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***Opportunities for innovative activities  
in education and prevention***

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**Introduction**

Rapid progress in a variety of areas, technological advances and the accompanying cultural and awareness transitions have had far-reaching consequences for development of pedagogical science. This situation implies two directions of considerations. First of them points to the fact that the new reality opens up new opportunities (such as information and communication technologies), but it also generates new educational problems and difficulties, whereas current problems are not sufficiently solved. This is particularly noticeable in pedagogical science and educational activities. Both contemporary schools and educators should be equipped in a variety of abilities and competencies, which also include being creative and taking innovative activities. Creativity and innovativeness has become a determinant of a contemporary teacher or, according to a prominent educator, A. Nalaskowski they are even an obligation.

Considerations of the present study concern challenges and tasks the teachers must face. Therefore, they concern a way the innovativeness of education is understood and the question whether innovative activities in educational practice and prevention are possible (and necessary). Howev-

er, in order to provide the answers to these questions, one should analyse the current educational reality and at least signal current challenges. In a variety of pedagogical studies, discussions and scientific conferences, the problems of pathologies and dysfunctions of families, their deficiencies or educational difficulties caused by young people and behaviour disorders have been widely discussed [Sołtysiak, Nowakowska, 2010; Sołtysiak, Kowalczyk-Jamnicka, 2007; Sakowicz, 2004].

### **Cultural Transitions as an Impulse for Pedagogical Investigations**

Besides commonly known manifestations of dysfunctions in the society and entities, such as alcoholism or drug addiction among children and adults, violence, increasing crime rate and educational deficiencies of the families and schools, educators must take into consideration new problems, such as e.g. effect of popular culture on young people and 'new addictions'[Guerreschi, 2006]. A synonymous expression of popular culture is mass culture, i.e. it contains 'anything which is communicated at a time to a great mass of people' [Kłoskowska, 2005: 97]. A part of educators today find that young people do not have a system of value and do not respect moral authorities; we worry about the people we educate. However, in consideration of educational patterns or the demanded values, we tend to think exclusively about those respected and accepted by the world of adults and neglect the perspective of young people, although we declare to consider it in the educational process.

It is impossible not to perceive the speed of transitions that have occurred in social life. These changes are connected with development of information and communication technologies, which, in a sense, are becoming a promoter for popular culture. Considerations of popular culture typically focus on emphasizing it as worse and on showing its negative manifestations, although its effect does not concern children and young people alone: adults are also its active participants and users. Conversely, a number of studies have emphasized rising importance of popular culture as a substantial element of socialization [Melosik, 2003: 68].

In Poland, the role and importance of popular culture in the process of education was emphasized by Zbyszko Melosik, who distinguished between its components, including consumerism, 'instant culture' connected with immediately satisfied needs, cult of body and success and 'the culture of appearance [Melosik, 2003: 68-81]. These elements of culture represent new educational challenges. Educators have noticed that young people yield to their requirements and quickly adapt to the changes. Consumerism approaches, idealization of good looks (which makes us estimate people), striving for success using all the available means (including those which are morally unacceptable) or at the cost of the others are typically emphasized. Another feature is dominance of our own good over the social good. Specific terms have even started to be used, such as 'global teenager' or 'generation X' [Melosik, 2003: 84-88] in order to describe young people who live according to the ideology of popular culture.

According to Z. Kwieciński, a 'socialization shift' can be observed, which means that a considerable role in education of young people and children and introducing them into social life is fulfilled by media or peer groups rather than conventional institutions [Melosik, 2003: 68]. This implies the necessity of new outlook on conditions of education of young people, which K. Rubacha defines by means of such terms as ambivalence [Witkowski, 1997: 142-143] and decentration. First of them indicates the existence of 'ambiguity, uncertainty and interpenetration' [Rubacha, 2003: 61] of different values. In pedagogical practice, this means consideration of not only previous patterns which are deemed to be demanded, but also facing the values of the popular culture, since their role and importance cannot be ignored in education, with particular focus on determination of the new method of understanding of these values.

Decentration means 'acceptance of the state of a number of cultures which cannot be reduced, prioritized or approached within the categories of universality' [Rubacha, 2003: 62]. In the aspect of education and pedagogical work, this means abandoning the accepted vision of the reality and the necessity to consider different approaches and views without assessing

them. This necessity is also conditioned with the presence of a powerful media, the Internet, which allows for learning a variety of perspectives in very short time. Therefore, pedagogical activities will be 'negotiating, with young people, meanings, different versions of the reality and behaviours (which come from both teachers and students) and vision of developmental changes which can be the effect of education' [Rubacha, 2003: 63; see also: Melosik, 2001: 47].

Both categories emerged in the pedagogical science as reactions to social and cultural transitions, including more and more influential popular culture. 'New addictions' should also be taken into consideration. These include addition to media (Internet, television, mobile phones), nutritional disorders or use of a variety of supplements in order to achieve and maintain the demanded slim body, drug abuse to keep being effective in order not to lose chance to be promoted.

Therefore, all of them call for using different (then previously used) educational solutions in practice.

### **Outlook for Pedagogical Innovation**

The dictionary of foreign terms by W. Kopaliński defines innovation as 'introduction of something new, a newly implemented thing' (<http://www.slownik-online.pl/kopalinski/5A71EDB9DECA10C8C12565E30026D687.php>, as of 4 March 2011).

Furthermore, this term originates from Latin *innovatio* ('renewal') or *innovare* ('renovate, refresh, change') [Ibidem]. In science, innovation means 'any idea, behaviour or a thing which is qualitatively different from the previous ones' [Pietrasiński, 1970: 8]. In other words, this means a new cultural value or a specific type of changes [Wróblewska, 2008: 9]. Therefore, innovativeness is closely related to changes, and direction of these changes must be in effect assessed as positive and demanded.

Pedagogical innovations are understood as 'any changes that occur in the domain of education, teaching, organization and conditionings of school and other forms of education [Pólturzycki, 2003: 332]. With this

understanding, innovation means both implementation of reforms, changes in organizational system of education and also use of new concepts and modernization of existing solutions or a new methods of operation and new roles [Wróblewska, 2008: 7-10].

Innovativeness involves creative activities of a teacher which assumes searching for new forms and methods in educational and didactic processes. However, according to A. Nalaskowski, 'knowledge resources collected in e.g. library, show how extensive this area is and how much you have to know in order to make any discovery. Hence, making anyone be creative is 'flattening' and relativisation of the act of creation. It resembles forcing people to invent something, which can be found, in a more perfect form, in a room next to us' [Nalaskowski, 2009: 79].

The question remains whether it is necessary to invent a new method of education or preventive procedures in order to become an innovative teacher? According to the citation above, pedagogical output collected throughout the centuries is impressive, with a number of current solutions promoted as new ones having their sources of previous experience. Therefore, it is worth considering innovative activities of educators in categories of abilities to use the existing solutions in new situation and in relation to new problems rather than thinking up or discovering new things. It seems that innovativeness might also consist in consideration of a number of different abilities, not necessarily convergent with our beliefs, including the perspective of young people. It can be assumed that innovative teachers/educators today are those who are able to negotiate meanings with young people rather than implement the 'policies of self-exclusion', being devoid of influence through neglecting discussion, which makes its conditions unacceptable to the young people' [Melosik, 2003: 69].

### **Universal Fundamentals of Innovative Prevention**

Sometimes it seems that the teachers, who yield to the pressure of the necessity to search for new solutions and to be creative or innovative, cease to be effective. There are a number of examples of teachers who simply do their job, who are respected and admired by students, in consideration of their needs and aspirations. The obligations of each school include prevention aimed at different manifestations of individual and social pathologies, whereas school can and should adapt the programs to the needs of the students. In consideration of this fact, preventive programs are developed each year in schools, aimed at prevention of addiction to psychoactive substances. The preventive measures are supposed to be implemented by school learning mentors and home room teachers. These programs are predominantly implemented by means of talks and lectures where young people are provided with the knowledge of negative effects of alcoholism and drugs.

The problem lies in that the young people have sufficient knowledge about properties and effect of drugs, acquired from peers or the Internet. This knowledge deters young people for a short time, because they do not realize a real threat and are convinced that this problem does concern them. Sadly, in consideration of the rise in the number of addicted adults, one cannot expect that young people will behave the other way. In effect, different studies have shown that the number of teenagers who drink alcohol and take drugs have soared, and the growing popularity of 'legal highs' (Polish *dopalacze*) cause the reduction in the age of initiation. The researchers who have investigated the reasons for taking psychoactive substances emphasize such dominant motives as family and school problems, boredom and desire to experience something new and interesting or pressure from a peer group that a young person cannot stand up to [See: Pospiszyl, 2008; Sierosławski, 2005; Fatyga, Rogala-Oblękowska 2002; Jędrzejko 2009].

Therefore, statistics show that the activities are ineffective. Therefore, it would be worth looking at the preventive activities from another point of view. Instead of passing knowledge, it is possible to educate young people through cooperating with them. Innovativeness of young people or educators can be reflected in a new approach to students, ability to creatively use the existing output, because a number of methods (including the programs of prevention) can be only found in publications or they are implemented in only few educational centres. As mentioned above, innovative activities consist in practical application of the existing output, and facilitation and modernization of work of educators [See: Marzec, 2008: 23].

Modernization is also possible in preventive and educational work. The literature in this subject area widely describes the types of preventive programs (information, education, and intervention, programs of alternative activities or environmental changes), strategies (detering, informative, activating or affective education) or dominant trends (showing the necessity to implement specialized environmental programs aimed at e.g. girls or risk groups to promote positive life skills) [Gaś, 1999: 25-33; Dziewiecki, 2003: 24-40]. Each of these programs focuses on separate problems, although it seems that alternative and activating measures, which promote positive skills, should be particularly emphasized.

The pedagogical science proposes a holistic outlook on prevention and creation of its integral model. According to e.g. M. Dziewiecki, it is not 'a transfer of knowledge that is a precondition for effectiveness of preventive programs but promotion of positive bonds, patterns and norms of behaviour' [Dziewiecki, 2003: 40]. The author emphasized the elements which are closely related with education and, in consideration of an integral model, he referred to qualitative changes in prevention i.e. the changed approach among the people who take preventive measures (involvement of young people), promotion of positive competencies among young people and focus on the entity rather than the substance or another pathological phenomena [Dziewiecki, 2003: 42-44].

In consideration of these facts, preventive and educational activities should be focused on those measures which are aimed at development of a variety of skills (assertiveness, cooperation, constructive solving problems and conflicts, coping with stress and other skills useful for social life) and supporting young people in searching their own identity through allowing them to realize alternative forms of spending leisure time in consideration of their interests and needs. With this aim in view, it is worth to involve young people to take a variety of initiatives. The students should be also treated as partners and co-participants in the activities. The subjectivity of a child has been long recognized in pedagogical science, and their right have been stipulated in a relative international and Polish legal acts [See: Marzec, 1996: 360].

Children have right to make decisions on their own future and their activities. One of these opportunities includes youth programs of peer support. These programs are not an absolute novelty: they have emerged throughout the recent decades and their components can be traced back in the activities of educators of the interwar period, e.g. J. Korczak. In consideration of the postulate of the subjective approach to students and the use of the need for activity and self-realization of young people, they seem to be worth popularizing. Therefore, the objective of these programs is 'to open up opportunities for young people getting involved in social activities which allow for making decisions on their personal lives and local societies, and taking responsibility for themselves and their own environment; teaching teenagers the ability to oppose to a negative peer pressure connected with involving them in antisocial and self-destructive activities: developing a variety of abilities and feeling competent in terms of social, interpersonal and intra-psychical functions' [Gaś, 1999: 44].

These activities include programs of peer pressure, which are aimed at helping peers adapt to new conditions (such as transition to another rung in education) or adoption of positive social roles (e.g. through development of interests). Another group is programs of peer counselling. Their task is to getting young people involved in helping peers solve a variety of

problems and difficulties. The idea of this program considers the importance of peer group and moral authorities in lives of young people. The programs of peer participation should also be emphasized. They stimulate young people to set tasks on their own, take activities which are important to them and take responsibility for these actions, thus proving competent in different social roles [Gaś, 1999: 44-50].

Moreover, activities by young people can also be used in organization of leisure time. The offer aimed at young people is frequently not adapted to their needs and interests and often does not match popular trends among young people. The reasons for this status can be the lack of material, financial and professional resources. It also seems that it is insufficient number of professionals who could organize attractive (to young people) classes (dancing, martial arts, survival camps) that is becoming the cause of abandoning the organizations of attractive forms of spending leisure time, although a number of publications have reported such innovative activities [Gutowska, 2004: 11-13; Kurzeja, 2008: 182-185].

However, the practice shows that when the young people are offered to realize the forms of spending leisure time which are attractive to them, they will be willing not only to get involved in equipping the places for realization of the exercises but they will also take care of the facilities and adapt to all the requirements. One example is the situation in one of the cities in Silesia region, where young people were asked to organize skate-park in the dedicated area instead of practicing skating tricks in urban facilities and on the streets. Young people not only got involved in this task, but they also actively participate in promotion of this way of spending free time among their peers. Another example is a group of university students at the Jan Długosz Academy in Częstochowa, Poland, who, seeing a majority of children spending holiday time outdoors, organized the action of Cinema in the Clothes-Horse (*Kino na trzepaku*), which consisted in watching a number of films, followed by the discussion about the contents of these films.

Another opportunity is social dancing or modern dancing, which are more and more popular among young people. Teenagers learn to dance through looking at older friends or practice in rooms adapted from desolate industrial facilities or buildings. Experience of dancers can be successfully used through giving them access to rooms in schools. It is also essential to develop sport and recreational activity of young people since it is sport which is the most popular activity that young people spend time on. Undoubtedly, survival camps or schools are able to satisfy the need of young people for experiencing strong emotions and adventures.

Furthermore, in order to effectively use sport and recreation in education of young people, two types of changes must occur. On the one hand, it is necessary to change the approach to organized activities (physical education classes), both among students and teaching staff. This involves bringing back educational functions in educational centres. Although the Ministry of Education has recently proposed changes in approach to physical education, and schools will have more freedom in organization of sport and recreation activities, it is necessary to implement wider changes in the system of education in order to effectively use education through sport. The focus is in particular on realization of the value of physical recreation and its importance to satisfactory functioning of human within the society. Therefore, a systematic education among the societies to promote health is necessary. On the other hand, it is also important to create a number of attractive opportunities for active spending of leisure time (sport fields, cycling paths, swimming pools etc.).

In the beginning of present considerations, we mentioned the role of the Internet in life of contemporary human in consideration of the fact that it is young people who are the most active user of this media. Therefore, it is worth emphasizing the opportunities for its utilization for preventive purposes. This can be achieved through on-line counselling or psychological support [Aouil, 2007: 175-185]. In Poland, one of these forms of support makes use of a variety of different hotlines which are operated by experts.

Therefore, it is worth considering the fact of searching for information in the Internet and providing them with professional support.

There are a number of initiatives in different cities in Poland, whereas a part of them are described in dedicated journals and a part of them is known only to local inhabitants. Their wider use can be conducive to education of young people providing that instead of striving for instilling previously adopted identity patterns in young people we will consider changeability and variety of the reality today.

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