

TRANSFORMATIONS IN SOCIAL SPACE AND THE FUNCTIONING OF SCHOOL

Abstract.

Background. The progressive social and economic changes occurring in our country in the period of the last twenty years are accompanied as well by the intensification of destructive phenomena, both in the sphere of entire society and in that of an individual alike. Criminological statistics indicate the existence of crime, delinquency and the different forms of pathological behavior, which are constantly remaining at a high level. These ought to be treated as the symptom of the disorganization of society connected with the structural transformation which is still in progress. These phenomena encompass within their scope different social categories, and children and school attending youths do not remain unaffected by them. Therefore, the goal of the article is to present macro-social conditions of educational problems that should be considered external reasons for pathological behaviours of students as well as internal determinants of this type of phenomena that result from an improper organization of school work.

Materials and methods. The article is strictly theoretical, but includes empirical research conducted by Polish authors and axiological concepts that present diverse trends and views on goals, tasks and functions of educational institutions. The author also relies on her own research conducted among schoolchildren using the diagnostic survey method. The research indicates a significant intensification of various forms of destructive behaviour considered a substitution form of meeting psychosocial needs deprived in the school environment.

Results. Contemporary school is an environment which is dehumanized and extremely formalized, in which a school attendee frequently remains anonymous, alienated, deprived of the possibility to establish individual, personal contacts both with their peers and with a teacher alike. Socially-destructive behaviors are becoming, therefore, the substitute manner of adjustment to the dysfunctional environment of school. The helplessness of school facing the increasing phenomena of pathological behaviors is manifesting itself in the form of the reaction of defense systems characteristic for "the victim syndrome" described in the literature of the subject. In this case, however, it is an inefficient institution that is becoming a victim, being put in the situation in which it faces contradictory expectations, acting in the conditions which are not conducive to attaining its statutory objectives.

Conclusions. Not only has contemporary Polish school failed to develop the effective system of counteracting destructive phenomena, but it has also itself become one of the pathogenic factors. The sole effective manner of counteracting pathology in school seems to be constituted by the restitution of its activity in the field of upbringing, based upon democratic (rather than the liberal ones) interpersonal relationships, a clearly-determined system of requirements, objectives and values. A substantial degree of differences in opinions widespread in contemporary trends in pedagogical science, the competition between conservative and postmodernist-liberal tendencies make it impossible to develop a homogeneous system of upbrin-

ging based upon the common ideological assumptions. Therefore, what is becoming a challenge for the reformers of Polish education, is creating the conditions for developing pluralistic upbringing curricula making it possible to create pro-social attitudes, democratic, while simultaneously taking under consideration the diversified social needs and expectations within the scope of activity in the field of upbringing.

Key words: educational activity of school, phenomena of social pathology, crisis of values.

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Аннотация.

Актуальность и цели. Прогрессивные социально-экономические изменения, происходящие в нашей стране последние двадцать лет, сопровождаются ростом негативных явлений как в общественной сфере в целом, так и относительно отдельных его представителей. Криминальная статистика свидетельствует о наличии преступности, правонарушений и различных форм асоциального поведения, показатели которых постоянно остаются на высоком уровне. Данное явление следует рассматривать в качестве симптома дезорганизации общества, связанного со структурной трансформацией, которая продолжает прогрессировать. Эти явления охватывают в полном объеме различные социальные категории, а уж дети и подростки, посещающие школы, тем более не остаются в стороне. Таким образом, целью данной статьи является представление макросоциальных условий образовательных задач, которые должны быть рассмотрены как внешние причины асоциального поведения учащихся, а также внутренние детерминанты данного типа явлений, возникающие в результате неправильной организации работы школы.

Материалы и методы. Статья имеет исключительно теоретическую направленность, хотя и включает в себя эмпирические исследования польских авторов и аксиологические понятия, которые представляют собой разнообразные тенденции и взгляды на цели, задачи и функции образовательного учреждения. Автор также опирается на собственные исследования, проведенные среди школьников методом диагностики. Исследование указывает на значительное усиление различных форм деструктивного поведения, которые, как считают, ограничивают удовлетворение психологических потребностей в школьной среде.

Результаты. Современная школа – это бесчеловечная и крайне формализованная среда, в которой участник школы часто остается безликим, отчужденным, лишенным возможности установить индивидуальные, личные контакты как со своими сверстниками, так и с преподавателями. Социально-деструктивное поведение, таким образом, возникает в результате приспособления к неблагоприятной среде школы. Беспомощность школы заключается в увеличении показателей поведенческих отклонений, проявляющихся как защитная реакция, характерная для «синдрома жертвы», описанного в тематической литературе. В этом случае, однако, школа является нерациональным институтом, жертвой, действующей в условиях, которые препятствуют достижению поставленных целей.

Выводы. Современная польская школа не только не смогла разработать эффективную систему противодействия пагубным явлениям, но и сама стала одним из факторов, способствующих усугублению сложившейся ситуации.

Единственным эффективным способом предотвращения подобной патологии в школе является возвращение к деятельности в области воспитания, основанной на демократическом (а не либеральном) стиле межличностных отношений, в рамках четко определенной системы требований, целей и ценностей. Присутствуют значительные расхождения во мнениях относительно современных тенденций в педагогике. Сложившаяся конкуренция между консервативной и постмодернистско-либеральной тенденциями делают невозможным разработку единой системы воспитания, основанной на общих идеологических предпосылках. Таким образом, проблемой для польских реформаторов становится создание учебных программ плюралистического воспитания, одновременно затрагивающих разнообразные социальные потребности и ожидания в пределах сферы деятельности в области воспитания.

Ключевые слова: образовательная деятельность школы, феномен социальной патологии, кризис ценностей.

The progressive social and economic changes occurring in our country in the period of the last twenty years are accompanied as well by the intensification of destructive phenomena, both in the sphere of entire society and in that of an individual alike. Criminological statistics indicate the existence of crime, delinquency and the different forms of pathological behavior, which are constantly remaining at a high level. These ought to be treated as the symptom of the disorganization of society connected with the structural transformation which is still in progress. These phenomena encompass within their scope different social categories, and children and school attending youths do not remain unaffected by them. It is also the reason, why school, as an educational institution, is facing new challenges set for it, new expectations and social objectives, formulated by axiologists. For instance, P. Dalin and V. Rust indicate the function of the school of the twenty-first century as being a mission in the service of society; this mission is constituted by serving democracy, multiculturalism, the survival of the mankind, labour, beauty, aesthetics, a human being and the environment of a human being, individual development and auto-creation [1, p. 83–87]. In the reality of school, however, idealistic objectives clash against particular problems in the sphere of upbringing, which indicate a dramatic divergence between the postulated state of the matters and the actual one. School does not function in social vacuum, but is a separate micro-environment, the organization and the manner of the functioning of which reflect the existing structure of society, and also all the problems occurring in the macro-social dimension. It is also the reason, why school is not free of destructive phenomena, and, from time to time, not even of the pathological ones, the origins of which might be claimed to be both different social environments and the specific character found of school itself alike. H. Spionek [2, p. 64], analyzing the relationships between the activity of school and the formation of disorders in the social development of children, attracts attention to three separate, but exerting a mutual influence upon one another, spheres of this influence. In accordance with the opinion of this authoress, school may become:

- the initial cause of developmental disorders;
- the area in which already existing developmental disorders are revealed;
- one of the chains in the complex process of the pathologization of a child if school has become a place in which failures and also the absence of success are experienced.

The causes of the pathological functioning of a school attendee in school are generally claimed to be situated within the realm of the individual developmental properties of a school attendee, or that of the influence exerted by external factors: micro- and macro-social ones. Into the group of social phenomena constituting the results of political transformation, and the economic crisis, connected with them, exerting an influence (direct or indirect) upon the increase in the number of pathological behaviors, the following ones ought, beyond any doubt, to be included:

- the crisis of values resulting from the mutual competition of different moral systems and the models of life, because the traditional, and still widespread in Poland, conservative and religious conception, is more and more frequently set against the model of modern society: lay, based upon the principle of pluralism and far-reaching tolerance. As a result of that, what not infrequently happens is disorganization within the scope of social norms and social patterns, which causes the peculiar lack of adjustedness and moral confusion, in particular, among young people;

- the fall of authorities and, clearly sensed by young people, the deficit of commonly-accepted positive role models, which results in the widespread popularity of attitudes based upon the principles of extreme moral pragmatism. Therefore, it is only the efficiency in achieving the objective of it that is becoming the criterion of the assessment of a behaviour, and the same position as the measure of the assessment of an individual is attained by socially-measurable success revealed, in the majority of cases, by demonstrating their own high economic status (real or alleged);

- the crisis of traditional family, limiting its functions in the field of upbringing, caring and socialization, which is, to make things worse, accompanied by the visible depreciation of parenthood and obligations resulting from that, which increases the phenomenon termed “family orphanhood”, and also that of so-called “euro-orphanhood”, connected with the economic migration of parents, which is more and more widespread;

- disorders in the process of socialization concerning both the contents, and also the direction, of forwarding socialization patterns. It is so because rapid changes in social sphere generate new requirements, expectations and problems, which the young generation is forced to confront, limit the possibility of learning in the case of children upon the basis of the socialization experiences of parents, which, in turn, makes it difficult to conduct the multi-generation transfer of cultural values and life patterns;

- pauperization and the extending of zones of poverty, economic and social marginalization, encompassing the ever-broader categories of population, disproportional and difficult to justify economic differences, causing the feeling of injustice, social aggression, willingness to acquire wealth quickly, disregarding law and moral standards, and also the attitudes of mutual dislike, jealousy and hatred;

- the unclear career and life perspectives of young people, increasing unemployment, even among the graduates of the institutions of tertiary education, the necessity of looking for work abroad, which, even though it guarantees young people a slightly better financial status, yet, as a rule, makes it unavoidable that they have a low social status in the country to which they have emigrated.

Looking for the new standards of behavior and acting, effective in current social conditions, causes the increased acceptance of patterns originating in subcul-

ture(s), treated as the more attractive and more modern ones, and, therefore, as being more useful. As it was claimed by K. Szafraniec: "Behaviors and phenomena which, yet until recently, have been stigmatized, are slowly becoming commonly accepted social norm, whereas showing preference (in individual behavior) for standards stemming from the axiological order sustaining the cultural identity of society is frequently treated as deviation and pathology" [3, p. 30].

The social phenomena presented hereinabove determine attitudes and behaviors manifesting themselves in school in the form of the different forms of pathologies. Thus far, the environment of school has failed to develop the effective methods of counteracting the negative influences exerted by society, which causes the intensification of these phenomena and makes them more permanent. Moreover, school itself, as a specific social environment, generates the new forms of deviation behaviors, becoming the direct and initial cause of them. That results from the character of this institution itself, the manner in which it is organized, the conditions of work and the limitations in the functions and tasks which are traditionally assigned to it.

Contemporary school is an environment which is dehumanized and extremely formalized, in which a school attendee frequently remains anonymous, alienated, deprived of the possibility to establish individual, personal contacts both with their peers and with a teacher alike. Beyond any doubt, the factors conducive to the destruction and pathologization of educational institutions include the following ones:

- excessive concentration on fulfilling the narrowly-understood didactic function, clear departure from accomplishing tasks in the field of upbringing and care, limiting the number of additional and extra-curricular classes, which makes it impossible for school attendees to form more diversified interpersonal relationships and adopting more diversified social roles, constituting the foundation of becoming mutually acquainted with one another, and also that of the integration of school community;

- curricula not adjusted to the cognitive capabilities and needs of school attendees, which discourage from acquiring knowledge, weaken motivation and suppress the individual interests of young people. In addition to that, the single-dimensional character of requirements restricted to mastering the subject-related contents, causes the situation in which a success in school is only available to a not-numerous group, and the majority of school attendees feel undervalued, defeated and rejected in this environment. Therefore, academic failures are becoming widespread, and these, in accordance with the opinion of J. Rejman: "Are, even too frequently, the cause and the starting point of difficulties with upbringing and disorders in behaviour, reaching the level of crime and delinquency." [4, p. 152];

- the stimulating of the activity of school attendees by means of introducing competition reaching the level of ruthlessness, which is becoming the source of frustrations, deepens antagonisms in the group of peers, generates mutual dislike, jealousy and hatred, manifested in the form of the acts of aggression and violence within the group of peers;

- the school system taking under consideration the additional level of education which is constituted by middle school. The transition of a school attendee to a new school and the change in the thus-far social environment, which is connected with this fact, occurring at the moment of entering the period of adolescence, causes difficulties with adjustment, manifesting themselves in the form of unaccepted

behavior. Moreover, a short, three-year long, period of stay of a school attendee in the institution in question makes it impossible to gain a deeper knowledge of the school attendee and to counteract the disorders arising in the social development of them;

- the interpersonal relationships between a school attendee and a teacher which are inappropriate, and not conducive to the appropriate social climate and effective activity in the field of upbringing, and which are oscillating between autocracy and liberalism. This phenomenon is not typical of solely Polish school. T. Gordon, characterizing the situation in American schools, arrived at the conclusions which may well be applied to our conditions as well. In accordance with the opinion of this author: "School is ruled in accordance with the principle: autocracy – liberalism, whereas, the latter one is most frequently imposed by young people upon the teacher." [5, p. 327]. Both of these extreme attitudes are not conducive to effective activity in the field of upbringing. As it is claimed by W. Komar: "The thus-far attempts at democratization... either have proved unable to break the routine of indestructible school-office, or, in the form of the various options of so-called stress-free behaviour have failed utterly. ... Excessive freedom, not accompanied by requirements in the field of responsibility, causes as much restriction of freedom as restrictivism does." [6, p. 139–140].

Some of the progressive trends in pedagogy, indicating the necessity of respecting the subjective character of a child, have resulted, with time, in the formation of new, extreme tendencies in the field of upbringing. The pathological character of them is most visibly reflected in the idea of so-called "stress-free upbringing", referred to as *laissez-faire* as well, which has been popular in Poland for some time now. Here, no requirements or expectations are set for children, and adults make attempts to remove all obstacles that may possibly hinder them, so as to prevent children from coming across any restrictions or prohibitions. The noble views of the authors of pedocentrism, humanistic pedagogy, anti-pedagogy and the other trends of this type, aiming to create for children the happy world, stress-free and not infected by problems, have, unfortunately, resulted in practice in the distortions of ideas in the field of upbringing, the collapse of the authority of parents and teachers and the formation of egocentric, egoistic, or even anti-social attitudes. Contrary to expectations, such upbringing (or, in a matter of fact, the absence of any activities in the field of upbringing) has failed to create a generation of free, creative and happy people. Quite the opposite, in fact – the young people brought up in a "stress-free" manner, when confronted with the reality of adulthood, turn out to be neither prepared to accomplish their own objectives, nor, the more, to undertake tasks connected with society in general. The reason for that fact is that growing up without principles, norms and restrictions leads to the perpetuation of immature, childish and based upon child-style egocentrism, which such an individual will never grow out of. The behaviour of them is, therefore, characterized by:

- the excessive focus on oneself;
- the lack of respect for other people;
- bullying the environment, from time to time since the early period of life;
- the lack of ability to control oneself;
- impulsive behavior, from time to time reaching the level of aggression;
- the lack of confidence, and also confusion;
- emotional destabilization;
- the loss of the feeling of security.

Young people are suddenly finding themselves at the threshold of adulthood, and facing unknown challenges. They fail to understand, why their social environment rejects them, they are unable to follow any principles and rules, and they fall into conflict with the world and with themselves, suffering and blaming their guardians for all the bad which they have experienced.

As a result, the number of pathological behaviors in school is increasing, and, beyond any doubt, the broadest scope among them is that of the different kinds of addictions and violence. The lack of the possibility of meeting the need of success and achievements in a manner acceptable by society leads to looking for the alternative methods of action. Pathological behaviors cater for emotional, social, and, from time to time, also material needs, make it possible to stand out in the crowd of the anonymous environment of school. Interest, admiration and making other people feel fear are the substitutes of success which make it possible to raise one's own self-assessment and feel someone of importance, someone who really matters, someone whose presence other people have to take under consideration. Socially-destructive behaviors are becoming, therefore, the substitute manner of adjustment to the dysfunctional environment of school. They may assume the forms of disorders of the following kinds:

1. External (aggression, hyperactivity, deficit of attention and impulsivity).
2. Internal (fear, complex of inferiority, sadness, disinterest, sleeping disorders, somatic disorders).
3. Socially-immature (weakened concentration, behavior inappropriate for age, getting tired quickly, the lack of resistance to prolonged effort).
4. Creating dangers to society (impetuosity, irritability, irresponsibility, excessive excitation and becoming frustrated easily, disorders in social relationships, difficulties with controlling oneself) [7, p. 28–29].

Among the symptoms of pathological phenomena, most frequently indicated by school attendees, there are various forms of violence, and also of substance dependence. Young people do not feel entirely safe in school. Beyond any doubt, fear, anxiety and misgiving are feelings interfering in didactic process, but, to make things worse, exerting, as well, a destructive influence upon the progress of social development and the formation of the attitudes of young people. It is also the reason why more than 40 % school attendees in Poland do not identify themselves with school, and nearly 30 % play truant. It is as well substance dependence that is becoming a serious problem; approximately 20 % of school attendees are in danger of drug dependence, 30 % in the danger of nicotine poisoning, whereas 80 % consume alcohol in spite of the fact that all schools, at least formally, develop and implement the prophylactic programmes [8, p. 150].

The helplessness of school facing the increasing phenomena of pathological behaviors is manifesting itself in the form of the reaction of defense systems characteristic for “the victim syndrome”¹ described in the literature of the subject. In this case, however, it is an inefficient institution that is becoming a victim, being put in the situation in which it faces contradictory expectations, acting in the condi-

¹ The victim syndrome encompasses, among others, such behaviours as: subjecting oneself to an aggressor, justifying their deeds, the feeling of helplessness and the lack of control of the situation, cf. I. Pospiszl, *Przemoc w rodzinie*, WSiP, Warsaw, 1994, p. 189–190.

tions which are not conducive to attaining its statutory objectives. These reactions may be summarized as the few most typical behaviors, such as:

- the denial of the problem – in situations difficult from the point of view of upbringing, a real fear of failure and “the loss of authority”, and also wanting to avoid a conflict, cause the denial of the existence of a pathological phenomenon, and denying that it constitutes a serious problem of school. School attendees manifesting the different forms of pathological behavior become, *ipso facto*, excluded from the environment, becoming a marginalized group, and therefore, the one which is susceptible to further pathologization;

- minimizing the scale and harmfulness of a phenomenon – the sphere of social pathologies is treated as a very narrow, of small importance and irrelevant to the functioning of school, margin of behaviors, characteristic solely for school attendees from demoralized social environments. In this case, any participation of school itself in the formation of pathological behaviors is questioned;

- leniency in relationship to the perpetrators of pathological behaviors, which is resulting from the excessive liberalization of attitudes in the field of upbringing. The symptoms of pathological behaviors are treated in this case as the symptoms of a transitional developmental crisis, as young age excesses not requiring a firm intervention in the field of upbringing. Thanks to such an interpretation of the anti-social behavior of school attendees, a potential conflict with an aggressor, and also with their parents, is avoided. Downplaying pathologies justifies passivity, *ipso facto*, legitimizing the disinterest of school concerning destructive phenomena;

- looking for causes in the qualities and behavior of a victim – leniency towards an aggressor causes partial or complete transfer of responsibility upon a victim. From time to time, the fact of “being a victim” itself is questioned. The causes of pathologies are claimed to be situated in the specific properties of victims themselves, in their personal characteristics, which may provoke an attack for the part of an aggressor, for instance, in retarded physical development, different outside appearance, manners, interests, the lack of sense of humour, showing off one’s affluence and the deliberate provoking of a perpetrator etc. Influences directed at this category of school attendees aim to the unification and conformization of them, and making them adjusted to the requirements of the group of peers;

- looking for “the scapegoat” – consisting in claiming that the causes of pathologies consist in professional incompetence of a particular teacher. In this manner, the problem involving the entire school is reduced to the subjective job-related difficulties of one individual, usually this very teacher who informed about the problem, or attempted to intervene. Not only are these types of practices conducive to the further intensification of pathological behaviors, but also, additionally, develop in teachers the attitudes of disinterest and passivity, tendencies to deliberate “failing to notice” destructive phenomena;

- attempts at “making pathologies more civilized” – aiming at transforming a behavior which is a highly destructive one into such a one which is less harmful, and, if nothing else can be done, possible to be accepted, adopting, from time to time, even the form of specific school traditions or rituals, for instance, organizing “hazing” as a less brutal form of a sub-cultural behavior, setting the boards for “the lovers of graffiti” etc. In a matter of fact, this type of activity legitimizes a pathology, encourages the potential perpetrators to “creatively” continue the forms of acti-

vity inspired by school and exert influence upon the ambivalent moral assessment of their behavior;

• substitutive actions – consisting in resorting to half measures, which may exert influence upon the apparent increase in the feeling of safety in school, but not upon actually solving a problem. The system of monitoring, badges with name and surname, the elements of sociotherapy and psychotherapy, prophylactic programmes treated as *sui generis* panacea, become reasonable only in the case in which they become auxiliary elements in the broadly understood activity of school in the field of upbringing.

Not only has contemporary Polish school failed to develop the effective system of counteracting destructive phenomena, but it has also itself become one of the pathogenic factors. The sole effective manner of counteracting pathology in school seems to be constituted by the restitution of its activity in the field of upbringing, based upon democratic (rather than the liberal ones) interpersonal relationships, a clearly-determined system of requirements, objectives and values. As it is claimed by K. Olbrycht: “the humanization of upbringing” would, in this case, mean determining the conception of a human being in a clear manner, which makes it possible to formulate ideals in the field of upbringing in a clear manner. In accordance with this position, the methods and techniques of upbringing work ought to be resulting from the choice of an integrated and internally cohesive conception of a human being as the foundation of objectives in the field of upbringing. Foster children and young people, parents and upbringing staff ought to be made aware of this choice, and they need to accept it. Each and every society ought to know what conceptions of a human being and ideals in the field of upbringing are proposed in it by different institutions and environments of upbringing [9, p. 42].

A substantial degree of differences in opinions widespread in contemporary trends in pedagogical science, the competition between conservative and postmodernist-liberal tendencies make it impossible to develop a homogeneous system of upbringing based upon the common ideological assumptions. Therefore, what is becoming a challenge for the reformers of Polish education, is creating the conditions for developing pluralistic upbringing curricula making it possible to create pro-social attitudes, democratic, while simultaneously taking under consideration the diversified social needs and expectations within the scope of activity in the field of upbringing.

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