could be confirmed by a statistically significant difference. Also, allowing more time for individual test tasks (for individuals with dyslexia or the entire research group) and the inclusion of “non-standard” or abstract drawings showing a creative tendency in a possible alternative evaluation could contribute to interesting and more authoritative conclusions.

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## Hearing and Hearing-Impaired Adolescents and the Use of the Internet: A Report From Research Conducted in Poland

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### **Abstract**

The article presents the second attempt in Poland at examining the use of the Internet by 150 hearing and hearing-impaired adolescents. The empirical research concerned both groups “navigating” in the virtual world. A comparative analysis was carried out on the differentiation, dependencies, and correlations between a group of hearing respondents (girls and boys) and a group with hearing impairment in terms of their intrapersonal and interpersonal attitudes and attitudes towards the world. The intrapersonal sphere included self-image and self-esteem in a global aspect. It consisted of non-specific, general self-esteem, and partial self-esteem: the cognitive, intellectual, physical, characterological, and socio-moral spheres. Interpersonal attitudes were understood in the eyes of the respondent as an image of the rest of society and the relations between them. Thus, the sphere of “others towards me” appeared, based on the sense of support from the social environment, appreciation or indifference, threat from others, or a sense of security, among other things. In the area of “me towards others,” the dependencies concerned pro-social behavior, the general attitude towards other people, an altruistic attitude, egocentrism or sociability, a tendency

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to isolate oneself, aggression or a lack of aggressive behavior, problematic use of the Internet – an adaptation of IAT A. Young, which measures a subject's sense of loneliness by De J. Gierveld – content sought on the Internet, the positive aspects of using the Internet, risks associated with it, and addiction.

*Keywords:* deafness, Internet, addiction adolescent

## **Introduction**

When in the 1960s Marshall McLuhan coined the term “global village” and predicted the digital revolution, hardly anyone was willing to admit that a real breakthrough was approaching and that we were gradually entering a new information age. This “global village” was supposed to shorten the distance between people, provide unlimited access to information, and open a new way to communicate on a global scale. Today, when Internet access is quick and expected, it can be considered an absolutely integral part of the functioning of most of us. Thanks to this tool, the virtual world has become more and more similar to the real world over the years. Due to this similarity, millions of users – children, adolescents, adults, and seniors – are now taking advantage of the many opportunities offered by the Internet. Interestingly, the age criterion is not the only decisive one here. The unique and unlimited technological possibilities also attract people with a range of disabilities.

The media around the world talk more and more about the problems of people with hearing impairment, and there are laws and regulations to facilitate their daily existence. Recognizing the difficulties of this social group, specialists and politicians work in a number of ways to enable free access to goods and various social institutions and to eliminate all barriers (Holmstrom & Schonstrom, 2017). In our empirical research, analysis, and (re)interpretations, we referred to hearing and hearing-impaired adolescents and their Internet use. It is extremely difficult for hearing people to understand the world of the deaf and its realities. The deaf live among us, but the language, communication, educational, cultural,

and conceptual barriers does not integrate but separates them from the rest of society (McKee et al., 2013; Knoors et al., 2019). Polish (Plutecka 2015; Jagoszewska 2016; Bartnikowska 2010; Woynarowska 2010; Cytowska 2012; Krakowiak & Dziurda-Multan, 2006) and foreign studies (e.g., Long et al., 2021; Allen et al., 2016) have indicated reluctance and difficulties in understanding and communicating with them, which causes a feeling of loneliness and isolation, for example, among 50,000 children in the UK (Daniels, 2019). The innovative research on the subject includes a project by Chilean, Colombian, and Spanish scientists on the Internet of Things for children with hearing impairment. By presenting tangible user interfaces of TUI, (Talkative User Interface) the authors presented a non-traditional way of interacting with digital technology. The Internet of Things can help children develop emotional, psychosocial, psychomotor, cognitive, and visual skills. A high level is achieved through interactive communication and building social and emotional skills (Cano et al., 2020). On the other hand, analyses of descriptive and inferential statistics in a Nigerian cross-sectional study on the quality of life of deaf and hearing-impaired students from the Ibadan metropolitan area indicate poor quality of life in 57.8%. Stigmatization and discrimination contribute to this, whereas participation in community and social interactions between the two groups is promoted. Students at special high schools who grew up in higher-income families can count on a better quality of life (Jaiyeola & Adeyemo, 2018).

As a result of many changes that have occurred over the past few years, people with hearing impairment have integrated into the larger community. To a large extent, this state of affairs is related to unlimited Internet access; their online presence has become more and more visible. The emerging websites or forums for users with hearing impairment are places where they make new acquaintances – not only among other deaf people, but also among their hearing peers. Therefore, the hearing-impaired interact with the environment of hearing people using this medium (Krause, 2011). They look for current information, entertainment, and job offers online, but most of all for new friends, often with similar disabilities. The difference, however, is that this contact is in fact limited

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to those closest to them – peers and neighbors – and sometimes to random people. On the other hand, on the web, the possibilities of making contact are endless. Young people want to become an equal virtual user, create and build a specific virtual environment, arrange a synergistic space, seek answers to the changing reality, participate in the exchange of thoughts, and immerse themselves as much as possible in the secrets of innovative digitization. The smart phone applications, instant messengers, and programs available on the market use timeless and easily understood symbols. The trends in communication, on the other hand, are moving towards more and more abbreviated statements, using emoticons and single words.

It would seem that using this form of communication and the opportunities offered by the web would be perceived as particularly attractive for these people. Aronson (2009) called humans social beings, seeing in the Internet a chance to satisfy the social needs of society. He also drew attention to the dangers of using this medium without reflection. These dangers are valid for all social groups, including hearing-impaired people. In his theory, McLuhan formulated the statement that modern media have become an extension of the human senses. So, are they particularly significant for people with sensory disabilities? The period of adolescence is difficult and full of challenges. The search for social acceptance and confirmation of one's value in the eyes of other people is characteristic of this developmental period. Interdisciplinary research on children and adolescents with hearing impairment (e.g., Mekonnen et al., 2015; Movallali et al., 2018) indicates that their functioning is clearly related to specific social and emotional problems. The so-called theory of mind holds that the skillful understanding and use of symbolism creates a common field of attention and separates one's thoughts and needs from the perspective of another person. In one word, the theory of mind is based on the ability to look beyond one's own point of view and to understand what the other person is about and how their intentions are presented (Stachyra, 2010). Therefore, by analyzing the results and interpretation of Polish and foreign empirical research (Podgórska-Jachnik, 2013; Kobosko, 2018; Plutecka, 2015; Young et al., 2008), we discover that

depending on the families and in what environment the deaf children were brought up, there are clear differences in terms of their emotional and social functioning. Teenagers who lived in hearing families usually demonstrate less adaptation than deaf children growing up in deaf families. Moreover, they are exposed to numerous mental problems that can manifest in controlling emotions, self-esteem and self-image, or the aforementioned social competences (Calderon & Greenberg, 2003: 182; Fellingner et al., 2012: 1040). The emotional regulation in this group is characterized by marked impulsiveness and difficulties in controlling it, as well as aggression. Most tend to have negative emotions and low self-esteem. These factors favor the inhibition of the ability to verbalize emotions, which is necessary in the process of regulating them (Dyck & Denver, 2003). Self-image and self-esteem are negative and most often inadequate. As Movallali et al. (2018) rightly pointed out, in this situation there are often additional feelings of loneliness, alienation, and isolation. The level of self-acceptance and self-image may be inflated. This, in turn, is associated with narcissistic disorder, which is more common in hearing-impaired adolescents than in their hearing peers. The former group has firmly limited patterns of social and individual behavior, limited social roles, and less empathy and adequate behavior in interaction with others. In this group, behavioral disorders are more common: tendencies to engage in risky behavior, seeking strong stimuli, aggression towards people and animals, theft, fraud, damage to property, and slightly more serious oppositional and defiant disorders, attention deficit, and hyperactivity. Hearing-impaired adolescents are more likely to be rejected by their peers. They may experience unpleasant situations of ridicule or stigmatization related to their deafness. Long-term behavior of this nature may lead to social phobias, neuroses, or emotional or mental disorders (Kobosko, 2018).

Despite the growing social awareness of people with disabilities and numerous social campaigns aimed at integrating them with the general public, it still happens that these people are treated as a completely separate group, defined by a specific disability. The most common explanation for this is the still-functioning myths and stereotypes that stand

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in opposition to attempts to integrate the two environments. The concept of integration itself can be understood in many ways, but it usually comes down to the key principle of acceptance and recognition of any differences in behavior and communication (Wójcik, 2008). Disorders in this area result in a significant deterioration in the social functioning of adolescents. There is a risk that they will lock themselves in safe and predictable patterns in order to avoid the anxiety and emotional tension associated with interpersonal contact (Padden, 2015). This situation may become the beginning of social isolation and avoidance of contact with an adolescent's social environment, in which interactions are governed by laws that are incomprehensible to them. Another aspect that develops adaptive abilities is the support of the closest family environment. It is the family, as the first social group to which a young person belongs, that equips them with interpersonal skills and teaches them how to function in the larger society. The young person's self-esteem also develops within their immediate family and in the case of people with hearing impairment, it turns out that it is most often inadequate and underestimated (Dyck & Denver, 2003). These factors can inhibit the ability to verbalize emotions or openly communicate one's needs, desires, or fears and can increase feelings of alienation, isolation, and loneliness.

## **Method**

The main aim of the research is to find differences in the use of the Internet between hearing-impaired and hearing adolescents. The main goal also included the assumption that some differences between the groups (e.g., the level of self-esteem, area of social position, and area of negative emotions) may be the key to this important issue.

### ***2.1. Research Hypotheses***

Our research topic includes various conditions for using the Internet. Several main and detailed problems and hypotheses were selected for the research:



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- P1: What personal factors differentiate the use of the Internet of the young people in the study group?
- P2: Do the physical, socio-moral, characterological spheres, support from others, lack of a sense of threat, pro-sociality, aggressiveness, meaning and organization of the world, goodwill of the world, sense of effectiveness, lack of a sense of helplessness, self-esteem, interpersonal relations, attitude to the external world, or feeling of loneliness correlate with the way the two groups use the Internet and to what extent?
- P3: What non-personal factors significantly determine the use of the Internet by young people in the two groups?
- P4: Is the absence of hearing impairment correlated with problematic Internet use and to what extent? Do the respondents' age or gender determine their problematic use of the Internet and to what extent?
- H1: Selected personality factors determine the way the Internet is used by adolescents.
- H2: Selected non-personality factors determine the way the Internet is used by adolescents.
- H3: A lack of hearing impairment is correlated with problematic Internet usage, as are age and gender.

The dependent variable was the use of the Internet by hearing and hearing-impaired adolescents; the independent variables were personality factors; and the mediating variables were non-personality factors.

## **2.2. Instruments**

The research used quantitative methods – testing methods and questionnaires – namely, the “Problematic Internet Use Test” (PUI), which is an original adaptation of Kimberly Young’s “Internet Addiction Test,” the “Questionnaire of Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Attitudes and Attitudes

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towards the World" (KNIIS) by Bartłomiej Gołek, and the "Scale for Measuring the Sense of Loneliness" (SPS) by Jenny de Jong Gierveld.

### **2.3. Participants**

The subject of Internet use among adolescents has been raised many times in research performed in Poland and abroad. Studies have been conducted by Czyż and Plutecka (2018) – social activity of deaf adolescents on the Internet; educational audiophonology, Improve (2012) – personality determinants of Internet addiction; (Barłóg, 2015) – problematic Internet addiction; (Wójcik, 2017) – using Internet by Polish youth – the grounded theory method; (Majchrzak, Ogińska-Bulik, 2010) – risky behaviors related to cyberspace – Polish adaptation of the Internet Addiction Test; (Augustynek 2010) – computer addiction; (Morbitzner 2018) – benefits and threats online. Diagnosis, prevalence, therapy. Among foreign publications in this area, topics related to young people being addicted to using the Internet and other related risks prevail (e.g., Ranaeiy et al., 2016; Castellacci & Tveito, 2018; McDool et al., 2020; Greenfield, 2011; Kim et al., 2008; Livingstone et al., 2011). All Polish studies, however, referred to non-disabled pupils or students. The novel issue of Internet usage among people with hearing impairment has yet to be fully researched. It is difficult, but most of all it has been overlooked and ignored. Therefore, we decided to take up this task and present our research results. The subject of our empirical research was the diagnosis, possibilities and specificity of functioning hearing and hearing-impaired adolescents, aged 15–20, using the Internet. The aim of the research was to search for differences, correlations, and dependencies in the use of the Internet (style, effectiveness, positive and negative aspects, threats, and risk of addiction) as well as personality and non-personality factors, sense of well-being, interpersonal relations, and social involvement between the two intentionally selected groups. The study group consisted of 150 respondents ranging in age from 15 to 18 years: 75 hearing people and 75 hearing-impaired people.

## Results

The youth participating in the research attended mass and special boarding schools in the Małopolskie, Wielkopolskie, and Podkarpackie provinces in Poland. The KNIIS questionnaire covered the following areas of self-esteem: self-esteem in the cognitive/intellectual sphere (SPI), self-esteem in the physical sphere (SF), self-esteem in the socio-moral sphere (SSM), self-esteem in characterology (SCH), support and appreciation from others (WS), no sense of threat (BZA), prosociality (PROS), lack of aggressiveness (BAGR), reasonableness and self-organization of the world (SZS), goodwill of the world (PrzS), sense of effectiveness (PoczS), lack of a feeling of helplessness (BPB), and global self-esteem (SSS). The SPS questionnaire distinguished the general area, the area of social position, and the area of negative emotions. The relationships between the variables (correlations) were analyzed separately in two groups. The analysis was preceded by a statistical description of the two study groups. Parametric tests of statistical significance were used because their assumptions were met. Student's *t* test was used to analyze the intergroup differences and Pearson's *r* correlation was used. Assumptions about the normality of the distribution and homogeneity of the variance are not important when the samples are large (over 30 people) and relatively equal (King & Minium, 2009).

**Table 1. Analysis of the Differences Between the Female Respondents With Hearing Impairment (NS) and the Group of Hearing Female Respondents (S)**

Dependent variable	Average		Standard deviation		t	p
	S	NS	S	NS		
KNIIS SPI	15.61	11.78	1.89	2.23	7.92	<0.001
KNIIS SF	16.17	13.08	1.78	2.07	6.81	<0.001
KNIIS SSM	14.58	12.57	1.75	1.85	4.79	<0.001
KNIIS SCH	14.69	13.16	1.83	2.41	3.05	0.003

KNIS WS	17.00	10.32	2.39	1.68	13.82	<0.001
KNIS BZA	16.03	10.84	2.44	1.89	10.16	<0.001
KNIS PROS	15.17	13.81	2.65	2.07	2.44	0.017
KNIS BAGR	12.25	8.43	1.61	1.44	10.67	<0.001
KNIS SZS	13.47	9.59	1.44	1.88	9.87	<0.001
KNIS PrzS	13.31	9.65	1.82	1.87	8.46	<0.001
KNIS PoczS	15.64	12.76	1.84	1.80	6.77	<0.001
KNIS BPB	14.42	10.32	2.71	2.07	7.27	<0.001
KNIS SSS	61.06	50.59	5.25	5.21	8.54	<0.001
KNIS FI	60.44	43.41	7.16	3.01	13.32	<0.001
KNIS IWM	33.03	21.16	4.37	2.56	14.20	<0.001
KNIS JWI	27.42	22.24	3.40	2.23	7.71	<0.001
KNIS ObrS	26.78	19.24	2.21	2.88	12.52	<0.001
KNIS OZ	30.06	23.08	4.02	2.82	8.60	<0.001
SPS Neg. emotions	10.86	19.22	1.15	2.33	-19.31	<0.001
SPS Social pos.	19.78	12.35	0.90	2.15	19.16	<0.001
SPS general	14.81	40.49	1.97	4.32	-32.50	<0.001
PUI	29.00	84.57	11.60	6.58	-25.26	<0.001

Data on the analysis of differences between the subgroup of girls with hearing impairment and that of hearing-impaired girls are presented in Table 1. The analysis of the data presented in Table 1 shows that all differences between hearing and deaf respondents were statistically significant. The hearing-impaired girls obtained lower values in almost every area of the questionnaires. The largest differences from the KNIS were related to interpersonal functioning (43.41 points for NS and 60.44 points for S), the sphere of global self-esteem (50.59 points for NS and 61.06 points for S), and the feeling of receiving support from others (17.00 points for S and 10.32 points for NS). In only three areas were the results of girls with hearing impairment significantly higher: the general area of

risky online behavior (PUI), the general level of loneliness (SPS), and the area of negative emotions (SPS).

**Table 2. Analysis of the Differences Between the Male Respondents With Hearing Impairment (NS) and the Male Hearing Respondents (S)**

Dependent variable	Average		Standard deviation		t	p
	S	NS	S	NS		
KNIS SPI	16.10	10.89	1.87	1.74	12.64	<0.001
KNIS SF	17.49	13.13	1.89	2.30	9.08	<0.001
KNIS SSM	15.51	11.87	1.79	2.33	7.72	<0.001
KNIS SCH	15.21	13.18	1.73	2.10	4.60	<0.001
KNIS WS	17.72	10.11	1.81	2.33	16.03	<0.001
KNIS BZA	16.69	10.74	1.42	2.48	12.98	<0.001
KNIS PROS	16.46	15.47	1.67	2.81	1.88	0.064
KNIS BAGR	12.72	8.68	2.49	1.79	8.14	<0.001
KNIS SZS	12.10	9.87	1.82	2.12	4.97	<0.001
KNIS PrzS	12.46	8.50	2.35	2.41	7.30	<0.001
KNIS PoczS	15.77	13.95	1.84	2.01	4.15	<0.001
KNIS BPB	15.44	11.47	2.09	2.04	8.43	<0.001
KNIS SSS	64.31	49.08	4.54	4.38	14.98	<0.001
KNIS FI	63.59	45.00	4.16	5.27	17.20	<0.001
KNIS IWM	34.41	20.84	2.36	4.00	18.17	<0.001
KNIS JWI	29.18	24.16	3.09	3.24	6.96	<0.001
KNIS Obr_S	24.56	18.37	2.85	3.57	8.44	<0.001
KNIS OZ	31.21	25.42	3.11	3.26	7.97	<0.001
SPS Neg. emotions	11.56	19.24	1.96	1.92	-17.35	<0.001
SPS Social pos.	19.21	12.74	1.96	2.06	14.10	<0.001
SPS general	16.62	40.08	4.26	5.05	-22.07	<0.001
PUI	27.28	72.21	18.79	11.70	-12.55	<0.001

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The data on the differences between the boys with hearing impairment and the hearing boys are presented in Table 2. Analyzing the data in Table 2, it can be concluded that, as was the case with the girls, the hearing respondents achieved higher results in almost all areas of the questionnaires. This is especially visible in the results from the KNIIS in global self-esteem: (64.31 points for S and 49.08 points for NS) and interpersonal functioning (63.59 points for S and 45.00 points for NS). However, in the case of two areas, these proportions turned out to be completely inverted: in problematic Internet use, respondents with hearing impairment obtained an average of 72.21 points, while the group of hearing respondents reached only 27.28 points. It was similar in the case of a general sense of loneliness (40.08 points for NS and 16.62 points for S). The third and smallest difference concerned the area of negative emotions (19.24 points for NS and 11.56 points for S).

When comparing the two groups of adolescents, several differences can be identified, which are visible in the context of the above analysis. Between the group of hearing adolescents and respondents with hearing impairment, it was observed that they obtained different values for all the variables under study. What is particularly noticeable in the comparison of many of the analyzed areas is the drastically greater tendency for problematic Internet use in the group of respondents with hearing impairment. In addition, this group also showed higher scores for overall loneliness and negative emotions. In fact, on all scales on the KNIIS questionnaire, the group of respondents with hearing impairment scored lower than their hearing peers. On the other hand, it was the hearing people who had significantly higher values in terms of global self-esteem and interpersonal functioning.

As for the gender differences, they were not large among the hearing respondents. In the sphere of problematic use of the Internet, the girls were marginally better. They obtained statistically significantly higher results in terms of world image on the KNIIS and of social position on the SPS. The boys, on the other hand, achieved higher scores than the girls in general self-esteem and interpersonal functioning. In the group of respondents with hearing impairment, the girls obtained

statistically significantly higher results than the boys in a feeling of favor from the world and problematic use of the Internet (KNIIS). The boys showed higher scores than the girls in terms of prosociality, a sense of effectiveness, a lack of a sense of helplessness, “me towards others,” and overall picture of life from the KNIIS questionnaire. All of the differences between the subgroup of hearing girls and that of girls with hearing impairment turned out to be statistically significant. However, the greatest disproportion concerned the problematic use of the Internet and a general feeling of loneliness – higher scores the girls with hearing impairment in this respect. On the other hand, the greatest disproportion between the two subgroups of boys concerned the problematic use of the Internet and a general feeling of loneliness, account the hearing-impaired respondents. All hearing and hearing-impaired respondents were asked about the type of content they sought on the Internet (Tables 3 and 4).

**Table 3. Responses From the Hearing Adolescents About Using the Internet**

Response	Number	Percentage value
A. Current news from the country and the world	12	6%
B. Auction services (online shops)	8	4%
C. Music and/or films	57	28.5%
D. Online games	61	30.5%
E. Thematic forums	4	2%
F. Social networks	35	17.5%
G. Pornographic content	12	6%
H. Dating websites	11	5.5%
TOTAL RESPONSES	200	100%

**Table 4. Responses From the Adolescents With Hearing Impairment About Using the Internet**

Response	Number	Percentage value
A. Current news from the country and the world	72	20.3%
B. Auction services (online shops)	6	1.7%
C. Music and/or films	10	2.8%
D. Online games	4	1.1%
E. Thematic forums	65	18.3%
F. Social networks	73	20.6%
G. Pornographic content	57	16.1%
H. Dating websites	68	19.1%
TOTAL RESPONSES	355	100%

The analysis of the results (Tables 3 and 4) shows that there are different Internet-related needs in the two groups of respondents. In the case of hearing adolescents, there was a clear tendency to treat the Internet as a source of entertainment and pleasant leisure time. Almost one third respondents (30.5%) play online games, either alone or in groups of friends; 28.5% answered declared that they mainly search for movies and music online, referring to the popular platforms YouTube, cda.pl or filmweb.pl; in third place was the need to use social networking sites (e.g., nasza-klasa.pl or facebook.pl). The responses from the respondents with hearing impairment were different. Among the main content which is particularly popular for this group of young people on the Internet, the most popular were current news from the country and the world and social networks (20.3% and 20.6%, respectively), thematic forums – mainly websites intended strictly for people with a hearing impairment, such as deaf.pl – (18.3%), as well as dating sites and pornographic content (19.1% and 16.1%, respectively). The clear difference in the expectations and needs of the respondent groups can be summarized as follows: the



hearing respondents most often search for entertainment content on the web, while the respondents with hearing impairment put more emphasis on searching the Internet for news and making contact with other people. The rationale behind this choice may be directly related to the special needs of a person with a hearing impairment. With access to websites offering news stories, which are usually even enriched with videos, a person with a hearing impairment is able to find out what the article or story is about. Unlike television, which transmits its content based mainly on the auditory channel, the Internet offers this group of recipients written content, photos, or videos that can be played repeatedly.

The respondents with hearing impairment also largely indicated Internet use related to direct contact with another person – thematic forums, dating sites, or social networking sites. These responses indicate an increased need to socialize and integrate with the rest of society. Due to their disability, face-to-face contact is not always possible, if only because of the language barrier (the predominance of a significant and profound degree of hearing loss), a feeling of shame, or being different from their interlocutors. The results clearly show a need to introduce deaf people to society and to promote inclusiveness in contact with them. These needs increase during adolescence and early adulthood. In order to counteract the feelings of alienation, isolation, and loneliness, it is advisable to surround young people with hearing impairments with kind attention and care and, if necessary, psychological support.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The period of adolescence is a unique time in a young person's life – demanding, difficult, and full of new challenges in many aspects of life. The search for acceptance, understanding or the satisfaction of one's own needs often becomes an overriding issue that significantly influences self-esteem. Comparing the two groups of respondents in terms of their online activity and the additional factors that determine this activity, it is easy to notice a main conclusion from the research undertaken.

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Feelings of loneliness, rejection, and being misunderstood pushes young people into risky behaviors and significantly increases the risk of a range of addictions. Comparing the results in terms of the gender of the respondents, there is a clear difference between hearing and deaf respondents – the girls with hearing impairment obtained significantly lower values in almost every area of the questionnaires used. The clearest differences concerned interpersonal functioning (43.41 points for NS and 60.44 points for S), the global sphere/general self-esteem (50.59 points for NS and 61.06 points for S), and the feeling of receiving support from others (17.00 points for S and 10.32 points for NS). Higher scores for girls with hearing impairment were recorded only in the areas of risky online behavior (84.57 points for NS and 29.00 points for S), the general level of loneliness (40.49 NS and 14.81 S), and the area of negative emotions (19.22 points for NS and 10.86 points for S), which justifies the conclusions presented by the authors. In the case of the male subgroup of respondents, these relationships were similar. It was the hearing respondents who scored higher in almost all areas of the questionnaires used. This was especially visible in global self-esteem (64.31 points for S and 49.08 points for NS) and interpersonal functioning (63.59 points for S and 45.00 points for NS). However, in the case of two areas, these proportions turned out to be completely reversed: problematic Internet use (72.21 points for NS and 27.28 points for S) and a general feeling of loneliness (40.08 points for NS and 16.62 points for S). The last difference concerned the area of negative emotions (19.24 points for NS and 11.56 for S).

The research results indicate that selected personal factors determined the problematic use of the Internet in one case – the socio-moral sphere in hearing respondents – at a moderate level (32\*\* on the Pearson scale). Other personal factors did not correlate statistically significantly with the problematic use of the Internet in both groups. In terms of non-personal factors, two statistically significant correlations were found in the respondents with hearing impairment: a negative correlation between age and problematic Internet use (-23\* on the Pearson scale) and a significant correlation in terms of age and Internet use (84.57

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points for F and 72.21 points for M). There were no statistically significant correlations in this area among the hearing respondents.

In summary, what is particularly noticeable across all the surveyed areas is the drastically greater tendency for problematic Internet use, a general feeling of loneliness, and negative emotions in the respondents with hearing impairment. As mentioned earlier, the feelings of loneliness, being misunderstood, and lacking communication with close family, which the deaf respondents complained of, certainly significantly strengthen these tendencies. This theory is supported by numerous studies showing the correlation of early childhood trauma with the tendency for addictions later in life (Schore, 1994; Higley & Linnoila, 1997; Teicher, 2000; Meaney, 2002). In view of these reports, it seems particularly important to sensitize parents to building a healthy relationship and bond with their own child. Even unconscious messages, behavior, or attitudes can increase children's feelings of rejection and loneliness. In the school environment, however, an issue worth considering could be regular meetings and workshops with an educator or psychologist who would help young people face the challenges and difficulties typical of adolescence. It would also be important to build young people's self-esteem during such meetings. Educators and teachers should also reassure them that in the event of any difficulties they can count on their support and, if necessary, they will be referred to appropriate institutions or specialists. Appropriate preventive measures can significantly contribute to reducing the difficulties of adolescents with hearing impairment, which were so clearly visible in the course of the research.

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## Attitudes Towards the Elderly Among Students of Pedagogy

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### **Abstract**

The main aim of this study is to consider and present pedagogy students' attitudes towards the elderly. The results presented herein were collected in a pilot project. The survey was conducted among 66 pedagogy students; a questionnaire and the semantic differential method were used as the research tools. The results revealed positive attitudes among the students towards the elderly. However, a conclusion was drawn that pedagogy students should be allowed to take part in activities involving the elderly. Students's awareness of their own attitudes might allow them to understand elderly people's behavior. A proper understanding of the aging process and old age can create a chance for better communication and inter-generational cooperation. It is also an inspiration for understanding their own aging process.

*Keywords:* ageism, attitudes towards the elderly, the elderly, students, stereotypes

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## Introduction

The aging of Polish society is prompting more and more discussions about old age and the elderly. The fact is causing changes in the socio-economic environment. The discourse and general issues of elderly people – although sometimes separated into a distinct topic – can in fact be found in different disciplines, including the humanities, social sciences, medicine, or even economics. The aspects of old age are presented in different contexts, which lead to both positive and negative perceptions of the elderly in society. Attitudes towards late adulthood and the elderly<sup>1</sup> depend on an individual's experiences. The subject of aging and old age is so important that it has been tackled many times in pedagogy. It has been dealt with by many authors, including Zofia Szarota (2011), Anna Leszczyńska-Rejchert (2010), Astrid Tokaj (2008), and Barbara Szatur-Jaworska et al. (2006).

Scientific studies claim that attitudes towards other people are created at the stage of late adolescence. There are plenty of factors which influence the personality of a young person. A person's attitudes, opinions and views are affected by many people who can both create and implement positive and negative values. "The period just before early adulthood is a kind of suspension between adolescence and adulthood, when young people clearly define their own identity by presenting preferences in values, goals, and outlook of their professional activities and interpersonal relationships" (Nierzewska, 2018, p. 57).

The literature on the subject presents the opinion that the elderly often meet stereotypical attitudes in society, negative judgements, or even prejudices from younger generations. Such behavior might cause different limitations in inter-generational relationships.

The issue of students' attitudes towards the elderly has already been discussed in various fields. It can be assumed that because of the growing number of elderly people, there is still a need to deliberate on the topic. It should be done in order to encourage younger generations to

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<sup>1</sup> The term late adulthood refers to the period of human aging traditionally called "old age." The lower limit of this developmental period hovers between the age of 55 and 60 and beyond (Harwas-Napierała & Trempała, 2002, pp. 15, 263).

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engage in reflection, actions involving the elderly, and inter-generational dialogue so as to increase active participation in social life and improve the quality of the lives of the elderly.

Author's occupation and her social activities closely connected with the elderly became a motivational factor to research the attitudes towards the older generations. Among young people a stereotypical perception of the elderly can often be observed; they may also avoid contact or be unwilling to do volunteer work or practical training at home care centers. Interviews with students prompted the author to seek a deeper understanding of opinions about the elderly expressed by students of pedagogy in Cieszyn.

### **The Research Process**

The following results were gathered in the pilot survey that preceded larger-scale research. The goal of analysis was to answer the following questions: What are the students' attitudes towards the elderly? How do the students perceive the elderly? The author's thesis was that the prospective educators would express positive views connected with old age and the elderly. The most common image of the elderly presented by the Cieszyn students considered them to be the source of knowledge and life wisdom. However, only a few students expressed a desire to work with the elderly in the future.

A questionnaire following Krzysztof Rubacha's typology was used as a tool for collecting quantitative data (Rubacha, 2008, p. 132). Due to the SARS-CoV-2 epidemic, an electronic version of the questionnaire was prepared (Batorski & Olcoń-Kubicka, 2006, p. 101). The tool was created in *webankieta*.

The semantic differential approach was also used in the research. This method is "a way of gathering knowledge about structural and functional features and dynamics of social phenomena, the opinions and views of selected societies, and the escalation and development of specified phenomena" (Pilch & Bauman, 2019, p. 80).

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Osgood's semantic differential is the most commonly used method to research a descriptive aspect of a stereotype. Apart from power and activity factors, an evaluation factor (Osgood) can be distinguished from scales measuring the meaning of different words. In comparison to other common lists of features (used to research the characteristic features of a subject), semantic differential scales have the advantage of being able to establish the level of a characteristic feature possessed by a research subject (Maciążek & Kurcz, 1992, p. 201).

A semantic differential makes it possible to describe a definition in an emotional aspect. The researcher is thereby able to establish the emotional attitude of a person or a group of people to an aspect they are researching (Chimicz, 2017, p. 153). A semantic differential allows one to measure the "connotative meaning of definitions in emotional attitude towards a referent" (Śleszyński & Wiśniewski, 1997, p. 200). A differential may consist of 10 to 12 scales and the results may be presented as numerical or percentage values.

All positive characteristics have to be on one end of the scale and all negative characteristics on the other. In order to reduce the risk of stereotypical assessment, some of the scales may be presented in reverse, which means that the end-points of the scales are reversed. However, this has to be taken into account when processing the results (Divilová, 2016, p. 1859). When considering the construction of a tool, Earl Babbie stresses that one should "avoid burdens in patterns of answers[;] closely connected definitions should not be written on the same side" (Babbie, 2006, p. 193).

The semantic differential used in this research was based on such guidelines. A list of features describing the elderly was created with the descriptions with similar emotional values written on different sides. The scale between opposing definitions was 10 points. The following descriptive categories for the 10-point continuum were adopted: points closer to the definition meant a stronger escalation of the emotional relation to it, while points 5–6 meant indifference, which may have been due to a lack of knowledge of the topic.

The research was conducted in November and December 2020. A total of 66 full-time and part-time, first-cycle studies (50.00%) and second-cycle

studies (45.45%) students of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Education in Cieszyn at Silesian University in Katowice were included in the study. The majority (72.73%) of the research sample was in the second year of university, 18.19% in the third year, and 6.06% in the fourth year; the remainder of the students did not record the year of their studies. Female respondents made up 90.91% of the sample. Most of the respondents were aged 20–25 years, while people between 29 and 44 years of age represented 9.09% of respondents. About half (51.52%) of the students questioned lived in towns or cities, while the remaining 48.48% of them came from rural areas.

### **Attitudes and Stereotypes Towards the Elderly: Theoretical Considerations**

Since time began, old age has been perceived ambiguously. On the one hand, experience and life wisdom were admired; on the other hand, people were afraid of the natural physical problems connected with aging. The negative attitudes of the younger generation towards the older one are a basis of inter-generational conflict.

“A lot of studies show that attitudes towards others are mainly developed at the period of late adolescence. Moreover, they are influenced by certain parents’ attitudes, peer groups, at school and work environment” (Bartkowiak et al., 2018, p. 188).

Young people form and express their own opinions and judgements on the basis of what they read and hear. This contributes to positive or negative perceptions being formed of people from other groups, including older people. It can be assumed that students of pedagogy – future teachers and carers who will work with children in the future – have a great responsibility in terms of shaping attitudes towards older people. The views they express in the presence of children should be balanced, without resorting to extreme statements.

Wojciszke (2011) stated that an attitude is a “relatively stable tendency towards a positive or negative opinion on the subject of the attitude”

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(p. 200). Attitudes consist of three coherent elements: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. "The majority of studies explain 'an attitude' as a definition that occurs mainly in social psychology, meaning a judgement of the subject of the attitude in cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects" (Bartkowiak et al., 2018, p. 188).

The cognitive element is connected with the knowledge a person has about the subject and towards whom the attitude is presented. "It can consist of beliefs, doubts, or assumptions connected with the subject of the attitude. It can also include information about the subject of the attitude which allows them to distinguish how wide and how reliable the knowledge is" (Tuczyński & Walat, 2019, p. 211). This knowledge is often based on stereotypes and prejudices derived from the home, school, or peers. Stereotypes might be connected with appearance, sex, religion, profession, place of residence, place of birth, nationality, or age. "The perception of other social groups – including ethnic groups – as the literature on the subject shows, might be theoretically connected with the definitions of attitudes, prejudices, or stereotypes" (Bokszański, 1993, p. 40).

The old age stereotype that functions in society reflects the situation of people in late adulthood. It can be positive or negative. The positive stereotype presents an old person as a person who is wise, "understanding, oriented towards the family and their needs, although focused on the past" (Żdziebło, 2008, pp. 65–66). When the elderly are perceived as useless and ill people, this is the negative stereotype. Shown in such a way, old age causes fear and unwillingness, especially among young people.

The emotional element, also known as affective, can be presented in terms of positive or negative emotions. This component also includes judgements which are presented by such expressions as good or bad (Marody, 1976). The phenomenon called ageism is a basic element of the emotional cognitive component.

Ageism can be seen as a process of systematically stereotyping and discriminating against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender. Old people are categorized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, and old-fashioned in morality and skills. Ageism allows the younger generations to see older people

as different from themselves; they therefore subtly cease to identify with their elders as human beings" (Cohen, 2001, p. 576).

The behavior of a person towards the subject of their attitude can be observed thanks to its behavioral component (Bartkowiak et al., 2018, p.188). "It is described by positive or negative actions, which include observed actions aimed at a subject of the attitude: verbal, mimic, pantomimic, and vocal reactions" (Fidelus, 2012, p. 97).

### **Students' Attitudes in comparison with the Research Conducted**

For 79% of the respondents, the onset of old age begins at 70 years, while 20% of them indicated that 65 represents the onset of old age. A few interviewees claimed that the boundary of old age is at the age of 45, while others suggested that it cannot be defined because it depends on an individual's wellbeing and condition. For this study, the range between 55 and 60 years was established as the boundary of the elderly development period (Harwas-Napierała & Trempała, 2002, pp. 15, 263).

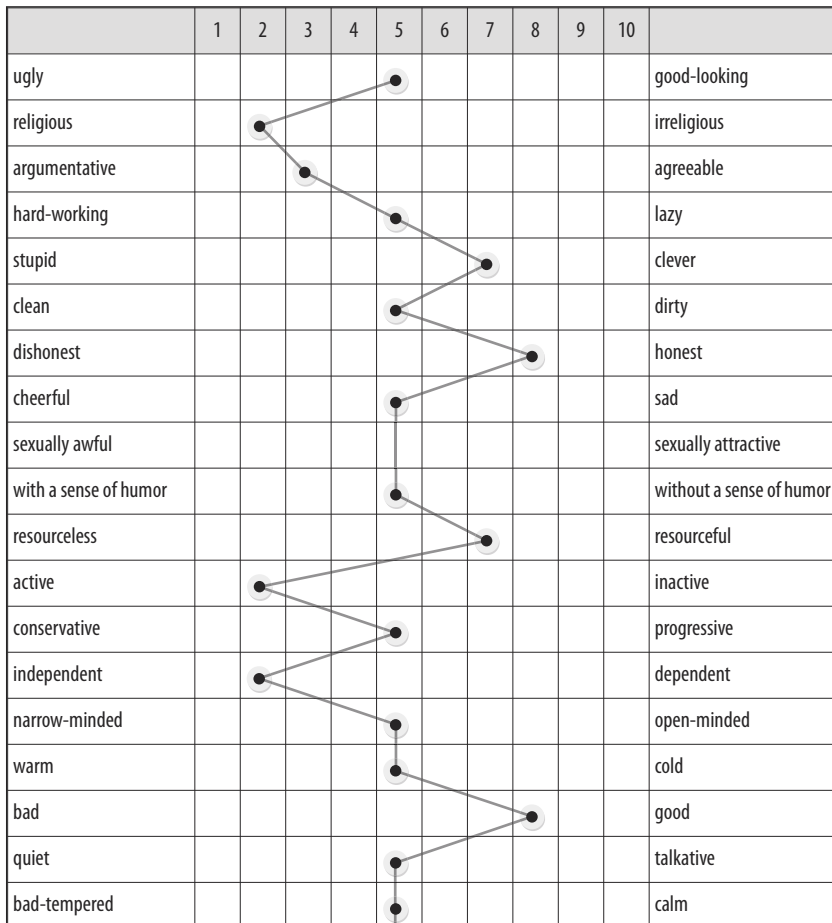
Among the features that characterise older people, the students who were surveyed indicated life experience (77.27%). Physical features such as wrinkles (62.12%) and grey hair (54.55%) were selected. Additionally, 22.73% paid attention to elderly people's smile or patience (19.70%), but also grumpiness (16.67%); only 7.58% of the respondents emphasised elderly people's positive attitude towards life.

Pedagogy students associated late adulthood with life experience (54.55%), illnesses (40.91%), loneliness (31.82%), and death (25.76%). One third (33.33%) connected this period with devotion. The interviewees also indicated that old age is connected with plenty of spare time (33.33%) and relaxation (31.82%).

The results of the study suggest that the students of pedagogy have positive perceptions of elderly people. Among the positive characteristics, students indicated that they perceive older people as religious, wise, resourceful, active, independent, good, and dutiful. When it comes to

negative traits, they perceived older people as quarrelsome and unambitious. The features in which the respondents gave indifferent answers were as follows: ugly/good-looking, hard-working/lazy, clean/dirty, cheerful/sad, sexually awful/sexually attractive, with a sense of humor/without a sense of humor, conservative/progressive, narrow-minded/open-minded, warm/cold, quiet/talkative, bad-tempered/calm, collectivist/individualist, idealist/materialist, wealthy/poor, uptight/easy-going, proud/humble, straightforward/sneaky, uneducated/educated, and tidy/messy.

**Figure 1. Features of Elderly People as Marked by Pedagogy Students**







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church as a place for contact with the elderly, and 1.52% take care of an elderly neighbor. Again, 6.06% stated that they do not have contact with older people at all.

Emotions towards the elderly were also researched. Mainly positive ones were mentioned: trust (66.67%) and joy (46.97%). When they think about the elderly, 18.18% of the respondents felt expectation, 21.21% sadness, 13.64% surprise, and only 1.52% anger. Some respondents (3.03%) mentioned fear as a feeling connected with the elderly. It is worth pointing out that none of the respondents mentioned disgust.

Although the respondents were all pedagogy students, many (43.94%) were acquainted with the topic of old age because of their studies; only 19.70% were willing to work with the elderly in the future. Almost half (45.45%) of the students had no opinions on the subject, while 34.85% did not want to work in that field. The young people associated working with the elderly with hygienic and care duties – such activities which, according to the students, are easier to be done with children than with the elderly.

Another interesting finding is the fact that 77.27% of the respondents had imagined their old age; only 22.73% had not thought about it. The students' own elderly age was perceived optimistically. It was thought of as time spent with family and friends. They dreamed of grandchildren, to whom they would devote their free time. Only a few students wrote that they would not live to old age; they would die lonely, bedridden, and grumpy with nobody to take care of them.

### **Summary**

The research on the attitudes of the pedagogy students towards the elderly was carried out using an online survey with semantic differential questions. The small sample of 66 students came from only one university and it should be noted that 91% of the respondents were women. All of these factors may be relevant to the attitudes that the respondents revealed in the research. The results showed that pedagogy students have

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positive, negative and neutral attitudes towards older people. Neutral attitudes seem particularly interesting for the author, as they may indicate an ambivalent character of attitudes towards the elderly. It also seems important to reflect on the formation of latent attitudes among students, an issue which may provide interesting material for further research.

It seems important to promote inter-generational contact and cooperation. One conclusion that can be drawn is that more subjects connected with the elderly should be introduced into curricula. Volunteer work, practical training, and internships in institutions and organizations which work with the elderly would be also important activities. The behavior of elderly people is also crucial. An openness towards younger generations and physical, intellectual, and social activities will develop positive perceptions of the elderly. Inter-generational cooperation brings different age groups closer and prevents younger people perceiving older ones as “a generation who move blindly, clumsily deal with obstacles, and unsuccessfully try to solve new problems” (Mead, 2000, p. 108), but as a generation who is willing to cooperate and make interpersonal contact.

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## Neurodiversity and (Semantic) Space for Academic Inclusion of People on the Autism Spectrum

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**Abstract**

There is a need to rethink functioning and the role of universities that implement inclusive education, understood as high-quality education for everybody, available at all levels of education because of the increasing number of neurodiverse people (with ADHD, autism, dyslexia and other disorders classified as neurodevelopmental).. The aim of our hermeneutical work is an attempt to identify opportunities and limitations on an empirical and theoretical level for creating conditions for the inclusion of students defined as neurodiversity. The research material consists of published own and other authors' studies, and the direction of exploration is determined by the following questions: Are there theoretical and empirical premises for the claim of full inclusion in the academic education of neurodiverse students? What are the research-related limitations that constitute a barrier to the academic inclusion of neurodifferent adolescents? The theoretical background of our work is the theories of social constructivism as defined by Alfred Schütz, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann. The research revealed

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theoretical and empirical premises confirming the validity of the claim regarding the inclusion of neurodiverse students in academic education due to the intellectual potential of young people, their high self-awareness and the need to provide a growing number of neurodiverse students with conditions for maturing to self-determination in adult life. In Poland, but also in other European countries, the number of students diagnosed with an autism spectrum is not monitored at the national level. Single studies conducted in Poland indicate the similarity of the problems of this group of students with the results of explorations carried out in other countries, and include dropout during the first year of studies, difficulties in relationships with peers, a feeling of loneliness, and a low level of employment after graduation. A large number of people with autism spectrum does not study at all. One of the barriers may be the availability of higher education, which is related to the cultural and economic status. This aspect has not been taken into account in Polish and international research. There was also little dissemination of the idea of neurodiversity, which may be important for the perception of students with the **autism spectrum**.

*Keywords:* neurodiversity, autism, dyslexia, ADHD, student, university, monitoring the number of neurodiverse students, barriers

## **Introduction**

The analysis presented in the article is the result of a meeting: the meeting of investigations by two authors, concerning the psychosocial aspects of functional disorders, including ADHD (Podgórska-Jachnik, 2019) and their emancipatory context (Podgórska-Jachnik, 2015) and concerning the issue of autism from the perspective of neurodiversity and the place for neurodiverse people in higher education (Cierzniewska, 2021) in the broader context of research on the academic community (Cierzniewska, 2011). This collaboration resulted in finding a common field of research focused on the application of the concept of neurodiversity in inclusive education, primarily at the level of higher education, but also at other levels and in other forms – in both epistemic and didactic aspects –



and support in general (authors' joint research project). A key joint discovery was the role of mental transformation in the perception of ADHD, autism, dyslexia, and of other individuals diagnosed with neurodevelopmental disorders, while creating inclusive openness of teachers in mainstream schools and universities by perceiving the potential of diversity (Cierzniewska, 2021). Nowadays, in Poland and around the world, implementing inclusive education – understood as high-quality education for everyone, available at every level of education – is an extremely important task, due to the need to rethink the functions and methods of operation of schools and universities. Some of the reflections have a more universal meaning, but the starting point and the most important area of reference in this article is university education. The aim of our hermeneutical work is to try to identify, on an empirical and theoretical level, opportunities for and limitations in creating conditions for inclusion for students labeled neurodiverse. The research material consists of published studies and the direction of exploration was determined by the following questions: Are there theoretical and empirical premises for full inclusion of neurodiverse students in the tertiary education? What are the research-related limitations that constitute a barrier to the academic inclusion of neurodifferent adolescents? The theoretical background of our work is the theory of social constructionism, as defined by Alfred Schütz or Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (Schütz, 2008; Berger & Luckmann, 2010).

### **Neurodiversity and the Paradigm Shift in the Perception of Students on the Autism Spectrum**

Detailed research question: How does the neurodiversity paradigm change the semantic perspective on resources for research?

The term neurodiversity is not a new nosological unit. It is an attempt to turn away from the nosological approach in favor of a functional approach (Błeszyński, 2019, 2021), but at the same time it changes the language of description from negative, medical, paternalistic, pathologizing,

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and ableistic (Bottema-Beutel et al., 2021) towards differentiation and the resources resulting from this differentiation, constructing the social world, and positioning people towards each other, as indicated by the theory of Schütz (2008) and Berger and Luckmann (2010). Neurodiversity is a form of neologism –an umbrellaconcept, that is, a collective descriptor, that defines neurodevelopmental diversity, which should be understood as an alternative to the concept sanctioned by medical science of a disorder, namely, neurodevelopmental disorder. Neurodiversity concerns people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Asperger’s syndrome (AS), dyslexia, dyspraxia, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which are not classified in terms of dysfunction, but by individual cognitive mechanisms (Molloy & Vasil, 2002, pp. 659–669). Doubts about this position concern the opposition of the concept of neurodiversity “to the treatment of autism as a serious development disorder” (Gerc & Jurek, 2017, p. 189). Resistance to this concept is also met because of its failure to meet the classical canons of science:

It is not a falsifiable scientific theory that could create a framework for methodologically correct research. The objections to the concept are also related to the introduction of imprecise terminology, which obscures the generally accepted findings in the world of science. The concerns expressed by critics of this concept concern the issue of possible questioning and negation of the systemic solutions developed so far in the field of diagnosis, treatment, rehabilitation, and education of people with ASD. (Gerc&Jurek, 2017, p. 189)

Undoubtedly, the differences in the understanding of autism result from the theoretical provenance, and thus “neurobiological, socio-educational- and existential” paradigm (Gerc & Jurek, 2017, p. 197). Furthermore, Krzysztof Gerc and Marta Jurek stated that

psychology, characterizing states on the autism spectrum and relying on scientific premises, analyzes autism, starting primarily

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from two distinguished approaches (most often from the first), heading towards a third. Autistic spectrum disorder is characterized as a neurodevelopmental disorder that implies serious, lifelong mental and social difficulties. (Gerc & Jurek, 2017, p. 197)

When reading their classification of positions on autism, it can be generalized that the first is embedded in the medical sciences and paradigms (experimental, with a normative methodological approach), while the second is social (interested in the social combination of individual dimensions of autism, including anthropological approaches which are methodologically normative and descriptive) and the third is rooted in the humanities (phenomenological-hermeneutical) including, for example, subjectivity, transcendentalism, and a methodologically descriptive approach. Their proposed division indicates the fulfillment of a specific cognitive interest (Habermas, 1983); therefore, the pursued scientific goal will be slightly different, and the scientific method results from the cognitive interests being satisfied (Czarnecka, 2016). The change/extension of the paradigmatic description of autism, the transition from a normative approach to a socio-cultural and humanistic approach, is indicated by the evolving positions of psychiatrists (Rymkiewicz, 2019) and strong arguments from Simon Baron-Cohen's an expert in autism. This is all the more so because this paradigmatic shift in thinking about autism does not eliminate differences within the spectrum, which can be described with the terms "dissimilarity," "disorder," "disability," and finally "disease." The first term refers to differences of a physical or mental nature that bring some potential for activity (e.g., a predisposition or lack thereof to play sports, compose music, systematize, or think analytically). The term "disorder" is used when there are symptoms causing the dysfunction and the cause is unknown. "Disease" is used when the disorder can be attributed to a specific causal mechanism. "Disability" refers to conditions in which a person experiences significant limitations in functioning that causes suffering in a specific environment (Baron-Cohen, 2019; 2021). Simon Baron-Cohen called the concept (not just a category) of neurodiversity "revolutionary" because "it offers a radically new view of the world – the view that there are many

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varieties of the brain, and all of them occur naturally, instead of the old, inaccurate, binary division into normality and abnormality” (Baron-Cohen, 2021, p. 210). The strongest argument in favor of the concept of neurodiversity, in the broadest sense of the word, is the theory of “five types of brains” on the scale of empathy–systematization, according to which “each of us places ourselves somewhere on the bell curve” (Baron-Cohen, 2021, p. 74). The five brain types are examples of neurodiversity that are present in every classroom, student group, and workplace. “No variety is better or worse than the other – just different – and all have evolved to do well in different environments” (pp. 75–76). However, respecting the voice of criticism, it should be admitted that the idea of diversity cannot be used without reflection, depriving people who require temporary or permanent therapeutic interventions – especially those with a significantly lower level of functioning. Psychiatrists refer to systemic restrictions in this respect, stating that the use of the categories “disorder” and “disease” is a condition for starting treatment, but also allowing the term “state,” which is acceptable in the medical nomenclature (Rymkiewicz, 2019).

The category of neurodiversity in a narrow sense applies to people with high functioning on the autism spectrum (HFA), AS, ADHD, and dyslexia or dyspraxia, which in the case of students does not require additional arguments. They gain double chances of personal liberation: by attaining the highest standard of education and by therefore being able to see themselves only in terms of difference, not disorder or disability. It is worth noting that these opportunities complement and thus strengthen each other, which is an important justification for using the concept of neurodiversity in the context of creating space for the inclusion of people on the autism spectrum in academic education. It is also worth noting that identifying specific people using the concept of diversity also causes some lexical difficulties. While a group (e.g., a student group) can be neurodifferent, one cannot use “neurodifferent” to describe a singular person (one can differ from those who are not neurodifferent). Therefore, there are differentiations along the lines of “neurotypical person–neurotypical,” “norm–typical–abnormal,” etc. However, this is problematic when we inquire about the source and legitimization of the

alleged hidden norm. Contrary to their slightly different wording, these notions are not consistent with the assumptions of the neurodiversity paradigm, which is also described by the norm in atypical individuals. The literature also uses the term “exceptional,” or even “double-exceptional” (Wejner-Jaworska, 2019), which perfectly fulfills its role as a positive distinction, but for scientific purposes may offend with its euphemistic or overly common connotations. Renata Stefańska-Klar (2013) proposed a rather interesting term, “specifically different,” but the lack of the distinguishing feature “neuro” to refer directly to the concept of neurodiversity makes it less useful. In our opinion, it would be worth considering the term “neurodifferent” or “neuromuscular,” but that is not the main focus of this article. When speaking of a group of students on the autism spectrum, we continue to use the most common term, “neurodivergent students” (also confirming the fact that each group of people on the autism spectrum varies greatly between individuals).

To conclude this section, we will again turn to the theory of the five types of brains by Baron-Cohen, whose research showed that at least half of autistic people have an average or above-average IQ, and by analyzing a British study on 36,000 autists (the largest in the history of psychological research on autism) in which he and his team discovered that 66% of men and 50% of women have a so-called systematizing or hypersystematizing brain (Baron-Cohen, 2021, pp. 82–83). It is about intellectual dispositions to systematize and identify patterns, about people with interests in the field of exact sciences, music, architecture, analytical sciences (law, linguistics, economics, and philosophy), crafts, sports, nature, and cooking. But some of them also find themselves in fantastic works, writing dramas and detective stories with a complicated plot. This huge potential related to neurodiversity has already been noticed and valued by global business, and leading corporations have started to use these values to build a market advantage (Austin & Pisano, 2017), which opens up an opportunity for professional self-realization and the full use of the potential of people on the autism spectrum as well as those with ADHD, dyslexia etc.. More and more new guides for employers are being published in the English-language literature, joint conferences are being organized for people who

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want to hire neuro-diversed people, there are even specialist employment agencies (e.g., Exceptional Individuals Ltd., 2020). These are not random decisions, but carefully thought-out and based on analysis – both psychological and economic strategies that combine the resources and interests of a potential neurodiverse employee with the interest and open attitude of a potential employer. Unfortunately, this phenomenon of managing diversity and differences is still relatively rare on the Polish labor market (e.g., Ernst & Young LLP).

### **Neurodiverse Persons (on the Autism Spectrum) Are Among Us – The Scale of the Phenomenon**

Research question: In light of the data, what barriers can be identified in the inclusion of neurodifferent academic youth?

The first use of the category of neurodiversity by Judy Singer (an Australian autistic sociologist) in the 1990s concerned autistic people, but it currently includes those next to the autism spectrum and those with dyslexia, Tourette's syndrome, dyspraxia, and ADHD/ADD, with a tendency to include further disorders (Baron-Cohen, 2019; Mellifont, 2021). Detailed data on each of the above-mentioned states is not collected, so it is difficult to trace the changes in this respect. We know a bit more about the statistical increase in the number of people on the autism spectrum, including those with AS. In the 1980s, autism was diagnosed in 0.05% of the population; currently, global statistics suggest the possibility that autism has a prevalence of even 1% of the total population. A significantly higher number with a confirmed diagnosis was identified by American statistics from 2014, indicating that 1.47% of the population in the USA are people with autism and AS. Data from Great Britain reported the level of 1.1%. The authors of the NIK (Supreme Audit Office) report estimated that 0.6% of the population in the European Union have autism, or approximately five million people (Raport NIK, 2020).

In Poland, only on the basis of data from the Educational Information System (SIO) can we approximate the number of children and adolescents

diagnosed with autism, including AS, while the Electronic National System for Monitoring Adjudication of Disability allows us to determine how many people since 2010 have been awarded a certificate of disability or a degree of disability with the code 12-C – pervasive developmental disorders – which indicates a diagnosis of autism or AS. An analysis of data collected by the Supreme Audit Office shows that in the following years, between 2016 and 2019, the number of students increased by approximately 20% each year. The collected data show that “one in 115 students (0.87%) was diagnosed with autism or Asperger’s syndrome” (NIK Report, 2020). In subsequent nationwide studies commissioned by the Center for the Development of Education and the Ministry of Education and Science, prepared by Dorota Podgórska-Jachnik, the increase in the number of children with autism and AS was confirmed. Data collected at the end of 2019 and early 2020 indicated that there were 48,073 children in kindergartens and schools in total (Podgórska-Jachnik, 2021). From this it follows that there was a significantly higher increase than the 20% suggested by previous studies.

The audit of the Supreme Audit Office showed that

in the years 2016/2017–2018/2019, the majority of students with autism or Asperger’s syndrome continued their education in general secondary schools and technical secondary schools. The average results of graduation exams obtained in 2017–2019 by graduates with autism or Asperger’s syndrome did not differ significantly from ... other graduates. Slightly lower results ... were recorded only in relation to the exam in mathematics at the basic level, but in the extensions in mathematics and English the average result was progressively higher. (Podgórska-Jachnik, 2021, p. 42)

In Poland, there is no monitoring of students with autism and AS, and the Ministry of Education and Science (formerly the Ministry of Science and Higher Education) does not collect statistical data on the make-up of the population of people with disabilities, including students with

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ASD (Podgórska-Jachnik, 2021. p. 43). For comparison, in the United Kingdom, data collected by the Student Affairs Office found that the percentage of students with social and communication disorders, including ASD, increased from 0.2% of the total in 2010–2011 to 0.9% in the years 2018–2019. The number of students with multiple disorders (including social, communication, sensory, medical, physical, and mental disorders) also increased during the study period from 30,955 (2%) to 44,490 (2.8%) (Lei & Russel, 2021). The Polish ministerial authorities' failure to monitor the number of neurodiverse students was surprising for us (especially in light of the NIK's post-audit guidelines), which made us to try to identify activities in this field in other European countries. In response to the submitted questions, Bureau of Research. Chancellery of The Sejm in Poland enquired about the mentioned issues at the analytical offices of the EU national parliaments through the European Center for Parliamentary Research and Documentation (ECPRD). It turned out that in most of the countries addressed, no institutional/departmental statistics are kept in this regard, which of course does not exclude the collection of data by other national institutions or organizations related to universities, as in the case of Finland. "According to the Student Health Survey, a research program conducted every four years by the Finnish Student Health Foundation (Ylioppilaidenterveydenhoitosäätiö) on Finnish students under 35, in 2016 Asperger's syndrome was diagnosed in 0.4% of students" (Inquiry No. 4848). Data collected by BAS (Bureau of Research. Chancellery of The Sejm in Poland) also revealed that

in Slovakia in 2020 there were 26 students with autism or other developmental disorders; in Hungary in the first semester of 2020–2021 there were 170 students with autism, and in the spring semester there were 153, which accounted for 0.06% of the total number of students. The other analyzed countries – Czechia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, France, Spain, Portugal, Romania, and Slovenia – do not keep statistics on the number of students with autism and Asperger's syndrome (Inquiry No. 4848, n.d.).



Based on a statistical estimate, about 50% of the total number of people on the autism spectrum (Pisula, 2021; Baron-Cohen, 2021) are within the intellectual norm or above, of which 20% have outstanding talents (Attwood, 2013, p. 23). Thus, theoretically speaking, over a period of several years, about 20,000 students with such a diagnosis may start their education at universities. It should also be taken into account that some people are diagnosed at a later age (Hendrickx, 2018; Pisula, 2021; Simone, 2016). Many students who apply to the offices of rectors' plenipotentiaries for disabled people do not decide to disclose their diagnosis (such is their right) or there is no such diagnosis; they nevertheless receive help, which is guaranteed by the Law on Higher Education of 2018. Using the 1% rate, one of the three largest Polish universities – Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań – estimates that it educates approximately 350 students with ASD, and employs approximately 50 such employees (Rutz, as cited in Majchrzak, 2021). According to our knowledge, nowhere are statistics collected or even needs related to the neurodiversity of academic workers identified, which may change in the near future, given the rapid development of the concept of neurodiversity and the self-adjudication movement of people with autism.

According to the information obtained by the Supreme Audit Office (from 12 universities and polytechnic universities), these institutions educated students and doctoral students with the autism spectrum disorder, who most often reported their diagnoses to the Office for Persons with Disabilities or to their lecturers and/or tutors or mentors; however, this pertains to those who have made themselves known. Researchers have identified the phenomenon of non-disclosure of diagnoses by neurodifferent people for fear of stigmatization or because they do not expect any reduced tuition or fees during their academic education (Opatowicz, 2021; Stefańska-Klar, 2010; Płatos, 2016). Returning to the NIK report, "in the 2018–2019 academic year, the universities which were surveyed had from two to 33 students with ASD. Despite the support received from 2016 to 2019, in half of the universities these students resigned from their studies or changed departments due to difficulties in social functioning" (Raport NIK p. 44). A similar phenomenon has been observed around the world

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by many researchers (e.g., Cai & Richdale, 2016; Cullen, 2015; Moore-Gumora, 2014; Stefańska-Klar, 2010) and the most dropouts occur in the first year of university. On the other hand, we already have confirmation that neuronormative students have no problems with academic competences (Bekker et al., 2019). In light of the research, it can also be concluded that the greatest problems of neurodiverse people are those related to aspects of everyday life in the field of executive functions (Moore-Gumora, 2014; Gelbar et al., 2014). And it is this sphere and the degree of its efficiency that turned out to be a sensitive marker for predicting the level of neurodifferent students' academic success (Dijkhuis et al., 2021).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

There is therefore a problem, not only with the rising number of potential students on the autism spectrum (we do not know the actual number), but also with creating conditions for education that would limit dropout rates at universities (Stefańska-Klar, 2010; Raport NIK). Our analysis of the high self-awareness identified in neurodifferent people indicates the possibility of them defining themselves as those with low self-confidence. (Cierzniewska, Podgórska-Jachnik, 2021). Experiencing this in the earlier stages of education could lead to the production of low self-esteem or could influence the strategies of coping with stress (Cierzniewska & Błachnio, 2021).

The growing number of neurodiverse students earning a high school diploma and entering university, theoretically speaking, should lead to a higher proportion of them among students. However, we do not see the living conditions, the previous educational experiences of young people, and the degree of their preparation for independent living away from home from this perspective. Only individual studies have taken into account variables such as place of residence and economic status, which – as one may assume – are important in the decision to continue education, often in a different city far away from one's place of residence. We know

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little about the existential difficulties of neurodifferent adolescents, although sometimes such signals appear in the statements of self-advocates (Dec, 2020). These “down-to-earth” factors can nonetheless play a decisive role in educational decisions.

One factor that may prevent young adults from choosing to begin a university education may be their insufficient preparation in terms of functionality and coping independently, not only in the academic space but also taking care of themselves physically and mentally, as indicated by the studies discussed herein. An important factor for educational success turns out to be efficiency in the field of executive functions, which is difficult for neurodiverse students all over the world; the issue was also raised in Polish research. It should be emphasized that many studies confirm the importance of preparing young adults for independent life and there are already adaptation programs being carried out before starting university, which are still missing at Polish universities. Admittedly, in the last few years, Offices for Persons with Disabilities have significantly expanded their activities for the benefit of neurodiversity, but these issues deserve a separate study.

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## Italian Schools in the Times of COVID-19: Implications for Students at the Personal and Didactic Levels

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### **Abstract**

The author takes up the problem of education in Italy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective of this article is to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the progress of school and the lives of children and adolescents. To pursue this cognitive objective, the author conducted an analysis of the relevant literature published between February 2020 and January 2021, mainly in Italian. The author also formulated three research questions to help in the investigation of the above problem. The article was written with the help of the analytical method and takes into consideration the literature on the subject dedicated to children and adolescents. The analysis of the literature allowed the author to formulate final conclusions, which were developed in close correlation with the adopted research questions.

*Keywords:* Italian school, COVID-19, distance learning, educational poverty, children's and adolescents' psychological health

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## Introduction

The problem of education during the COVID-19 pandemic is current and little explored; it has been at the center of pedagogical reflection only for a few months. The COVID-19 global emergency has changed the lives of children and young people, not only in Italy. The new reality of education has sensitized teachers and researchers to dedicate more space to dialogue and the exchange of experiences in order to face this crisis together (Scholas, 2020). According to some scientists, children and adolescents will inherit all the consequences of the pandemic and are already forming a generation called in an editorial in *The Lancet* "Generation C," that is, the one that will suffer the effects and deprivations caused by COVID-19 (Editorial, 2020).

The words most heard in this period of crisis are creativity, empathy, hope, collaborative learning, flexibility, responsibility, and solidarity. Health needs have determined the planning of new educational paths in schools and the use of functional environments and common spaces. Schools have been forced to employ a new didactic configuration. The goal is to experiment with new ways of organizing educational activities online, creating listening situations and dialogue with pupils (group and cooperative activities), diversifying work and teaching material, and re-thinking spaces and times to collaborate with families.

The online lessons have unmasked the gap in technological tools necessary for both teachers and children in families, and the difficulties regarding weak or non-existent Internet connections. In the first weeks of restrictions in Italy, it was possible to observe a gradual adaptation to new needs and new behaviors by both teachers and, above all, by students in Italian schools. Distance learning has forced teachers to apply different degrees of interconnection between school and family: from assigning tasks via messengers and the electronic register, through asking parents to help their children by explaining the attached lessons, to sending recorded video messages and conducting video lessons interactively.

Although in Italy there are several universities that have prepared data collection measures in the form of online surveys in order to generally

analyze the risks to the psychological well-being of individuals in quarantine (e.g., La Sapienza di Roma, Università Cattolica di Milano, and Sigmund Freud University of Milan) (Burioni, 2020), it must be admitted that so far there has been a niche in the scientific field that could explore the impact of COVID-19 on school practice. Currently, there are still few university-level studies to explore the impact of quarantine on the behavior of children and adolescents (Wang et al., 2020).

Therefore, the objective of this article is to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the progress of school and on the lives of children and adolescents. To pursue this cognitive objective, the author conducted an analysis of the relevant literature published between February 2020 and January 2021, mainly in Italian. The author also formulated three research questions to help investigate this research problem. They are as follows:

To what extent can the COVID-19 pandemic and the fact that schools have been closed affect teaching?

To what extent can the fact that schools have been closed affect the educational poverty/early school-leaving of pupils?

What effects caused by COVID-19, and by children and adolescents consequently staying at home, can be seen on their psychological health?

The article is written with the help of the analytical method and takes into consideration the literature on the subject dedicated to children and adolescents.

## **1. Distance Learning as a Consequence of COVID-19 in School Life**

From the analysis of the literature on the subject, we see that the Italian education system previously had little experience with online teaching, especially when compared with Anglo-Saxon countries. However, some authors have noted that starting from the 1990s, and then since 2000, e-learning practices have acquired a greater importance. Currently, it is noted that online teaching still does not appear to be a “normal” practice for several teachers compared to other practices and we can observe

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an emerging and continuous learning process characterized by improvisation and formability (Gherardi, 2016, pp. 680–698). It is right to say that based on some available scientific evidence, the total closure of schools does not appear to be an effective measure to slow the contagion of the virus in epidemics. According to Viner et al. (2020, pp. 397–404), closing schools has a minimal effect on a virus with high transmissibility, while it can have profound economic and social consequences.

Now in the first point we will focus more on the consequences of COVID-19 in school education. The COVID-19 crisis and the need to rethink the organization of schools has aroused great concern in teachers; on the other hand, it has also revealed an enormous interest in resorting to teaching methods without any preparation and experimenting with new teaching strategies. Teachers around the world have wondered about the impact of COVID-19 on education (LUMSA Università, 2020).

In Italy, the researchers describe teachers who lack experience in distance teaching, which also refers to the set of activities carried out with the use of technological devices (computers, smartphones, or tablets) and allowing students and teachers to continue their schooling even if they are spatially removed. Having to work from home applies above all to the teachers in the first levels of education, with almost 90% of interviewees teaching kindergarten and slightly fewer of those teaching primary school claiming to do so. For the other grades, about 2/3 of each group are concerned (middle schools, high schools, technical and professional institutes) (Di Nunzio et al., 2020, p. 25).

A few years ago, researchers were wondering and trying to understand whether and how traditional learning can be integrated with digital methodologies (Fiorentino & Bruni, 2013). Now, with the timid appearance of distance learning, it has become an essential tool for maintaining the relationships between children and adolescents and the school and among peers. It is a practice that has necessarily had to rely on families that have become the decisive factor for its realization, but which at the same time have expressed numerous criticisms. Authors therefore encourage a better understanding of the possibilities of distance learning by getting rid of the prejudice that opposes and is critical towards online

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lessons by further evaluating the positive experiences and good practices of recent months (Bruschi & Perissinotto, 2020).

There are those who enthusiastically say that with distance learning the remote school has reached a significant number of children and young people characterized by different abilities. Online teaching has therefore trained the children, offering them digital skills and proving to be inclusive towards the most disadvantaged adolescents (Sernagiotto, 2021). However, by analyzing the literature on the subject more carefully, it can be said that the situation regarding distance learning in the world is worrying. According to a new UNICEF report, at least one third of the world's pupils were unable to access distance learning when their schools were closed due to COVID-19 (UNICEF, 2020). However, as regards the commitment of teachers to distance learning in Italy, the situation could be described as satisfactory (OCSE-PISA Programme for International Student Assessment, 2020) despite the important fact that even before the outbreak of the pandemic, from 2018 to 2019, one third of families did not have computers or tablets at home. The situation was even more difficult in the south of Italy (more than 40% of families did not have computers at home and over a quarter of the people were living in overcrowded conditions. The proportion rises to 41.9% among minors) (ISTAT, 2021).

In the last year, numerous surveys were carried out on the subject of distance learning in Italian schools, giving voice to the points of view of teachers, students, and their families. Distance learning in Italian schools for various authors implies the duty to face the new challenge. First of all, this applies to enhancing the training opportunities offered by distance learning, reorganizing time and thinking about schools not only in terms of new technologies, but also of environments that can promote school learning for students (Bruschi & Ricchiardi, 2020, p. 2). Several institutions have reported that children and adolescents in Italy experience difficulties with distance learning (45.4% of students between 6 and 17 years) (ISTAT, 2020). Many authors are warning that technology absolutely must not further amplify digital pathologies, leading to addictive and compulsive behaviors (Capellani, 2018) or, most of all, perpetuate

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the existing inequalities in access to and quality of learning (OCSE-PISA Programme for International Student Assessment, 2020).

The analysis of the literature on the subject seems convincing in that the emergency caused by the coronavirus has breathed new life into teaching, helping to give it an impulse capable of “resetting” old teaching methods that had not accounted for the birth of a new digital generation of kids tired of dull and sometimes improvised lessons (Barbuto, 2020). A different school should therefore be created, one capable of empowering individuals who are immersed in the digital reality. This involves rethinking the aims of schools, the structure, the organization, the idea of learning, the paper culture on which it is based, and the equipment (Midoro, 2016). The analysis of the literature revealed that, in the eyes of various authors, distance learning turns into a great opportunity provided that well-standardized content is transmitted to highly motivated subjects and that small groups of children or teens, who favor moments of exchange and interaction online, are created (Giancola & Piromalli, 2020, pp. 1–10).

It is proposed to explore the impact of technologies on Generation Y, or young people who have already grown up in the digital age. In this way, we want to face the challenges of modernity by focusing on the problems of education (educational structures) in the perspective of forming digital natives (Riva, 2019). Teaching in the digital age must surely put the pupil at the center of the learning process; it must train people who would be able to learn critically; and it must create experiential methodologies possible on a large scale and critically use the tools that the network environment offers (Campione, 2015). The contributions of various authors confirm that in today’s Italian schools, there is a new generation of children and teachers ready to face a different future (Carlini, 2020). The emergency of COVID-19 has somehow forced the school to rethink teaching, so that traditional teaching is currently seen as an ally to distance learning, as an opportunity to live in harmony, and not in contrast to distance learning (Toselli, 2020). This exceptional situation is also an opportunity for schools to think about providing educational tools to be used in the days immediately following the return to class, to not only

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reconstruct the socio-relational issues, but also to reflect on the new experience of life (Capurso & Mazzeschi, 2021).

There are also authors who look with perplexity at the impact that distance learning can have on students considered to be digital natives. It is emphasized that distance learning tends to favor anonymity and marginalization of the most disadvantaged students. Furthermore, in the relationship between teacher and pupil, there is a risk of reducing the spaces needed for discussion. Another particularly delicate issue is the risk of teachers becoming mere computer technicians or computer administrators. Therefore, we also insist on rethinking the preparation of teachers, who will also have to take into account the cultural and mental aspects. (Giovannella et al., 2021, p. 37). In the digital school, with regard to learning, the stress will be shifted from the teacher to the student. This does not mean that the fundamental role of the teacher will disappear, but rather that the teacher will have to perform the tasks of a director of the learning process of each individual pupil. In this case, we are talking about a radical paradigm shift centered not so much on the delivery of education (programs, rigid schedules, standardized evaluation, etc.), but on the demand for it (personalized training itineraries, diversification of the styles and learning rhythms of the students) (Tuttoscuola.com, 2021).

People today, and especially young people, are living in an information society. This society constitutes the stage of a revolution of unprecedented importance, which Luciano Floridi called “the fourth revolution” (Floridi, 2017, p. 3). In this context, the hypothesized role of the future school as an educational agency may oscillate between classroom activities, increasingly remote activities (a flipped classroom), and the environments (laboratories) in which it will be possible to engage in cooperative learning using the different technologies that are often still in their experimental phase.

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## 2. Problem of COVID-19 and Educational Poverty/ Early School-Leaving of Pupils

We must be aware that learning during COVID-19 is not achieved only through a computer, providing new technologies and teaching tools that are often too tied to theory (Ferri & Moriggi, 2018), but through effective social relationships between teachers and students, in addition to between children and parents. Undoubtedly, at this moment of crisis, digital technology can prove very promising in guaranteeing that students can access high-quality learning; however, students staying at home for a prolonged period can also contribute to the increasing implicit school dropout rate (difficulty in reaching the minimum skills in mathematics and Italian) (INVALSIopen, 2020).

In general, the data show us that children and youths make good use of the opportunities offered by the Internet for the purpose of studying (for example, searching the Internet) (Baroni et al., 2019, pp. 229–240). Despite this, several months after the start of COVID-19, there was talk of “lost children” in Italy, in the sense that the school and the teachers themselves lost contact with some children, especially those in kindergarten and in the mandatory school. On the other hand, authors such as Ignazio Drudi and Giorgio Tassinari highlight that the educational poverty resulting from the epidemic should not be underestimated. The term “loss” implies that some families have no Internet connection, no computers, and no smartphones. As of April 2020, around 6.7 million pupils were participating in distance learning, but around 2.4 million of them were still unable to fulfill the distance teaching obligation (Drudi & Tassinari, 2020). Educational poverty is linked to economic poverty, as a consequence of numerous families being in a state of absolute poverty. The increase in social exclusion at home due to the closure of schools and the inability to carry out training and sports activities provokes another new threat, namely, the creation of children of series A and series B (Investing in Children, 2020).

The problem of educational poverty also affects pupils of foreign citizens born in Italy or recent residents of Italy. According to data from the



Ministry of Education, in the 2018–2019 school year students with foreign citizenship enrolled in Italian schools represented 857,729 of the total of 8,579,879 pupils. Ilaria Venturi wrote of a million minors in Italy who live in a state of poverty, thus risking isolation. The author notes that one out of ten minors has not been reached by distance learning, thus remaining without school or sports activities (Venturi, 2020). With this new *modus operandi*, the poorest and most disadvantaged social groups risk induced dispersion. The economic poverty of these children and their families translated into educational poverty is the result not only of the current coronavirus pandemic but, above all, of a policy that is too tied to ideologies and not focused on the emergencies and real needs of foreign children (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, 2020). Not infrequently, immigrant boys and girls have relied on the presence of older brothers or sisters in the family. The help of schools is also important, since for foreign children Italian language mediators or facilitators have been enrolled in individual distance learning (Ardizzoni et al., 2020, pp. 77–78).

There are also authors who do not see a correlation between COVID-19 and early school-leaving. They point out that during the societal emergency, most schools were able to keep students who were already in possession of the technological tools or economic resources that could allow them to keep up with distance learning. In the eyes of these authors, teachers are somehow absolved from the responsibility of preparing lessons that are appropriate to the institutional system (Ardizzoni et al., 2020, pp. 77–78).

### **3. Consequences of Staying at Home for Children's and Adolescents' Psychological Health**

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, schools in Italy have been closed. The impact of this situation can be particularly destabilizing on the mental and psychological well-being of many children and adolescents, especially those who already suffer from certain problems. Regardless of the school context, psychologists speaking of the typically human consequences

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connected to COVID-19 emphasize, first of all, a fear of the unknown and a feeling of a lack of control in the face of uncertainty (Scott, 2020).

We can conclude from the research done on the impact of being forced to stay at home on children's psychological status that the answer is positive (Pisano & Cerniglia, 2021). Generally, the research which has been recently done at the international level on the psychological impact of quarantine suggests that from a psychological point of view the influence is broad, substantial, and possibly long-lasting. In recent research published in *The Lancet*, attention was drawn primarily to the increased level of psychological distress and to the onset of feelings of fear, disorientation, anger, emotional emptiness, and resignation. In some cases, the development of real psychopathological patterns can also be seen, mainly characterized by symptoms of anxiety and depression and sleep disorders (Brooks et al., 2020, pp. 912–920).

In general, the authors point out that children and adolescents may express fear and irritability due to the closure of schools and their obligation to participate in distance learning. Due to the prolonged quarantine, spaces to express one's emotions have become restricted and uncertain commitments of the new daily life have arrived. As Orben et al. stated, not only do biological and hormonal changes occur in adolescence, but it is also an especially sensitive period for social development that partly depends on the maturation of areas of the brain involved in social perception and cognition. The authors claim that adolescence is a period of high vulnerability for psychological difficulties. According to the researchers, social deprivation in adolescents can have an impact on brain and behavioral development (Orben et al., 2020, pp. 634–640).

It must be emphasized that in the Italian context, within a few months, several universities and institutes promoted investigations to investigate the psychological impact of the pandemic on children and adolescents. An anonymous survey promoted by the Giannina Gaslini Institute was launched approximately three weeks after the lockdown, through the *Google Form* platform. More than 6,000 people from all over Italy took part in this survey. From the analysis, it emerged that behavioral problems and symptoms of regression arose in almost 70% of children

both younger than and older than 6 years. In children and adolescents, the most frequently seen effects were anxiety disorders, breathlessness, and sleep disturbances. There was also a greater emotional instability with irritability and mood swings. The researchers highlighted how the confinement has led to a remarkably widespread increase in stress levels, with significant repercussions on physical, emotional, and mental health in both the students and parents (Università degli Studi di Genova, 2020). The results of another study conducted by Valentina Tobia et al. on a sample of over 600 adolescents revealed the risk of an increase in anxiety symptoms and difficulties in emotional regulation in adolescents (Tobia, 2020, pp. 39–44). The consequences of the psychological impact of social distancing on children and adolescents were also investigated by Elisa Delvecchio and Claudia Mazzeschi, who reported changes not only in terms of temporary physical disturbances (headaches, stomach aches), nutrition, and concentration, but also changes in mood (reactions of prolonged sadness, nervousness, crying, anger, or agitation) (ModenaToday.it, 2020). Similar results were obtained by the IRCCS Stella Maris Foundation, which carried out a national study on over 700 families in the months before March 2020, with the aim of analyzing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people in terms of psychophysical health. In children and adolescents with neuropsychiatric problems between the ages of 6 and 18, “an increase in obsessive-compulsive symptoms, behaviors related to a post-traumatic stress disorder, and impaired thinking were observed.” On the other hand, in children under 6 years of age, an increase in symptoms of anxiety and somatic complaints emerged (headache or stomach ache) (IRCCS Fondazione Stella Maris e Università di Pisa, 2020). Marika Gesué reported that the prolonged stay of children at home led to the risk of a greater possibility of developing various psychopathologies: anxiety disorders, sleep disturbances, depression, psychosis, obsessions, post-traumatic disorders, and even eating disorders (Gesué, 2020).

The contribution of Mara Morelli et al. is also interesting. The researchers investigated the influence of parents’ distress on parental self-efficacy due to the COVID-19 lockdown and on children’s emotional

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well-being (Morelli et al., 2020). According to their research, during quarantine parents were the only point of reference for children between the ages of 6 and 13. The findings also suggest that doctors should remotely provide psychological support to parents during a lockdown, encouraging their personal strengths and working on effective parenting strategies. The research also shows that pediatricians and psychologists have a great responsibility to specifically support families during a quarantine due to a global pandemic, providing advice to parents so that they understand what to do to improve the well-being of their children. Various initiatives that start at schools and that encourage students to share about their moods, reflections, considerations, and fears through blogs are also valued (Scuola Paritaria S. Freud, 2021). It is hoped that these reflections will be able to serve a cathartic function.

### **Conclusions**

Municipalities and regions in Italy, starting from the 2020–2021 school year, have moved in the direction of implementing measures of social distancing and closing schools, which involves the risk of aggravating the inequalities in the learning opportunities of pupils. The considerations cited herein provided clarity on the fact that starting from April 2020, the extension of the quarantine has caused changes in the lives of many children and adolescents due to the individual and collective transformations that followed. Scientists noted that the lack of face-to-face interaction has affected the pupils' adaptation and participation in school activities.

On the basis of these analyses, we can conclude that Italian schools, despite the seriousness of the phenomena linked to COVID-19, seem to manifest a good capacity to thrive in situations of insecurity and to face adverse conditions in order to look for new normalities. The research analyzed in this article shows that adolescents and children generally do participate in classes organized over the Internet. The schools have proved capable of ensuring distance learning by responding positively

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to the new circumstances that suddenly appeared in the lives of all pupils. Undoubtedly, it must be recognized that distance learning has made it possible to carry on school activities ensuring, although with a thousand difficulties, the relationship between pupils and teachers. Paradoxically, this crisis situation has brought attention to not only the centrality of the personal relationship between the pupil and the educator, but also to the importance of face-to-face teaching. In light of these analyses, we can also see that the suspension of school activities due to COVID-19 and the subsequent isolation of children and adolescents have led to a significant alteration of their school, social, and personal life, causing an interruption of the didactic process – of acquiring knowledge and skills – while causing psychological problems and early school-leaving. It should be emphasized that this new situation in Italy and the need to adopt the strategies linked to distance learning can be perceived as an opportunity for cultural evolution, for a change in mentality, and – following Pope Francis’ reasoning – see and live the problems of our time not as obstacles, but as challenges from which creativity, prudence, new skills, and passion for others are born (Pope Francis, 2020).

The data that emerge from the various studies clearly demonstrate that forced isolation and the lack of social relations can in many cases have a negative impact, generating anxiety, loneliness, sadness, depression, and concern for the future. The physical and mental impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on children and adolescents is a matter of fundamental importance for both governments and families and cannot be overlooked. Scientists are of the opinion that adequate strategies must be developed to support the youth population in coping with the uncertainty stemming from the pandemic and quarantines in order to minimize the psychological impact of school closures and home confinement.

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# Reflections on Teaching

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## Neighborhood, Segregation, and School Choice

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### Abstract

Over the past few decades, school choice has been a widely debated issue around the globe, following the development of pluralism, liberty, and democracy. In many countries, school choice systems were preceded by residence-based school assignment systems, creating a strong connection between a neighborhood and its schools' demographic compositions. However, schools often remain highly segregated. School segregation is thus seen as a major problem and is supposedly driven by three main factors: residential segregation, parental school choice, and schools' selection of pupils. This paper aims to shed light on what research should be focusing on as regards school choice and residential segregation with the following two research questions: What are the links between neighborhood and school choice in the literature? How are neighborhood and school choice connected to school segregation in the literature? Two main findings emerged: (1) the neighborhood-based social networks that parents developed had limited their school choices and (2) neighborhood segregation is one of the most

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important factors that contributes to school segregation and is related to multi-ethnic and socioeconomic contexts.

*Keywords:* neighbourhood, segregation, school choice

## **Introduction**

Residential segregation has been found to be an important contributor to children's social and emotional development (Collins, 1997). During the past few decades, many pluralist, liberal, and democratic countries have implemented school choice systems or are experimenting with such systems. The rise in the prevalence of these systems can be attributed to three arguments for offering school choice: liberty, equity, and efficiency.

The liberty argument is used to legitimize school choice in pluralist societies, as pluralism entails diversity and pluralist societies are tolerant societies comprised of people from different races, cultures, and backgrounds who have different ideas, religions, and philosophies. While true pluralism is still a key challenge for many societies around the world, globalization is laying the groundwork by turning many countries into diverse social, liberal spheres. In these societies, allowing people to choose and respecting their choices is a fundamental principle (Reich, 2008).

The equity and efficiency arguments are the most debated ones, for they are the main drivers behind the debate about societal and school segregation. The equity argument is at the core of many countries' political policies and it is a main target of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), which state that every child should have equal access to a good education. At the core of this argument is the idea that school choice can help level the educational playing field by providing minorities and disadvantaged children with more educational opportunities (Lubienski & Feinberg, 2008; Weis III, 2020).

Finally, the efficiency argument is rooted in the belief that school choice will improve the quality of education through market mechanisms driven by parents' demand for high academic performance (Musset,



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2012). However, school choice has been a widely debated issue in the last decade. It was found that school choice programs could reduce the achievement gap by 25% (Jeynes, 2014), but school choice has also been discussed in relation to segregation at the classroom level (Davis, 2014).

The idea that school choice improves educational equity and quality is not unilaterally supported. Critics of school choice argue that school choice feeds into mechanisms of school segregation. The social, cultural, and economic backgrounds of parents are among the factors that are assumed to influence their choice of schools (Fowler, 2002; Maile, 2004; Musset, 2012; Weis III, 2020). A recent review (Rohde et al., 2019), looking at the reasons behind parents' choice of elementary schools, showed that parents from high-income countries found different factors important than parents in low-income countries. For example, while school academic quality was the most important factor in high-income countries, parents in low-income countries found safety and discipline equally important. With school systems being vastly different among countries and parents having many alternate reasons for choosing schools, it is unsurprising that the existing literature on the issues of school choice and the effects of school choice on segregation is laden with controversies.

In many countries, school choice systems were preceded by residence-based school assignment systems, creating a strong connection between a neighborhood and its schools' demographic compositions (Boterman et al., 2019; Wilson & Bridge, 2019). This connection is widely debated, considering the international trend towards more inclusive and equitable cities and countries. One of the main channels through which governments often attempt to foster equity and thus combat societal and neighborhood segregation is education. However, schools often remain highly segregated. School segregation is thus seen as a major problem and is supposedly driven by three main factors: residential segregation, parental school choice, and schools' selection of pupils (Jenkins et al., 2008). The paper examines the connection between residential segregation or neighborhood segregation and school choice in closer detail via a systematic literature review.

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## **Aim and Research Questions**

This paper investigates the apparent connection between residential segregation or neighborhood segregation and school choice. Mainly, we view a neighborhood as a school choice factor and investigate its connection with segregation. A systematic literature review was done to examine residential and neighborhood factors in different school choice contexts in the global age. The main purpose of this systematic literature study – besides finding out what is known, how it is known, and how it varies across studies – was to identify what knowledge is missing in the existing research (Gough et al., 2013). Thus, we set out to also identify gaps in the existing literature on school choice and residential segregation.

The research questions of the study were as follows:

- (1) What are the links between neighborhood and school choice in the literature?
- (2) How are neighborhood and school choice connected to school segregation in the literature?

## **Method**

This study is a systematic literature review. The keywords used in the literature search and the process of literature selection (which included scoping, searching, and screening) are presented in the following sections.

### ***Keywords***

This paper investigated the neighborhood as a school choice factor, focusing especially on segregation. Accordingly, the keywords for the literature search were school choice, neighborhood, and residential segregation.

### ***Process of Literature Selection***

Knowledge from previous research can help when planning future research, by analysing what is known and what is not known. To find

these gaps, it is essential to select relevant, reliable literature on which to base a systematic review (Gough et al., 2013). The literature we draw on in the current review was selected through the stages of systematic review as presented in a paper by Gough et al. (2013) for the Alliance for Useful Evidence – namely, scoping, searching, and screening.

### *Scoping*

Scoping, according to Gough et al. (2013), covers the process of establishing selection criteria. These criteria are also known as inclusion criteria, because they reveal the kinds of information that a research paper should include in order to be analyzed in the review process. Inclusion criteria specify the keywords that guide the literature search and are based on the data that the research questions aim to uncover. Inclusion criteria also specify types of research methods or sources of data, countries where the study has taken place, the language in which the study has been written, or a period in which the study was undertaken. Apart from focusing on the aforementioned keywords as criteria for inclusion, this literature review also employed some additional criteria, which are summarized in Table 1. It is important to note that the criteria applied in a literature search may generate a limitation.

**Table 1. Criteria for Inclusion or Exclusion**

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Criterion 1	School choice AND neighborhood	Articles that are not about both school choice and neighborhood (e.g., not neighborhood and choice of transportation to school)
Criterion 2	Primary or secondary education	Tertiary education
Criterion 3	High-income countries	Low-income countries
Criterion 4	Findings of empirical studies	Conceptual/theoretical analyses or reviews
Criterion 5	Peer-reviewed academic journals	Journals that are not peer-reviewed or not from journals (e.g., books, reports, etc.)
Criterion 6	Written in English	Written in languages other than English
Criterion 7	Published between January 2015 and December 2019	Published before 2015

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### *Searching*

After the scoping phase, the inclusion criteria were used to determine the search strategy. The search was conducted on December 15–16, 2019 using the EBSCO Discovery Service, which provides journal articles from all subject areas. In this case, the search was limited to include journals from the following databases: the Education Resource Information Center database, Academic Search Premier, and JSTOR journals. During the process of searching, the keywords were used as search terms. The term “school choice” was used as a title and in two advanced searches was combined – first with “and” neighborhood and then with “and” residential segregation. The searches were further limited to peer-reviewed journal articles where a full-text PDF was available and which were published in English between January 2015 and December 2019. The reason for limiting our article search period to 2015 and later is to find studies conducted after the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005–2014) (United Nations, 2015). Finally, a total of 183 articles were screened for their usefulness to the study.

### *Screening*

Searching the databases using the keywords and most of the inclusion criteria resulted in a total of 183 articles returned. However, less-relevant articles were removed during the screening process, which consisted of two phases. During the first phase, the title and subject keywords were read and all articles that did not include both keywords “school choice” and “neighborhood” or “residential segregation” were disregarded. During the second phase, the abstracts of the 29 remaining articles were read and their relevance was assessed, leaving 13 articles (from the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom, Southern Europe, and the Nordic countries) to be thoroughly read and reviewed in this paper. The detailed search results can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

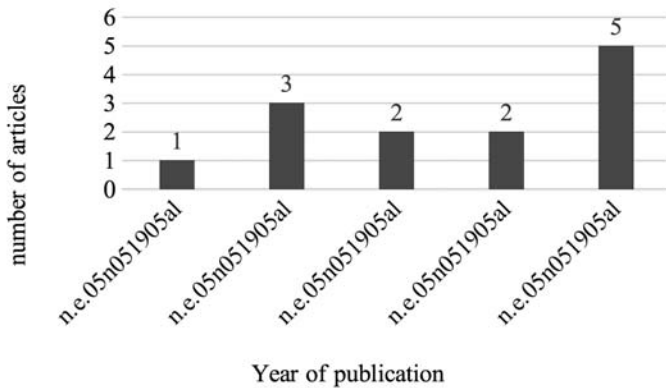
## Results

As mentioned above, the aim of the current paper is to investigate the apparent connection of neighborhood, segregation, and school choice. An overview of the selected 13 articles is presented below, and the results are presented according to the themes of the research questions.

### Overview of the Selected Articles

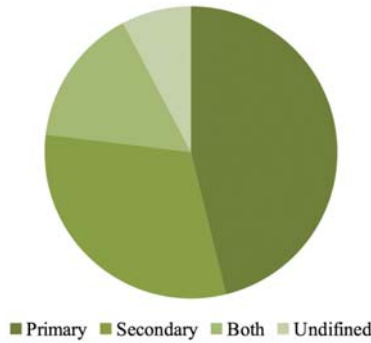
Regarding the years and locations of publication, the results reveal that the majority – five out of 13 of the selected articles – were published in the United States. One of the articles was published in Australia and the remaining ones were published in the following European countries: Sweden, the UK, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, and Italy. Furthermore, as presented in Figure 1, the majority of the selected articles (five) were published in 2019.

**Figure 1. Publication Dates of the Selected Articles**



Regarding school level, as presented in Figure 2, the results revealed that slightly more studies (46%) covered primary education. One third of the studies covered secondary education, while the remaining studies covered both primary and secondary or lower secondary education. One study did not specify which level of education was focused on.

**Figure 2. Education Levels Covered in the Selected Articles**



***Research Methods Used in the Selected Articles***

The results indicate that 77% of the articles employed quantitative methods for their data analyses. Only two articles applied a qualitative method, while one paper used a mixed-method approach. The quantitative studies drew mostly on national or regional data which was provided by national or local statistics agencies and governments. They used this data to find family background and residential area information or to calculate sociodemographic variables such as socioeconomic status (SES) and household income. Studies in which ethnic or socioeconomic segregation was a main focus calculated indices such as the Dissimilarity Index and the Isolation Index (Bonal et al., 2019; Nielsen & Andersen, 2019). The Dissimilarity Index was used to show how evenly two groups were distributed across a geographical area, whereas the Isolation Index was used to reveal how likely people from a certain minority group were to have contact only with members of their own minority group. In these studies, educational outcomes were included as a result or premise of segregation, employing both general family and residential data as well as standardized test scores. Test scores were used to assess the connection between school segregation and student achievement (Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016; Rowe & Lubienski, 2017).

Some articles that employed quantitative research methods used both longitudinal data from governments and data from surveys of parents on residential choices (Bernelius & Vaattovaara, 2016), demographics (Pearman

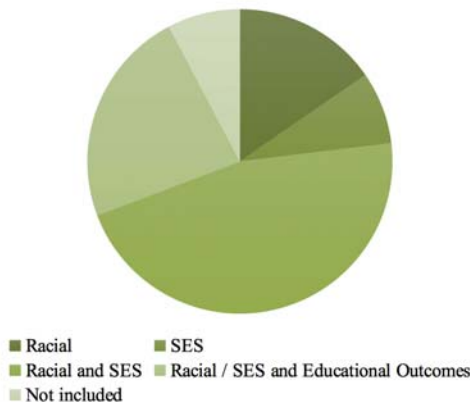
& Swain, 2017), and attitudes towards education and school satisfaction (Fleming et al., 2015). Most quantitative studies, whether they focused more on ethnic segregation or segregation based on student performance, employed correlation and regression tests as means of analyzing the data.

Regarding the qualitative and mixed-method articles, the results indicate that these studies used data from interviews with 30–50 parents, covering their school choice considerations and the ways their neighborhoods or social environments influenced their school choices. These interviews were analyzed by using content analysis (Kosunen & Rivière, 2018) or thematic analysis (Bader et al., 2019; Nielsen & Andersen, 2019).

***Theories Used in the Selected Articles***

While only four articles explicitly mentioned the use of a theoretical framework, the results showed that all of the selected articles employed some form of concept or theory upon which the research rested. As Figure 3 shows, all but one article employed the concept of segregation in their theoretical framework. Of the selected articles, 46% focused on segregation based on race and SES and 23% of the selected articles had an additional focus on educational outcomes. The remaining articles concentrated on either racial segregation or segregation based on SES alone.

**Figure 3. Coverage of Segregation in the Theoretical Framework of the Selected Articles**



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Various other concepts and theories were mentioned in the articles, most of which were related to segregation. Jenkins, Micklewright, and Schnepf (2008) used a theoretical framework which employed three main aspects that give rise to segregation between schools and which covered nearly all the conceptual frameworks found in the selected articles: residential segregation, parental school choice, and schools' selection of pupils. Firstly, residential segregation, also referred to as the demographic composition of the school's neighborhood, was mentioned in the background of at least four selected articles (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Candipan, 2019; Bernelius & Vaattovaara, 2016; Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016). For example, Bernelius and Vaattovaara (2016) took the process of segregation, which operates through residential choices and local institutions, as a theoretical basis for their paper. They thus examined whether school choice increases segregation within schools and neighborhoods. Bischoff and Tach (2018) based their research on the neighborhood-school nexus, where the demographics of school attendance zones shape the neighborhoods, which translates into schools being more or less attractive for parents to live in. Similarly, place stratification theory and spatial assimilation theory, which were used by Pearman and Swain (2017), are based on parents' patterns of moving and settling down in certain neighborhoods.

School choice was found to be a frequently researched concept. Parents who have a higher SES, who are more highly educated, or who belong to an ethnic majority group were more likely to be informed about school choice and therefore also more likely to actively make such a choice and to choose schools of higher quality. Consequently, immigrant parents and parents with lower SES were more likely to lack apposite networks and language skills and were therefore less likely to make active choices for higher quality education (Böhlmark et al., 2016). That being said, parents that did make an active choice had various reasons for choosing or not choosing schools. In addition to Böhlmark et al. (2016), this conceptual framework, or parts of it, has been used in at least nine other studies (e.g., Bischoff & Tach, 2018; Bonal et al., 2019; Kosunen & Rivière, 2018; Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016).



The school choice framework could furthermore be divided into two theories: the market or rational choice theory, which focuses on market mechanisms and the tendency of parents to select the “best” school based on educational performance and quality, and the social capital theory, which views school as an important socializing milieu for children. Rowe and Lubienski (2017), for example, based their research on market theory and the significance of standardized test scores for middle-class parents. Kosunen and Rivière (2018) and Bader, Laureau, and Evans (2019), on the other hand, connected school choice theory to social capital theory. They argued that school choice is a social process and that schools are cultural institutions that provide children with social and cultural capital as well as safety.

Schools’ selection of pupils was not as often debated in the background sections of the selected articles. Two articles discussed this factor in light of cream skimming, which was seen as an argument against school choice programs, because private school selection – in which only the best and brightest students are accepted into schools – only serves privileged students and thereby almost automatically exacerbates segregation (Böhlmark et al., 2016; Fleming et al., 2015).

### ***Neighborhood and School Choice***

Regarding the connection between neighborhood and school choice, the literature showed that neighborhood factors affected parents’ school choice in various ways. For one, parents used their local social networks when assessing whether a school was the right choice for their child and assessed the neighborhood as a physical and social space for themselves as well as for their children (Kosunen & Rivière, 2018). Parents developed social networks through interactions with other parents in their neighborhoods. These networks developed and evolved into crucial sources of information when parents were presented with major life decisions such as school choice. Thus, the neighborhood-based social networks that parents developed limited their school choices (Bader et al., 2019). Similar results were found by Fleming et al. (2015), who suggested that parents’ awareness of their educational options relied mainly on the

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knowledge they gained from their social networks. Perhaps surprisingly, parents from different neighborhoods and different social backgrounds appeared to make similar school choices (Burgess et al., 2019), with school image (the reputation of a school, often influenced by the proportion of ethnic minority children among their pupils) being a key concern when choosing schools (Nielsen & Andersen, 2019).

### ***Neighborhood, School Choice, and Segregation***

Regarding the connection between neighborhood, school choice, and segregation, evidence from Sweden suggests that neighborhood segregation is one of the most important factors contributing to school segregation (Böhlmark et al., 2016). This finding was supported by Rowe and Lubienski (2017), who found popular schools to be located in catchment areas with higher levels of household income and native-born residents. More similarities were found in the egalitarian Finnish context, where schools located in multi-ethnic, socioeconomically deprived areas were more likely to be rejected by parents looking for the best school for their children. In fact, schools and their student composition are an important driver of segregation in already segregated multi-ethnic neighborhoods, where dissatisfaction with the local school can push middle-class parents to move away from the area (Bernelius & Vaattovaara, 2016). Likewise, Bischoff and Tach (2018) found school segregation to be higher where neighborhood racial diversity and economic inequality was greater. However, this connection between school and neighborhood racial composition varied due to different levels of socioeconomic inequality and racial diversity in those neighborhoods. Also, the connection was weaker in urban areas than in suburban districts. Yang Hansen and Gustafson (2016) found that schools in metropolitan areas were more segregated than schools in small towns and rural areas.

When school choice was taken into account, the findings became even more inconsistent. By comparing actual school segregation with segregation in fictitious situations where no choice or only certain choice principles were allowed, Yang Hansen and Gustafson (2016) found evidence that school choice reduced school segregation in particular neighborhoods.

Similarly, Pearman and Swain (2017) found that school choice reduced segregation through the way families choose their neighborhoods when settling. A study on residential segregation and school segregation of foreign students in Spain, however, found that a positive effect of school choice on segregation is not a given. Different social and ethnic groups reacted differently and unequally to increasing school choice (Bonal et al., 2019). Choice was often made by better-off parents. For example, middle-class parents were found to choose public schools which serve students from a higher socioeconomic cohort (Rowe & Lubienski, 2017). Other evidence of school choice as a factor mediating the relationship between neighborhood and school segregation was found by Candipan (2019), whose study showed that schools do not automatically become more integrated if neighborhoods change demographically. When neighborhoods improved along socioeconomic lines, schools became increasingly less a reflection of the neighborhood in which they were located. Perhaps the strongest negative results of school choice in the literature were found by Bernelius and Vaattovaara (2016). Their study on the relationship between school choice and urban segregation in Finland suggests that school choice produces an independent effect for segregating schools based on student ability, meaning that choice leads to the “best” performing schools becoming better and the “worst” performing schools becoming poorer. The neighborhood factors that influence school choice were quite similar between studies of elementary and secondary school choice. That is, residential/neighborhood factors have a similar effect on school segregation in both elementary and secondary schools.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this literature review was to discover what is “known” in the literature about the connection between neighborhood, segregation, and school choice. What is evident is that the theoretical frameworks and concepts used in the selected literature focus mostly on patterns of residential segregation or on the causes and effects of the school choices

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that parents make. This was in line with the three aspects of residential segregation, parental school choice, and schools' selection of pupils used by Jenkins et al. (2008). Market theory and rational choice theory, which were deeply discussed by Maile (2004) in the school choice context of South Africa, were also found in some of the other studies, such as Rowe and Lubienski (2017). On the other hand, a connection of school choice theory to social capital theory was also found in the argument that school choice is a social process and that schools are cultural institutions that provide children with social and cultural capital and safety (Bader et al., 2019; Kosunen & Rivière, 2018).

Many of the existing studies employed quantitative methods to analyze the connection between neighborhood and school segregation (Bader et al., 2019; Bischoff, & Tach, 2018; Bonal et al., 2019; Burgess et al., 2019; Böhlmark et al., 2016; Candipan, 2019; Kosunen & Rivière, 2018; Nielsen & Andersen, 2019; Rowe & Lubienski, 2017; Yang Hansen & Gustafsson, 2016). This makes sense, as the aim of this kind of analysis is to detect patterns in society, such as the various configurations of residential and school segregation: something that cannot be done using qualitative methods. The studies that employed qualitative methods had a more prominent focus on school choice and how parents' choices were influenced by neighborhood characteristics. The selected qualitative studies found evidence that parents' social connections, which are forged in the neighborhood, affect their school choice and limit the number of schools that they consider when choosing (Bernelius & Vaattovaara, 2016; Fleming et al., 2015; Pearman & Swain, 2017). The quantitative studies provided evidence for the connection between neighborhood, school choice, and school segregation. Most studies found school choice to be an important factor which influenced neighborhood segregation and school segregation. The ethnic and socioeconomic demographics of neighborhoods influenced the popularity of the schools located within these districts. Some studies found that school choice reduced segregation in schools or in neighborhoods, while other studies which included students' test results found that segregation increased as a result of school choice. What can be concluded from these contrasting results is that different types

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of segregation produce different results. School choice influences both ethnic and socioeconomic segregation, as well as segregation in student performance. However, school choice was also found to decrease the achievement gap (Jeynes, 2014). It has been found that parental school choice is not exercised by all parents equally in minority and disadvantaged families (Weis III, 2020) and that segregation can exist at the classroom level (Davis, 2014). As addressed, residential segregation is one of the critical factors to children's social and emotional development (Collins, 1997). Here, we also argue that more research via qualitative or mixed methods is needed on the topic of neighborhood and school segregation in different cultural contexts, such as areas with a high density of immigrants and classroom/school culture.

In addition, one thing that most of these studies fail to take into account is the potential of the school choice system and the mechanisms it employs to play a mediating role. This seems to be a gap in the research on school choice mechanisms, neighborhood, and segregation. Which priority rules does a local or national school choice system employ and how do these affect school and neighborhood segregation? What would happen if different rules were applied? These are relevant questions for future research. As stated in the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), quality education is a basic human right, therefore we need to continue working to make sure every child has equal access to a good education.

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**Appendix 1.**

*Summaries of Selected Articles*

No.	Reference	Research design	Aim	Results
1	Kosunen, S., & Rivière, C. (2018). Alone or together in the neighborhood? School choice and families' access to local social networks. <i>Children's geographies</i> , 16(2), 143–155.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Qualitative</li> <li>- Content analysis</li> <li>- Semi-structured interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To explore how the everyday geographies of city life and families' access to social networks in the neighborhood influence families' school choices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access to local social networks influences the reasoning behind choosing the local school.</li> <li>- School choice is not just a choice of an institution, but of aspects concerning the surrounding neighborhood as a physical and social space.</li> </ul>
2	Candipan, J. (2019). Neighborhood change and the neighborhood-school gap. <i>Urban Studies</i> , 56(5), 3308–3333.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative</li> <li>- Combining key demographic and SES neighborhood data from 46 districts between 2000 and 2010</li> <li>- School attendance boundary data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To examine how neighborhood and school composition in 46 US districts correspond in socio-economically changing neighborhoods</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When neighborhoods improve along socioeconomic lines, schools become increasingly dissimilar to their neighborhoods.</li> <li>- Neighborhood demographic change does NOT necessarily produce school integration.</li> </ul>
3	Böhlmark, A., Holmlund, H., & Lindahl, M. (2016). Parental choice, neighborhood segregation or cream skimming? An analysis of school segregation after a generalized choice reform. <i>Journal of Population Economics</i> , 29(4), 1155–1190.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative</li> <li>- School register and demographic data of ninth-graders between 1988 and 2009</li> <li>- *Theory mentioned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To understand whether a generalized school choice voucher system leads to increased segregation and through which mechanisms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Neighborhood segregation is the most important contributing factor to school segregation.</li> <li>- The option to choose/opt out of the assigned school increases school segregation to a greater degree than the segregation that would be expected from residential segregation patterns.</li> <li>- Associations between school choice and segregation imply relatively small shifts in distribution internationally – segregation has increased everywhere.</li> </ul>
4	Burgess, S., Greaves, E., & Vignoles, A. (2019). School choice in England: evidence from national administrative data. <i>Oxford Review of Education</i> , 1–21.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative</li> <li>- Data from all students applying for secondary education in year 2014/15</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To examine the extent to which parents (from different neighborhoods and households) actively choose schools and</li> <li>- to what extent parents choose schools with higher academic standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School choices do not vary significantly according to the social backgrounds of parents.</li> <li>- Parents proactively use the choice system.</li> <li>- Admissions criteria that prioritize distance penalize poorer families.</li> </ul>

5	<p>Bernelius, V., &amp; Vaatovaara, M. (2016). Choice and segregation in the 'most egalitarian' schools: Cumulative decline in urban schools and neighborhoods of Helsinki, Finland. <i>Urban studies</i>, 53(15), 3155–3171.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative</li> <li>- National education outcome assessments and register data from Statistics Finland, as well as a survey on residential choices</li> <li>- *Theory mentioned &amp; school system explained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To examine the relationship between school choice and urban segregation in the egalitarian Finnish context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- School choice increases the variance of educational outcomes among schools.</li> <li>- The growth of urban socioeconomic and ethnic segregation is reflected in the population structure of school catchment areas, driving even larger wedges between schools' student bases and educational outcomes.</li> <li>- The decline of disadvantaged areas drives up pressure for school choice.</li> </ul>
6	<p>Bonal, X., Zancajo, A., &amp; Scandurra, R. (2019). Residential segregation and school segregation of foreign students in Barcelona. <i>Urban Studies</i>, 56(15), 3251–3273.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative</li> <li>- Data from national and city registries</li> <li>- Regression analysis</li> <li>- Calculations of Dissimilarity Index (DI) and Adjusted Isolation Index (AI)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To explore which educational and non-educational drivers foster the school segregation of foreign students between the city's neighborhoods and</li> <li>- to what extent admissions policies (catchment area and choice) contribute</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a positive association between residential and school segregation of foreign students.</li> <li>- There is doubt over the capacity of school choice to reduce the effects of residential segregation on school segregation.</li> <li>- Different social/ethnic groups react to increasing school choice in different and unequal ways.</li> </ul>
7	<p>Bader, M. D., Lareau, A., &amp; Evans, S. A. (2019). Talk on the Playground: The Neighborhood Context of School Choice. <i>City &amp; Community</i>, 18. 483–508. DOI: 10.1111/cico.12410</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Qualitative</li> <li>- Interviews with 34 white, middle-class and white, upper-middle-class families living in racially integrated neighborhoods</li> <li>- Thematic analysis using coding scheme</li> <li>- *Theory mentioned &amp; school choice as a social process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To understand how neighborhood contexts could influence the major life course decision of school choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parents develop social networks through playground interactions – these networks evolve and become crucial resources for making major life decisions.</li> <li>- Networks provide not merely instrumental or transactional support, but mostly emotional support.</li> <li>- School choice is a moment where parents' identities are called into question, making it a critical decision.</li> <li>- Neighborhood-based social networks limit their school choices.</li> </ul>
8	<p>Bischoff, K., &amp; Tach, L. (2018). The racial composition of neighborhoods and local schools: The role of diversity, inequality, and school choice. <i>City &amp; Community</i>, 17(3), 675–701.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative</li> <li>- Using spatial data on school attendance</li> <li>- School attendance zones (geographic catchment areas) as "neighborhoods"</li> <li>- 14,288 zones in 2009GINI coefficient for neighborhood income inequality</li> <li>- Linear regression models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To understand the community characteristics that influence the demographic connection between schools and their local communities and</li> <li>- how the connection between school and neighborhood differs in urban and suburban districts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Greater neighborhood racial diversity and economic inequality means significantly lower proportions of white children in school populations.</li> <li>- The link between school and neighborhood racial composition varies as a function of neighborhood SES inequality and racial diversity.</li> <li>- This link is weaker in urban areas than in suburban districts.</li> </ul>

9	<p>Fleming, D. J., Cowen, J. M., Witte, J. F., &amp; Wolf, P. J. (2015). Similar students, different choices: Who uses a school voucher in an otherwise similar population of students? <i>Education and Urban Society</i>, 47(7), 785–812.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative</li> <li>- Demographic and cross-sectional achievement differences among 23,000 students in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA</li> <li>- Longitudinal student achievement data</li> <li>- Parent questionnaires (N = 5,136) regarding demographics, education attitudes, and school satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To examine what factors predict why some parents enroll their children in voucher schools while other parents from similar neighborhoods do not</li> <li>- To investigate how aware parents are of their educational options, where they get their information from, and what school characteristics they deem the most important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In Milwaukee, where choice parents have better education but less income than public school parents, there were conflicting results (article highlights) suggesting little evidence of wide-scale cream skimming and negative selection.</li> <li>- This lessens in the case of the voucher choice programme.</li> <li>- Parents' social networks play an important role in their knowledge of educational options.</li> </ul>
10	<p>Yang Hansen, K., &amp; Gustafsson, J. E. (2016). Causes of educational segregation in Sweden—School choice or residential segregation. <i>Educational Research and Evaluation</i>, 22(1–2), 23–44.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative</li> <li>- Counterfactual approach (e.g., simulate a setting where only the proximity principle was allowed)</li> <li>- Between school variation estimations</li> <li>- Small area market statistics (SAMS) units</li> <li>- Mixed-model approach using hierarchical linear models for fictitious and observed schools in three types of municipalities between 1998 and 2011</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To examine changes in school segregation across different types of municipalities between 1998 and 2011 in Sweden</li> <li>- To explore the extent to which these changes are the consequence of school choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The degree of school segregation varied considerably across municipalities and between fictitious and actual schools.</li> <li>- Metropolitan schools were the most segregated, while schools in small towns and rural areas were the least segregated.</li> <li>- Segregation was higher in the fictitious schools than in the actual schools in cities, small towns, and rural areas.</li> <li>- The results suggest that implementing school choice has reduced school segregation and achievement inequality in the above-mentioned regions.</li> <li>- Segregation increased in the metropolitan areas regarding migration and achievement, but decreased based on parents' education.</li> </ul>
11	<p>Rowe, E. E., &amp; Lubieniski, C. (2017). Shopping for schools or shopping for peers: Public schools and catchment area segregation. <i>Journal of Education Policy</i>, 32(3), 340–356.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative</li> <li>- Identify popular high schools</li> <li>- Examine residential segregation</li> <li>- Combine the two with standardised test scores</li> <li>- Data for 12 catchment areas in Melbourne</li> <li>- Theory mentioned (market theory)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To explore segregation by examining catchment areas for a range of public high schools in a specific middle-class urban area</li> <li>- Not examined: whether school mirrors the segregation of the catchment area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Popular high schools are located in catchment areas with higher levels of household income, higher numbers of Australian-born residents, and a higher proportion of non-religious residents.</li> <li>- Standardized test results are higher for popular public high schools, but these results are less dramatic when compared to racial, income, and religious segregation.</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Middle-class parents choose public high schools that serve a higher SES cohort. → rational within the logic of the marketplace</li> </ul>
12	<p>Nielsen, R. S., &amp; Andersen, H. T. (2019). Ethnic school segregation in Copenhagen: A step in the right direction? <i>Urban Studies</i>, 56, 3234–3250.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mixed method</li> <li>- Quantitative data from official public statistics databases</li> <li>- Qualitative data from interviews with 50 residents/parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To quantitatively identify the level of ethnic segregation in schools</li> <li>- To qualitatively analyse the considerations regarding school choice in an ethnically diverse district</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Changes in pupil composition show that the proportion of students with a non-Danish background has declined – this has reduced segregation in municipal schools.</li> <li>- Ethnic school segregation reflects ethnic spatial segregation in Bispebjerg.</li> <li>- Isolation index is high but Dissimilarity Index is low – ethnic composition is homogenous within public and private schools.</li> <li>- Ethnic minorities utilize the right to form private schools; there is a slight increase in segregation in private schools.</li> <li>- School image is a key concern when choosing schools, particularly based on the proportion of ethnic minority students.</li> </ul>
13	<p>Pearman, F. A., &amp; Swain, W. A. (2017). School choice, gentrification, and the variable significance of racial stratification in urban neighborhoods. <i>Sociology of Education</i>, 90, 213–235.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quantitative</li> <li>- National statistics and survey data</li> <li>- *Theory mentioned</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To examine whether and the extent to which expanded school choice facilitates gentrification of racially segregated urban communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The expansion of school choice policies diminishes the role of racial stratification in guiding the likelihood and extent to which disinvested urban neighborhoods experience gentrification.</li> <li>- The findings suggest that the expansion of school choice initiatives may reduce the segregation that guides residential selection mechanisms into previously disinvested urban neighborhoods.</li> </ul>

**Appendix 2**  
*Overview of Article Specifications*

No.	Country	Research Paradigm	Method/Design	School Level	Segregation
1	France, Italy, and Finland	Qualitative	Content analysis	Primary	Not included
2	United States	Quantitative	Empirical – statistical analyses	Primary	SES
3	Sweden	Quantitative	Exploratory – statistical analyses	Lower secondary	Racial and SES
4	England	Quantitative	Empirical – statistical analyses	Secondary	Racial and SES
5	Finland	Quantitative	Correlation and regression analyses	Primary and lower secondary	Racial and educational outcomes
6	Spain	Quantitative	Regression analyses	Primary	Racial and SES
7	United States	Qualitative	Thematic analysis – in-depth interviews with 34 families	Primary	Racial and SES
8	United States	Quantitative	Empirical – statistical analyses	Primary	Racial
9	United States	Quantitative	Empirical – statistical analyses, national and survey data	Secondary	Racial and SES
10	Sweden	Quantitative	Empirical – statistical analyses	Primary and secondary	Racial, SES, and educational outcomes
11	Australia	Quantitative	Empirical – statistical analyses	Secondary	Racial, SES, and educational outcomes
12	Denmark	Mixed methods	Statistical analyses and content analyses	Primary	Racial and SES
13	United States	Quantitative	Empirical – statistical analyses	Undefined	Racial





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## The Level of Knowledge About the University Building Among the Academic Community in the Context of Place Attachment

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### **Abstract**

This paper presents the issues of place and attachment to place. The aim of the article is to determine the level of knowledge among the academic community of the university building in which they study or work and its surrounding area, in the context of place attachment. The cognitive component – one of many aspects of identifying with a place – was examined. With limited knowledge about the building in which the study population spends time, calculated in months or years, it is difficult to determine place attachment, identification, or experience. The research method applied was a diagnostic survey, a questionnaire consisting of questions designed by the author. Both students and academics were surveyed. The results showed that students have limited knowledge of the building where they attend classes. The university building appears to be more of an anonymous non-place, without deeper symbolic or social meanings, than a place with which the academic community identifies itself.

*Keywords:* place, non-place, place attachment, academic community, identity

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## Introduction

Human beings usually seek to identify an area of their own in any space, which is why place attachment is one of the most important human traits. As Lewicka (2012) pointed out, the literature contains such terms as place attachment, place identity, sense of place, place dependence, insideness, embeddedness, rootedness, appropriation, belongingness, residence satisfaction, and topophilia. Today's mobility – taking the form of laptops, mobile phones, airports, etc. – has significantly changed the understanding of rootedness. Modern people are increasingly often not connected to a place by any sentiments, emotions, ties, or people (Paprzyca, 2015).

Place attachment is the cognitive and emotional bond between people and places (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). This people–place bond emerges from people's interaction with a place and their social interactions that occur in that place (Scannell & Gifford, 2014). Residents develop an attachment to their residential environment or neighborhood and tourists can become attached to a tourist destination (Eisenhauer et al., 2000).

The aim of this article was to determine the level of knowledge among the academic community of the University building in which they study or work and its vicinity, in the context of place attachment. The cognitive component – one of many aspects of identifying with a place – was examined. Knowledge – unlike awareness (feeling, being conscious of events, objects, thoughts, emotions, or sensory patterns) – consists of facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education. If the study population spends time calculated in months or years in the university building and have limited knowledge about it, do they have place attachment, identification, or experience? Theoretically, the university is the ultimate example of an institution which builds its identity through a strong connection with tradition. Employees and students shape their academic identity by referring to characters and events from their past, among other things.

Places have many dimensions and meanings for people, organizations, and institutions (Massey, 1995). A place can be simply defined as



the sum of three components: its physical location, the meanings that are assigned to it, and the activities (actions) that take place there (Bańka, 2002; Bierwiazzonek, 2018; Gnieciak, 2013). The roots of our understanding of a place lie in our background and experiences, as well as in the language: “our home,” “our room,” “our street,” “our city,” or “our neighborhood” (Dymnicka, 2011). A place is an essential space for humans, transformed by the meanings assigned to it (Chmielewski, 2010). Böhme (2013) claimed that landscapes, parks, cities, and buildings, as well as people and artifacts, “influence us.” Idealizing distinctive places based on locality and familiarity may, however, lead to praise for provincialism, intolerance, or a dangerous isolation from intercultural exchange (Seamon & Sowers, 2008). In the collection of texts that define the concept of a significant place, one may find the books *Key Texts in Human Geography* (Hubbard et al., 2008) and *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* (Hubbard et al., 2004). Other researchers who define space and rely on individual experiences and social interactions include Tuan Yi-Fu (1974), Edward Relph (1976), and Anne Buttimer (1980).

An increasing part of space in the modern world is occupied by non-places, because the highway, hotel hall, and airport hall are identical no matter the city, country, or continent (Głyda, 2013). The dichotomy of place/non-place (*non-lieux*) proposed by Augé (2011) is supported by a number of other dichotomies of terms, providing room for evaluation: familiar/foreign, named/anonymous, static/dynamic, permanent/ephemeral, specific/general, etc. Examples of “non-places” known from the literature are airports (Wróbel, 2018; Varley et al., 2020), roadways (Merriman, 2004; Spinney, 2007), gas stations (Cwynar, 2017), cemeteries (Fabiszak & Brzezińska, 2018), food courts (Karpińska, 2007), traffic islands (Roberts, 2015), hotels (McNeill, 2009), docks, and areas such as banks, stations, and hospitals (Urry, 2007), etc.

Non-places are negative spaces; they are anonymous and stripped of identity, increasing the feeling of rootlessness and alienation. They are spatial signs of contemporary spiritual emptiness and existential alienation (Augé, 2011). The condition for a connection between a person and a non-place is, for example, showing a valid ticket (air, train, bus, highway,

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parking lot, etc.), having a passport or driver's license, or having a payment card accepted by a terminal (Cwynar, 2017). Educators define and consider the concept of "location without place," for example, in a kindergarten (Kurcińska, 2018) or orphanage (Kurzynoga, 2012). Zygmunt Bauman (2004) wrote that people in these public places do not create a shared presence. Non-places do not necessarily need to be part of dilapidated spaces; they undergo various transformations. Smagacz (2008) wrote about the strategy of taming non-places and used the example of young people, emphasizing that although a shopping mall can be superficially tamed by young people and can become a "place" for them, it is certainly not so for the other users, who perceive it as a transitory space.

In the case of universities, although they are not organizations with particularly high customer acquisition costs, research into student loyalty to universities is needed and beneficial (Hall, 2015). The modern university is increasingly described as a social institution that provides services – a knowledge factory (Melosik, 2002). Students no longer regard their time at university as an act of belonging to the academic community, but more and more often as a visit to a huge department store (Knasiecka-Falbińska, 2014). An analysis of the expectations of contemporary students towards universities can be found in the work of Wroczyńska (2013). When choosing a place to study, students behave like customers looking for the best-quality goods; three dominant attitudes can be identified among them (Zakowicz, 2013):

- a specific client – a student who knows why they have chosen a specific university and why they are studying there; their main goal is to get a job in the profession they have learned and consider interesting;
- a hesitant client – one who does not have precisely defined educational and professional plans and who needs help choosing their activity; and
- a minimalist client – one whose main principle in studying is the "3 Zs" (in Polish: *zakup, zdaj, zapomnij* [study, pass, forget]), with the aim of graduating quickly and with reasonable ease.

In addition to a wide range of studies focusing on marketing activities and the image of universities (Drapińska, 2006; Iwankiewicz-Rak, 2004; Krzyżak, 2009; Stachura, 2006), a separate group of studies concerns the place of origin and decision-making process of university candidates (Borowiec, 2006; Gąsiorowska, 2004). Baruk (2016) focused on the hierarchy of associations, with the university as a workplace. The strong link between students' satisfaction with their studies and their loyalty and between their loyalty and their willingness to recommend the university was confirmed by Stach and Bąk (2009).

This study is also an attempt to validate the conclusions resulting from the observation made at various levels of the academic life of Nicolaus Copernicus University students (Majchrzak, 2013). It was shown that the majority of the students considered the university to be a "non-place," a space they thought of as "terminals," as in the case of an airport, a railway station, or a doctor's office. They considered it a "service provider" and "production site." The research carried out at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń showed that students did not feel connected with the university and their classmates. In their free time, most of the respondents distance themselves from the university, not because of an aversion to the Nicolaus Copernicus University, but rather because they chose other activities related to their private interests (music or sport) (Bielska et al., 2015). However, they declared an interest (mainly through groups on Facebook, etc.) in what is happening at the university – scientific and cultural events. They expressed positive opinions about the University, satisfaction with the city and their studies, and a willingness to learn about the University; nonetheless, these factors did not translate into knowledge about the University. One in five respondents did not know who the dean was, half of them were unable to indicate the name of the rector, and on average they knew the names of six out of 17 departments/institutes (Bielska, et al. 2015).

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## Materials and Methods

The research method used in the study was a diagnostic survey, a questionnaire consisting of 15 questions designed by the author. The survey of students and academics was designed to determine their knowledge of the history and current events related to the main building of the Pedagogical University in Krakow, at 2 Podchorążych Street, among other things. The topics concerned the geological past of the area around the University (two questions), its history (four questions), figures associated with the Pedagogical University (two questions), the location and names within the main building (one question) and other university-related facilities (three questions), nearby sports clubs (one question), and the structure and authorities of the Pedagogical University (two questions).

The study covered a group of 102 students and 47 academics of the Pedagogical University of Krakow. For the group of students, the the auditorium questionnaire method was used and was carried out in the main building of the university. For the group of employees, a questionnaire set in a Google form was used and a link to it was included in an e-mail. The questionnaire was completed by 66.2% of the employees to whom it was sent. The students of first-cycle studies represented the following faculties: "tourism and recreation," "geography," and "historical tourism and cultural heritage"; the second-cycle students represented the faculty of "tourism and recreation." All the respondents had either conducted or participated in at least 75% of their courses at the building at 2 Podchorążych Street in Krakow. The survey was conducted for students between November 2019 and January 2020, and for employees in July 2020.

Among the surveyed students, 72% were women; the average age was 22 years; and 19% were from Krakow, 29% from other cities, and 60% from rural areas. Among the employees who completed the questionnaire, 40% were women; the average age was 41 years; and 28% were people from Krakow and 36% from other cities and villages.

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## **The Level of Knowledge About the University Building of the Academic Community**

In the initial assessment of the survey results (Table 1), a low percentage of correct answers from the student group is noticeable. Only two questions had over 50% correct answers. In the group of University employees, only six questions had a high percentage of correct answers (over 70%).

In Question 1, concerning the geological past of the area, the correct answer was that at the end of the ice age (the Pleistocene) the area was overgrown with tundra vegetation and resembled today's areas beyond the Arctic Circle; this answer was selected by almost 1/3 of the students and 3/4 of the employees. The most frequent answer from the students (33.8%) was that the area was covered with a thick layer of ice and a significant number of answer (30.7%) concerned the bottom of a deep sea where ammonites, belemnites, and sponges lived.

In Question 2, half of the respondents gave a wrong answer, denying the fact that the first people who settled today's Hill of Blessed Bronislava, 3 km from the University building at 2 Podchorążych Street) were looking for mammoths. Today, mammoth bones are hanging on chains in front of the entrance to Wawel Cathedral. Only 26.5% of the students surveyed correctly answered that the first people who settled today's Hill of Blessed Bronislava could have been building Gontyna to honor Salwator, which attracts tourists today. In the employee group, as many as 29.8% of the respondents selected the option "Don't know" and only 1/3 gave the correct answer.

**Table 1. Percentage of Correct Answers to the Survey Questions**

	Employees	Students, by department					
		[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	Total
Question 1	<b>74.5</b>	23.1	42.9	27.3	38.6	23.7	30.7
Question 2	36.2	15.4	33.3	36.4	21.1	26.3	26.5
Question 3	31.9	46.2	28.6	27.3	15.8	39.5	31.5
Question 4	<b>89.4</b>	23.1	23.8	<b>54.5</b>	<b>68.4</b>	<b>55.3</b>	45.0
Question 5	23.4	38.5	42.9	45.5	5.3	34.2	33.2
Question 6	<b>91.5</b>	<b>53.8</b>	47.6	<b>81.8</b>	<b>68.4</b>	<b>65.8</b>	<b>63.5</b>
Question 7	<b>53.2</b>	<b>84.6</b>	19.0	45.5	42.1	31.6	44.6
Question 9	42.6	<b>61.5</b>	38.1	<b>54.5</b>	21.1	39.5	42.9
Question 10	<b>80.9</b>	46.2	47.6	27.3	31.6	44.7	39.5
Question 11	–	30.8	<b>57.1</b>	27.3	21.1	10.5	29.4
Question 12	<b>83.0</b>	<b>84.6</b>	19.0	<b>72.7</b>	<b>89.5</b>	<b>81.6</b>	<b>69.5</b>
Question 13	<b>80.9</b>	30.8	23.8	<b>72.7</b>	36.8	23.7	37.6
Question 14	<b>63.8</b>	15.4	14.3	27.3	5.3	5.3	13.5
Question 15	<b>53.2</b>	38.5	4.8	45.5	47.4	34.2	34.1

1 – 1st year of studies, first-cycle studies “tourism and recreation”

2 – 1st year of studies, “historical tourism and cultural heritage”

3 – 3rd year of studies, first-cycle studies “tourism and recreation”

4 – 3rd year of studies, first-cycle studies “geography”

5 – 2nd year of studies, second-cycle studies “tourism and recreation”

*Note:* Questions with more than 50% correct answers are presented in bold.

Only 1/3 of the students thought that the building called Podchorążówka, which has functioned since 1918 as the Infantry Cadet School (Cadet Institute) in Łobzów, does not belong to the Pedagogical University (Question 3). The remaining respondents were not aware that the name of the street on which the main building of their university

is located (Podchorążych Street) is connected with the building opposite the main building's entrance. Importantly, less than 1/3 of the university employees chose the correct answer to this question as well.

The Wawel sports club was correctly and most often indicated by the students (45%) and the employees (89.4%) as being closest to the Pedagogical University building at 2 Podchorążych Street.

Only one in three representatives in the student group was aware that there is no mound in the immediate vicinity of the Pedagogical University building. The question pertains to the Esterka Mound at the junction of Głowackiego and Podchorążych Streets, which was "dismantled" when the sports facilities of the Wawel club were constructed. An even lower percentage (23.4%) of correct answers was recorded in the questionnaires from the employees.

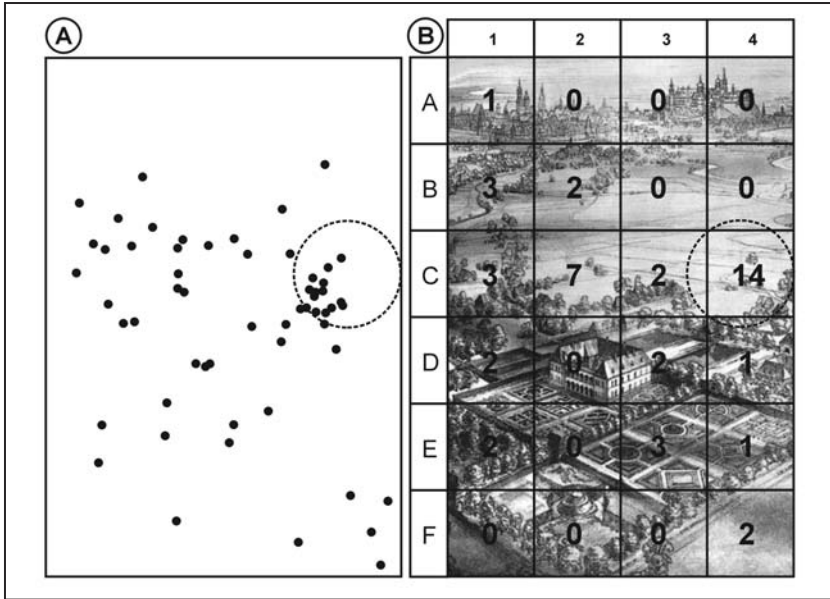
Both the employees and the students demonstrated their knowledge of the names of the streets surrounding the main building. Over 90% of the employees and 2/3 of the students did not correctly indicate in the names of the rector of the university in office at the time.

Approximately half of the students and staff had trouble identifying the plants in front of the main university building. The presence of splendid elm trees was most often explained by the respondents correctly, i.e. by the course of a section of a medieval King's Leat (Młynówka Królewska) leading the waters of the Rudawa to the town moat or incorrectly (41.5%) by the boundary line of the park palace in Bronowice.

In Question 8, based on the reconstruction of the palace complex in Łobzów, the correct contemporary location of the main building of the Pedagogical University was indicated by 29.8% of employees (Figure 1). In the student group, only 58% of respondents tried to indicate the location of the building, of which 29% located it correctly.

The location of Wawel, the old town buildings, the palace in Łobzów and the Esterka Mound shown on the map turned out to be insufficient. This finding is confirmed by the conclusions from the remaining questions in which these buildings appear.

**Figure 1. Students' (A) and Employees' (B) Indications of the Present Location of the University's Main Building on the Background of the Reconstruction of the Palace Complex in Łobzów**



The image in Question 9, by Michał Stachowicz and depicting ruins of the palace in Łobzów was correctly recognized by nearly 43% of the students and employees surveyed, indicating that it is not the current seat of the Faculty of Architecture at the Pedagogical University.

The following question concerned the institution after which the Pedagogical University (KEN) was named; the majority of the students (59.5%) indicated the wrong answer, claiming that it was the ministry responsible for science and higher education in Poland. The correct answer – i.e., the first secular educational authority on Polish soil – was selected by 8 out of 10 Institute of Geography employees.

In Question 11, only one in three students was aware of which fields can be studied at the Pedagogical University in Krakow.

The highest percentage of correct answers in the student group (69.5%) was recorded in the question directly related to the current location



of the Pedagogical University buildings in Krakow – at Osiedle Stalowe (Nowa Huta) and Podbrzezie Street (Kazimierz). In the case of employees, one in five respondents gave an incorrect answer to this question.

In the question concerning a figure closely related to the University, Professor Wincent Danek, the largest group of students (37.6%) correctly indicated that he did not deal with astronomy, mathematics, and geodesy. A significant proportion (34%) was unaware that the figure after whom the hall in the main building was named used his position in the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) to contribute to abandoning the plans to liquidate the Higher Pedagogical School in Kraków and became its rector. Eighty percent of the employees gave the correct answer to this question.

Another figure, Jerzy Owskiak, most often mentioned by the student respondents (56.1%), was mistakenly indicated as a person without an honorary doctorate from the Pedagogical University; only 13.5% of the respondents indicated the correct answer, Stanisław Lem. The fact that the university honors the figure associated with the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity (WOŚP) functions in the consciousness of the group of the employees of the Pedagogical University (only 6.4% of incorrect answers).

The last question concerned the functioning of museums in the main building of the Pedagogical University. The most frequent (34%) and correct answer among the students was the Handbook Museum, with a similar percentage of answers regarding the Museum of Tadeusz Kantor Documentation Center (33.5%). Only half of the Institute of Geography employees were able to correctly indicate the museum facility in the building where they hold over 75% of all their classes with students, use the administrative staff services, and have their staff rooms.

The student group did not show a strong correlation between the number of correct answers and the period during which the respondents were in contact with the university. Only in one question, concerning the location of the buildings of the Pedagogical University in Krakow, was the highest rate of correct answers given by students of the second year of supplementary MA studies. Comparing the answers of students in the first and third years of undergraduate studies, only in six cases did people who spent three years in the main building of the University provide

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higher rates of correct answers than those studying less than one full academic year. The greatest differences in these two groups were found in the questions concerning the topography of the university and its surroundings (sports facility, museum facility, and auditorium). In the case of the surveyed employees, seniority was not a significant factor in the number of correct answers, with seniority set at a threshold of five years of employment at the Pedagogical University. Half of the questions were more frequently answered correctly by people with longer seniority. Similarly, the results of the survey were divided into graduates of the Pedagogical University and others. The first group indicated more correct answers in only half of the questions. Moreover, better knowledge of the location of university facilities in Krakow was demonstrated by people who had not previously been associated with the Pedagogical University.

On the other hand, significant differences in the number of correct answers were noted between the students from Krakow and those from other towns. The former showed better knowledge of street names, green areas, and hydrotechnical and historical buildings. Place of origin was not an important element in the correct answers provided by the employees.

### **Conclusion**

This research is exploratory in nature and the conclusions cannot be generalized to the entire academic community of the university. The topic of attachment to place requires further detailed research, based on an analysis of non-cognitive components. They can answer the question of whether university buildings are non-places in contemporary discussions on space –along with airports, banks, department stores, and hotels. The results, showing that students have limited knowledge of the building they are attending, do not indicate attachment to place.

In the case of the University staff, correct answers were only prevalent in questions involving practical, organizational, and procedural information, as opposed to those concerning the history and current events related to the university's main building and its immediate surroundings.

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For example, 2/3 of the students and 2/3 of the employees were unaware that the name of the street at which the main building of their university is located is connected with the building opposite the main entrance. Half of the respondents had problems determining the course of the famous Royal Mill (Młynówka Królewska) in front of the main building of the University and identifying the museum on its premises. For 2/3 of the students and 2/3 of the employees, the palace building in Łobzów, currently owned by the Krakow University of Technology, remained undiscovered or was thought to belong to the Pedagogical University. The respondents in both groups were also largely unaware of the unique site, Esterka Mound, located in the immediate vicinity of their place of study and work, and the nearby Salwator area with Gontyna and the Salwator church.

The percentage of incorrect answers outlined above fits in with the conclusions resulting from the observation made at various levels of academic life of Nicolaus Copernicus University students (Majchrzak, 2013). The simplified image of the university is confirmed, where it is assumed that the student is a customer (recipient of services) and the university is a service provider.

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## Ethical Education for Grades 1 and 2 in Finland from the Values Perspective

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*A man without ethics  
is a wild beast loosed upon this world.*

Albert Camus

### **Abstract**

The article addresses a key issue in curriculum policy, ethical education in Grades 1 and 2. The article uses the Finnish 2014 basic curriculum as the basis for a case study rooted in the humanities, philosophy, and the cultural sciences. The article explores what is embodied in this policy, especially the objectives of the subject of ethics in the curriculum. The article draws attention to the development of values through the curriculum in primary education in Finland and presents an overview of recent developments in values education in schools, taking curriculum research into account. The key part of the study is an analysis of the Finnish National Core Curriculum, principally those parts which involve secular ethics, as formulated by the Ministry of Education, and which emphasize the right of children to a good education and “to understand themselves, other people, the society, the environment, and different cultures” (National Core Curriculum, 2016, p. 15).

*Keywords:* ethical education, ethics, values, values in education, curriculum in primary education

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## **Introduction**

The main part of the study is an analysis of the Finnish National Core Curriculum, principally those parts which involve secular ethics, as formulated by the Ministry of Education, and which emphasize the right of children to a good education and “to understand themselves, other people, the society, the environment, and different cultures” (National Core Curriculum, 2016, p. 15). The article presents what is embodied in the objectives of the subject of ethics in the curriculum and which values and their strengths are developed through curriculum development in primary education in Finland.

## **Secular Ethical Education or Religious Education in Finnish Elementary Schools**

The Finnish National Agency of Education prepared and launched a national core curriculum reform in the autumn of 2012. The process of curriculum reform was open and clear from the beginning, involving many individuals working collaboratively. Principals, teachers, representatives from ministries, teachers’ unions, labor unions, parents, various ethnic groups, local education authorities, teachers, and researchers throughout the country worked together to design the reform and development of the core curriculum.

The substantial breadth and multidisciplinary nature of secular ethics is typically noted. The subject appears to be a substitute for religious education, based on philosophy and the social and cultural sciences. Secular ethics takes a multidisciplinary perspective, presenting similarities to integrative models of religious education (Tomperi, 2003). In 2015, secular ethics was studied by 5% of comprehensive school students, Evangelical Lutheran religion by 91%, and other religions by 4% (Statistics Finland, 2014). Today, secular ethics classes are also open to students with religious affiliations other than Lutheran. Moreover, Lutheran students do not have the right to attend secular ethics lessons.

Debates concerning religious diversity and the ways education should be developed in both religious and non-religious worldviews have played a central role in the works of Robert Jackson (2014) and Siebren Mediema (2014). According to Jackson, religious education has never been presented as widely as it is now (Jackson, 2012). Non-religious and religious perspectives in Finland are both taken into consideration by the separative education model. On this basis, the religious education of learners is organised according to their religious beliefs, with Lutheranism and alternative religions being the fundamental basis of organisation.

Students who are not a part of a religious community study secular ethics. Furthermore, the subject of secular ethics in Finland represents an autonomous improvement over other nations' initiatives. It is generally presented as an originally Finnish subject (Niniluoto, 1995). Secular ethics lessons appeared in the 1920s, when it was necessary to provide the "history of religion and ethics" for students who were non-affiliated in terms of religious education (Saine, 2000). The beginnings of the current subject of secular ethics followed in 1985 with the inauguration of a new subject, called *elämäkatsomustieto* in Finnish. This word has no straightforward translation and has been interpreted in many ways, including "education in life stance," "philosophy of life," and "life questions and ethics." This article uses the name "secular ethics" to distinguish it from ethics – which is described as a field of philosophy – and from religious education (Aarnio-Linnanvuori, 2013).

The range of secular ethics education includes four main content areas that were universal in the national comprehensive school curricula for 2004: "human relations and ethical development," "self-knowing and cultural identity," "society and human rights," and "the human being and the world." The basic objectives introduce not only critical skills for ethical action, but also studies on tolerance, justice, and sustainable development. The objectives for the first five grades include knowledge about cultures and human worldviews. The National Curriculum (2004) stipulates that instructing students in cultural literacy, in addition to interactive and self-expressive intercultural capabilities, is the fundamental aim of this aspect.

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The National Curriculum of 2014, in effect since autumn 2016, has been restructured, but it retains the objectives of the curriculum from 2004.

According to Niiniluoto (1995), the definition of secular ethics education concerns a personal worldview – including ethics, values, and views about the world – within an epistemological view which reveals how students recognize and acquire knowledge. The priority of secular ethics education is to guide and support students' growth and development, specifically their worldviews and philosophies of life. The subject of secular ethics is regarded as non-confessional, since its aim is neither to present nor to socialize students into specifically organized worldviews. However, Poulter et al. (2015) disputed the claim that the secular framework is neutral, since education has been always culturally and morally loaded. According to Tomperi (2003), the beginnings of secular ethics education are based on knowledge and meanings which are close to us as human beings, irrespective of non-religious and secular worldviews. The subject of secular ethics is based on values such as democracy, human rights, non-violence, and positive multiculturalism (Tomperi 2013).

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

In order to present secular ethics education from a Finnish perspective, I formulated the following research questions: What values in Grades 1 and 2 are included in the Finnish secular ethical education curriculum? What are its strengths?

The main component of my study was an analysis of the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014, especially those parts covering the content to be taught, which are applicable to all schools in Finland. As I mentioned previously, the analysis of the curriculum began with a review of the literature on values in teaching and secular ethics. The next step was to concentrate on the curriculum and to identify how issues of secular ethics were addressed. I also used the curricular guidelines, differentiations, and support for elementary schools in Grades 1 and 2 with content areas.

I employed the problem method, along with critical discourse analysis and the study of documents concerning educational change and the study of discourses in political rhetoric. I collected data concerning specific areas of political activities and “macro-themes of discourse” (Wodak & Krzyżanowski, 2008, p. 156). The problem method derives from an educational phenomenon which is placed in time and related to society. From this perspective, it is necessary to contrast different views, regularities, and principles. Discourse analysis was conducted using meanings which were usually contextual. In this light, this article uses discourse – not only language and its meanings, but also conventions and codes – which are typical of particular societies and anchored in their cultures and history (Hammersley, 2013). Moreover, discourses are “social texts, ... particular signifying practices of a given group that are both constituted by and constitutive of the discourse field in which members of the group live and function” (Elbaz, 1990, p. 15).

In this article, I aimed to use primary rather than secondary sources, appearing in different places and at different times. I chose representative documents and analyzed the meanings they presented along with their intended and perceived contexts. Resources available from the University of Helsinki library were assessed, which was the most crucial stage. The next step was to choose materials for the final analysis. The sample materials which were the most representative and which provided the greatest support were used for this article.

### **Values and Education**

The continuity of values in the contemporary era is significant due to the technological advances and changes from globalization. According to Berkowitz (1995) and Oser (1996), values investigate subjective judgments (attitudes) and behavior. The moral imperatives of a society are determined and conveyed to the individuals residing within it based on the values that develop in society from honest viewpoints and principles. Berkowitz (1996) added that there is no need to have many values

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to develop morality in peoples' judgments and actions; people need only such central values as justice and well-being. Berkowitz (1997) named these regulative values due to their useful characteristics or "meta-morals."

Values and education are currently being discussed throughout the Western world and in Asia (Stephenson et al., 1998). Different terms are used around the world to refer to tradition and the theoretical position of values (Veugelers, 2000). We read about "values education," "character education," "moral education," "personal and social education," "citizenship education," "civic education," "religious education," "moralogy," and "democratic education," especially in the English-language literature. Scientific publications in Finland more often employ the term "moral education" or "ethics." Publications from the USA and Singapore use the term "character education," whereas in Scotland and England "value education" is common (Munn, 1995; Halstead & Taylor, 1996). In the European context it is usually "civic education" (Starkey, 1991).

Values have various dimensions and they are embedded in the curriculum. They are often used to design a school's mission (National Core Curriculum, 2016, p. 19). Seen in this perspective, values are like constructs: in adopting them, people decide what is good and what is bad, how they solve their problems, and what they believe in. Values "are not personal preferences based on taste; they are judgements based on more or less explicit and systematic ideas about how a person relates to his/her environment" (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003, p. 379). Teachers and students have their sets of values, which "collaborate" in education. Teachers have the will to influence the students' values and the moral functioning of the school, which is perceived as a learning organization.

### **The Values of Basic Education and its Roots in Philosophy, the Humanities, and Social Sciences in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education, 2014**

Finland's national curriculum directs the country's education system by defining values and objectives for all Finnish elementary schools.

There are no school inspections in Finnish schools. The curriculum designates the main objectives and goals for school subjects and motivates teachers to use new learning methods in project-based and collaborative learning. The curriculum may be construed freely by every basic school, even though prior establishment of the principal frameworks has occurred. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 in Finland contains 508 pages, 100 pages of which deal with school values, goals, and principles. The rest of the document presents the syllabi of school subjects.

**Figure 1. Values in Basic Education in Finland  
(National Core Curriculum, 2016, pp. 15–17)**



According to the document (National Core Curriculum, 2016, p. 15), each child is unique and valuable. It stresses the child’s uniqueness and right to improve their skills as a human being and as part of a democratic society. To accomplish this, pupils need not only individual support, but also encouragement and the experience that they are valuable and being heard in their society. The core curriculum emphasizes the need for students to work together “to advance the functioning and welfare of the community” (p. 15). It stresses the right of each child to a good education. Furthermore, learning is perceived as a process which helps students build their “identity, understanding of humanity, worldview, and philosophy of life and to find their place in the world. At the same time, they come to understand themselves, other people, the society, the environment, and different cultures” (National Core Curriculum, 2016, p. 15). Taking all

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this into account, basic education designs and strengthens the conditions for lifelong learning on the part of each student.

In the contemporary world, values education is emphasized due to various forms of media, the global network, social media, and students' relationships, all of which contribute to the value system presented above. It is suggested that, during lessons in Finnish schools, discussions should be conducted with students concerning the values that enable them to build their own life values. As a result, students perceive a variety of values in their lives and are able to think about them critically. All in all, schools support students in building their systems of values. Students' holistic well-being in basic education is built through cooperation between the values promoted in schools and in their homes. Open-mindedness and a respectful attitude on the part of teachers towards various religions and worldviews constitute the root of constructive schooling, cooperation, and interaction.

Apart from philosophy and the right of each child to a good education, the core curriculum emphasizes support for each child in their growth as a human being. It stresses the need to aspire to "truth, goodness, beauty, justice, and peace" (p. 16). Every child's development is shaped by sympathetic and ethical disputes, in addition to the right to advocate for sound reason, according to the humanistic standpoint.

In this light, each student and each community are capable of making decisions following ethical reflections. The document emphasizes the importance of the ethical and aesthetic perspective in guiding students towards a realization of what is valuable in their lives. Consequently, for an educated individual in Finland, the news, surroundings, other individuals and one's personal life are viewed in a way that informs the understanding of one's environment. They are able to take action and to show respect to other people.

It should be mentioned that "respect for human life, human rights, and human dignity" are the humanistic roots of basic education in Finland. Education contributes to the promotion of well-being in a democratic society and promotes "economic, social, regional, and gender equality" (p. 16). In Finland, the idea that education does not lead to any philosophical,



political, or religious commitments is emphasized. 'Richness' is how the document views cultural diversity, which makes education crucial. The core curriculum emphasizes "cultural diversity as richness." Education in Finland is based on "a diverse Finnish cultural heritage" (p. 16). Taking all this into account, students are supported in building their own "personal cultural identities" and their gradual development as valuable agents capable of participating in the culture. Primary education reinforces students' creativity and contributes to the promotion of interactions between cultures in the light of omnipresent sustainable development. Moreover, students from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds understand different customs and beliefs. They are capable of recognizing the circumstances and life situations of others. In connection with this issue, genuine intercultural interaction and communality is created as a result of study "across the boundaries of languages, cultures, religions, and beliefs" (p. 16).

In addition to the uniqueness of each child and the right to a good education, the writers of the national core curriculum took into account "humanity, general knowledge and ability, equality, and democracy" (p. 16). The document stresses the need to support each child's growth and to contribute to the child's "truth, goodness, beauty, justice, and peace" and it emphasizes the conflicts between students' aspirations and the realities of their lives. Students' ability to resolve these conflicts ethically and their courage in defending what is good constitute parts of their general knowledge and ability, which in turn enable them to make decisions dependent on ethical thinking and their capacity for putting themselves in another student's place. The guide to ethical perspectives and esthetics teaches students what is valuable in their lives. "General knowledge and ability manifest themselves in our attitudes towards ourselves, other people, the environment, and information, in the ways we act, and in our willingness to take action" (p. 16). An educated person strives to behave properly and to show respect for themselves, other people, and the environment. They are able to manage information in a critical manner. Efforts at self-regulation and taking responsibility for one's own development and well-being are also part of general knowledge and skills. In this light, it is emphasized that basic education relies on

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respect for human life and rights in order to promote well-being and democracy. The basic education curriculum is grounded in economic, social, regional, and gender equality and equity.

Viewed from the perspective of the curriculum, basic education in Finland affirms sustainable development with eco-social knowledge. Humans, as a part of nature, rely on the vitality of ecosystems and reflect on the “necessity of a sustainable way of living.” Eco-social knowledge contributes to the creation and understanding of sustainable ways of living and the inviolability of human dignity. It supports the renewal of ecosystems through students’ ability to practice the sustainable use of natural resources, especially with regard to climate change. Elementary school students discuss conflicts between different styles of consumption and the country’s production, in the interests of a sustainable future. These discussions broaden the students’ understanding and horizons and teach them to value cross-generational responsibility.

### **Values in the Tasks of Ethical Education in Grades 1 and 2 with Content Areas C1–C4**

There is no doubt that the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 incorporates the underlying values of basic education and states that its main task is to promote “pupils’ ability to pursue a good life” (p. 148). This appears to be the strong point of the curriculum, also supported by students’ obligation to reshape and create experiences during ethics lessons, to attempt to understand different cultures, and to share with each other activities which produce meaning in school and outside of school. Some schools even encouraged their students to read the drafts of the core curriculum and to assess the text and present their feedback. The subject of secular ethics is based on values such as democracy, human rights, non-violence, and positive multiculturalism (Tomperi, 2013). The term “values” is used in the present paper to refer to the principles and common beliefs which serve as basic guides to behavior and to standards which are perceived as good or desirable.

Another positive assumption is associated with this investigation: that ethics should guide students towards their own independence, open-mindedness, and participation in a democratic Finnish society. On the other hand, “critical thinking is understood as a self-correcting activity that seeks reasons and perceives connections, and is sensitive to different situations” (p. 149). Let us first take a closer look at Grades 1 and 2. The teaching and learning of ethics in basic education is concentrated on cooperation and skills (thinking and learning) in education. A major benefit at this level of education is the provision of support for each student in terms of healthy self-confidence and a positive working self-image. In order to understand this more profoundly and to perceive existing strengths and gaps, we should analyze the objectives of ethics instruction in Grades 1 and 2 presented in the National Core Curriculum.

The first objective is to “guide the pupil to listen to the opinions and thoughts of other pupils”; the second one is “to encourage the pupil to express his or her thinking and feelings in different ways”; the third objective is to “guide the pupil to appreciate his or her own and others’ thinking and to support the development of the pupils’ ability to ask questions and present justified arguments” (National Core Curriculum, 2016, p. 149). It seems reasonable to assume that the succeeding objectives are to “guide the pupil to recognize the causes and consequences as well as the ethical dimensions of the everyday situations he or she encounters” and to “encourage the pupil to reflect on goodness and the difference between right and wrong” (p. 149). Still other objectives are to “guide the pupil to learn about different customs in his or her surroundings, to guide the pupil to understand the foundations of communal life, and to guide the pupil to respect and value his or her own environment and nature” (p. 149). As a result, Finnish teachers prepare students to function well in a democratic society and to some extent teach them how to be a “good citizen.” According to Veugelers (2001), democratic citizens take a critical social approach towards their skills, which are linked to their manner of solidarity with other students, especially in a multicultural society. It seems reasonable to assume that Finnish students are taught how to participate actively in society and to respect existing differences between

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citizens. On the other hand, teachers can never be certain about the consequences of the decisions students make in their own lives.

To reinforce the meaning of the new curriculum, teaching on this level includes key Content Areas C1 and C2, which are related to the objectives of ethics presented above. As a result, the content areas are used to form units for each grade. The pupils' experiences, ideas, and thoughts "are taken into account in the selection of content and in more detailed discussion of it" (National Core Curriculum, 2016, p. 149). I observe that these sets of Finnish school values are embedded in the curriculum and are perceived as signposts to teachers, who are obliged to include them in their teaching practice. This can be a plus or a minus for teachers and their methods of teaching, depending on their personalities. Some teachers prefer such solutions – others do not.

According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014, in Content Area C1, concerning reflections on a good life, each student learns conversational skills through the respectful process of listening to others. Students are taught how to recognize the difference between good and bad and right and wrong, how to understand human goodness, and the meaning of friendship. Content Area C2 – different ways of life – offers answers to the question, "Who am I?" and explains different lifestyles to the student in the "context of his or her own family and cultural background" (National Core Curriculum, 2016, p. 150). The appraisal of issues and what is negative or positive rests crucially on one's cognitive abilities. In this light, Oser (1996) used the term moral discourse, which involves an interactive discussion concerning issues of justice, with the purpose, according to Oser, of teaching children how to develop their own opinions while also taking the opinions of others into consideration.

The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 also includes Content Area C3, which presents the content of communal life, presenting its foundations via the meanings of rules, trust, honesty, and fairness in various life situations. Viewed from the perspective of document analysis, it can be said that students study the status and rights of children. Content Area C4 – nature and a sustainable future – concerns the exploration of different forms of life on Earth and research on the finite nature

of human life, along with examinations of choices and actions which students view as helping them to “seek meaningful experiences related to nature” (p. 150). I suggest that this part of curriculum fits within social constructivism in cognitive psychology, where efforts are made in the production of knowledge (Prawat, 1998). As a result, the production of knowledge is perceived as a process of personal meaning; if values are linked to this knowledge, personal meaning is more significant. The conclusion is that this process can reinforce students’ ability to use sets of values in their lives.

Concerning the curriculum, Buzelli (1992) suggested that the formulation of moral intelligence in children is vitally shaped in the two years following birth. In accordance with Dunn (1988), emotional and social development of learners is intimately linked to moral development. Truth, composure, security, contentedness, justice, freedom, equality and love are particular values in this regard. Children learn about values not only in their homes, but from their peers, the media, and their local community. Children arrive at school with a catalogue of various values from their experiences at day-care centers or kindergarten. Consequently, elementary schools supplement the values children have already acquired and develop values that are omnipresent in society.

According to the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014, it is valid to use working methods which contribute to the creation of a safe, psychologically, and socially open learning environment. The core curriculum presents objectives such as culture, worldview, and ethics, which reinforce students’ self-efficacy in providing guidance and support. Efforts are made to foster a physical learning environment, in terms of both teaching and learning. “Inquiry-based group discussions led by the teacher are enriched with functional activities, fairy tales, stories, play, music, visual arts, and drama” (National Core Curriculum, 2016, p. 150). To sum up this discussion, the subject of ethics supports students’ opportunities to understand and identify with various worldviews. Certainly, the choice of varied teaching methods by Finnish ethics teachers is the key to success in their individual approach to pupils. It seems reasonable to assume that learning at this level in Finland is perceived as a process

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that helps students to build their “identity, understanding of humanity, worldview, and philosophy of life and to find their place in the world.”

### **Conclusion**

Finnish teachers, by using sets of school values embedded in the curriculum, teach students how to actively participate in society and to respect differences between citizens, especially in a multicultural society. The article presented the objectives of the subject of ethics in the Finnish elementary education curriculum and the strengths of the values it develops.

The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014 stresses the right of each child to a good education. The National Core Curriculum (2016, p.15) defined perspective learning as a procedure through which learners are able to discover their location in the world, their life philosophy, world perspective, comprehension of humanity and their identity.

In this light, students are taught how to recognize the difference between good and bad, how to understand human goodness, and the meaning of friendship.

Every child’s development is shaped by sympathetic and ethical disputes, in addition to the right to advocate for sound reason, according to the humanistic standpoint. Students’ holistic well-being is strengthened in basic education through cooperation between the values promoted in schools and in their homes. As a result, students are capable of making decisions following ethical reflection. The document emphasizes the importance of the ethical and esthetic perspective in guiding students towards a realization of what is valuable in their lives. As a result, students are able to take action and to show respect to other people.

In Content Areas C1–C4, each student learns conversational skills through the respectful process of listening to others, answering the question, “Who am I?,” and understanding different lifestyles in the “context of his or her own family and cultural background” (National Core Curriculum, 2014, p. 150). In this light, the student not only recognizes the meanings

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of rules, trust, honesty, and fairness in various life situations, but also explores different forms of life on Earth and research into the finite nature of human life.

Viewed from the perspective of the curriculum, basic education in Finland affirms sustainable development with eco-social knowledge, which contributes to the creation and understanding of sustainable ways of living, the inviolability of human dignity, and the sustainable use of natural resources, especially with regard to climate change. Elementary school students discuss conflicts between different styles of consumption and the country's production in order to learn to value cross-generational responsibility.

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## La Educación de los hijos en *Amoris Laetitia* a la luz de la filosofía tomista [The Education of Children in *Amoris Laetitia* in Light of Thomist Philosophy]

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**Resumen:**

Este artículo se ocupa del significado esencialmente humano y personal de la educación que nos presenta la Exhortación Apostólica *Amoris Laetitia* del Papa Francisco. Se realiza este trabajo en razón del “Año de la Familia” establecido para celebrarse desde marzo de 2021 a junio de 2022.

Verdadera respuesta a la “emergencia educativa” denunciada a partir de enero de 2008 en el Mensaje del Santo Padre Benedicto XVI a la Diócesis de Roma. Mediante un estudio del capítulo VII de la mencionada carta (Papa Juan Pablo II, 1998), denominado “Fortalecer la educación de los hijos”, se analiza y compara con los principios filosóficos universalmente reconocidos en la historia acerca de la educación, especialmente en Santo Tomás de Aquino, en lo que se refiere a la formación moral de los hijos, reconociendo la significativa y fundamental responsabilidad de los padres en esta importante materia.

Al finalizar el análisis se concluye que el texto magisterial está enraizado en la tradición del pensamiento filosófico cristiano y que, como tal, colabora, como luz y guía, en la labor educativa de los padres y, por tanto, en dar

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solución a los problemas que enfrenta la educación hoy en día; pero respecto de la filosofía del ser tomista, no podemos decir que exista un fundamento en esta metafísica, aunque es perfectamente complementaria (Pontificia Academia Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, 2010).

*Palabras claves:* *Amoris Laetitia*, Santo Tomás, conocimiento, educación, amor.

**Abstract:**

This article deals with the essentially human and personal meaning of education presented to us by Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. This work is carried out because of the "Family Year" established to be celebrated from March 2021 to June 2022.

It is intended to show that the Exhortation is a true response to the "educational emergency" denounced by Pope Benedict XVI since 2008. A study of chapter VII of the above-mentioned letter, entitled "Towards a better education of children", analyzes and compares with the philosophical principles universally recognized in history about education, especially in St. Thomas Aquinas, with regard to the moral formation of children, recognizing the significant and fundamental responsibility of parents in this important matter.

At the end of the analysis it is concluded that the magisterial text is rooted in the tradition of Christian philosophical thought and that, as such, it collaborates, as a light and guide, in the educational work of parents and, therefore, in providing solutions to the problems facing education today; but with regard to the philosophy of the Thomistic being, we cannot say that there is a basis in this metaphysics, although it is perfectly complementary.

*Keywords:* *Amoris Laetitia*, St Thomas, knowledge, education, love.

**Introducción**

El tema de la educación siempre es relevante en nuestras vidas, está presente en la conciencia de todas las personas, de tal modo que cada uno se sabe contingente, caduco, necesitado de perfección y de ayuda

por parte de otros, como también, se descubre con cierta capacidad para guiar y colaborar a que otros puedan alcanzar alguna perfección moral; además, es un tema que está presente en lo cotidiano de una conversación familiar o en las políticas de los países de nuestro mundo. Porque, de alguna manera, todos tenemos presente que necesitamos de educación, y que, como se educa, es como se vive.

También la Iglesia Católica se ha pronunciado sobre esta materia, así vemos que en el Concilio Vaticano II, considerado unos de los documentos eclesiológicos más importantes de los últimos tiempos, se ha ponderado atentamente la gravísima importancia de la educación en la vida del hombre y su influjo cada vez mayor en el progreso social contemporáneo (Concilio Vaticano II. *Gravissimum educationis*, 1965).

Recordemos, además, las sentidas palabras del Papa Benedicto XVI a comienzos del 2008, en las cuales develaba una crisis o “emergencia educativa” de carácter universal, “confirmada por los fracasos en los que muy a menudo terminan nuestros esfuerzos por formar personas sólidas, capaces de colaborar con los demás y de dar un sentido a su vida” (Papa Benedicto XVI, 2008b). Tengamos presente que, en aquella ocasión, el Papa no sólo se limitó a denunciar el problema, sino que, al año siguiente, también solicitó a todo el mundo académico dar una respuesta a la crisis, entregando él mismo, como veremos, diversas orientaciones para saber cómo enfrentarse al escollo.

Después de un tiempo, el Papa Benedicto XVI (2008a) insistía en el tema, diciendo: “me parece necesario ir hasta las raíces profundas de esta emergencia para encontrar también las respuestas adecuadas a este desafío”, y planteó dos raíces problemáticas de esta emergencia, con sus respectivas soluciones, las cuales sucintamente quedan expresadas del siguiente modo: En primer lugar, “una raíz esencial consiste en un falso concepto de autonomía del hombre”, para lo cual propone “superar esta falsa idea de autonomía del hombre, como un «yo» completo en sí mismo, mientras que llega a ser «yo» también en el encuentro colectivo con el «tú» y con el «nosotros»”, es decir, nadie se educa a sí mismo, tema que no ayudará a comprender mejor la necesidad de fortalecer la educación de los hijos; y en segundo lugar,

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la otra raíz de la emergencia educativa es el escepticismo y el relativismo o, con palabras más sencillas y claras (afirmaba el mismo Papa Benedicto), la exclusión de las dos fuentes que orientan el camino humano. La primera fuente debería ser la naturaleza; la segunda, la Revelación (Papa Benedicto XVI, 2010)

Ante esta situación mundial, y frente al notable llamado de la Iglesia a dar respuesta a la “emergencia educativa” (Papa Benedicto XVI, 2008a) de acuerdo con las dos orientaciones mencionadas, se destaca la Exhortación Apostólica *Amoris Laetitia* del Papa Francisco, que trata directamente de la educación en unos de sus capítulos (Papa Francisco, 2016).

A partir de esto, nos proponemos en este artículo mostrar cómo algunos aspectos de la concepción filosófica de la educación, según el patrimonio universal de la humanidad (Papa Juan Pablo II, 1998), están presentes en la encíclica *Amoris Laetitia*, especialmente en su capítulo VII. De ese modo podremos mostrar que el capítulo mencionado colabora a dar respuesta a la emergencia educativa desde una «fuente natural» según la nomenclatura empleada por el Papa Benedicto. Además, a pesar de que en el capítulo VII de *Amoris* no se cita en ningún momento al Aquinate, pretendemos tratar algunos temas de Santo Tomás que resultan complementarios al texto del magisterio y que son, a nuestro parecer, de gran importancia para un posterior estudio (Papa Juan Pablo II, 1998).

### **Fortalecer la educación de los hijos**

Como indicamos en la introducción, desarrollaremos el artículo centrados en el capítulo VII de *Amoris Laetitia*, titulado: “Fortalecer la educación de los hijos”, para mostrar los alcances filosóficos y complementar, a su vez, con el Aquinate. Comencemos por recordar la conocidísima definición que nos heredó Santo Tomás, en ella nos dice que la educación es la conducción y promoción de la prole al estado perfecto del hombre, en cuanto hombre, que es el estado de virtud (Aquino, 2005, *In IV Sent.*, dist. 26, q. 1, a. 1.). Si nos interrogamos acerca de quién educa, la respuesta

es obvia, respecto de los primeros responsables, ya que se trata de educar a los hijos. Vislumbramos, en el texto magisterial la referencia a los padres en su rol como educadores. A partir de la lectura del mismo título del capítulo séptimo: "Fortalecer la educación de los hijos" podemos intuir la relación al rol de los padres; vemos, además, en el mismo texto, que desde el inicio nos dice el Papa: "los padres siempre inciden en el desarrollo moral de los hijos" (Papa Francisco, 2016), lo cual implica, no sólo una gran responsabilidad, sino también su importancia, lo cual nos invita a comprender, en el cuerpo de este artículo, el correcto ejercicio de la paternidad.

Complementando lo anterior, el Papa Francisco agrega: "ya que esta función educativa de las familias es tan importante y se ha vuelto muy compleja, quiero detenerme especialmente en este punto" (Papa Francisco, 2016), y enfatiza esto diciendo en el mismo texto citado: "la familia no puede renunciar a ser lugar de sostén, de acompañamiento, de guía" (Papa Francisco, 2016). Tema que tendremos presente en el resto de este trabajo.

Bajo estos parámetros entendemos las palabras del Papa en las que le otorga gran responsabilidad a los padres en la tarea educativa, de tal modo que sus acciones inciden no sólo profundamente en la vida de los hijos, sino que, además, de suyo, son determinantes de sus vidas. En este sentido, el Santo Padre Francisco afirma que los padres ejercen sobre sus hijos una influencia insustituible. Así nos dice:

El desarrollo afectivo y ético de una persona requiere de una experiencia fundamental: creer que los propios padres son dignos de confianza. Esto constituye una responsabilidad educativa: generar confianza en los hijos con el afecto y el testimonio, inspirar en ellos un amoroso respeto. Cuando un hijo ya no siente que es valioso para sus padres, aunque sea imperfecto, o no percibe que ellos tienen una preocupación sincera por él, eso crea heridas profundas que originan muchas dificultades en su maduración. Esa ausencia, ese abandono afectivo, provoca un dolor más íntimo que una eventual corrección que reciba por una mala acción (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 263).

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Por ello la familia, entendida como aquella primera comunidad nuclear en la sociedad, es la institución primordial para el desarrollo de la vida moral de las personas, pues en ella se encuentra el ámbito de aceptación incondicional que todo ser humano necesita para crecer en la virtud. Sin la familia la persona crecerá subdesarrollada desde el punto de vista afectivo y ético, porque es el ámbito donde trasuntan nuestros deseos y aspiraciones más profundas:

La familia es la primera escuela de los valores humanos, en la que se aprende el buen uso de la libertad. Hay inclinaciones desarrolladas en la niñez, que impregnan la intimidad de una persona y permanecen toda la vida como una emotividad favorable hacia un valor o como un rechazo espontáneo de determinados comportamientos. Muchas personas actúan toda la vida de una determinada manera porque consideran valioso ese modo de actuar que se incorporó en ellos desde la infancia, como por ósmosis: «A mí me enseñaron así»; «eso es lo que me inculcaron» (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 274).

Hay un segundo aspecto a distinguir, complementario a lo anterior, aunque más bien propio de Santo Tomás (Aquino, 2005). Los padres, aunque son los primeros educadores de la prole, no causan la ciencia en los hijos, sino que buscan que éstos, desde sus principios intelectuales y morales, causen la ciencia en sí. Esta sentencia tomista nos ayudará a entender que la causa eficiente de la educación del hijo es el mismo hijo o educando, porque, como resulta obvio, nadie entiende por otro, ni ama libremente por otro, las acciones pertenecen a la persona que las realiza, como su dueña, y en su riqueza personal, de un modo único e irrepetible.

Analicemos brevemente la doctrina tomista. Como bien sabemos, Santo Tomás da particular importancia a la enseñanza, dentro de lo que corresponde al conjunto de las acciones humanas según vemos en el sistemático desarrollo de la Suma Teológica (*S. Th.* I, q. 117, a. 1). Esto quiere decir que destaca sobremanera aquellas acciones por las que una persona colabora a que otra adquiera conocimiento, lo cual pertenece esencialmente



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al ámbito de la educación. Recordemos y analicemos algunos aspectos esenciales de estas acciones de acuerdo con el texto de la Suma:

El hombre adquiere la ciencia a veces por un principio interno, como es el caso de quien investiga por sí mismo; y, a veces, por un principio externo, como es el caso del que es enseñado. Pues a cada hombre le va anejo un principio de ciencia, la luz del entendimiento agente, por el que, ya desde el comienzo y por naturaleza, se conocen ciertos principios universales comunes a todas las ciencias. Cuando uno aplica estos principios universales a casos particulares cuyo recuerdo o experiencia le suministran los sentidos, por investigación propia adquiere la ciencia de cosas que ignoraba, pasando de lo conocido a lo desconocido. De ahí que también todo el que enseña procura conducir al que aprende de las cosas que éste ya conoce al conocimiento de las que ignora, siguiendo aquello que se dice (Aristóteles) en *I Poster.:* *Toda enseñanza, dada o adquirida, procede de algún conocimiento previo* (S. Th. I, q. 117, a. 1.).

Lo anterior lo podemos expresar del siguiente modo: los padres proponen los instrumentos necesarios para que el hijo aprenda propiamente desde sí mismo. Estos son, por ejemplo, todos los signos sensibles aptos para comunicar la ciencia. Y a través de estos signos sensibles se presentan a la inteligencia las especies inteligibles que la hacen fecunda (Canals Vidal, 1987). Es el hijo quien, movido desde la actualidad del entendimiento agente, se mueve al aprendizaje, formando las concepciones inteligibles, cuyos signos los padres proponen, al modo como el médico causa la salud en el paciente ayudando a que la naturaleza alcance su fin natural (S. Th. I, q. 117, a.1, ad 1 y 3.). Estos signos sensibles, que el maestro suministra o propone, son la verdadera causa instrumental y no los padres (Aquino, 2005):

El maestro puede contribuir de dos maneras al conocimiento del discípulo. La primera, suministrándole algunos medios o ayudas

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de los cuales pueda usar su entendimiento para adquirir la ciencia, tales como ciertas proposiciones menos universales, que el discípulo puede fácilmente juzgar mediante sus previos conocimientos, o dándole ejemplos palpables, o cosas semejantes, o cosas opuestas a partir de las que el entendimiento del que aprende es llevado al conocimiento de algo desconocido (*S. Th. I*, q. 117, a. 1.).

Detengámonos un momento en aquello que dice el Aquinate: “el hombre puede adquirir ciencia por sí mismo”, lo cual delata que de algún modo es causa eficiente para sí, por lo menos en lo que se trata de adquirir ciencia, porque entender es propio del alma inteligente. Y como nadie entiende por otro, le puede ayudar colaborando, orientando y promoviendo, como el médico ayuda a la naturaleza para que ésta cause la salud en el enfermo (*S. Th. I*, q. 117, a. 1, ad 4.). Se concluye que los padres transmiten su ciencia a los hijos desde su propia formalidad inherente, la ciencia, pero es el hijo, desde la luz del intelecto agente y sus primeros principios, quien aprende. Por ello, dice Santo Tomás que la ciencia se adquiere “a través de un principio interno”, porque le es propio al alma “un principio de ciencia”, al que Santo Tomás llama “entendimiento agente”, es decir, la misma alma en cuanto que es principio de conocimiento, porque siendo el alma humana subsistente se tiene presente a sí misma, y teniendo presente, se sabe siendo, sabe que es ella.

Por ello deducimos, con el Doctor Angélico, que los padres suministran una ayuda externa para que sea el hijo quien aprenda. Luego, son los padres quienes actúan sobre la naturaleza del hijo para que éste adquiera mediante ayudas externas los conocimientos necesarios de lo que es apto para aprender (*S. Th. I*, q. 117, a. 1, ad 4.) La luz del intelecto es puesta como la causa principal del aprendizaje, luz que los padres presuponen en el hijo y que no la causan (Aquino, 1967).

Los temas tomistas que hemos traído a colación nos pueden ayudar a complementar las palabras del Papa Francisco; así ocurre, por ejemplo, con el siguiente texto:

Cuando se proponen valores, hay que ir de a poco, avanzar de diversas maneras de acuerdo con la edad y con las posibilidades concretas de las personas, sin pretender aplicar metodologías rígidas e inmutables. Los aportes valiosos de la psicología y de las ciencias de la educación muestran la necesidad de un proceso gradual en la consecución de cambios de comportamiento, pero también la libertad requiere cauces y estímulos, porque abandonarla a sí misma no garantiza la maduración (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 273).

Por otra parte, siguiendo con nuestro breve análisis tomista, el segundo modo de contribuir al conocimiento de los hijos, según nos sigue diciendo el Aquinate, es: “fortaleciendo el entendimiento del que aprende” (*S. Th. I, q. 117, a. 1.*), pero “no mediante alguna virtud activa como si el entendimiento del que enseña fuese de una naturaleza superior” (*S. Th. I, q. 106, a.2; q. 111, a.1*), puesto que todos los entendimientos humanos son de un mismo grado en el orden natural, sino en cuanto que se hace ver al hijo la conexión de los principios con las conclusiones, en el caso de que no tenga suficiente poder comparativo para deducir por sí mismo tales conclusiones de tales principios. De este modo, cuando los padres enseñan por «demostración», según la nomenclatura tomista, ayudan a que el hijo adquiera ciencia (*S. Th. I, q. 117, a. 1.*).

Por tanto, los padres, aunque no son causa eficiente del entender del hijo, ni de la adquisición de la virtud por parte de éste, son, según las palabras del Papa, son los principales responsables de la educación, en cuanto a la conducción y promoción de los hijos a adquirir conocimiento y virtud, participando de este modo de la paternidad divina, según nos dice el Aquinate (*S. Th. I, q. 117, a. 1, ad 3.*).

Ahora, para analizar otro aspecto, tratemos de responder la pregunta: ¿para qué educar? Siguiendo la lógica de Santo Tomás entramos en consideración de la causa final de la educación. Como es propio de la razón de fin, será aquello último en alcanzar, pero que, sin lo cual, nada se haría, y, por esto, es lo primero que se pretende (*In IV Sent., dist. 26, q. 1, a. 1*). Como afirma el Aquinate: el fin de la educación es el “estado de

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virtud" (S.Th. I.II. q.1, a.1, ad 1.), aunque en el texto magisterial no se presenta este tema directamente, veamos qué significa en el Aquinate. Para Santo Tomás el estado perfecto del hombre significa la adquisición de la virtud. Esta perfección no le corresponde al hombre por esencia, sino en cuanto sujeto perfectible por el correcto ejercicio de su libertad, y es un "estado" porque cabe poseer esta perfección aún mientras no se esté ejerciendo la virtud, y esto sólo se consigue por la perfección estable que otorga la virtud.

Encontramos en el texto magisterial la referencia al tema: "La tarea de los padres incluye una educación de la voluntad y un desarrollo de hábitos buenos e inclinaciones afectivas a favor del bien" (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 264). Y más adelante nos dice el Papa: "Es necesario desarrollar hábitos. También las costumbres adquiridas desde niños tienen una función positiva, ayudando a que los grandes valores interiorizados se traduzcan en comportamientos externos sanos y estables" (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 266).

Una vez más, busquemos complementar con Santo Tomás. Primero, tengamos presente aquello de "todo agente obra por un fin" (S.Th. I.II, q. 1, a. 1.). En nuestro caso, son los padres, como agentes, los que educan para que el hijo alcance el estado de virtud. Pero, no basta con advertir el fin inmediato y propio de algo, en este caso de la educación, porque, como también nos recuerda el Aquinate, no podemos elaborar una escala infinita de fines, ya que no habría movimiento alguno en el agente, luego, necesariamente hay que tener presente el fin último, aquel que satisface todo movimiento, es decir, Dios, que como ser perfectísimo satisface toda necesidad y en cual se alcanza la felicidad plena y absoluta (S.Th. I.II. aa. 7 y 8.).

Por tanto, cuando tratamos de la educación en *Amoris Laetitia* no podemos perder de vista, lo más importante: que todas las acciones educativas se realizan en vista de la felicidad del hijo, como fin último. Porque, el estado de virtud tiene, a su vez, como fin, el ser feliz: fin último de toda la vida del hombre (S.Th. I.II, q. 3, a. 1).

Así entonces, cuando el Santo Padre inicia el documento *Amoris Laetitia* diciendo: "La alegría del amor que se vive en las familias es también

el júbilo de la Iglesia”, o cuando se pregunta: “¿Dónde están los hijos?” (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 261), podemos dirigirnos a pensar en el fin último, porque es donde se encuentra la alegría plena, y es también la razón última de la pregunta que se hace el Papa. Así vamos entendiendo los textos magisteriales de acuerdo con el último Fin.

Al Santo Padre Francisco le preocupa entonces “generar procesos, más que dominar espacios” (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 261). Obviamente nos podemos preguntar: ¿generar procesos para qué? La respuesta acertada nos podrá, evidentemente, conducir al del fin último. Veamos qué nos dice el texto magisterial:

Si un padre está obsesionado por saber dónde está su hijo y por controlar todos sus movimientos, sólo buscará dominar su espacio. De ese modo no lo educará, no lo fortalecerá, no lo preparará para enfrentar los desafíos. Lo que interesa sobre todo es generar en el hijo, con mucho amor, procesos de maduración de su libertad, de capacitación, de crecimiento integral, de cultivo de la auténtica autonomía. Sólo así ese hijo tendrá en sí mismo los elementos que necesita para saber defenderse y para actuar con inteligencia y astucia en circunstancias difíciles (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 261).

Entendemos con esto, que los padres deben procurar la adquisición de las virtudes en el hijo en orden a un crecimiento en perfección del ejercicio de la libertad, para que así, siendo dueño de sí mismo, pueda amar verdaderamente. Nos parece apropiado ir pensando en el para qué final. Además, el Papa Francisco (2016), afirma:

Entonces la gran cuestión no es dónde está el hijo físicamente, con quién está en este momento, sino dónde está en un sentido existencial, dónde está posicionado desde el punto de vista de sus convicciones, de sus objetivos, de sus deseos, de su proyecto de vida. Por eso, las preguntas que hago a los padres son: ¿Intentamos comprender “dónde” están los hijos realmente en su

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camino? ¿Dónde está realmente su alma, lo sabemos? Y, sobre todo, ¿queremos saberlo? (p. 261)

Por otra parte, como segundo epígrafe del mismo capítulo séptimo que estamos analizando, el Papa Francisco titula: “formación ética de los hijos” (Papa Francisco, 2016), lo cual nos hace tener presente nuevamente el tema subyacente del fin último nombrado más arriba. De la mano de Santo Tomás hemos de decir que sólo en vista del fin último podemos desarrollar cualquier formación ética, y dependiendo de la veracidad de este fin, será la veracidad de la formación.

Al finalizar el Papa Francisco en el capítulo que tratamos, haciendo una consideración teológica del tema, nos dice que: “La educación de los hijos debe estar marcada por un camino de transmisión de la fe” (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 287), desde la mirada sobrenatural evidentemente es Dios el fin último, es decir, la Santísima Trinidad. Con esto el Santo Padre Francisco nos conduce a realizar una mirada teológica, elevando la filosófica o la razón natural, al ámbito de lo sobrenatural, y por ello, a lo más luminoso y verdadero.

Por último, podemos apreciar que el Santo Padre Francisco nos habla de la necesidad de adquirir la virtud a través de un proceso que se da en el tiempo. Por tanto, la perfección a la que se aspira, obviamente, hay que lograrla progresivamente, es un fin por alcanzar, a través del buen ejercicio de las acciones humanas, por lo que el Papa nos dice: “siempre se trata de un proceso que va de lo imperfecto a lo más pleno” (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 264). Luego, se trata del ejercicio de la libertad que tiene su sustento en el conocimiento de la verdad; porque, de lo contrario, nos asegura el Papa Francisco: “si la madurez fuera sólo el desarrollo de algo ya contenido en el código genético, no habría mucho que hacer” (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 262), sería algo ajeno a la vida personal, caracterizada por el ejercicio de la libertad y por la conciencia de ejercerla.

Lo anterior lo expresa el Papa Francisco con las siguientes palabras: “Lo que interesa sobre todo es generar en el hijo, con mucho amor, procesos de maduración de su libertad, de capacitación, de crecimiento integral, de cultivo de la auténtica autonomía” (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 265),

y más adelante dice: “el fortalecimiento de la voluntad y la repetición de determinadas acciones construyen la conducta moral, y sin la repetición consciente, libre y valorada de determinados comportamientos buenos no se termina de educar dicha conducta. Las motivaciones, o el atractivo que sentimos hacia determinado valor, no se convierten en una virtud sin esos actos adecuadamente motivados” (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 266).

El vínculo entre el ejercicio de las virtudes, como aquello que es lo formal de la educación, con el estado de virtud, como aquello que es el fin al que se aspira, lo presenta el Papa Francisco afirmando respecto de lo que podríamos considerar en el texto magisterial el final del proceso educativo: “La virtud es una convicción que se ha transformado en un principio interno y estable del obrar. La vida virtuosa, por lo tanto, construye la libertad, la fortalece y la educa, evitando que la persona se vuelva esclava de inclinaciones compulsivas deshumanizantes y antisociales” (Papa Francisco, 2016, p. 267).

## Conclusión

Respecto de la tesis inicial, podemos decir que hemos visto a lo largo del artículo que las palabras magisteriales expresan, en su fundamento, varios de los principales principios de la filosofía de la educación, entendida ésta, como perteneciente a aquel patrimonio intelectual y universal de la humanidad que mencionábamos en la introducción. Especialmente en lo que se refiere a la moral y al fin de la educación, ya que se hace especial énfasis en el desarrollo de las virtudes, como en respetar la libertad de los hijos en el proceso educativo, en orden a un verdadero ejercicio de la libertad.

Es por esto que podemos afirmar que el texto de *Amoris Laetitia*, especialmente en el capítulo VII (Papa Francisco, 2016) que hemos tratado, hace un especial aporte doctrinal a la respuesta que la Iglesia nos ha invitado hacer por boca del Papa Benedicto XVI (2008), ante la emergencia educativa que sufre la humanidad en nuestros tiempos. Considerando temas en el ámbito natural o filosófico ilumina el quehacer educativo

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de los padres y exhorta con fuerza a asumir la misión educativa propia de los progenitores.

Por otra parte, respecto del segundo aspecto que planteaba nuestro artículo, en lo referente a la metafísica tomista, creemos que el texto de *Amoris Laetitia* contiene principios filosóficos suficientes para ser complementada y desarrollada según la filosofía del ser tomista (Aquino, 2005). A pesar de que el Aquinate no es citado ni tratado de modo específico en el capítulo que hemos analizado, la doctrina del Santo Doctor se hace perfectamente complementaria y necesaria para profundizar en posteriores estudios (Aquino, 1967).

Queda patente en el texto magisterial la importancia de los padres de familia, cuya presencia y acción es vital en el proceso educativo, no sólo en lo referente a alcanzar la vida virtuosa, sino también en crear el ambiente emocional favorable para que crezcan los hábitos virtuosos correspondientes (Papa Francisco, 2016). En esta tarea peculiar, los padres ejercen una particular causalidad, pues colaboran con su vida y ejemplo a que se alcance la perfección necesaria para llegar a la plenitud moral y ética que no sólo exige el concepto de educación, sino que es fundamental para la felicidad de los hijos (Pontificia Academia de Santo Tomás de Aquino, 2019).

Además, siendo el hombre creado por Dios y para Dios, y que la razón de la creación se funda en la bondad divina, hemos de destacar, como elemento clave del texto magisterial, el amor con que se educa, ya que, de modo análogo al acto creador, lo formal del acto educativo por parte de los padres debe ser el amor, como, a su vez, la razón final debe ser el Amor, que es Dios mismo (S.Th. I, q.93.). En definitiva, la educación de los hijos es el acto de amor más importante que pueden realizar los padres y es lo que más conduce a la plenitud de la vida personal de éstos en cuanto padres.



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## Determinants of an Old Text in the Field of Pedagogy on the Example of *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] by Janusz Korczak

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### Abstract

The scientific aim of the article is to present the characteristics of an old text: *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] by Janusz Korczak. The method adopted for the article is a semantic and structural analysis of the pedagogical book, in which the educator presented issues regarding key concepts of pedagogy, such as education, upbringing, and care. The pedagogy book under analysis does not fit into the contemporary framework of scientific language, but it still brings up-to-date findings on pedagogical practice. Janusz Korczak's pedagogical texts should be obligatorily included in the reading canon of theoreticians and practitioners of education.

*Keywords:* Janusz Korczak, concept, pedagogical term, education, history of education, scientific language, child's rights

### Introduction

Janusz Korczak, as Barbara Smolińska-Theiss (2014, pp. 67–70) wrote, was not permanently affiliated with any university pedagogy department,

but was among the practitioners in the broader social and academic movement. He entered the field of pedagogy as a doctor, a member of the Warsaw Hygiene Society. Korczak's educational activity was done at summer camps – which he attended with Warsaw children – in a boarding school for Polish boys in Kiev during World War I, at the Jewish Orphans' Home (*Dom Sierot*) in Warsaw – where he was the head from 1912 to 1942 – and at Our Home (*Nasz Dom*), the Warsaw orphanage for Polish children. The main themes of Korczak's pedagogical books are a system for raising orphaned children and the issues of bringing up a child in a family. Smolińska-Theiss (2014, p. 68), in her pedagogical monograph devoted to "the Old Doctor," emphasized that while most of the achievements of interwar educators have been lost, the texts Korczak published are read and interpreted anew, both in the country and abroad. The canon of his pedagogical works includes *Jak kochać dziecko* [How to love a child], *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect], *Momenty wychowawcze* [Educational moments], *Prawidła życia* [Rules of life], *Pedagogika żartobliwa* [Playful pedagogy], and numerous articles which were part of pedagogical journalism.

The subject of the conceptual analysis is the book entitled *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect], which was published in 1929 in Warsaw by the J. Mortkowicz Publishing Association. It is a small book consisting of five unnumbered parts:

- Lekceważenie – Nieufność [Disdain – Mistrust]<sup>1</sup> pp. 5–14
- Niechęć [Reluctance] pp. 15–24
- Prawo do szacunku [The Right to Respect] pp. 25–31
- Prawo dziecka, by było, czym jest [A Child's Right to be What They Are] pp. 33–40
- pp. 41–43 (the fifth and final part is untitled)

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<sup>1</sup> For the most part, the English translation by Sean Gasper Bye was used (Korczak, 2017). The text can be found here:

[http://brpd.gov.pl/sites/default/files/a\\_childs\\_right\\_to\\_respect\\_-\\_book.pdf](http://brpd.gov.pl/sites/default/files/a_childs_right_to_respect_-_book.pdf).

In the introduction to *Pedagogika żartobliwa* [Playful pedagogy] from 1939, the eminent educator wrote that the content of the book was presented in the form of a lecture: "Summarizing the series of lectures in a short brochure, I gave it the heading, "The Child's Right to Respect." The keynote was "a child is equally valuable to us" (Korczak, 1939, p. 5; cf. Korczak, 1993, p. 507). During the author's lifetime, this text was published only once, then it was reprinted many times (e.g., in 1993 and 2012).

### **The Aim of the Research and the Methodology Adopted in the Work**

The scientific aim of the article is to characterize the old scholarly book. I use the term "old" for monographs and articles published before World War II that present research within various scientific disciplines.

The method adopted for the article is semantic and structural analysis of the pedagogical text, in which the educator presented issues related to key concepts of pedagogy, such as education, upbringing, and care.

### ***Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] as an Old Text in the Field of Pedagogy**

According to the findings of numerous researchers dealing with the characteristics of scientific texts (e.g., Klemensiewicz, 1956; Gajda, 1990, 2001; Furdal, 2000; Wilkoń, 2000; Rejter, 2018), textual statements representing scientific language are characterized by particular content, resulting from their belonging to different scientific fields and reflected in the text being saturated with concepts and terms characteristic of a given scientific discipline. The fact that *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] is a work in the field of pedagogy is proven by the vocabulary representing the concepts characteristic of the field, among other things.

**Table 1. Pedagogical Concepts and the Vocabulary That Represents Them**

Concept	Lexical Representations (selection) <sup>2</sup>
Upbringing	<p>               dziecko [child] p. 5 ff.; prawa dziecka [a child's rights]; dorosły [adult p. 5 ff.]; pedagogia [pedology<sup>3</sup>] p. 37; rodzina [family] pp. 9, 15, 26; rodzice [parents] pp. 17, 26; ojciec [father] pp. 10, 42; matka [mother] pp. 17, 42; autorytet rodziny [authority of the family] p. 9; wychowawca [educator] pp. 17, 19, 33, 36, 39, 41; wychowawcy: rzadziej doradca i pocieszyciel, częściej surowy sędzia [educators: advisors and comforters are rare, while strict judges are common] p. 18; pochyła upadku wychowawcy [decline of an educator] p. 18; sąd dla nieletnich [juvenile court] p. 29; zakład poprawczy [correctional facility] p. 40             </p>
Education	<p>               dziecko [child] p. 5 ff.; prawa dziecka [a child's rights]; dorosły [adult] p. 5 ff.; autorytet szkoły [authority of the school] p. 26; wychowawca [educator] pp. 17, 19, 33, 36, 39, 41; pedagogia [pedology<sup>4</sup>] p. 37; powszechne nauczanie [universal education] p. 26; registracja i pobór szkolny [school registration and intake] p. 26; przymus pracy umysłowej [compulsion of intellectual work] p. 26; przymus powszechnego nauczania [constraints of universal education] p. 27; szkoła [school] pp. 17, 26, 27; nauczyciel [teacher] p. 20; wychowawca klasy [class tutor] p. 19; urzędnicy szkoły [school officials] p. 27; program szkół [school curriculum] p. 37; lata mozolnej nauki [years of hard learning] p. 7; egzamin [exams] p. 7; kształcić [educate] p. 8; szkolna wymówka [ploy to get out of school] p. 30; szkolna godzina [school hours] p. 35             </p>
Care	<p>               dziecko [child] p. 5 ff.; prawa dziecka [a child's rights]; dorosły [adult] p. 5 ff.; pedagogia [pedology] p. 37; nieuczciwy opiekun [dishonest caregivers] p. 26; prawy opiekun [virtuous caretaker] p. 17; rodzina [family] pp. 9, 15, 26; rodzice [parents] pp. 17, 26; ojciec [father] pp. 10, 42; matka [mother] pp. 17, 42; wychowawca [educator] pp. 17, 19, 33, 36, 39, 41; piastunka [nurse] p. 16; piastować [to nurse] p. 8; osłaniać [to protect] p. 8; żywić [to feed] p. 8; pilnować [to keep an eye on] p. 12; opieka szkoły [school care] p. 26; internat [boarding school] p. 37; wychowawca internatu [boarding school teacher] p. 19             </p>

Another determinant of the genre of a scientific text is avoiding first-person narrative. Nowadays, science recommends avoiding the singular forms of pronouns and verbs in monographs and articles due to the prevailing postulate that the objectivity of scientific communication is manifested in the impersonality of messages of this type. Old scientific texts often did not have this feature. In *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's

<sup>2</sup> The quoted terms come from the 1929 edition of the book *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect].

<sup>3</sup> Pedology was a science developing in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which dealt with the physical and mental development of children and adolescents, understood mainly as a process conditioned by biological and environmental factors. The root of the word, *pedo-*, indicates its semantic relationship with a child, descendant, or offspring and is derived from the Greek language (*país, paidós*: child) (Bańko, 2005).

Right to Respect], Korczak directly revealed his presence in the text several times, through pronoun and verb forms in the first-person singular. In the following passage, in an elliptical and then a personal form, he describes his efforts to understand one of the issues related to raising a child:

Years of work have made it ever more clear that children deserve respect, trust, and kindness; that they prosper in a sunny atmosphere of gentle feelings, cheerful laughter, lively first efforts, and surprises; of pure, bright, loving joy; where work is dynamic, fruitful, and beautiful. One thing has caused doubt and concern. Why, at times, does the most certain child disappoint? ... I have stubbornly kept seeking and, little by little, have found an answer. ... I found an explanation for this ... My observation is specific – clinical. (Korczak, 2017, pp. 23–25)

The author also revealed his presence directly in beautiful reflections on time:

When I play with or talk to children, two moments from my life and theirs intertwine, equally mature; when I am with a group of children, I always take time to say hello and goodbye to one of them with a look and a smile. When I am angry, we are once again joined together – but my anger, a single vengeful moment, violates and poisons this mature, important time of their lives. (Korczak, 2017, pp. 34)

The author reveals himself once again in the passage in which he describes how to work with difficult youth (“with the offspring of drunkenness, rape, and madness, with the despairing, rebellious” [pp. 38–39]):

I am reaching for the highest level of initiation, the most challenging revelation. The only thing transgressions and offenses call for is patient, kind understanding; wrongdoers require love. Their angry rebelliousness is justified. We must spurn

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easy virtue and take the side of the lonely, maligned offense.  
(Korczak, 1929, p. 39)

This direct way of revealing the subject of the utterance through the form of the first-person singular “I” is rare in this text, while the verb forms used in the first-person plural “we” and the second-person plural form “our” appear over 150 times, used to build an understanding with the readers. This linguistic procedure equates the author with the adult recipient to whom he addresses his message, thus slightly softening the tone of his harsh statements (e.g., “We command and demand to be heard” [p. 8]; “We snap and quarrel with children, chastising, reprimanding, punishing, and unkindly withholding information” [p. 28]). This procedure, often used by Korczak in his pedagogical works to include the author within a larger family or social group through the use of first-person plural forms, is important because of a specific feature of such a way of writing. Well, apparently *we* are the senders, *we* say it, but *I*-the author am writing it. The goal of such a strategy is to establish closer contact with the reader and to exert the desired influence on them, changing their way of thinking and acting (Sieradzka-Baziur, 2019a, 2019b). Sometimes the author of the text is also clearly revealed in second-person statements, when they address the recipients directly. Exponents of the dialogicality of this text are verb forms of the second-person singular and plural and pronoun forms (“you”):

A single small, weak child is wearying and individual transgressions are infuriating, but how maddening, beleaguering, demanding, and unpredictably impulsive is a group! Understand once and for all: not children, but a group (p. 19); A bunch, a gang, a pack – not children. One is accustomed to thinking one is strong; suddenly, one feels small and weak (p. 19); Children grow ... They grow by day and by night, when sleeping and feeling, when happy and sad, when they misbehave and when they stand repentant before you (Korczak, 1929, pp. 29–30).



The author also addresses the recipient using imperative forms: "Beware: it is the strong brutes who mold modern life, *homo rapax* – they dictate the way forward" (p. 43).

A characteristic feature of the text *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] is also the presence of emotionally marked forms, which are another manifestation of the textual manifestation of the subject of the utterance. This is done by communicating feelings using various names of emotional states or phraseologies (Bally, 1966; Grabias, 1981, 1994). Examples of language forms that Korczak (1929) used in this book in order to communicate feelings include *kochać* ["adore" (p. 15), *podziw* ["admiration" (p. 5), *cześć* ["honour" (p. 41), *wdzięczność* ["gratitude" (p. 17), *zawdzięczać* ["owe" (p. 8), *cieszyć (się)* ["enjoy/be happy" (pp. 5, 11, 35), *radość* ["joy" (pp. 5, 11, 15, 21, 22, 30, 31), *radość życzliwej przysługi* ["joy of selfless service" (p. 41), *uśmiech* ["smile" (pp. 25, 31, 35), *kwiat uśmiechu* ["flower of a smile" (p. 39), *roześmiać się* ["burst into giggles" (p. 16), *zadowolone* ["glad" (p. 9), *szczęście* ["happiness" (p. 11), *szczęśliwy* ["happy" (p. 15), *wesoły* ["cheerful" (pp. 30, 41), *ciepłe wzruszenia* ["positive emotions" (p. 41), *niechęć do obłudy* ["hatred of hypocrisy" (p. 39), *niechęć* ["hesitation" (p. 21), *uraza do dzieci* ["resentment towards children" (p. 16), *nie lubić* ["dislike" (p. 16), *nienawiść* ["hatred" (p. 39), *nieufność* ["mistrust" (p. 14), *cierpienie* ["suffering" (p. 24), *gorzyc młodych lat* ["bitterness of youth" (p. 29), *pochylona rezygnacja* ["stooped resignation" (p. 42), *bezdomny ból* ["homeless pain" (p. 24), *boleśnie* ["agonizingly" (p. 29), *smutek* ["sorrow" (p. 5), *rozczarowanie* ["disappointment" (p. 29), *przykrość* ["vexation" (p. 28), *żale* ["regrets" (p. 34), *poczucie niemocy* ["feeling of powerlessness" (p. 6), *uczucie niesmaku i winy* ["feeling of distaste and guilt" (p. 22), *bezpańskie opuszczenie* ["derelict abandonment" (p. 24), *niepokój* ["concern" (p. 12), *młode budzi niepokój* ["we fuss over the young" (p. 8), *mroczne przewidywania* ["dark predictions" (p. 12), and *niespokojne oczekiwanie* ["restless anticipation" (p. 8). Feelings are also expressed by the writer with the use of expressive linguistic signs, such as expressive, explicit word-forming constructions, metaphors, exclamation marks, etc. (Bally, 1966; Grabias, 1981, 1994). The well-known educator saturated his text with such words and expressions, through which he expressed

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various emotions. For example, to stigmatize bad attitudes of educators, he defined them using the following emotionally charged terms:

As educators, what is our role, what is our share of labor? Guardians of the walls and furniture, the calm of the yard, the cleanliness of ears and floors; shepherds for the youngsters so they do not stumble into harm, do not bother adults at work or happily on their days off; stewards of ragged knickerbockers and shoes; and miserly dispensers of porridge. Defenders of adult privilege and idle perpetrators of unprofessional caprices. A little jumble-store selling anxieties and admonitions, a market stall offering moral odds and ends, a license to sell denatured knowledge which intimidates, confuses, and lulls to sleep instead of awakening, enlivening, and cheering. Agents of cheap virtue, we are meant to force honor and humility onto children while warming adults' hearts and touching their positive emotions. Build a solid future on a shoestring budget, mislead and conceal that children are a multitude, a will, a power, and a law. (Korczak, 1929, pp. 41–42)

He expressed compassion about children, calling them "the race of children, the nation of the immature, the class of serfs" (p. 26). Adults expressing their negative feelings towards a child use such terms as "the immature are suspicious" (p. 13), "tiny tot" (p. 11), "little scruff-despot" (p. 15), "a hindrance" (p. 15), "little troublemaker" (p. 16), or "gang/pack" (p. 19).

Korczak expressed his feelings using specific syntactic structures, such as rhetorical questions – "How dare we blame and accuse?" (p. 23) – or exclamations with repetition – "Do not trample, do not abuse, do not enslave tomorrow, do not extinguish, do not rush, do not hasten" (p. 30).

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## Final conclusions

Janusz Korczak – the author and narrator of *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] – shows a strong emotional commitment through his text, and this expression of emotions is one of the main stylistic determinants of this old scientific text. It should also be added that in the work of the famous pedagogue there is no documentation in the form of quotes or footnotes and that no bibliographic data accompanies the text. The famous small book by the outstanding educator, published about 100 years ago, does not fit into the contemporary framework of scientific language, yet every serious academic teacher has read it. After all, the essence of pedagogy is not the efficient use of methodology or the sophisticated use of concepts and terms, but most of all the constant search for the truth about how to educate a person, how to look after them, to help them achieve their full humanity. For a hundred years, the pedagogical dimension has been found in *Prawo dziecka do szacunku* [A Child's Right to Respect] by all those who deal with the welfare and happiness of children. Smolińska-Theiss (2014, p. 51) wrote that Korczak

discovered the child, got to know their joys and cares and introduced them to science. Thus, he stripped the classic academic pedagogy of its façade, formalism, self-righteous scientism, concentration on measures, stages, regularities of development, and methods of working with a child. He introduced the realism of everyday life, common sense, and elements little known to pedagogy, such as a witticism, jokes, and literary narration.

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# Miscellaneous Articles

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## Proactive Coping in Youth and Old Age as an Indicator of Identity Formation in an Anormative Context

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### Abstract

**Objective:** This paper provides a comprehensive investigation of coping with distress, with a focus on the proactive approach, which is of particular significance for individuals who manage identity transition periods. The researchers discuss the findings from two independent projects which analyzed individual variation in strategies for coping with difficult situations at two sensitive periods for identity development: adolescence and old age. Both studies were conducted between 2014 and 2016. In the first project, proactivity preferences were analyzed in a sample of 332 adolescents. The second project on proactive strategy was larger, involving a sample of 1,552 seniors. The Proactive Coping Inventory for Adolescents (PCI-A) and the Proactive Coping Inventory for Adults (PCI) were used in the respective studies.

**Results:** Our findings show that the strategies preferred by the adolescent group included proactive coping, looking for emotional support, and

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preventive coping, whereas the results for the elderly group revealed a preference for looking for emotional support and reflective and preventive coping. Nevertheless, the proactive coping strategy was chosen by both adolescents and the elderly. The analysis demonstrated no statistically significant difference in the reflective coping strategy for the two age groups. **Conclusions:** These findings show that the assumptions of normative theories of human development are losing descriptive and explanatory functions in many contexts. Moreover, they argue for a more person-centered idiographic approach to studying the process of person development. This is how a growing body of decollective biographical pathways is being created (Loos, 2012).

*Keywords:* proactivity, adolescence, aging, transition, identity, medical practice, education

## Introduction

Globalization (Bauman, 2000; Lee, 2005; Błachnio, 2011; Cierzniewska, 2017) has opened up multiple areas of development and self-improvement for the modern person, but has also created some issues. The periods which are the most critical are adolescence and old age, in which a clear pluralization of lifestyles occur (Błachnio, 2013, 2017). The number of opportunities available to an individual (Wrosch and Freund, 2001; Błachnio, 2006) can result in a prolonged delay to early adulthood (Arnett, 2000, 2015), and possibly to old age as well.

Therefore, in Erikson's perspective, significant temporal changes are identified within adolescence and late adulthood, each including key solutions based on the earlier "capital" collected throughout life, and requiring that all the previous conflicts be dealt with. If they are satisfactorily resolved, it may lead to the achievement of a successful identity integration. However, in each of the periods in question, such integration has different constitutive and developmental meanings. It should be emphasized that in both adolescence and late adulthood the temporal perspective plays a special role (Erikson, 2002; Puchalska-Wasył & Oleś, 2008).

All spheres of human existence (ethos, soma, and psyche) are subject to changes which make it necessary to re-define oneself and accumulate the potential needed to the self-transgression. In Erikson's view, they include a longing for rebirth (Erikson, 1997, 2002). Both self-exploration and self-commitment, which are the key processes that shape an individual's identity, require an active "I" with a sense of authorship, self-directedness, and self-reliability (Erikson, 2002; Sedikides & Skowroński, 2004; Obuchowski & Błachnio, 2011). In this process of re-adaptation, the presence of other people is very important, as it provides identification patterns, as well as the opportunity to "confirm oneself," read the meanings, and finally to re-upgrade oneself and others through others (Erikson, 1997, 2002; Ricoeur, 2005).

The cultural patterns also give content to the ethos, soma, and psyche that creates a buffer against the sense of meaninglessness of one's existence (Boski, 2008). However, the modern excess of offers and opportunities introduces ambiguity to individual choice (Bauman, 2008). This forces people to look for, select, and interpret information. They create and recreate meanings and determine goals and the ways of achieving them (Baumeister, 1998). A reflective approach to one's dilemmas in life prevents one from being a mere passive viewer or the subject of others' manipulation. The sense of authorship and having an influence on reality protect one from negative information about oneself (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Such a synthetic description of the changes taking place in both adolescence and late adulthood illustrates certain similarities of developmental tensions and highlights common areas of the individual's commitment in going to another level in epigenesis.

Therefore, the global context of human life and development may be seen as a set of stressful situations which a person has to cope with. Depending on the strategy one adopts, the effects of one's actions differ in terms of expenditure and benefits. The need to take up developmental challenges and prepare new coping strategies, which occurs in both phases, is related to the optimization of individual development. This problem systemizes the model of proactive coping (Schwarzer & Taubert, 1999, as cited in Greenglass, 2002), which (1) links planning and prevention with

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the proactive mechanism of self-regulation that includes the intentional determination and consistent fulfilment of goals, (2) aims at ambitious and self-improving goals – a proactive approach – with the identification and use of social resources, and (3) proves the relationship between proactivity and the strategy of emotional coping (Greenglass, 2002). Proactivity positively correlates with well-being, the quality of the individual's life (Gamrowska & Gałkowska-Bachanek, 2014), and their life energy (Ogińska-Bulik, 2009).

In this aspect, proactive behavior, as compared to reactive behavior, becomes adaptive. It is not enough to diminish stress (Carver et al., 1989; Matthieu & Ivanoff, 2006; Walinga, 2008). Ideally, one anticipates difficult situations and, through proactive actions, prevents or limits the distress before it even occurs.

This proactivity is generally associated with youth. However, due to the economic environment being driven by new technologies and being globally competitive, many young people lose their stability and narrow their temporal perspective to the present. Over the past few decades, the retrospective orientation of seniors has also diminished. As a consequence of the "silver revolution," many elderly people are present-oriented, and some of them are even future-oriented.

These changes in the functioning of individuals and society raise the question of whether and to what extent young people and seniors show proactive coping in difficult situations. In case of youths, globalization leads to the deregulation of their life paths, especially in the educational and professional realms. Society's expectations of a young person are now multiplied. The process of learning has to be dynamic, and it should be fulfilled in an intercultural, virtualized space. Education does not only take place in a formal way, but it is omnipresent and easily accessible, which results in the fact that the only problem is selecting what is worth learning and understanding. Coping with the excess of opportunities generates anxiety and uncertainty, as society does not offer ready solutions. In the case of the "silver generation," the distress stems from the opportunity to counterbalance individual and environmental resources, on the one hand (Martin et al., 2001), and the pressure of matching the

model of aging in an attractive manner, on the other hand (Błachnio, 2017). Successful lifestyles of youths and seniors are culturally defined by extreme individualism (not being a burden to anyone); by emotionality (controlling and anticipating emotions, remaining distant in social interactions); by focusing on tasks and effectiveness (bringing added value makes one important); by consecutive projects (which become the meaning of life); and by the aggressive estheticization of life and body (illness, old age, and weakness are marginalized or even pushed out of the social sphere). The results of such cultural oppression are very serious for both groups. There is a constant sense of inadequacy that accompanies many people or even social groups, leading to destructive tendencies from depression or suicide to separatist movements and social revolutions (Cierzniewska, 2017; Marody, 2015). Therefore, for both groups, reactive or even preventive actions should be replaced with proactive activities.

Proactive entities are more efficient because they know that results do not depend on luck, coincidence, or favorable external circumstances. Their coping strategy in difficult situations is based on their own responsibility, vision of the future, and awareness of the available resources (Greenglass, 2002). At the same time, they obtain the basis of positive self-valuation, which is precious for the construction of the "I" at every stage of development (Sedikides & Skowroński, 2004).

## **Objective**

The purpose of this study was to explore if coping strategies patterns differ in adolescence and aging. The research problem was to find out whether proactivity preferences occur during adolescence and are limited to this period. Changes due to globalization in economic mobility, the deregulation of life paths, and the self-exploitation of the individual (Kowalik, 2015) argue for a revision of the normative future orientation among adolescents. In turn, the widely disseminated paradigm of a successful, active old age leads seniors to abandon past orientation in favor of present or even future orientation. The subject of our empirical verification was

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to what extent the reconstruction of “coming of age” and “coming to wisdom” changes an individual’s preferences for coping strategies. The research was conducted in two separate projects using the same tool, but adapted to the given age groups; the Polish version of the Inventory of Coping with Difficult Situations was used (Pasikowski et al., 2002).

### **Method**

The data were collected between 2014 and 2016 in two independent projects. One related to various aspects of the functioning of adolescents, while the second focused on the determinants of successful aging among the elderly in Poland. The first study was carried out collectively in five schools in a population of pupils between the ages of 13 and 15, with a total of 332 completed questionnaires. For the selection criteria, please refer to Cierzniewska et al. (2017). The inclusion criteria for the group of elderly participants were as follows: at least 60 years of age, absence of diseases that may cause death within 6 months, and absence of significant cognitive disorders. The study sample included 1,555 respondents conducted via snowball sampling. The research was carried out individually with each participant being fully informed of their rights and the objective of the study as well as being asked to express their willingness to participate in the study. Three incomplete questionnaires were not taken into account in the analysis.

As previously mentioned, the study on proactively coping with difficult situations was carried out using the Polish version of the Proactive Coping Inventory for Adults (PCI) as well as the Proactive Coping Inventory for Adolescents (PCI-A) (Pasikowski et al., 2002). The tool in both versions consists of 55 items. The respondents gave their answers on a modified 4-point Likert scale (1 – never; 4 – always). The questionnaire included subscales describing various strategies for coping with difficult situations:

- (1) proactive coping scale (PCS; 14 items) – the formulation and fulfillment of objectives;

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- (2) reflective coping scale (RCS; 11 items) – the tendency to think about possible actions and compare their potential effectiveness;
  - (3) strategic planning scale (SPS; 4 items) – the process of creating goal-orientated action plans in which larger tasks are divided into smaller sub-tasks that are easier to carry out;
  - (4) preventive coping scale (PrevCS; 10 items) – predicting possible threats and stressors and preparing for them even before they fully manifest;
  - (5) instrumental support seeking scale (ISSS; 8 items) – the search for information, advice, and help from other people;
  - (6) emotional support seeking scale (ESSS; 5 items) – dealing with emotional distress by sharing one's feelings with others, evoking kindness, and searching for the company of friends; it is a kind of an emotional catharsis "with the use" of significant others; and
  - (7) avoidance coping scale (ACS; 3 items) – the tendency to avoid actions in the face of a difficult situation (Greenglass et al., 1999).

The collected data were analyzed using Statistica 12.5.

## **Results**

A total of 332 pupils (181 females [56%], 126 males [34%], and 25 missing data [7.5%]) participated in the adolescent study. The mean age was 14.98 years ( $Sd = 0.82$ ).

The sample of 1,552 seniors consisted of 840 females (54%) and 712 males (46%). The mean age of the participants in this project was 72.79 years ( $Sd = 7.15$ ). The age and sex distribution in both samples are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1. Age and Sex Distribution in the Samples**

Variable		Seniors (N = 1,552)		Adolescents (N = 332)	
		Women n = 840	Men n = 712	Women n = 181	Men n = 126
Age (years)	Average (Av)	72.49 (7.16)	73.16 (7.13)	14.94 (0.79)	15.04 (0.88)
	Min.–Max.	60–93	60–94	14–16	14–16

The reliability of the PCI and PCI-A was analyzed using Cronbach’s  $\alpha$ . The coefficients for each sub-scale are presented in Table 2, which also shows the values of Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for the Canadian version of the tool and its Polish adaptation (Pasikowski et al., 2002).

**Table 2. Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  Values for Each Sub-Scale on the Proactive Coping Inventory Questionnaire**

Sub-scales	Canadian ( $\alpha$ )	Polish adaptation ( $\alpha$ )	PCI ( $\alpha$ )	PCI-A ( $\alpha$ )	No. of items in the sub-scale
Proactive Coping Scale (PCS)	0.85	0.87	0.84	0.76	14
Reflective Coping Scale (RCS)	0.79	0.86	0.86	0.83	11
Strategic Planning Scale (SPS)	0.83	0.74	0.68	0.63	4
Preventive Coping Scale (PrevCS)	0.71	0.79	0.76	0.74	10
Instrumental Support Seeking Scale (ISSS)	0.85	0.81	0.84	0.85	8
Emotional Support Seeking Scale (ESSS)	0.73	0.72	0.72	0.76	5
Avoidance Coping Scale (ACS)	0.61	0.67	0.68	0.55	3

The values of Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  for the PCI sub-scales (adults) fell within the range of 0.68 to 0.86, which are comparable to the results of the Canadian and Polish samples collected during the cultural adaptation of the tool (Pasikowski et al., 2002). The Cronbach’s  $\alpha$  values for the PCI-A (youths) sub-scales were slightly weaker; the weakest value of only



0.55 was obtained in the Avoidance Coping sub-scale. The value was a little higher for Strategic Planning (0.63), but this was still below the reference level of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (0.70). The shortest sub-scales included three and four items; therefore, we may assume that the values were satisfactory.

**Table 3. Inter-Correlations Between the PCI Sub-Scales**

Sub-scales	Canadian ( $\alpha$ )	Polish adaptation ( $\alpha$ )	PCI ( $\alpha$ )	PCI-A ( $\alpha$ )	No. of items in the sub-scale
Proactive Coping Scale (PCS)	0.85	0.87	0.84	0.76	14
Reflective Coping Scale (RCS)	0.79	0.86	0.86	0.83	11
Strategic Planning Scale (SPS)	0.83	0.74	0.68	0.63	4
Preventive Coping Scale (PrevCS)	0.71	0.79	0.76	0.74	10
Instrumental Support Seeking Scale (ISSS)	0.85	0.81	0.84	0.85	8
Emotional Support Seeking Scale (ESSS)	0.73	0.72	0.72	0.76	5
Avoidance Coping Scale (ACS)	0.61	0.67	0.68	0.55	3

As can be seen in Table 3, the PCS positively correlated with the PrevCS, RCS, and SPS. Similar results were obtained for the Canadian version of the tool as well as the Polish adaptation of the PCI (Pasikowski et al., 2002). Weaker positive correlations were obtained between the PCS and the ESSS, as well as between the PCS and the ISSS. The weakest negative correlation occurred between the PCS and the ACS. Those correlations also occurred in the Canadian and Polish measures, after the scale adaptation.

**Table 4. Inter-Correlations Between the PCI-A Sub-Scales**

Variable p < 0.05;	N = 332								
	M	St. Dev.	(PCS)	(RCS)	(SPS)	PrevCS	(ISSS)	(ESSS)	(ACS)
(PCS)	39.71	5.72	-	0.40	0.28	0.45	0.13	0.16	-0.33
(RCS)	29.94	5.65		-	0.48	0.67	0.27	0.15	-0.11
(SPS)	9.74	2.45			-	0.54	0.26	0.19	-0.12
PrevCS	28.31	4.63				-	0.21	0.17	-0.15
(ISSS)	21.57	4.87					-	0.72	-0.14
(ESSS)	14.22	3.36						-	-0.18
(ACS)	6.92	1.88							-

From a psychometric perspective, the results obtained from the PCI-A were weaker. In the correlation matrix, the direction of relations was maintained, but the values of the coefficients were weaker. The only exception was the higher value of the correlation coefficient between PCS and ACS, which was -0.33.

**Table 5. Strategies for Coping with Difficult Situations  
Among Adolescents and Seniors**

Project on adolescence	Students (N = 332)		Project on aging	Seniors (N = 1,552)	
	M	St. Dev.		M	St. Dev.
(PCS)	39.71	5.72	(PCS)	35.82	6.53
(RCS)	29.94	5.65	(RCS)	29.34	5.89
(SPS)	9.74	2.45	(SPS)	10.20	2.43
PrevCS	28.31	4.63	PrevCS	26.68	4.88
(ISSS)	21.57	4.87	(ISSS)	20.07	4.41
(ESSS)	14.22	3.36	(ESSS)	13.52	2.88
(ACS)	6.92	1.88	(ACS)	7.33	1.95

The results of the study show that the participants displayed a similar level in all of the strategies, without a definite prevalence of any of them. Basically, the strategy for proactive coping was preferred by the youths, while for the seniors it was the fourth most preferred strategy. In the case of the RCS, the average values were similar in both groups. In comparison to the youths, the seniors obtained higher results in the SPS and ACS. Those strategies were not preferred by them. They obtained the highest results in three sub-scales: looking for emotional support, as well as reflective and preventive coping. However, the strategies preferred by the youth included: proactive coping, ESSS and PrevCS. They also displayed a relatively high value in the RCS and ISSS. However, they clearly did not prefer behavior related to avoidance or building a strategy.

## **Discussion**

The study indicated that the nature of developmental challenges faced by people “coming of age” and “coming to wisdom” are relatively similar. In both adolescence and old age, an individual (re)discovers their own potential and (re)constructs their identity. Young people attempt to achieve autonomy, new social status, and high self-esteem at the beginning of adulthood, while seniors reconstruct their identity in a new, culturally depreciated situation of a person at post-production age. In this case, it is also necessary to fight for one’s autonomy, social status, and meaning in life.

The results indicate some differences between the two groups, although both obtained relatively high average results in the scales of proactively coping with difficult situations. In a developmental sense, this may confirm adaptive functioning and a mastered ability to anticipate the future and manage change. In the “fluid reality,” those are the key competences necessary to achieve success – both individually as well as for entire generations.

The results for the seniors indicate that they most often looked for emotional support and more often dealt with stress through reflective

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and preventive coping based on anticipating the further, uncertain future. They were less likely to use the instrumental way of coping with stress. The seniors also used avoidance, but this strategy was the least preferred action out of all available options. This means that as they get older, people who face new and difficult situations look for advice, information, and support from family and friends before resolving them. Although they still have a need for a high level of autonomy, they are less independent in gathering the knowledge required to make decisions. Through mobilizing and wisely managing their own resources and taking reflective and preventive actions in a stressful situation, seniors try to eliminate difficulties in the maximum possible way. The sense of uncertainty induces them to create protective mechanisms, which is not surprising when we take into account their awareness of the passage of time, the frequent deaths of their loved ones, and their limited financial resources and increased costs of medical care due to the gradual loss of health and fitness. The strategic planning and avoidance coping methods they adopted are likely to be logically connected and to result from an increased awareness of the passage of time, a loss of vital energy and social activity, and an ability to abandon less important commitments. Therefore, what we are dealing with is the "economy of expenditure" of accumulated personal resources and time, which at that developmental stage must be a significant factor in commitment and activity. Late adulthood, as our research has also confirmed, is characterized by deep reflectiveness, that is, weighing and choosing what is worthwhile (Luyckx et al., 2006).

In both groups, comparatively high results were found for the strategy of reflectively coping with stress. However, reflectiveness is not a simple process. Deep post factum reflection is the most desirable and consequential in terms of life and development. The second type is broad reflection, which is the thought process that precedes action and prepares a person for making a decision; the third type is ruminative reflection, which hinders activity (Crocentti et al., 2008; Luyckx et al., 2006). The third type of reflection is characterized by destructive, ineffective "emotional rumination" of previous experiences and negative events which may block proactivity and may occur in both the broad and deep

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reflection phases (Słowińska & Oleszkiewicz, 2012). As can be seen from the results obtained from the seniors, some of them choose the avoidance strategy, which may be the consequence of ruminative reflection (Luyckx et al., 2006).

Among the adolescents, the proactive coping strategy was important, but was connected to both support from family and friends and preventive coping. In addition, the young people often used a reflective strategy and instrumental support, but they hardly ever used strategic planning. The high tendency for them to choose the first of these strategies is a natural consequence of the developmental phase (searching for, experimenting, and committing to even risky activities). Existential dependence on parents and risk-taking, which are often experienced by young people, make them reach for the easiest and the most unconditional emotional support, which they usually receive. This is a mechanism that is practiced from birth; however, they should gradually become independent of it. While analyzing the research results, we may assume that such a mechanism is still strong. In adolescence, preventive coping is also a natural and developmentally beneficial strategy for long-term future planning, which includes making educational and professional choices. However, it should be noted that at that stage of development young people consult with their families and that the consequences of their choices have an effect not only on themselves but also their families.

In addition, the reflective and instrumental support strategies were often chosen by the adolescents. The instrumental support strategy refers to coping with a lack of knowledge: collecting information or developing skills that make it possible to perform particular tasks. However, strategic planning (adopting certain goals and planning to fulfill them within shorter periods of time) was not selected very often; therefore, we may hypothesize that these are reactive behaviors. In other words, the adolescents focus on coping with external tasks and in order to deal with them they look for emotional and/or instrumental support. This means that their proactivity is strongly channeled, which must make it difficult for them to solve crises brought about by their developmental phase, in which case the crises last longer. Another conclusion could be that we are dealing

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with a broad – penetrating – reflection (instrumental strategy), which tests the individual's power in a relatively safe social and educational environment, characterized by existential security – the strategy of emotional support (Luyckx et al., 2006). Therefore, the results in the strategic planning and reflectiveness scales were lower. Likely because of the strong influence of their parents, prevention is a useful and preferable strategy for them. It is important to note that girls clearly prefer strategies related to looking for emotional and instrumental support, a view which was supported by Ficková (2009).

These findings do not fully tackle all of the issues related to difficult situations and the coping strategies adopted by adolescents and the elderly. Future research projects should focus on attempts to clarify the inter-dependence between proactivity and emotionality (fear or aggression) as well as wellbeing. This may help us better understand the conditions under which youths go through the transition to adulthood and in which seniors adapt to the process of aging and old age. The initial results suggest that the seniors who prefer proactive coping strategies present a higher quality of functioning (Brzezińska, 2011; Błachnio, 2017) as well as more positive attitudes towards old age (Gamrowska & Gałkowska-Bachanek, 2014). Further exploration of these issues may help us prepare more effective forms of re-adaptation and re-education for old age. Similarly, the research could be made more detailed by introducing tools to identify the domains of withdrawal and/or proactively coping with stress over a lifetime (Crocetti et al., 2008; Luyckx et al. 2008; Kłym and Ciecucha 2015).

## Conclusions

A deeper understanding of the similarities and differences in the coping strategies of young and older adults can facilitate support during these critical developmental phases, that are focused on the processes of constructing (for adolescents) and reconstructing (for seniors) their identities. Meanwhile, education and professional training still refer firmly to theories that are called into question by the changes observed in society

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and within individuals (Olson & Tooman, 2012). On the whole, it results in the limited effectiveness of education on clinical practice. As for the discussion on strategies for proactively coping with difficult situations, the analyses argue in favor of functional representativeness on behalf of adolescents as well as seniors.

Proactivity in late adulthood is different from the proactivity of adolescents, and it is safe to say that the results justify such an interpretation. In addition, theoretical descriptions based on psychoanalysis suggest that there are qualitative changes in people's behavior which continue in their development throughout their life. The seniors we have surveyed mainly coped with an uncertain future by engaging in proactive coping, but they used slightly different strategies for "managing" their lives than adolescents. In late adulthood, the less frequent use of new knowledge and reflection, which may become more ruminative, may have significant consequences for the individual or society at large. Therefore, it deserves further research attention. Adolescents have a tendency to mix proactive and reactive coping strategies, which may be a consequence of their developmental conditions and may have an impact on the length of the transition phase to adulthood, which requires more responsibility.

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## Prevention of the Sexual Abuse of Children in the School Environment

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### Abstract

The aim of the article is to present the assumptions of the prevention of sexual violence against children in the school environment. Child sexual abuse has become a global problem that affects not only the family environment, but educational institutions as well. One example of such an institution is a school where, under the guise of upbringing, there may be numerous abuses committed by people who are an authority in the child's life. School staff members are often unaware of institutional grooming and its perpetrators, which means that the entire institution may unknowingly contribute to promoting child sexual abuse. The author first presents the methods of grooming used by perpetrators, pointing to activities aimed at children and the mechanisms of institutional grooming that may create a specific culture that makes it difficult to protect children. The author then presents the standards and strategies for prevention in schools, paying attention to the need to involve the entire community: conducting proper recruitment and training of employees and constructing preventive programs adapted to the age and development of children and their proper implementation.

*Keywords:* child sexual abuse, grooming, institutional grooming, prevention standards, prevention programs

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## Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) has been a well-known phenomenon for centuries, although in all types of societies sexual relations between children and adults upset the normative order, always taking the side of children, both legally and morally. However, only in recent decades has CSA, especially when found in different types of institutions, begun to be treated as a societal problem. A succession of reported abuse cases, shocking reports on the extent of child abuse in Church institutions in different countries, and increased media attention have led to a view of CSA as a global problem (Stoltenborgh et al., 2011, p. 80).

The identification of CSA as a “global problem” does not, however, automatically answer the question of how to adequately address child abuse at the individual and societal levels. On the one hand, we can observe efforts to describe the phenomenon by both quantitative (the scale of abuse in individual countries and social groups) and qualitative methods (the characteristics of perpetrators and victims and the functioning of educational institutions); on the other hand, we face enormous difficulties resulting from such factors as imprecise terminology, the low percentage of cases which are reported, the sensitive nature of the problem – for both victims and perpetrators – and the high dark figure of crime, which leads to a deterioration of the problem and to inadequate interventions targeted at both victims and perpetrators (Sajkowska, 2018).

According to Maria Beisert and Agnieszka Izdebska (2012), definitions of CSA can be divided into three groups: clinical, legal, and social. The clinical definitions are the most comprehensive and refer to a specific type of relationship and interaction between individuals. They are created in order to best describe the phenomenon and to make an accurate diagnosis. The legal definitions refer to the law in force in a given country. The definition of CSA set out in the provisions of the Polish Penal Code describes the essence of the phenomenon and contains three elements: the characteristics that describe a victim, the perpetrator, and the act, that is, the type of sexual activity of an adult with a child. Finally,

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the social definitions express unwritten social beliefs about the phenomenon of CSA. They are based on information reaching society from the media and are less often based on reliable knowledge derived from scientific research. In this study I adopt the definition presented by the World Health Organization (WHO), which defines CSA as

the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. (WHO, 2019, pp. 15–16)

CSA encompasses a range of behaviors that cause negative effects in the child's psyche and may lead to many disorders of the child's social functioning (Izdebska, 2009). Traumatic experiences are further reinforced by the fact that most perpetrators are people close to the child. According to David Finkelhor (2012), about 90% of children who are victims of sexual abuse know their perpetrator; only 10% of sexually abused children are abused by strangers. In addition, about 30% of sexually abused children are abused by family members, and about 60% are abused by people whom the family trusts. In addition, abuse often takes place on the premises of care and educational institutions, and the perpetrators have direct contact with the children in their care for many hours and may even have permanent custody of the child. With this in mind, the concept of "institutionalized abuse" of children was introduced, which distinguishes this phenomenon from domestic abuse. It can occur in any setting where there are individuals in a position of authority over the children entrusted to them. However, most of the available research on institutional abuse refers to sports settings, residential care, schools, and religious institutions (McNeish & Scott, 2018).

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This article addresses the issue of societal prevention of child sexual abuse in schools based on the assumption that prevention is better than dealing with the consequences. Prevention can take various forms and can be directed to various target groups. A distinction is made between interventions that target the perpetrators of CSA, those that target parents and professionals working with children, those that target children, and those that target society as a whole (Finkelhor, 2009).

A school is a special institution whose task is to care of and educate children; therefore, the numerous cases of sexual abuse require adequate and organized action for the protection of children. This is served by adequate prevention, which involves creating a safe environment and strengthening a culture of sexual abuse prevention that involves the entire school institution. These issues will be addressed in this article. I will first discuss the ways in which grooming occurs in a school setting before presenting standards and best practices for CSA prevention in schools.

### **Ways That Perpetrators Groom Children**

CSA is an activity that requires a high level of commitment from the perpetrator, who sometimes takes a long time to plan and prepare before carrying out their intentions. David Finkelhor (1984) distinguished four prerequisites that a perpetrator must meet for CSA to occur. Firstly, the perpetrator must be motivated to sexually abuse the child. Contributing factors include child-related sexual arousal, emotional congruence with children, and difficulties establishing relationships with adults. The predictors of such a motivation include childhood adversity, including experiences of CSA as a victim, but also the absence or inadequacy of a primary caregiver, whether due to drug and alcohol abuse or debilitation by domestic violence. Secondly, the perpetrator must overcome all internal inhibitions, such as the belief that sexual abuse harms the child. This is done by justifying or downplaying the significance of their behavior and its consequences; sometimes an abuser resorts to drugs or

alcohol to overcome their fear or conscience or they may attribute the abuse to the child's wishes and desires. Thirdly, the abuser must overcome external barriers, such as adult supervision, in order to gain access to the child and carry out the abuse. Thus, the abuser "grooms" those closest to the child in order to remain hidden. They may use practices such as presenting themselves in a prosocial light, creating an alibi for their behavior, undermining the child's credibility, or domestic violence. Finally, the abuser must overcome the victim's resistance. Sometimes they use physical force, but more often the grooming revolves around a particular vulnerability of the child (e.g., children who are bullied by peers, who have no friends, who lack confidence, who are sexually naïve, or who have learning disabilities/intellectual deficits).

In the literature, the use of various techniques to manipulate and control victims in order to exploit them is called "grooming." It is a process of preparing a child as well as significant adults and their social environment for the sexual exploitation of that child. In this way, the perpetrator wants to gain access to the child, obtain the child's consent and maintain secrecy with the child to avoid disclosure (Craven et al., 2006, p. 297).

Using a variety of manipulative techniques, abusers may also prepare others to gain access to the child. They reach out to those who can be manipulated to hide the abuse, such as parents and other caregivers. In institutional settings, targets of grooming may be children, parents and caregivers, colleagues, and others through whom access to the child can be gained. Thus, grooming extends beyond the immediate social environment to institutions and their stakeholders (Williams, 2015). Gallagher defined institutional child abuse as

the sexual abuse of a child (under 18 years of age) by an adult who works with him or her. The perpetrator may be employed in a paid or voluntary capacity; in the public, voluntary, or private sector; in a residential or non-residential setting; and may work either directly with children or be in an ancillary role. (Gallagher 2000, p. 797)

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Institutional grooming focuses on the unique characteristics of institutions that may facilitate the crime. The institutional setting includes the physical environment and the organizational culture of the institution. Research has shown that physical factors can create opportunities for CSA because many cases of abuses occur in unsupervised locations. Aspects of the physical environment that may create a high risk of abuse are known as "target sites" (Kaufman et al., 2012). These places are isolated and difficult to supervise and have limited access. The location of classrooms, bathrooms, locker rooms, and public spaces can also create risk. For example, buildings with many exits, entrances, corridors, and enclosed spaces increase the likelihood that activities are concealed and that perpetrators can avoid surveillance.

Cultural conditioning influences how an institution views child safety and its attitudes toward CSA. Staller (2012) identified five primary organizational and cultural barriers to identifying and/or disclosing grooming and abuse, related to how the perpetrator constructs their professional image within the organization and thus presents themselves as a trustworthy person: (1) confidentiality and other codes of silence that make it difficult to share information; (2) unclear lines of abuse reporting, where information may fall into the hands of those who are more concerned with discretion; (3) distrust of law enforcement and child protection agencies; (4) extreme differences in the exercise of power between victims, perpetrators, whistle-blowers, and other institutional actors; and (5) strong personal, professional, and institutional loyalties.

The institutional environment can also promote CSA by protecting the offender. Institutional offenders claim that the culture of the institution in which they committed their crimes does not promote the welfare of the child. Offenders often hold a high position in the institution, which gives them a sense of authority, power, and the trust of others; they therefore seem to remain outside the realm of suspicion. Researchers have identified several organizational factors that may be important in facilitating grooming: 1) a lack of knowledge among staff of grooming techniques; 2) inadequate supervision of children; 3) a reluctance to intervene in cases of potentially inappropriate behavior;



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4) a lack of clear and formal rules/expectations; 5) institutional trust in the perpetrator; 6) a lack of opportunities to report concerns about CSA; and 7) a lack of communication channels/opportunities to disclose CSA (Leclerc et al., 2011).

Grooming is widely recognized as a complex, step-by-step process that involves three main stages: 1) gaining access to the victim; 2) initiating and maintaining the abuse; and 3) concealing the abuse (Sullivan & Quayle, 2012, p. 89; Colton et al., 2012). A group of researchers centered around the Council of International Schools paid particular attention to how children are groomed in school. The following stages of grooming were identified:

- 1) selecting a target victim – The perpetrator assesses vulnerability, identifies the love/attention the child is seeking, and assesses emotional needs.
- 2) gaining the victim's trust – The perpetrator observes and gathers information, easily mixes with children and adults (caregivers, coaches, and teachers), uses positional authority/proximity, and may allow the child to do something the parent does not allow in order to maintain secrecy (candies, staying up late, alcohol or drugs, or viewing pornography).
- 3) gaining the trust of others – The perpetrator claims to be a normal, nice person, is a great teacher, and can strike up a quick conversation with adults about the child's lies/convictions to sow distrust.
- 4) satisfying a need – The abuser tries to become an increasingly important person to the child, gives presents, favors the child, and arranges special trips or activities. They show the child that they are the only person who understands or appreciates them.
- 5) isolating the child – The perpetrator drives a wedge between the child and the caregivers, shows themselves to be the one who loves, appreciates, and can provide what even the parents cannot provide (a positive male role model).
- 6) gradual sexualization of the relationship – The perpetrator uses desensitization techniques such as tickling, touching during play, hugs,

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talking like adults (about marital problems, conflicts, etc.), telling adult jokes and making insinuations, encouraging intimacy, or offering to “play doctor” (Smellie et al., 2020).

### **Prevention Carried Out by the School**

CSA not only arouses indignation and provokes negative emotions, but it also mobilizes for extensive action to reduce it. Individual prevention programs targeted at specific risk groups are insufficient; what is needed instead is a comprehensive approach of the entire child-rearing environment. Sophisticated methods of institutional grooming used by perpetrators make it necessary to focus all the attention on protecting children in care and educational institutions. To this end, standards of universal, selective, and indicated prevention are being developed. In the case of schools, universal prevention seems to be the most important in order to prevent CSA on school premises. However, it is also important to have procedures in place to respond to reports of abuse that has already taken place.

Monica Applewhite outlined the elements of effective prevention at all levels, which include 1) prevention principles that address specific guidelines and programs; 2) “codes of behavior,” or guidelines and requirements for interactions between adults and children; 3) procedures when sexual abuse occurs and how to report it; 4) educational programs for children and adolescents; 5) outreach to those harmed and their loved ones; 6) working with families; and 7) procedures for inappropriate behaviors that may already be grooming but are not yet sexual abuse (cited in Kush, 2020).

Considering that child sexual abuse is supported by various factors concerning the victim, the perpetrator, and the situation or organization, Quadara et al. (2015) stated that effective prevention needs appropriate strategies that require in-depth knowledge of each of these factors and how they interact with each other. These strategies include (1) teaching children protective behavior; (2) preventing situational crime; (3) therapeutic interventions prior to referral to the judicial system for problematic

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sexual behavior and behavior associated with CSA; (4) post-criminal justice involvement to prevent re-offending; (5) criminal justice and other statutory interventions; and (6) therapeutic work with children who have been sexually abused.

The assumptions of CSA prevention in school should respond to the threats arising from the mechanisms of institutional grooming by perpetrators outlined above. Therefore, comprehensive institutional prevention begins with ensuring the selection of the right educational staff. This is done through screening and appropriate recruitment procedures and is important because many child sex offenders have no criminal record and cannot be identified by examining criminal statistics alone. Appropriate codes of conduct and training are also important for effective prevention in schools. These should provide clear guidelines on what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behavior and staff should be trained to implement these procedures. Codes of conduct or professional standards may be developed to communicate what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate relationships between staff and children and what behavior is acceptable or unacceptable in the institution. Similarly, it is important to create procedures for appropriate reporting of professional abuse by educational staff. An extremely important element of effective school-based prevention is the promotion of a positive institutional culture. As I indicated above, the culture of an organization may inadvertently support or normalize grooming behavior – through group and professional solidarity, for example – so training staff to understand appropriate and inappropriate behavior can help change the culture of the institution (O'Leary et al., 2017).

One form of preventing CSA is sex education directed at children. Within the framework of sexual pedagogy, two processes can be distinguished: sex education understood as providing relevant knowledge and sex education understood as an educational influence aimed at forming in children and adolescents the desired attitudes towards their own sexual characteristics, sexuality, and sexual activity. The former is the transmission of a wide body of knowledge that is necessary for proper sexual functioning, including such issues as human biology, interpersonal relationships,

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creating and ending intimate relationships, assertiveness, conflict resolution, and elements of medicine, sociology, and law. Sex education as the formation of attitudes, on the other hand, helps children and adolescents develop the desired attitudes towards their sexuality and prepare the for family life.

Educational programs for CSA prevention should address issues that are directly related to the events that children encounter. Agnieszka Izdebska and Agata Ruchel (2011) proposed the following topics addressed to children:

- correct nomenclature connected with sexuality – Having knowledge about their own body and the ability to use correct vocabulary connected with sexuality increases a child's self-confidence in this sphere.
- relationship to one's body – The message is that each person has the exclusive right to decide what happens to their body, who has access to it, and to what extent.
- types of touch – The message is meant to teach children to distinguish between different types of touch; the idea behind its introduction is that children who are able to recognize potentially harmful or inappropriate touch will be in a better position to avoid situations where it might occur.
- skills connected with leaving dangerous situations and refusing contact – Children learn specific reactions or patterns of behavior, which they will be able to use in order to leave potentially dangerous situations and to express their disagreement and refusal to potential perpetrators. The most common skill taught in this area is the ability to say "no."
- reporting abuse – Many educational programs include modules designed to prepare children to disclose abuse if it occurs.

The effectiveness of sex education in schools depends not only on selecting appropriate prevention programs, but also on the manner in which they are implemented. This is connected with well-prepared educators

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and management, among other things. Appropriate implementation of a prevention program means 1) providing children with enough information to help them make wise choices about disclosing abuse, 2) offering a variety of training scenarios that are sensitive to children's feelings and take into account the inherent power imbalance between children and educators, 3) forming a community perspective that involves parents, teachers, and other school personnel, 4) reiterating complex learning concepts, and 5) providing age- and stage-appropriate educational materials (Kaufman & Erooga, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

The scale of the problem of sexual abuse, its global reach, and the presence of cases of CSA in educational institutions is a serious concern. It even raises doubts as to the possibility of effectively responding to this undesirable phenomenon. Another problem is the limited awareness of educators and leaders of care and educational institutions regarding the grooming of children or entire institutions. Although there has recently been an increase in the level of knowledge and involvement of many institutions and foundations in the prevention of CSA, there is still much to be done.

The aim of this article was to show the methods of institutional grooming and to present the assumptions of CSA prevention at school. The growing awareness of adults about CSA and the rising number of training and prevention programs is encouraging. It should be remembered, however, that as long as there are even isolated cases of abuse, efforts to protect children must not cease. It is therefore necessary to involve parents, educators, and local communities in the protection of children in order to improve preventive measures and their implementation.

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## **E-Learning and Blended Learning in the Opinions of Polish Students**

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**Abstract**

For the first time in history, the education system has experienced a crisis situation on a global scale, leading to total and forced isolation in social life and communication. In March 2020, full-time classes at universities in Poland were suspended due to the epidemic caused by the COVID-19 coronavirus. This state of affairs resulted in the need to shift scientific and didactic work to be "remote." This article aims to present students' opinions on e-learning and blended learning after several months of experience with such forms of learning. The main research problem was formulated as follows: "What are the Polish students' opinions of e-learning during the pandemic?" The method of diagnostic survey and the questionnaire technique called the SWOT were used in the empirical research. The research was conducted in May and June 2020 in three selected universities. A total of 314 students took part in it. The results indicate that remote teaching has both specific strengths and weaknesses and that there are many opportunities and threats associated with this form of teaching; nevertheless, a larger proportion of the data were related to the weaknesses. Undoubtedly, there are still many

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activities that should be introduced into practice and everyday academic education. Perhaps a creative solution will be to introduce only some elements of distance learning, which can contribute to a better acquisition of IT and digital competences and can help students develop activity, self-discipline, and independent learning.

*Keywords:* distance education, online learning, COVID-19, pandemic, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills

## **Introduction**

In March 2020, full-time classes at universities in Poland were suspended due to the epidemic caused by the SARS-COV-2 coronavirus. This state of affairs resulted in the need to shift scientific and didactic work to be "remote." This article aims to present students' opinions on e-learning and blended learning after several months of experience with such forms of learning.

## **The Concepts of E-Learning and Blended Learning**

E-learning is teaching with the use of information technology, supporting the didactic process with the help of personal computers, smartphones, tablets (m-learning), and the Internet. The term e-learning refers to the use of electronic technology in teaching to a much greater extent than in traditional online courses or computer-assisted learning.

Blended learning is a style of education that combines traditional learning methods with activities conducted remotely through online platforms. It has been recognized by some of the best universities, such as Harvard, Oxford, and MIT, who use it on a massive scale and build "virtual classes" such as edX or Coursera.

E-learning and blended learning are, in a way, the effect of adapting education to the challenges of the present day. The emergence of the digital society (GUS, 2019), the process of digitalization, and the increasing

use of new technologies impact and condition the education process. New technologies – particularly in the area of IT, but also other social innovations – facilitate very fast access to the existing knowledge base, support content processing, provide analytical tools, and support content archiving and aggregating. The younger generations, which from an early age function “within the network,” have access to all information and communication devices, and use social media, nowadays expect completely different methods of education and educational instruments, as well as new roles of the teacher and learner/student.

In the context of the development of learning networks and the growth of the network society, it is worth referring to the concept of Stephen Downes (2021), known as Learning 2050. Downes predicted that in four decades all objects will be able to communicate with people to explain what they are and how to deal with them. The network (even more advanced than the modern Internet) will no longer be a passive network, but will become a dynamic network with individual components able to communicate with each other. It will be a network which will know and learn.

According to Downes, learning will therefore be a continuous process based primarily on people sharing knowledge regardless of age or level of education. It will be a “stream,” not the creation of a closed resource that we use throughout our lives. The essence of the education process will be the acceptance of change and the ability to quickly assimilate new knowledge necessary for functioning in life. As the environment will change constantly and rapidly, so will the objects – the tools that we will use. Each of us will create our own network of people and tools that are helpful in the education process, which we will use on an ongoing basis.

Ken Robinson, a world-class opinion leader in the field of developing creativity, innovation, and human resources, listed three key features of the human mind. He believes that (1) people are different by nature, (2) the way to happiness is through curiosity, and (3) humans are creative. These characteristics are now taking us away from the “factory school model” and moving toward a better use of humankind’s natural potential, hence the Top 5 trends in modern education (Business Insider Polska, 2018): interdisciplinary studies, micro-specializations, studies without

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borders, personalized educational paths, and e-learning and blended learning.

Witold Kołodziejczyk and Marcin Polak (2011) accordingly presented possible scenarios for the educational future. They listed three groups of such scenarios:

*status quo* (i.e. the institution of school and formal education more or less as we know it from the end of the 20th century); *re-schooling* (reconstruction of the school to adapt to the changing conditions of social life); [and] *de-schooling* (departure from a single, traditional model of the institutions of school and education to many equivalent forms of education, including online education, and maybe even – in the most radical forecast – the end of school as we know it). These scenarios can be a starting point for considering how education will change. (Kołodziejczyk & Polak, 2011, pp. 19–20)

Similarly, the OECD (2020) proposed four possible scenarios, but did not indicate which scenario can or should be implemented. It is up to the national education systems to determine how they develop. OECD scenarios are an interesting catalogue of possible solutions that can be a valuable help for those making the most important decisions in the field of education.

Guglielmo Malizia (2019), in discussing the international processes of de-schooling and re-schooling, described various attempts at out-of-school education. He cited Illich (1972) and educational vouchers; the self-organized learning environment program, launched in India and developed in Europe (Bottani, 2013)<sup>1</sup>; replacing teachers with robots (Castoldi & Chiosso, 2017); homeschooling (unschooling) (Malizia & Nanni, 2015); and finally the UN project called “Education 2030” (UNESCO, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> The SOLE project began in India in 2008–2009; starting in 2014, Professor Sugata Mitra from Newcastle University in Great Britain developed the School in the Cloud, sitting pupils around a table with a computer on it.

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## The Pros and Cons of E-Learning and Blended Learning

On the basis of Karl Steffens' theory (2015, p. 47), Michał Klichowski (2017) compared the present model of traditional learning and the new model of generative education. Adaptive learning includes keeping up with changes, managing dangers, reaction to symptoms, intercepting trends by acknowledging their early signs, elasticity, forecasting new trends, and seeking conventional knowledge. Generative teaching, on the other hand, is connected with widening possibilities, enhancing creativity, looking for new ways, solving basic issues, unconventional thinking, foreseeing the future, and rewarding the reconstruction of knowledge.

In the context of smart education, Klichowski (2017, p. 131) stated that the word "smart" is treated as an acronym, meaning the following:

- *Self-education* – The role of the student in smart education involves managing the process of learning, while the teacher's role is only to support this process.
- *Motivation* – In smart education, pupils should be motivated and should learn from their own cognitive curiosity through experience and exploration.
- *Adjustment* – In smart education, the formal course of studying should be flexible, while the school ceases to be a place of knowledge distribution, instead providing space for personalized teaching.
- *Enriched resources* – Materials used in smart education should be diverse and innovative as well as based on the logic of open access.
- *Embedded technologies* – The newest ICT solutions, which enable studying in any given time and place, should be used in smart education.

Obviously, there are certainly many benefits to computer-based learning. One such outcome is improving the effectiveness of self-education, which is obligatory for proper functioning in a changing reality. The school cannot only be a place of passing on knowledge; its task is also to build up

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the ability to think independently, seek out information, and rank it as well. Moreover, with the use of a computer we can present certain processes and phenomena which are impossible to observe in natural surroundings, since they occur at a very fast or slow pace. The teacher can treat computers as means of teaching and the students can use them in the process of learning in the classroom while the teacher supervises, or even after school.

Virtual reality is rapidly developing and bringing advancements in various related technologies through the virtual world. It has much potential and plays an important role in the fields of education and training. Mixed reality (MR) is a type of hybrid system that involves both physical and virtual elements. Experimental results showed that after studying with the support of MR technology, students' abilities in geometric analysis (mean difference = 4.36;  $p < 0.01$ ) and creativity (mean difference = 1.59;  $p < 0.05$ ) significantly improved. The students' skill of model visualization was also significantly better than that of the control group (mean difference = 3.08;  $p < 0.05$ ). In general, there were positive results of using the MR to support their study. MR was also better than traditional note-taking in various measured effects (Tang et al., 2020).

From the point of view of a student, the benefits of e-learning and blended learning are as follows:

- individual learning mode – Every participant has their own individual range of necessary knowledge regardless of previously known training material.
- flexibility of teaching and learning – The participant chooses the time and place for studying according to their needs.
- uniformity and timeliness of the teaching material – The participant does not have to worry about lower-quality material in comparison with other participants.
- attractiveness of form – In contrast to the traditional forms, the teaching material may include multimedia resources in the form of presentations, interactive graphics, audio/video recordings, etc.

The research indicates that blended learning maintains or increases access for most student cohorts and produces higher success rates for minority and non-minority students alike (Dziuban et al., 2018).

The results of multiple regression analyses show that the design of blended learning (the quality of technology, online tools, and face-to-face support) and student characteristics (attitudes and self-regulation) predicted student satisfaction as an outcome and that some of the students' characteristics/backgrounds and design features were significant predictors for student learning outcomes in blended learning (Kintu et al., 2017; Neroni et al., 2019).

Aleksander Nalaskowski (2020), when discussing remote teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, noted three dispositions of an ideal "remote learner": the will to study, a strong motivation for learning, and self-discipline. He also added that these traits are in short supply in today's youth and that what is needed is a change of public attitudes toward learning.

E-learning opens up new possibilities, but at the same time it is impossible to ignore its shortcomings. At the educational level, there are particular dangers to cognitive activity and schooling, which include threats to the cognitive sphere (uniformity and/or reduction of experience), limitations in the perception of problems, domination of pictorial material over verbal material, a flood of ready-made hypermedia information that inhibits creative processing and application, and an inability to make rational decisions and actions.

The inability to select content and information is becoming an increasingly serious problem. Many young people who are addicted to the Internet have trouble concentrating, synthesizing, or connecting content in a logical argument. Manfred Spitzer (2012) began a very important discussion in Germany, claiming that digitization can lead to dementia among people who overuse technology in the process of learning and education. His book, entitled *Digitale Demenz. Wie wir uns und unsere Kinder um den Verstand bringen* [Digital Dementia: How We Drive Ourselves and Our Children Crazy] has become the foundation of criticism against digital abuse in the cognitive process among children and youth.

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Spitzer has been very critical of the new media and the new “pseudo-communication.” He argues that over-digitalization and over-technologization result in reduced brain capacity and memory. In addition, writing by hand (rather than on a computer) is crucial to a child’s development. According to Spitzer, the computer has very negative psycho-somatic effects on youths. Multitasking, typical for computer users, causes increasing difficulties with concentration, unreliable performance of tasks, and problems with mindfulness. According to Spitzer, tablets are an educational evil for children that should be prohibited.

Criticism of the excessive use of the Internet and computers has also been presented in another famous book, Robert Putnam’s *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (Putnam, 2015). In the context of computerization and digitization, Putnam pointed to the problem of unequal access to technology, asymmetry of information and, above all, the fact that children from poor families use the internet thoughtlessly – treating it mainly as entertainment and not as a source of knowledge and learning.

There are barriers to implementing e-learning and blended learning from a learner/student perspective:

- poor knowledge of computer technologies – fear of using new tools;
- a lack of access to appropriate computer technologies – many potential distance learners do not have sufficient computers or additional equipment (e.g., webcams or headphones with a microphone) or an Internet connection with adequate bandwidth;
- a general distrust of novelty – conservatism in most areas, including education;
- a feeling of isolation and loneliness – some distance learning participants have difficulties communicating with people whom they have no direct contact with;
- a lack of self-discipline – many people cannot motivate themselves to learn.

In the times of COVID-19, remote learning is common and the literature contains preliminary research on this form of learning. Objections



from parents and children are listed on the popular educational portal Librus (2020), among others. The difficulties relate to:

- limited equipment – One third of parents struggle to make available the necessary equipment; they are unable to provide each child with an online learning device, so it is shared in these families.
- the scope of distance learning – Some parents (4%) reported that distance learning is not provided in their children's schools; 9% said that distance learning covers less than half of the subjects.
- distance learning formulas – The predominant methods are instructional; teachers, according to parents, primarily chose indirect contact with the students: sending materials from the textbook and exercises for independent study.
- excessive parental involvement – Some (21%) of the parents participating in the survey admitted that they spend five or more hours a day "learning" with their child.
- a lack of direct contact with peers – 59% of respondents and 54% of teacher respondents mentioned this aspect.
- difficulties working independent – This includes planning the learning process and knowing the various learning methods (34% of respondents).
- excessive burden on children – 36% of the parents said that education is definitely excessive, and according to 35% rather excessive.

Difficulties were also formulated by teachers, as evidenced by the following statements:

Preparation for classes takes a lot of time, even exceeding 12 hours. Retrieving returned work and reading it is a difficult and laborious job. Then, checking and entering the description in the e-register takes several hours again. I collapse from exhaustion because there is much more work than before. (Gryc, 2020)

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After the first few weeks of online teaching, I can confidently say that it is a sham. When teaching remotely, people do not feel satisfied with their work. They don't know if their effort has been wasted. Another thing is the nature of the subjects: not all of them can be taught online. In Polish lessons, for example, you often need an extensive explanation; a short instruction will not help. You need the energy of the classroom, the questions, the concerns, the "live" teacher–student contact in order to teach. Right now, most classes are done with audio only. (Gryc, 2020)

Jacek Pyżalski and Wiesław Poleszak (2020) pointed out that the student–student, teacher–student, and student–parent relationships, which are at the center of traditional education, remain the same in distance education. The challenge is building them with only indirect communication.

### **Methodological Foundations of Empirical Research**

One of the measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 were school and university closures. In order to cope with this new and unexpected challenge, remote teaching was instituted. It was undoubtedly a new experience for both students and teachers. This fact inspired our empirical study, which aimed to investigate the students' opinions about this form of teaching in relation to their personal experience of e-learning in practice.

Therefore, the main research problem was formulated as follows: What are the Polish students' opinions of e-learning during the pandemic? In this respect, four detailed problems were distinguished: What are the strengths of e-learning in the opinion of the respondents? What are the weaknesses of e-learning? What opportunities are associated with e-learning? What are the threats that e-learning poses?

A diagnostic survey with the questionnaire technique was applied in the empirical research. A SWOT questionnaire was used – it is a tool by means of which it is possible to recognize and analyze strengths and weaknesses as well as existing and potential opportunities and threats.

The questionnaire consists of four open-ended questions and questions about the respondents' themselves: gender, age, university name, mode of study, and degree of study. Due to the limitations resulting from the pandemic, which prevented direct contact with the respondents, the questionnaire was made available online on the platform Survio.<sup>2</sup> It appears to have been a good and safe way of collecting research material. Approval was obtained from the relevant authorities to conduct research at three selected universities: Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, and Kazimierz Pulawski University of Technology and Humanities in Radom. Information about the study was sent to students via a university mailing. The request to fill in the questionnaire was preceded by a letter in which the purpose and scope of the research was presented and a link to this tool was provided. Participation in the research was voluntary and anonymous. The research was conducted in May and June 2020.

### Characteristics of the Study Group

In total, 314 students participated in the study. The gender distribution was unequal, with a very significant majority of women ( $n = 276$ ), constituting 87.9% of all respondents; the 38 men in this group made up the remaining 12.1% of the respondents. Undoubtedly, this difference may have resulted in part from the fact that it is mostly women who study pedagogy.

The surveyed students ranged in age from 19 to 46 years. The most frequent age by far was 22 years, as there were 70 people at this age, accounting for 22.3% of all respondents. This was followed by 21-year-olds ( $n = 60$ ; 19.1%), 23-year-olds ( $n = 45$ ; 14.3%), 20-year-olds ( $n = 40$ ; 12.7%), and 24-year-olds ( $n = 29$ ; 9.2%). Slightly fewer people represented further age groups: 16 people (5.0%) were 25 years old, 13 students (4.1%) were

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<sup>2</sup> This is a software program for preparing questionnaires in an online form, available at <https://www.survio.com/pl/> (retrieved May 5, 2020).

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19 years old, and 12 respondents (3.8%) were 26 years old. Then there were five people (1.5%) who were 31 years old. Another four people each (1.3%) were 29 and 35 years old, while three respondents (0.9%) were 28 and 30 years old each. Only two people (0.6%) were 27 years old. Finally, one respondent (0.3%) represented each of the following ages: 32, 33, 36, 37, 41, 42, 43, and 46 years. The analysis of the data shows that the age distribution of the surveyed students is very diverse. The average age of the students was 23.05 years (standard deviation = 3.80).

The respondents represented the following universities: 160 people (50.9% of all respondents) were students of the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow; 87 people (27.7%) were students of the Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce; and 67 people (21.4%) were students of the University of Technology and Humanities Kazimierz Pulawski in Radom. There were 251 full-time students in the group of respondents, which constituted 79.9% of the total number of respondents, while 63 people were taking the extramural program (20.1%). In terms of the degree of study, 137 people (43.6%) were in their first-cycle studies, 93 people (29.6%) were in long-cycle studies, and 84 students (26.8%) were pursuing second-cycle studies.

A total of 314 correctly completed questionnaires were qualified for quantitative and qualitative analysis. It should be noted that the answers varied considerably: some contained only single words, slogans, and short sentences, while others were more extensive. Therefore, it is worth emphasizing that many of the respondents posted extensive statements, which allows us to assume that the survey met with interest and to some extent responded to the important need to express their reflections – and sometimes very critical opinions – related to the issue of distance learning in a very difficult situation like the coronavirus pandemic.

In order to analyze the results, the categorization method was used. Categorization is an abstract concept, denoting a set (group, class) of elements that have certain common features and distinguishing them from other elements that do not have these traits. Therefore, a very important part of the analysis was to categorize the answers in order to get a uniform message from similar reflections, feelings, and opinions of the

respondents. Then, a critical analysis of the collected data was carried out, in terms of both quantity and quality.

Further in the article, the results of the research are presented and discussed in relation to four important aspects of distance learning – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats – as well as formulating conclusions and postulates for educational practice.

### **The Advantages of E-Learning in the Opinion of Students**

An important and interesting issue taken up in the research was the analysis of the students' opinions regarding the advantages of e-learning. A wide variety of responses were obtained; therefore, in order to organize the data and conduct the analysis, the following categories were formed. Among the main advantages of e-learning, time-saving was mentioned, which is mainly due to the end of commuting to universities. This answer received 96 responses (30.5%). Next, 50 of the surveyed students indicated individual time management (15.9%), while study/work at home was given 44 times (14.0%). Another interesting indication was the category defined as convenience. Such answers were given by 39 respondents (12.4%), mostly one-word statements. Undoubtedly, remote learning can be convenient because it can take place anywhere and anytime and it offers a certain comfort of work, freedom, and a relaxed atmosphere. The individualization of learning was indicated by 30 people (9.5%). The same number of respondents claimed that e-learning did not have any strengths. The answer "being at home" is important in the context of the coronavirus pandemic and related restrictions; such an answer was selected by 24 people (7.6%). It can be assumed that for these respondents it is simply important to be at home and to comply with epidemiological requirements. In the same context, the answer that limiting the spread of the coronavirus is an advantage of e-learning is also interesting; such an answer was indicated by three people (0.9%). The answer that the advantage of distance learning is access to materials was given by 23 students (7.3%). In this regard, the respondents pointed specifically

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to the possibility to record classes and listen to them anywhere and any-time, as well as the presentation and materials that were sent to them by the teachers. On the other hand, the next category – contact with lecturers and the transfer of information – received 22 responses (7.0%). Twenty participants mentioned cost reduction from not having to commute or purchase bus tickets, or being able to stop renting an apartment. In this sense, especially in the case of students who commute to universities, remote classes certainly are very advantageous. For 13 of the surveyed students (4.1%), the continuity of the teaching process was an advantage – the ability to proceed with their education in this difficult pandemic. The last categories mentioned by the respondents concerned the possibility of greater concentration ( $n = 7$ ; 2.2%) and the combination of study and work ( $n = 5$ ; 1.5%).

Three students chose the following responses: a sense of security, less stress, the use of new technologies, and not needing to participate in classes. The categories of interesting activities, a new experience, and no delays received two answers each. The following responses were chosen only once: the safest form of teaching, very efficient organization of e-learning, respect for the teacher, documentation of the teachers' work, saving paper, and self-discipline.

To summarize the discussion and analysis regarding the strengths of e-learning, it should be stated that the students found many benefits resulting from this type of teaching.

### **Weaknesses of E-Learning in the Opinion of the Students**

In this study, the students were also asked to answer the question, "What are the weaknesses of e-learning?" This open-ended question received a wide range of feedback. Undoubtedly, the greatest weakness of distance learning from the students' point of view was an excess of material and work to be done: this answer was chosen by 124 respondents (39.4%). They felt that problem was the excessive load placed on them with a large number of tasks, written papers that were insufficiently

explained, and an excessive amount of new, undiscussed materials for individual study. Technical problems were also an obstacle, as indicated by 96 respondents (30.5%). In this regard, the students mentioned issues related to computer equipment and its quality, as well as internet access, disturbances and limitations of internet connections, and the functioning of educational platforms. The limited direct interpersonal contact was noted by 60 respondents (19.1%). Certainly, the COVID-19 restrictions were and still are quite a difficult challenge for the students. It should also be noted that this situation happened very suddenly and unexpectedly. Undoubtedly, the participants belong to a generation which had never experienced any serious limitations before.

Difficult contact with lecturers was indicated by 48 people (15.2%), while 45 respondents (14.3%) stated that the quality of the classes was poor and the teaching was unreliable. On the other hand, 31 of the surveyed students (9.8%) indicated a lack of practical classes, 17 (5.4%) a lack of motivation to study, and 12 (3.8%) a heavy load of individual work. Nine people (2.8%) mentioned poor organization and a lack of training for e-learning (particularly on the part of teachers). Another group of weaknesses, related to the lack of access to materials and literature, was mentioned by eight (2.5%) of the surveyed students. At that time, libraries were closed and students could only use their own literature, if they had any, or online e-books, which certainly posed a limitation. According to the respondents, other weaknesses of e-learning were too much time spent in front of the computer, according to seven (2.2%) respondents; stress and frustration for six (1.9%) people; the low level of teaching also mentioned by six (1.9%) students; the costs, in particular for purchasing computer equipment or a high-speed internet connection, indicated by five (1.5%) respondents; and the use of multiple educational platforms, as four respondents (1.2%) complained about. Three responses each mentioned the following: exhaustion, loneliness, poorer assimilation of knowledge, and the lecturers not understanding the students' situation. The following responses were chosen by only one respondent each: virtual reality, being at home all the time, the difficulty of working at home, cheating, sharing equipment with other family members, and the lack

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of an individual approach to the students. There were also some interesting comments: this style of teaching does not make sense, it is not the same as normal teaching, and the place of rest becomes a place of work and study.

To sum up, the opinions of the students show that distance learning has both specific strengths and weaknesses. Overall, the percentage of strengths was 135.9%, while for weaknesses it was 160.3%. It must therefore be stated that a larger proportion of the collected data is related to the weaknesses.

### **The Opportunities of E-Learning in the Opinion of the Students**

Another question referred to the students' opinion on the opportunities associated with e-learning. In this case as well, the responses were very diverse, so the data were categorized. The largest percentage of respondents (9.5%;  $n = 30$ ) answered that there are no opportunities related to e-learning. It can be assumed that it was a completely new and difficult experience for the students, and perhaps that is why it was difficult for them at that stage to indicate any specific advantages of distance learning. On the other hand, according to 25 respondents (7.9%), the continuation of education is an opportunity, as it allowed them to complete their chosen course of studies. Another 23 people (7.3%) said that the lectures can be conducted remotely. For 22 respondents (7.0%), e-learning is a good chance to acquire new IT competences; likewise, 13 respondents (4.1%) mentioned learning, developing, and using new technologies. An answer from 11 people (3.5%) was that access to this form of classes is especially an opportunity for the disabled and the sick. According to 10 people (3.1%), e-learning has great potential and is a step into the future. Nine respondents (2.8%) saw it as a chance to complete the semester and to combine studying with work. For eight of them (2.5%), it is a time-saving opportunity, while seven respondents (2.2%) found it to be a good alternative and a solution in difficult and crisis situations, such as a pandemic.



Slightly fewer students, five (1.5%), chose each of the following responses: getting better grades, self-education, and the chance of survival. Three responses (0.9%) related to learning self-discipline. Responses that received one answer each included access to education, time to build family ties, becoming a digital native, the possibility of earning money on your own online courses, and the modernization of Polish universities, which may result in some classes always being held online.

In summary, it should be noted that the surveyed students did not associate any greater opportunities with e-learning. In connection with this, it is worth considering whether the stereotype of young people described as “digital natives” is adequate and true, and what students can expect from this form of education.

### **Threats Resulting From E-Learning in the Opinion of the Students**

An important issue taken up in the research was the analysis of the opinions of the respondents regarding the risks associated with conducting classes remotely. As with the previous questions, the answers were very diverse. The distribution of responses to the question, “What are the risks of e-learning?” was very uneven. Undoubtedly, in the opinion of the surveyed students, the greatest threat from remote teaching is the poor quality of education. This category received 80 responses, which was 25.5% of the total. Therefore, it can be assumed that the quality of education is an important issue for students, as it will undoubtedly impact their further professional work.

The second category of threats was health risks, which were indicated by 49 people (15.6%). In this group the following were mentioned in particular: deterioration of sight and hearing, back pain, overweight, internet addiction, exhaustion, stress, frustration, depression, neurosis, and mental imbalance. In this regard, it should be noted that people aged 18–24 (many of them students) showed a significantly higher level of depression and generalized anxiety symptoms during the pandemic than

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other age groups and significantly more often than all other age groups manifested suicidal or self-aggressive thoughts (Gambin et al., 2020).

The next category of threats, which received 31 responses (9.8%), was the limitation of interpersonal relations. This is a valuable and interesting statement, as it is clearly possible to prove the very important role of interpersonal relations in the functioning of a person. The results indicate that interpersonal contact and the presence of another person are important for students, as well as for the educational process. Slightly fewer respondents ( $n = 24$ ; 7.6%) indicated that a significant threat is cheating or dishonesty on the part of students in their written assignments and exams. It is encouraging that students are aware of such inappropriate behavior. The issue of social isolation was indicated by 21 respondents (6.6%), while 19 people (6.0%) mentioned the risk of failing exams. Another category, the lack of practical competences, was noted by 16 respondents (5.0%). In total, 15 students (4.7%) stated that there are no threats from distance learning. Another 12 people (3.8%) noted the threat of low motivation or a lack thereof. Another threat, mentioned by nine respondents (2.8%), was accounts being hacked and data theft. These respondents were concerned about the interception of information by hackers, the processing of their personal data, or online harassment. Laziness was considered a threat by eight respondents (2.5%), and the lack of verification of knowledge and learning outcomes was a threat according to seven people (2.2%). Five respondents (1.5%) mentioned a lack of preparation for professional work and the student's lack of involvement in the teaching process. Four students (1.2%) chose such responses as convenience, unfair assessment, and digital exclusion. Three respondents (0.9%) mentioned the lack of practical classes and plagiarism.

There were some responses that were chosen by a single student each: no friendships, instrumental treatment of other people, no group work, less responsibility, resignation from university, the university becoming a place to sell degrees and not for acquiring knowledge. Other threats that were mentioned were that books would decrease in value and be read less, there would be less contact with literature, problems with handwriting, weaker skills of self-presentation, a dependence on

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equipment and systems during exams, and the huge amounts of electricity used for computers' operation.

To summarize, it should be noted that there are many threats that result from the use of e-learning, so it is worth considering taking appropriate measures to reduce or eliminate them.

### **Conclusions and Postulates for Educational Practice**

The coronavirus pandemic caused a serious socioeconomic crisis, which initiated an innovative approach to solving many problems, including those related to forced isolation and a lack of communication from the outside world. This situation was and still is a serious challenge for education and interpersonal contact. Therefore, due to the need to quickly introduce distance learning, participation and organization of academic classes in this system was not properly prepared in advance, undoubtedly making it a difficult and stressful situation.

The experience of the students who take part in remote teaching indicates that there are still many activities that should be introduced into the practice of everyday academic education. We will certainly be able to make constructive use of good solutions and the strengths of e-learning and to eliminate any problems and threats. Perhaps a creative solution will be to introduce only those elements of distance learning which can contribute to a better acquisition of IT and digital competences and can help students develop activity, self-discipline, and individual learning. The results of our empirical research undoubtedly recommend a certain caution about extending distance learning in academic education.

One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, close to half the world's students are still affected by partial or full school closures, and over 100 million additional children will fall below the minimum proficiency level in reading as a result of the health crisis. Prioritizing education recovery is crucial to avoid a generational catastrophe (UNESCO, 2020).

The current, undoubtedly dramatic, pandemic has revealed an interesting area for in-depth research on preparing and coping with remote

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education. Therefore, it is highly recommended to undertake further and more detailed longitudinal research on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of distance learning.

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