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*The Interconnection of the Processes of Teaching and Supporting Development With Elements of Artistic Therapy in the Awareness of Teachers Striving for Further Education*

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Powiązanie procesów nauczania i wspierania rozwoju z elementami terapii artystycznej w świadomości doksztalających się nauczycieli

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ABSTRACT

The study contains considerations and description of the research (in the qualitative strategy) on the triad of terms included in the title of the study against the background of the teachers' struggles with the current difficulties arising not only in field of educational system but also in professional training of teachers. The research was conducted by applying method of implicit observation during seminar classes with students working in a kindergarten/school. The qualitative research procedure allowed to attempt to answer the questions whether teachers are aware of the need to combine teaching processes, supporting development and therapy (with artistic means), and whether applying it in practice is related to coping with internal and external difficulties, as well as the systemic ones. The observation resulted in producing detailed notes on the issues of accumulation of teaching processes, therapy and support for students' development. The analysis of the notes enabled determination of the problems faced by the respondents and identification of sources of mentioned problems.

**Keywords:** teaching; supporting development; therapy; teacher

## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary educational system, as never before, places upon teachers a wide range of requirements that must be coped with regardless of the conditions in which teachers work. Therefore, a specific scope of formal education is defined<sup>1</sup>, but the fact that it is obtained does not guarantee that all duties can be fulfilled in such a way that teaching, supporting the development and therapy, especially the one employing artistic means, constitute a compact, uniform quality whole. These three concepts mentioned in the title of this study are crucial for educational process, hence it seems necessary to combine them in the course of teachers' work. Therefore, the question arises: to what extent are they prepared to work with a child/student, with respect to the combination of these three processes.

Before we attempt to answer this question, we shall formulate the way of understanding the terms used in the title of this study. Teaching is defined as “planned teacher’s work with students, enabling them to acquire knowledge, skills, habits and developing their personality”, it is also “guiding the learning process” (*Encyklopedia PWN*). This approach is rather broad, and the process of personality development mentioned here is an ambiguous term, often not very clear to teachers, although each of them during the pedagogical studies got acquainted with the issues of developmental psychology of children and youth. However, guiding of the learning process – as we think – can be understood in an authoritarian, prescriptive way, which unfortunately used to take and still takes place in many schools. Teaching in our understanding is a process characterised by temporal continuity, with various points of saturation and intensity, focused on the transmission and consolidation of skills necessary for functioning in today’s world of knowledge, it draws from student’s most valuable features of character, intellect and shapes his/her moral attitudes. In this understanding of teaching, it is impossible to disregard the issue of supporting the child’s/student’s development.

This concept functions both in pedagogical practice and in many scientific publications as well as in the methodological ones intended for teachers-practitioners. We think that in the third case it is frequently used because of trends in education rather than in its proper understanding. This process requires knowledge in the field of general and developmental psychology, oligophrenopedagogy or

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<sup>1</sup> Still in force today is the Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 17 January 2012 on education standards in preparation for work as a teacher. See also Attachments to the draft regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 2019; Appendix No. 1 Standard of education preparing to perform the profession of a teacher; Appendix No. 2 Standard of education preparing to perform the profession of kindergarten and early school education teacher (grades 1–3 of primary school); Appendix No. 3 Standard of preparation education to perform the profession of a special school and a special unit teacher as well as a teacher conducting classes with children and students with special educational needs; Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 1 August 2017 on specific qualifications required from teachers.

special pedagogy, moreover, it needs certain personality traits (Pituła, 2010) and pedagogical experience enabling perception of their activities aimed at supporting development of a child/student/pupil, with appropriate distance characterised by reflectivity and a reliable assessment of the effectiveness of their own actions. It is difficult then to disagree with the view that

teachers, as a professional group, are highly motivated to improve themselves and acquire knowledge, which may also result from the specificity of their career path, but their knowledge is often not of operational character and it does not find a direct translation into relationships with students. (Bartkowiak, 2018, p. 168)

The very completion of studies, or additionally post-graduate studies, when learning about pedagogical and psychological theories is aimed at obtaining a formal diploma, it does not determine the quality of their work on supporting the child's/student's development. Taking into consideration the fact that the studies by Blazar and Kraft (Blazar, Matthiew, Kraft, 2016) suggest that the good effectiveness of teachers in teaching is not synonymous with the proper effects of shaping the attitudes and behaviour of students, it may be assumed that supporting the development is a multidimensional process that does not lie within the capabilities of all the pedagogues/educators, including the so-called "good teachers".

Supporting the development of a child/student at school, intertwined with other activities (or maybe only theoretically they are separated to facilitate the scientific movement in this complicated world of related, and often "tangled" networks of relationships between people), is a process that cannot be accurately defined because of the diversity of children's nature, their predispositions, personality traits, or character. In this context, this support must be multi-dimensional, or even "multi-coloured" if one assigns colours to individual human characteristics or social situations. Sometimes it may even mean that the child is not disturbed in learning with the near and distant surroundings, allowing him/her to experiment, or simply to patiently answer his/her questions, frequently repeated many times, until the child/student understands the adult's explanation. Apart from these principles, the development support takes various forms, verified not only by researchers (Waloszek, 2009), but most often through pedagogical (cf. Klus-Stańska, 2008; Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2008; Palka, 2008; Puślecki, 2008; Uszyńska-Jarmoc, 2008; Zalewska-Bujak, 2008; Zwiernik, 2008) or therapeutic practice. It should be emphasised here that this promotion of development does not apply only to gifted, exceptional children, which is most often raised in published works. According to Bobek,

working with skilful children is a multidirectional job, but an alternative method of working with a gifted student, or tutoring, is used to a small extent. Apart from schoolwork, interesting educational activities, and the use of various forms and teaching resources, it should include pointing to additional sources of knowledge, inspiring to use additional extracurricular activities to develop interests and cognitive activity as well as the need for self-education. (Bobek, 2018, p. 41)

We believe that this view (or recommendation) should be applied to all children, because the diverse potential they are equipped with should be intensively developed. This will result in raising the level of functioning of whole communities, not only selected individuals. Naturally, exceptionally gifted children should be surrounded with special care, enabling them to improve themselves in their chosen field of knowledge or skills, but this is a separate subject that goes beyond this study.

At this point it is vital to bring to mind a phenomenon which has been very “trendy” for many years in our country, i.e. coaching (Bałachowicz, Rowicka 2013; Bennewicz, 2013; Kozielska, Skowrońska-Pućka, 2015), which is a form of development support not only in educational processes, but it is also applicable at every level of human functioning (in social, professional relations, on the way to achievements or removal of various types of disorders that make it difficult to attain them, to shape self-determination and self-fulfilment, etc.).

Most authors agree that coaching is a method focused on individual development and performance improvement; it is an interactive process, a professional relationship with a structured formula, which aims to strengthen the client (coachee) in making a specific change based on resources, conclusions and discoveries of the client. (Kozielska, Skowrońska-Pućka, 2015, p. 38)

Among the terms most often combined with coaching, whose meaning boundaries are blurred, mentoring, consulting, therapy and teaching should be mentioned (Kozielska, Skowrońska-Pućka, 2015). In this context, supporting the student’s development is a procedure related to therapy, while using, for example, artistic means to work with the child/student, one may talk about the interpenetration of these processes (cf. Sacher, 2004).

It is worth recalling the fact that when in 2001 a research was carried out as part of the “Schooling for Tomorrow” programme, experts from around twenty countries described the most likely scenario of education development until 2020. It predicted “strengthening the bureaucratisation of education and expanding the market model of school” (Torończak, 2011, p. 5) which, as we currently unfortunately observe, is confirmed and thus projecting on teachers’ working conditions, their struggles not only with the current system but also with the public opinion through the media’s negative attitude towards this profession. In this context, introducing changes in the perception of teachers’ work is particularly difficult, although these changes seem necessary.

In order for the above-discussed educational phenomena to be one entity (teaching, supporting the development of children/students, therapy, especially including the application of artistic means), both at the level of their importance and implementation, it would first and foremost be necessary to completely re-shape the teacher’s figure.

Although the priorities of the EU educational policy draw attention to: “equal educational opportunities for children and youth from different backgrounds, different nationalities, lan-

guages, religions”, “equality of educational opportunities for students with physical and mental disabilities”, “upbringing in the spirit of solidarity, tolerance, human rights, sense of European identity (the European dimension of education) and search for personal patterns”, it is worth noting that the change in the existing model of the teacher is the most vital, and consequently the transformation of the functions and tasks to be fulfilled by the teacher. (Bednarkowa, 2011, p. 20)

It is not enough anymore to be a teacher of “chalk, blackboard, textbook and notebook”, as we are heading for the necessary teacher-student relationships based on euthyphronics, understood as the relationship of “pure-mindedness with a balanced, non-incapacitating partnership” (Bednarkowa, 2011, p. 20), as well as the relationship with the new technology with its constant changes, modernisation and extension of its scope applicability in everyday life. Therefore, the teacher should, in the view of the activities undertaken with children/youth, attempt to combine the teaching processes, development support and therapy, here, for aesthetic and cultural reasons, we indicate artistic therapy.

In the initial phase, when art therapy (artetherapy) was created (Szulc, 1996), its methods were applied only to patients of psychiatric hospitals or other somatic treatment departments. Today, it has been popularised to include children with various types of disabilities, as well as children and young people with developmental norms, but requiring assistance due to the change of the country of settlement, adaptation problems, internal problems resulting from e.g. low threshold of emotional sensitivity, shyness, or psychomotor anxiety, but also from loss of parents or severe pauperisation (Szafranec, 2007). According to Juszczyk,

new sources of children’s experiences, sensations and emotions appear. But at the same time, the social space is shrinking, which is exemplified in direct interpersonal interactions. The today’s space of a child’s life is characterised by variability, huge complexity and diversity of its elements. It is a close space but at the same time a very distant one, both private and public, own and foreign, both safe and dangerous, allowed and forbidden, educational, educating, creative, but also undeniably threatening the child’s development, destroying it, and captivating. Thus, Polish children function in conditions typical of a transforming society. (Juszczyk, 2011, p. 21)

This raises the question of whether an average teacher working in the kindergarten/at school/at university, fulfilling the formal requirements for holding the post is aware of the links between teaching, supporting the development and applying artistic means therapy, and thus conscious of all the problems of modern children and youth associated with violent transformations, not only social, economic and cultural, but also ones associated with mentality. Is it not the case that despite the content of many subjects acquired during the course of study, covering specific issues (pedagogy, didactics, detailed didactics, general and developmental psychology, pedagogical therapy, etc.), these areas of knowledge are treated in a separate way, e.g. somehow exempting teacher from taking therapeutic actions because teacher believes that not only is there no obligation to use such forms of work, but

teacher may assume that he or she is not authorised to do so. The fragmentation of specialisations and teaching specialisations suggests the possibility of adopting such an attitude<sup>2</sup>.

In order to confirm the doubts about the sense of teachers' perseverance, who despite the formal, conforming preparation requirements do not feel confident in the areas of supporting the development of children with disabilities, one may recall the results of the research (Kionka, 2019). Well, the education of teachers working with children with disabilities includes specialised studies, i.e. typhoidagogy, surdopedagogy, oligophrenopedagogy, early support of students with autism, early support of students with Asperger's syndrome, corrective gymnastics, numerous courses, workshops and trainings supplementing the pedagogical and didactic knowledge related to early education of a child and neurologopedics<sup>3</sup>. Although the surveyed teachers have formal education to conduct classes with children with disabilities, as many as 43% of them consider themselves to be unprepared for work in the field of educating and upbringing such children. This conclusion confirms the thesis that teacher does not perform all the tasks in force with commitment and freedom, but he or she struggles with problems arising from the functioning of the current educational system and with his/her own limitations. These restrictions are:

- frequently: lack of awareness of the necessity to link different areas of knowledge in pedagogical practice;
- too frequently: poor preparation in the field of artistic knowledge and skills;
- frequently: vague, superficial understanding of a holistic approach to work with child/student;
- frequently: looking for didactic patterns rather than creating them;
- frequently: lack of reflective thinking about his/her didactic activities, which is, *inter alia*, the result of negative selection for the profession.

## RESEARCH PROCEDURES

To verify the thesis contained in the title of this study, we conducted research among teachers graduating from university<sup>4</sup>, working in various educational institutions. According to Gnitecki (2006, p. 273), who presents scientific disciplines according to many different criteria, pedagogy can be "included in both empirical (based on the repetitiveness of phenomena) and humanistic sciences (based on the

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<sup>2</sup> Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 1 August 2017 on specific qualifications required from teachers; Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 28 August 2017 amending the regulation on the rules for the provision and organisation of psychological and pedagogical assistance in public kindergartens, schools and facilities.

<sup>3</sup> The teachers of only one institution have such a range of qualifications.

<sup>4</sup> The interviewed teachers obtained a bachelor's level, i.e., they are graduates of first-cycle studies.

uniqueness of phenomena)”. This approach is reflected in the research practice. The research on educational processes, and therefore on pedagogical issues, contains problems requiring empirical testing and problems for the solution of which a description of unrepeatable phenomenological phenomena is indispensable. By selecting the qualitative research procedure, we attempted to solve the problem through the question if teachers are aware of the need to combine teaching processes, supporting development and applying therapy (artistic means) and whether the usage of this interconnection in practice is related to struggling with internal and external, systemic obstacles. We conducted the research applying the implicit observation technique. It is a type of descriptive research, entailed with the diagnosis, deduction and critical description of the data obtained.

The study group consists of teachers employed in kindergartens (N = 14) and primary schools (N = 12) completing the second cycle of MA studies, i.e. they combine work and obtaining further education. These are exclusively women aged 28–52. This is also related to their seniority in the teaching profession, ranging from 1.5 years to 23 years. The teachers work in kindergartens and primary schools of the Silesian Voivodeship.

Observational studies were conducted during the seminars, when the research concepts of the teachers/students regarding teaching issues, supporting the development and applying therapy with artistic means to children/students were elaborated on and discussed. After each class their comments, statements and questions were recorded. As a result, a compact text was created and put under analysis. To describe the research findings in a transparent manner, we adopted the following categories of the description of these statements, discussions and seminar talks:

- applying the knowledge obtained during studies in pedagogical practice;
- linking their research to the situations observed in pedagogical work;
- treating teaching, supporting the development and applying therapy in a related/separated manner;
- problems related to the operating system of the institutions in which they work;
- pedagogical activities suggesting the inoperability of the knowledge acquired during the course of studies.

In the description, we also included particularly interesting statements of the respondents, both in the positive and pejorative sense.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

During the seminar, the students most frequently asked questions about the methods and forms of work with children in specific teaching situations, expecting ready-made formulas to solve problems that arise during classes with children. When attempts were made to refer them to the scope of knowledge obtained in the course of studies, e.g. the methodology of teaching music, they were often

surprised to discover that in their resources of the acquired knowledge they could find a solution to the reported methodical problem themselves. Only some of the respondents attempted to find the information they needed in their own resources or in the literature. A special case was the questions and statements of the student who was focusing on the vocal skills of the early school-class teacher implemented as part of her master thesis. She was aware of the teachers' problems, knew their causes, but she searched for the hidden motives of choosing a repertoire of children's songs and broadened her inquiries about the media's impact on teachers' preferences, complementing her own research procedure with new scope and additional research tools. However, the most difficult interlocutor was a student who, despite the wide range of knowledge acquired through studying the literature, could not make any analysis or synthesis, failed to notice the relationship between the various activities described in the methodical works, despite their obviousness, asking questions formulated in a way that suggests that "I know but I don't understand".

Linking the research with the situations observed in the course of their own pedagogical work took place very often. A closer perspective, an analysis of the justifications for selecting the subject of the master thesis, suggests, however, that the fact of facilitating the research due to their work and while working was more important than a specific research problem. Hence, often in the conceptual phase, these problems were either "unproblematic", i.e. already described in the previous literature, or too difficult for students to solve, because they would require longitudinal research, or the use of research procedures that are too difficult for students. The discussion of these issues led to raising the awareness of real problems and possible methods of solving them. Some students, however, accurately recognised the problems observed in their work, the consideration and examination of which contributed to the deepening of knowledge about their own pedagogical work and the lessons valid for the practice could be derived from them. They concerned the interrelations between teaching processes, e.g. therapy, especially if the research was carried out in integration classes. Here, the difficulties resulting from the use of didactic and therapeutic methods together, despite the presence of a supporting teacher, were emphasised. The majority of the questions that deepened the reflection on the subject of the research focused on the theses elaborating on the response to music of pre-school children. In such a case, the students also showed great curiosity and ingenuity in applying results of their teaching practice. They also noted the acceleration of general development of children, and the fact that music classes display therapeutic functions, although this connection of ways of working with children (teaching, supporting the development, applying therapy) was not the subject of any of the students' research. In the discussions they raised this issue by stating that the most difficult area of their work is artistic therapy and, of course, artistic education. The awareness of these difficulties is, on the one hand, valuable because it prevents mistakes in the teacher's work, and, on the other hand, it is disadvantageous, because it frees teachers from undertaking



the effort of their implementation. An interesting case was a student who, lacking any artistic preparation, was involved in conducting music classes for children, employed by a private company providing “therapeutic services”, which is a curious situation. She also had no doubts about her musical or therapeutic skills, because, as she said, “I like to do it, I sing and dance well, and children after classes are relaxed” (literal quoting of the student’s statement), which was supposed to prove the effectiveness of this “musical therapy”. However, she did not undertake studies to verify the effects of her work, because she “would have to read so much literature on music and therapy” (literal quoting of the student’s statement).

From the analysis of the recorded text of conversations, opinions and questions, we also extracted tips related to the problems associated with the functioning of the institutions in which the respondents work. The integrated system of education in kindergartens and early primary school grades would seemingly serve the possibilities of entangling teaching processes, supporting the development and the artistic means of therapy. In the Core Curriculum, one can find such recommendations, e.g. “according to the regulations regarding the tasks of kindergarten, teachers organise classes to support the child’s development” (Podstawa programowa..., 2017). From the discussions of the respondents, sometimes very vivid ones, emerges the picture of educational institutions, which are managed more in terms of bureaucratic correctness complying with ministerial and local supervision than in terms of the care for the developmental well-being of the pupils. Teachers’ professional position is also uncertain, as they work in a hurry juxtaposed with the changeability of the regulations that does not make their functioning easier, which is certainly reflected in their relationships with children, and also in their personal lives. Under these conditions, the assumption of a well-thought-out strategy of combining teaching processes, supporting the development and applying therapy is rather doubtful, which was underlined by the respondents many times.

Pedagogical activities suggesting the inoperability of the knowledge acquired in the course of studies are also the subject of conversations and seminar discussions. In case of the issues related to teaching and supporting development, it happens that students understand the relationship of these processes, but it was noticed that there was uncertainty or an inclination towards classifying practical activities, assigning them to different processes. It seems that the respondents did not understand the essence of overlap in teaching and development support, as well as the elements of therapy, and that all these processes take place simultaneously in the mind of the child/student. Quite indicative were statements suggesting a completely different understanding of the discussed processes. One of the students said that she “must teach so much to children that there is no time to think about supporting the development or applying therapy, and she does musical and artistic activities, after all, when the time allows, because they are good interludes (sic!) for children” (literal quoting of the student’s statement).

Here one can clearly see the lack of skills to operationalise the knowledge acquired through studies, because the didactic activities of the authoress of the statement focus primarily on obtaining effects in the basic knowledge and basic skills of children, not recognising that each teaching and learning process contains elements of support for development and therapy. Even more disturbing is the statement about the treatment of artistic education. Only one person in the group noticed this fact by discussing the importance of education in the field of art, referring to the literature and using reliable arguments.

## CONCLUSIONS

The interconnection of the processes of teaching and supporting development with elements of artistic therapy, significant for wise and effective education of children, generates problems with which modern teachers struggle for various reasons. We can cautiously deduce from the research that the main reason for these struggles is the command system with a large area of bureaucracy and additional duties resulting from them.

Given the contemporary “flickering” diversity of the world and the people who create it, it is difficult to assume that certain standards, ordered according to the current pedagogical and psychological knowledge, may be sufficient for work with children and youth. Contemporary education is seen as the aftermath of the achievements of previous generations, which in the past was sufficient, but now it seems necessary to accelerate the pace of change, especially in the field of the way and quality of teachers’ education. It is them who can or should be aware of facing the future, with an attempt to imagine it and try to prepare children/young people for its emergence. Certainly, this future is an “unexplored space”, but one thing is unquestionable – it will not be the same and this change depends to a large extent on teachers. Meanwhile, this professional group, plunged by incongruous regulations, working under conditions of permanent changes and pressure of the passing time, is not able to delve into issues directly related to their pedagogical activity, there is no temporal, mental and economic space for the use of processes in peaceful and favourable conditions that could significantly improve the results of the achievements, not only in terms of students’ knowledge and skills, but most of all in their comprehensive development manifested in ever-greater intellectual, emotional and social maturity, because teaching is more effective when the student’s inner problems are covered by therapy, and all activities are carried out to support the student’s development.

Discussions, divagations, conversations and disputes in the groups of the surveyed students/teachers also highlighted their struggles with their own problems, including unjustified self-confidence, conviction about the high level of their skills, certainty about the effectiveness of their work, with no deeper reflection, not to

mention the verification by means of the research. The majority, however, are characterised by inquisitiveness, willingness to learn from others, as well as modesty in self-evaluation, which probably will lead to further education.

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#### LEGAL ACTS

- Attachments to the draft regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 2019.
- Appendix No. 1 Standard of education preparing to perform the profession of a teacher.
- Appendix No. 2 Standard of education preparing to perform the profession of kindergarten and early school education teacher (grades 1–3 of primary school).
- Appendix No. 3 Standard of preparation education to perform the profession of a special school and a special unit teacher as well as a teacher conducting classes with children and students with special educational needs.
- Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 17 January 2012 on education standards in preparation for work as a teacher.
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 1 August 2017 on specific qualifications required from teachers.
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 28 August 2017 amending the regulation on the rules for the provision and organisation of psychological and pedagogical assistance in public kindergartens, schools and facilities.

## ABSTRAKT

Opracowanie zawiera rozważania i opis badań (w strategii jakościowej) triady pojęć zawartych w tytule, uwzględniono również zmagania nauczycieli z obecnymi trudnościami, mającymi swoje źródło nie tylko w systemie oświatowym, lecz także w przygotowaniu zawodowym nauczycieli. Badania przeprowadzono metodą obserwacji niejawnej w toku zajęć seminaryjnych ze studentkami pracującymi w przedszkolu/szkole. Procedura badań jakościowych pozwoliła na podjęcie próby odpowiedzi na pytania, czy nauczyciele mają świadomość potrzeby łączenia procesów nauczania, wspierania rozwoju oraz terapii (środkami artystycznymi) oraz czy stosowanie tego w praktyce jest związane ze zmaganiem się z trudnościami wewnętrznymi, zewnętrznymi i systemowymi. Wynikiem przeprowadzonej obserwacji są szczegółowe notatki dotyczące podejmowanej przez studentki problematyki kumulacji procesów nauczania, terapii i wspierania rozwoju uczniów. Analiza notatek umożliwiła ustalenie problemów, z jakimi zmagają się badane oraz identyfikację źródeł tych problemów.

**Słowa kluczowe:** nauczanie; wspieranie rozwoju; terapia; nauczyciel