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Logoprevention: A New Concept of Prevention of Risky Behaviors in Children and Adolescents Based on the Assumptions of Victor E. Frankl's Logotherapy

Logoprofilaktyka. Nowa koncepcja zapobiegania zachowaniom ryzykownym dzieci i młodzieży oparta na założeniach logoterapii Viktora E. Frankla

ABSTRACT

The article is based on both theory and research. The goal is to analyze selected aspects of the concepts of logotherapy and logotherapy by Viktor E. Frankl, in terms of their use in developing programs for the prevention of risky behavior of children and adolescents.

The subject of research is logotherapy. This concept provides a theoretical framework for creating programs for prevention of risky behavior. The main research problem boils down to the following question: Is logotherapy applicable, and to what extent, as the theoretical basis in the new concept of risk behavior prevention? The research method is a source analysis of data obtained through a selective search and a qualitative interview with the author of the first

KEYWORDS

logoprevention, risk behavior prevention, logotherapy, logotherapy in preventive practice, "Archezja" Educational Support Foundation, "Cuder: Live With Meaning"

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

logoprofilaktyka, profilaktyka zachowań ryzykownych, logoterapia, logoterapia w praktyce profilaktycznej, Fundacja Wspomagająca Wychowanie „Archezja”, „Cuder – żyj z sensem”

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risk behavior prevention program in Poland based on the principles of logotherapy.

After introducing the ideas of logotherapy, the author describes its key concept: the meaning of life in the process of human development and upbringing. She then discusses selected principles and techniques of logotherapy as the theoretical underpinning of logoprophylaxis. In the next section, she cites the practical application of logotherapy and logotherapy in social prevention, using the example of the prevention program “Cuder: Live With Meaning” run by the “Archezja” Educational Support Foundation.

ABSTRAKT

Artykuł ma charakter koncepcyjno-badawczy. Celem naukowym jest zanalizowanie wybranych aspektów koncepcji logoterapii i logoteorii autorstwa Viktora E. Frankla pod kątem ich wykorzystania w procesie budowania programów zapobiegania zachowaniom ryzykownym dzieci i młodzieży.

Przedmiotem badań w niniejszym tekście jest logoterapia jako koncepcja stanowiąca podstawy teoretyczne dla procesu formowania programu profilaktyki zachowań ryzykownych. Główny problem badawczy sprowadza się do następującego pytania: Czy i w jakim zakresie logoterapia ma zastosowanie dla podstawy teoretycznej w nowej koncepcji profilaktyki zachowań ryzykownych? Metodą badawczą jest analiza źródłowa danych uzyskanych w wyniku wybiórczej kwerendy oraz wywiad jakościowy z autorem pierwszego w Polsce programu profilaktyki zachowań ryzykownych opartego na założeniach logoterapii.

Autorka po wprowadzeniu w tematykę i myśl logoterapii charakteryzuje kluczowe jej pojęcie, czyli sens życia w procesie rozwoju i wychowania człowieka. Następnie omawia wybrane założenia i techniki logoterapii jako podstawy teoretyczne logoprofilaktyki, po czym przytacza przykłady praktycznego zastosowania logoteorii i logoterapii w profilaktyce społecznej w ramach programu profilaktycznego „Cuder – żyj z sensem”, realizowanego przez Fundację Wspomagającą Wychowanie „Archezja”.

“Life does not come as a given,
but a task—at every moment it is a task.
Therefore, the more difficult it is,
the more meaning it may have.”

(Frankl 2021: 60)

Introduction

Regardless of theories that explain the origin of human beings, we can assume that each of us is born with a certain potential that we either develop or stifle throughout our lives. There is an aspect of human life that appears in the process of growing up and is sometimes overlooked even by parents or educators. Namely, it is the aspect of formation of a person within a human being: a person that is an individual whole constituted by the physical, mental, moral, spiritual, emotional, and relational orders. This “set” of qualities known from anthropology is accentuated in the modern psychology and pedagogy. Although the moral and spiritual aspects of personality are taken into consideration by social sciences, they at the same time the least researched. Paradoxically, they are most significant in crisis situations and those moments in life where a person fails in the process of their own development, especially in its early phases.

This article presents a new concept for prevention of risky behaviors and a brief description of practical actions to prevent loss of meaning of life in young people. It is based on the concept of logotherapy and logotherapy, which has been developed for the last several decades and was founded by Viktor Emil Frankl (1905–1997), Austrian psychiatrist, neurologist, psychotherapist, and philosopher.

Logotherapy (since 1938) has been described by the historians of science as the third Viennese school of psychotherapy, alongside Sigmund Freud’s (1856–1939) psychoanalysis and Alfred Adler’s individual psychology (1870–1937). What these schools have in common is the search for “basic motivation.” Freud ties it to the pleasure principle, Adler to the “will to power, significance, and defense against the feeling of inferiority,” while for Frankl this motivation is connected with the “will to meaning and pursuit of value” (Popielski 1994: 13). However, the factor that distinguishes logotherapy is its

focus on a person's future and filling it with attainable goals, which has significance for educational (Michalski 2011: 43).

As it focuses on the search of meaning and value, theoretical foundations of logotherapy combine existential philosophy with psychology and pedagogy.¹ It addresses the problem of dialogicality of human relationships, also in educational contexts, the free will of persons entering into dialogue, freedom, and responsibility in the process of decision-making as significant components of social and individual maturity. Finally, it addresses the essence of life: the meaning that is carried but also created by the human being. Assuming that meaning is one of the most permanent motivators of human existence, we can say that searching and reinforcing it in early puberty will be an important protective factor against the loss of coping skills and a wide range of other social threats that appear throughout our lives.

Significance of the meaning of life in the process of development and education of a human being

“The formation of personality structures and the subjective and personal ‘I’ is part of the basic preparation for life in the educational process. Given that this process is multi-dimensional and continuous (i.e. it takes place at all developmental stages), it is necessary to constantly develop and nurture it” (Popielski 2008:16). In other words: it is necessary to continuously give meaning, which is a concept that encompasses personal and primary experience: common and individualized at the same time. Defining the “meaning of life” is a need of both an individual and humanity as a whole (Głaz 2006: 95).

Taking a broad look at the problems of life, development, and definition of a human being within the context of the educational process, it needs to be stressed that meaning of life pertains only to humans. It is related to intellectual and psycho-emotional effort, engagement and existential experience based on autotelic values. Meaning of life is among the highest experiences and because of the extent of its penetration into the structure of existence, it is

¹ Logopedagogy has been implemented since 2011, mainly by Elizabeth Lucas who transposed Frankl's theory to education sciences. See: <https://www.franklzentrum.org/zentrum/logopaedagogik.html>.

a condition for living life to the fullest, fulfilment, and self-realization, i.e. fulfilling the highest needs in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy (Popielski 1994: 20).

Viktor Frankl called logotherapy "education towards responsibility," which indicates that pedagogy and prevention were very important to him. For Frankl, the art of education was strictly related to the humanistic aspect of psychotherapy (Szary 2019: 101). Just like the educational process, it aims to support another person in forming a relationship (with themselves and others), and once that has been accomplished, to accompany them in discovering their own inner wealth, potential, and uniqueness. Joanna Budke highlights the fact that logotherapeutic education is based on a personal meeting between the therapist and the patient (Budke 2018: 49). The author finds many links between Frankl's approach to education and concepts developed by Martin Buber or Tadeusz Gadacz, who equated the education with a dialogical and interpersonal encounter.

The question of meaning, raised not only in logotherapy, but also in pedagogy, is strictly related to values and questions about these values (Michalski 2011: 174). These seem to be crucial in the process of education and prevention, as they constitute a set of influences that shape all aspects of a child's or adolescent's personality (Kmieciak-Jusięga 2018). According to Jarosław Tomasz Michalski: "Meaning is the kind of value that one finds on their own and with regard to which one makes their own choices" (Michalski 2011: 258).

The meaning of life according to Frankl is a constant search for oneself and meaning in three areas: creative work or action (the meaning of work), experience of love (the meaning of love) and suffering (the meaning of suffering) (Frankl 2012: 118). The meaning of work as a constituent of the meaning of life allows us to fulfil basic needs related to the sense of security, but also the need of social recognition and self-realization. This is because work is not only a means to satisfy one's existential needs, but it also provides opportunities for training responsibility, engagement, and decision-making—all of which are important categories in the educational process. The meaning of love, which, according to Frankl, is strictly related to spirituality and oriented towards the spiritual side of a relationship with another person is the essence of a dignified and fulfilling life. Finally, the meaning of suffering is linked to the existential interpretation of

being in the world full of dangers and pathology in its etymological sense. In the current social and cultural reality, *homo patient*, is able to lead an existence based on values only when they find meaning in their suffering. Frankl claims that suffering is an ineradicable part of human existence, and it is human's destiny to suffer and see the good and meaning in this suffering. Once one starts to see this meaning, the suffering goes away (Frankl 1998).

The category of meaning in the developmental and educational process can be described with the use of the following statements and educational advice (cf. Michalski 2011: 264–267):

1. Meaning is above the goals and benefits that appear in different phases of our lives. It shapes life, and organizes needs and values in an atemporal order.
2. The individual meaning of life appears in a person's development which is unique and singular. Therefore, we are the only ones who have the ability to discover the meaning of our lives and the educator (teacher or prevention specialist) can support and guide us in the process.
3. A person acquires meaning by realizing and accepting the temporal and historical dimension of their life. The educator's task is to present these dimensions to the young person.
4. The meaning of life is actualized itself in patience, being faithful to oneself and finding value in time for oneself and others. In this context, the educator responsible for shaping the student in harmony with themselves, and accept, and show full respect for the other person.
5. The meaning changes at different stages of life and depends on the person's development, their cognitive maturity and psychophysical health.
6. The meaning of life is found in relationships according to the belief that no one is an island. Education towards relationships and dialogue always prepares a young person to search for their meaning of life.
7. The true meaning of life emerges once it goes beyond death and the person enters the transcendental dimension of their being in the universe.

Selected principles and techniques of logotherapy as a theoretical basis of logoprevention

Logotherapy, just like any other school that supports the human condition, seeks the answer to the question: Who and how is a human? (Frankl 1998) In answering it, it first calls attention to the holistic nature of the human being that consists of numerous aspects: physical, social, as well as moral and spiritual. It should be noted that the latter one has a crucial role in human development. Secondly, it organizes the definition of a person around the meaning of life, which stands above goals, growth, development, well-being, and all other benefits. Thirdly, logotherapy helps understand the role of human existence, including the role of human suffering and crises and provides clear conditions for finding the meaning of life, including process, relationship, focusing on the spiritual and helping others.

According to the articles that discuss Frankl's concept and constitute the theoretical background of logoprevention, one of the most important theses of logotherapy is the significance of needs and values that go hand in hand with the meaning of life and create and support this meaning. These are the categories found in philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy, mainly freedom, love, hope, engagement, self-realization, and altruistic sacrifice in the name of someone or something (cf. Popielski 2008: 23).

Another premise of logotherapy that constitutes the basis of logoprevention is the answer to the question who a person is. What kind of people are they? What is their identity? These are crucial categories and questions that arise in adolescence, a time when preventive actions are most impactful and needed. Quite often, the programs for teenagers include similar topics, but it seems they are not sufficiently developed and thought-out, so that young people would have an opportunity to understand and contemplate them. In Frankl's theory, the human being is considered holistically and constitutes a psychological, physical, social, and spiritual whole (Kamińska 2018: 45).

The third claim underlying logoprevention is sacrifice for another person: Transcending auto-realization and the focus on one's own well-being, benefits or goals. Frankl writes that "the more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love—the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself."

(Frankl 1978: 106). Authors who discuss the impact of volunteer involvement on young people make similar points. They clearly show that such actions prevent risky behaviors (Gaś 2002).

The fourth assumption that provides the basis for logoprevention is the freedom of choice and responsibility that is reflected in the awareness of one's attitude towards another person, view, event or behavior. Secondly, it refers to the ability of making autonomous choices and decisions about one's own life (Popielski 2008: 18). Not only one's education is realized through the sense of responsibility, but also self-education and higher awareness of one's own life. However, responsibility itself is an inborn disposition (Frankl 2012: 148) that every person (Kamińska 2018: 50). It is worth noticing that logotherapy is conceived of as a universal and cross-cultural educational method (Wiśniewska 2013) that introduces a component of self-transcendence. It allows for steering the child or adolescent towards the way of thinking and functioning in the world that fills in the existential void present in the contemporary culture (lack of meaning in life).

In order to minimize this void and find a sense of being in the world, logotherapy offers specific working techniques, where relationships are made a priority. The most important of these include (1) paradoxical intention: persuading a person to crave exactly the thing they fear; this technique requires some self-distancing, sometimes a sense of humor and aims at reversing the attitude in a way that the fear is replaced by a paradoxical desire of it (Frankl 2012: 130–131); (2) dereflexion, which leads to inner growth, turning away from something that is subjectively regarded as a problem towards something that is objective and meaningful; discovering something new that reduces the importance of the old and overcoming of self-centeredness through opening up to the world (Wolicki 2010: 188). In practice, “the method is based on a reversal of the child's or teenager's thinking patterns. If up till now they have been self-centered and all their actions have been subject to their egocentric goals, they will reevaluate their thinking through dereflexion and will open up to the group, start cooperating with them and notice their needs. To some extent, this develops the need for socialization” (Wiśniewska 2013: 198–199); (3) modulation of attitude that teaches to identify and change irrational thinking

and the assumptions underlying this thinking; this technique aims at stimulating reflection that allows one to accept one's life situation, search for meaning and significance in it, and change of the sense of being in crisis into a sense of self-realization; (4) Socratic dialogue, which is defined as a conversation that leads to self-discovery. It is based on the assumption that the educator (teacher or prevention specialist) not only passes on information and teaches certain skills, but also activates the child's or adolescent's personal potential through relationships and posing questions. The dialogue very often includes a critical view of oneself and self-distance that is indispensable in forming a personal view of one's own life and the surrounding world. Elizabeth Lukas puts forward a five-step model of the Socratic dialogue in the following questions: (1) What is your problem? (2) Where is your area of freedom? (3) What are the choices within your area of freedom? (4) Which of the choices makes most sense to you? (5) What is the first step toward your choice? (Wolicki 2010: 190–192).

Practical application of the concept of logotherapy in social prevention: Example of the prevention program of the “Archezja” Foundation for Educational Support

Selected tenets of Victor Frankl's theory and his conclusions about the development, definition and growth of a human being have contributed to efforts to prevent risky behaviors among teenagers and to deal with crises of adolescence. The “Archezja” Foundation for Educational Support has developed a prevention program based on the concept of logotherapy. Its founder and director is Tomasz Gubała, initiator and the first practitioner of logoprevention in Poland, co-founder of Krakow Institute of Logotherapy.

A qualitative interview with Tomasz Gubała, carried out for research purposes, shows that the development of the prevention program based on Victor Frankl's theory had been underway for several years. It involved the search for effective solutions to strengthen the meaning of life in children and adolescents as well as those directly involved in the educational process (parents and teachers).

According to Tomasz Gubała: “We looked at how people dealt with dire crises in the past and whether there were systemic solutions that went beyond individual psychological or spiritual help.” In the late 30s of the last century, professor Victor Frankl, the founder of the so-called third Viennese school of psychotherapy, proved to be 100% successful in a similar situation in Austria by using his own method: logotherapy. According to logotherapy, a person always has a possibility to transform every defeat and tragedy into a victory, and there is one more path to take between dysfunctional victim playing and escape from suffering: discovering its meaning.

The development of a new prevention program that would meet the criteria for professional intervention is a long-term endeavor that involves a team of widely cooperating experts with knowledge of psychopedagogy and vast experience in working with other people. In the “Archezja” Foundation, activities based directly on the concept of logotherapy have been implemented for the last several years in different projects and educational activities such as:

- the flagship behavioral addiction prevention project “Cuder” that draws on Victor Frankl’s idea of the necessity of including the spiritual sphere in the definition of a human being;
- ecological education projects and integration activities for children and adolescents in conjunction with the outdoor prevention project in Ojców (using the techniques of Socratic dialogue and modulation of attitudes);
- two nationwide educational and preventive campaigns carried out between 2018 and 2020: “Let’s Be Authority Seekers” and “Let’s Seek Love in the Family” where the philosophical basis of logotherapy was used. “True love is an orientation towards the other person” wrote Marian Wolicki about love within a family in the context of Victor Frankl’s work (Wolicki 2003: 26).

A new program based on the selected principles and techniques of logotherapy is carried out under the name of the Preventive and Educational Program “Cuder – Live With Meaning” and is dedicated to children and adolescents from primary schools. The main goal of the program is to provide the students with knowledge on how to deal with developmental and situational crises. In this program, young people are guided to define crisis as a challenge and a good starting point for a change of their current attitudes or

behaviors. Apart from this, the goal of the program is to inspire adolescents to reflect on human spiritual and moral potential and to view it in a holistic context. The working methods are mostly author's own activities based on the technique of Socratic dialogue, dereflexion, and modulation of attitudes. The students work on excerpts of the animated movie "Up," where the educators introduce given situations and relate them to personal experiences. The program "Cuder – Live With Meaning" prepares young people to properly exercise their freedom and be responsible for their choices and decisions.

Another project that is currently being launched in the "Archezja" Foundation is preventive training for teaching staff. The main aim is to provide teachers and educators with tools they can use in their preventive work with adolescents. The training classes are based on the above mentioned principles and techniques of logotherapy. Logotherapeutic training of the authors of preventive activities is provided, as Tomasz Gubała says, in cooperation with the experts from Krakow Institute of Logotherapy (<https://www.logoterapia-krakow.pl>), where the concept of logoprevention was created. It includes activities based on Frankl's logotherapy, uses its methods, but also features learning based on experience and Foundation's own methods, like immersion in a play.

Our experiences in preventive and educational work as well as data from evaluations of our prevention programs confirm that there is a need for a systemic implementation of logoprevention in education, prevention and crisis intervention. We see the need for better coordination of aid activities, research on the causes of children's crises and crisis intervention in Poland. In our country, there are many institutions, NGOs, consultation and crisis intervention agencies, and there are many activities that bring positive results but there is no systemic coordination of these activities. These systemic activities should be based on accessible, effective and short-term preventive and educational work based on science, especially logotherapy, whose principles provide effective countermeasure to the poor psychological condition of our society.²

² From an interview with Tomasz Gubała [own source].

Summary

In recent years, the psychological condition of the young generation has been worsening. This is mainly the result of two global crises which have affected our mental health: the COVID-19 pandemic and the war caused by Russia. Research on mental health in children and adolescents as well as young adults³ shows, firstly, the inadequacy of the preventive measures taken so far and secondly, the need to implement new solutions for working with young people in order to teach them the psychological skills that protect them from engaging in risky behaviors. A young person who experiences crises and existential void is in an extremely difficult situation. According to Frankl, this void is related to a double loss. Firstly, as humankind, we have lost some of the basic survival instincts, and secondly, we are experiencing the disappearance of traditions that used to define the nature of human behavior. Unable to rely either on instinct or tradition to guide their actions, people are often unable to decide what they wish to do. As a result, they want to either act as others do (conformism) or do whatever other people expect from them (totalitarianism) (Frankl 2012: 113).

Logoprevention is the middle ground between the two. It can be defined as preventive measures focused on the search for the meaning of life as an open potential which is what prevents us from risky behaviors and attitudes. This potential can be a significant part of our personality, a virtue that we work on or another element that provides foundations for moral and spiritual development.

To answer the question whether and to what extent logotherapy can be used as a theoretical background of a new method of risky behavior prevention, we can specify that:

- logotherapy and preventive activities can use similar methods when working with adolescents, especially Socratic dialogue, modulation of attitudes, and dereflection;

³ The special report prepared by the Institute of Research and Analysis of Local Government Performance shows the percentage of suicide among death causes in different age groups. Between 2016 and 2019, there was an upward trend in all age groups. The percentage of suicide in the age group 19–24 is the most moving. It is 27% on a national scale and almost 40% in the Małopolska Region. The second group by the number of suicide deaths is ages 25–29 with 22% of all deaths.

- logotherapy constitutes a solid theoretical background for knowledge-based prevention, whose goal is to search for the meaning of life in the difficult time of puberty and in developmental and situational crises;
- logotherapy organizes the process of defining a human being as a person, with a special focus on the spiritual sphere, including the sphere of values. This defining process is a crucial element of universal preventive measures;
- preventive actions grounded in logotherapy promote altruistic, humanitarian, and empathetic attitudes and encourage young people to be socially active as well as foster their positive socialization;
- the category that connects logotherapy to prevention of risky behaviors is the value of freedom and responsibility when making autonomous choices about one's life, especially one's behavior.

Risky behaviors in children and adolescents often stem from broadly defined suffering and sense of incongruity between oneself and the world, which in turn may lead to anxiety and frustration. By equipping young people with skills and attitudes to deal with crises and fear, logotherapy is an opportunity to form a strong young generation who is resilient to global crises. Moreover, as we live in a time when experts who analyze fragments of reality are commonly more appreciated, we are doing our best so that young people do not lose their sense of cohesion and belief that they and their life constitute a whole worthy of unconditional love (cf. Fizzotti 2006: 79). Drawing from the school of logotherapy and the holistic approach of Viktor Emil Frankl, we as educators, psychologists, and prevention specialists, can contribute to the creation and empowerment of a holistically conceived human being as a coherent, creative, responsible, and free person in search of the meaning of their life.

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