# THE TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITY IN WORKING WITH PUPILS HAVING EDUCATIONAL DIFFICULTIES

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Abstract. Educational difficulties have been the subject of many psychological and pedagogical analyses for years. In literature on the subject, the term "special educational needs" began to refer to pupils with learning disabilities. Children with difficulties encounter many barriers at school, which they are often unable to overcome. This is not due to their resentment, but to dysfunctions that, when noticed early and properly diagnosed, give the child a chance for normal and successful learning. The responsibility for the diagnosis, followed by the child's successes at school, is borne by a professional teacher-educator, whose knowledge, commitment and determination will allow them to look after the pupils and help in overcoming all educational difficulties.

# Odpowiedzialność nauczyciela w pracy z uczniem z trudnościami edukacyjnymi

Słowa kluczowe: trudności edukacyjne, odpowiedzialność, uczeń, nauczyciel

Streszczenie. Trudności edukacyjne od lat stanowią przedmiot wielu analiz psychologiczno-pedagogicznych. W literaturze przedmiotu, w odniesieniu do uczniów mających trudności z nauką, zaczął nawet funkcjonować termin "specjalne potrzeby edukacyjne". Dzieci z trudnościami napotykają w szkole na wiele barier, których niejednokrotnie nie są w stanie same pokonać. Nie wynika to z ich niechęci, a dysfunkcji, które odpowiednio wcześnie zauważone, właściwie zdiagnozowane, dają szansę dziecku na normalną naukę uwieńczoną sukcesami. Odpowiedzialność za diagnozę, a w dalszej kolejności sukcesy dziecka w szkole ponosi profesjonalny nauczyciel-wychowawca, którego wiedza, zaangażowanie oraz determinacja pozwolą na opiekę nad wychowankami i pomoc w pokonaniu wszelkich trudności edukacyjnych.

#### Introduction

The issue of educational difficulties has become a permanent part of Polish pedagogy. It concerns the essence of the teacher's work at every stage of education. It is part of special educational needs that give the importance of inclusive education as one that plays an important role in today's problem assumptions. Students' educational difficulties are the subject of many analyses and studies. In Poland, among the many authors of studies on this subject, the positions of Marta Bogdanowicz and Halina Spionek deserve attention. In many countries of the world, including European countries, societies have been set up to help children and their parents reduce difficulties. The most popular of these are: Polish Society of Dyslexia, and European, British, German and American Societies.

Among children functioning properly in educational and upbringing institutions, there are pupils who fail at school owing to educational difficulties. Understanding the nature of these difficulties, as well as their psychological, social and emotional mechanisms, is a condition for responsible help and support from the teacher, and then equalizing the educational opportunities for children with disabilities.

A teacher's responsibility is not only a moral obligation, but also a legal one, consisting in bearing the consequences for their actions, so that the teacher working with the child performs their duty. Joanna M. Michalak sees responsible acting as a pedagogical directive in shaping the attitude of responsibility of pupils in the process of education. Referring to the pedagogical category of responsibility, it is necessary to emphasise the teacher's behaviour towards the pupils, regardless of the type of their dysfunction or possible disability<sup>1</sup>. A responsible teacher understands the need for active help for pupils, especially those who require this support. Their responsibility is expressed in the approval of "otherness". Being responsible in an autonomous way is shaping the autonomy and responsibility of the ones under the teacher's charge. The educator must enter the role of a guide to the reality that the pupil has not yet discovered. Its beginning is at school, in the classroom, in classes, where potential difficulties caused by dysfunctions should not and must not even obscure the need for development, self-realisation and the desire to explore one's own capabilities. As emphasised by Janusz Homplewicz, in the field of pedagogy, responsibility

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> B. Cieśleńska, Odpowiedzialność zawodowa nauczyciela Studium teoretyczno – empiryczne, Akad. Human. im. A. Gieysztora, Pułtusk 2019, s. 18-22.

has become the accepting of consequences for a child's development, supporting a child, meeting the child's needs and feeling responsible for their development<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, before the teacher undertakes actions towards the pupil, they must know his / her strengths and weaknesses, as well as the successes and difficulties that the teacher-pupil relationship will have to face. It should be emphasised that the pedagogue is responsible for every child to the same degree; however, the moral responsibility for a pupil with dysfunctions is higher than for other children. The promotion of the importance of this responsibility refers to the inclusion of its ,subjective' dimension in the understanding of the pedagogical role of the teacher.

# Educational difficulties – analysis of the concept

Educational difficulties are interpreted as "an unexpected and inexplicable condition in a child with intelligence at least within the norm, expressed by a significant delay in at least one area of learning"3. In defining the concept of educational difficulties, M. Bogdanowicz included them in two areas: broader and narrower. The first describes "all kinds of learning difficulties, conditioned by a variety of factors, only with mental retardation, neurological disorders, brain damage, damage to the organs of the sense and movement, as well as emotional disorders"4. The second, most often used in our country, refers to children having educational problems as "despite the right intellectual level, maturity in general development, being in the right cultural environment and appropriate teaching conditions for the acquisition of school knowledge and skills"5.

In the Pedagogical Encyclopaedia, learning difficulties are referred to as "disorders of one or several basic mental processes (memory, auditory and visual perception, language and thinking) involved in the understanding and use of oral and written speech that may be associated with impaired hearing, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, correct spelling and counting"6.

In the literature on the subject, the term "special educational needs" began to refer to pupils with learning disabilities. The law stipulates that a child who

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> J. Homplewicz, *Etyka pedagogiczna*, Lexis Nexis, Warszawa 1996.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> M. Selikowitz, *Dysleksja i inne trudności w uczeniu się*, Prószyński i S-ka, Warszawa 1999, s. 12.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> M. Bogdanowicz, Specyficzne trudności w czytaniu i pisaniu u dzieci – nowa definicja i miejsce w klasyfikacjach międzynarodowych, "Psychologia Wychowawcza" 1996, nr 1, s. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> T. Pilch, Encyklopedia Pedagogiczna, t. VI, Fundacja Innowacja, Warszawa 2003, s. 816-817.

has greater difficulties than their peers at work in school and communicating is to have special conditions, including:

- additional or different assistance in the form normally provided to children of a given age in institutions subordinate to local authorities, other than special schools in the given area;
- for children under two years of age any educational support<sup>7</sup>.

In children, the first symptoms of educational difficulties appear as early as at the pre-school stage, and they are visible in the younger grades of primary school. "A child is reluctant to go to school, especially when teachers do not accept their otherness. That is why these children should be tested for their abilities as soon as possible"8. By interpreting the test results, the teacher is able to plan effective work with a child, who will stop assessing himself as being incapable and will believe in their own cognitive abilities. Teachers should adhere to the following rules to help educate pupils:

- Children with educational difficulties have the right to meet their needs.
- The child has the right to express and respect their views.
- Parents / guardians play an important role in helping the child.
- Children with educational disabilities should have broad access to sustainable and adequate education, including a tailored curriculum, both in kindergarten and at school9.

The causes of educational difficulties have been the subject of many psychological and pedagogical analyses for years. At the root of these difficulties lies the genetic equipment, structure and functioning of the nervous system and the environmental factors affecting its development<sup>10</sup>. Studies confirm that children with educational difficulties usually come from families genetically burdened with this dysfunction. The changes are inherited in the central nervous system, and they condition functional disorders that underlie reading and writing difficulties11.

Environmental factors, i.e. family structure and atmosphere, also have a significant impact on the difficulties, psychological properties of parents and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> J. Thompson, Specjalne potrzeby edukacyjne, CMPP-P MEN, Warszawa 2013, s. 2.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> G. Binder, R. Michaelis, Trudności w nauce skuteczne sposoby pracy z dzieckiem, PZWL, Warszawa 2003, s. 78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> J. Thompson, op. cit., s. 14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> G. Krasowicz-Kupis, Psychologia dysleksji, Wyd. Nauk. PWN, Warszawa 2008, s. 73.

<sup>11</sup> M. Bogdanowicz, Etiologia - pierwotne przyczyny dysleksji rozwojowej, "Scholasticus" 1994, nr 1, s. 55.

the educational system they use. A liberalist, rigorous or inconsistent upbringing are the cause of failure to deal with educational situations<sup>12</sup>. Educational difficulties can also be a consequence of biopsychic reasons inherent in the pupil, i.e. health, physical development, intellectual ability, concentration, personality traits and motivation to learn<sup>13</sup>.

The consequence of educational difficulties may be low self-organisation in the learning process. Children wanting to keep up with the rest of the group are careless; they are in a hurry and do not adjust the pace of work to their abilities. These pupils have problems with overcoming difficulties, and learning failures become a pathogenic factor that adversely affects the pupil's personality and their cognitive sphere<sup>14</sup>.

#### Classification of educational difficulties

In Polish literature, the classification of educational difficulties includes: dyslexia, dysgraphia, dysorthographia and dyscalculia, and the dysfunctions refer to children with normal mental development and an intellectual norm.

The term "dyslexia" comes from Greek and means "difficulties". The British Dyslexia Society defines dyslexia as "specific learning difficulties that affect the development of literacy and other language skills"15. Researchers of the dyslexia problem define this condition as a kind of difference in the functioning of the brain through cognitive processes that run in such a way that information is processed differently than in most people. Differences cause difficulties in carrying out tasks related to reading or writing, which may result in a lack of these skills16.

Following Czesław Kupisiewicz, dyslexia is considered as "serious difficulties in mastering reading skills and the proper level of mental and physical development, favourable living conditions of learning to read"17. A dyslexic pupil most

<sup>12</sup> H. Spionek, Zaburzenia rozwoju uczniów a niepowodzenia szkolne, PWN, Warszawa 1975, s. 69-70.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, s. 77-78.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Ibidem, s. 79-89.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> British Dyslexia Association, *Definition of dyslexia*, www.bdadyslexia.org.uk as of 06.2009.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> J. Thompson, op. cit., s. 52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Cz. Kupisiewicz, M. Kupisiewicz, Słownik Pedagogiczny, Wyd. Nauk. PWN, Warszawa 2009, s. 37.

often has difficulties with the development of phonological or visual processing, working memory and the speed of information processing.

When working with a dyslexic child, the teacher's responsibility for the pupil's educational successes increases. When working with a child, the educator should ensure that the tasks are divided for pupils so that they can learn the material more easily. The tasks should be in a given order and should be controlled and discussed by the teacher. The responsibility of the teaching profession for a child with this dysfunction should be based on ensuring that the child has the same opportunities in the school class as their "healthy" peers. Teachers and educators should strengthen children's self-esteem by using not only positive reinforcements, but also taking care of the diversity of methods of learning to read and write. In this case, the key principle at work is the principle of individualisation based on the subjectivity of didactic and educational activities.

The specific difficulty in mastering writing skills is called dysgraphia. It is analysed individually in relation to each person<sup>18</sup>. Dysgraphia is often referred to as agraphia and refers to "specific difficulties in mastering writing skills and its loss due to organic changes in the central nervous system, as well as the dysfunction of central visual and auditory analysers". Graphical typing errors, i.e. inaccuracy in letter reproduction, uneven writing density and differentiation of letters, a non-uniform slope of writing and giving letters shapely forms are among the main symptoms of dysgraphia<sup>19</sup>. J. Lewinson recognises the problem in writing as a form of agraphia observed in children who have a problem learning literacy and in adults experiencing similar difficulties due to brain damage<sup>20</sup>.

Helping a pupil affected by dysgraphia is easier the sooner this dysfunction is detected and diagnosed. When working with a pupil who has difficulty writing, the teacher should use a range of help that includes visual-manual and spatial-directional skills. The pedagogue can create an individual educational and therapeutic programme for the pupil, under which the pupil will: work at their own pace, have their work checked in terms of content and have notes provided in the form of a printout. The key seems to be the use of positive reinforcements when working with the child, rewarding the child for even the smallest results. Helping consists in supporting, not to do the pupil's work.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> M. Selikowitz, op. cit., s. 86.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> Cz. Kupisiewicz, M. Kupisiewicz, op. cit., s. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> J. Lewinson, *Pomóż dziecku z ... dysgrafią*, K.E. Liber, Warszawa 2009, s. 37.

Difficulty in mastering correct spelling, manifesting itself in making various types of errors, is called dysorthographia. The root of this disorder is the malfunctioning of visual, auditory and motor analysers<sup>21</sup>. Dysorthographia is often accompanied by a reading disorder, which may include errors that are symptomatic of visual and auditory dysfunction, including phonemic hearing, as well as typical spelling errors associated with poor perception in auditory sound differentiation and disturbed visual-auditory integration<sup>22</sup>.

Working with a child affected by dysorthographia and success in this depends largely on the teacher, who should strive to make the child aware of their disorder. The responsibility that rests with the teacher concerns the results of their work with the pupil and the successes they will experience. The educator should work using play as a form of active exercise with the child. They should plan the work taking into account both teaching and improving spelling, as well as consolidating and checking the developed material. Children should rewrite texts, write from memory and write with comments<sup>23</sup>. The effectiveness of treatments depends on the ability to apply several principles: regularity, gradation of difficulty, visibility, integration of the use of spelling with other teaching departments, as well as control and assessment of a pupil's progress<sup>24</sup>.

Specific difficulties in learning mathematics or arithmetic skill development disorders are defined as dyscalculia. In terms of the Pedagogical Dictionary, it is a "structural disorder of mathematical ability, which can be caused by damage to those parts of the brain in which calculations are carried out". Dyscalculia appears in the form of: problems with understanding mathematical language, counting, reading time on a clock face, mastering the multiplication table, using statistical information and using maps and plans, as well as reluctance and even aversion to learning mathematics"25. Another definition points to dyscalculia as "a structural disorder of mathematical abilities that is rooted in genetic and congenital disorders of those parts of the brain that are directly the anatomical

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> M. Dąbrowska, Moje dziecko jest dyslektykiem. Poradnik i informator dla rodziców i wychowawców, Seventh Sea, Warszawa 2003, s. 47-48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> M. Kostka-Szymańska, G. Krasowicz-Kupis (ed.), Dysleksja. Problem znany czy nieznany, UMCS, Lublin 2007, s. 81-82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> J. Karbowniak, *Nauczanie ortografii*, "Życie Szkoły" 2008, nr 1, s. 10–11.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, s. 8.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Cz. Kupisiewicz, M. Kupisiewicz, op. cit., s. 37.

and physiological basis of the maturation of mathematical abilities according to age, without disrupting general mental functions"<sup>26</sup>.

When undertaking work with a pupil with difficulties in the form of dyscalculia, it is necessary to take actions related to overcoming the fear of solving tasks, based on a corrective and compensatory programme, which includes information about a child's shortages and assistance in the planning of goals divided into stages<sup>27</sup>. The result of the teacher's understanding and cooperation are various tasks to be performed, including group math games. By improving dexterity and visual-auditory coordination, one can reconstruct the basic knowledge and skills of a child in mathematics<sup>28</sup>. It should be remembered that the pupil's success depends on the teacher. The contribution of their work and commitment to helping the child and systematic work based on appreciating the smallest successes will slowly begin to bring about results visible to the pupil themselves.

# Working with a student with educational difficulties

Contemporary schools and their teachers face new challenges not only regarding the implementation of new programmes and content, but also the use of activating methods and means in their work. The daily responsibility for the pupil plays an invaluable role. The teacher, often undertaking new challenges, ensures that they translate into their daily work. Opening the school, and thus the teacher, to the social and personal problems of the pupils often determines the face of the school and its social and individual suitability for pupils. In this context, responsibility for the pupil becomes a kind of readiness to introduce changes, a challenge to move away from stereotypical activities that are replaced by newness. A teacher's work based on professional responsibility is combined with helping the pupil in many aspects of their functioning in educational reality. It is expected that this work should be based on knowledge and pedagogical innovation. The hope remains that the responsible teacher will see the individual development opportunities of their pupils and take up the challenge of their diagnosis and therapy. These activities guarantee the support of a child with difficulties and their effective solution.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> U. Oszwa, *Zaburzenia rozwoju umiejętności arytmetycznych. Problem diagnozy i terapii*, Impuls, Kraków 2005, s. 21.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> E. Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska, *Dzieci ze specjalnymi trudnościami w uczeniu się matematyki*, WSiP, Warszawa 1998, s. 198.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Ibidem, s. 199-201.

One of the key assistance activities are psychological tests performed to determine general intellectual performance and analysis of the development of perceptual-motor functions that condition the correct learning process. This includes the diagnosis of visual perception, visual memory, auditory memory, motor skills, lateralisation, eye-hand coordination and the development of other cognitive functions<sup>29</sup>. Test results should be analysed and interpreted to suit the individual needs of the child.

Another study containing the recognition of the phenomenon, its assessment and prognosis is a pedagogical study, which should replace the exact determination of a person's symptoms and their environmental conditions<sup>30</sup>. It is based on an assessment of the pupil's perceptive-motor and auditory-linguistic functions.

An in-depth form of pedagogical diagnosis is speech therapy determining the level of a child's speech development, preventing the occurrence of speech defects and correcting speech errors. The detection of speech defects and their elimination removes one of the basic causes of educational difficulties<sup>31</sup>.

Sometimes, a pupil's illness is the cause of educational difficulties. The key here is to refer the pupil to a medical diagnosis to exclude or confirm any diseases affecting the child's functioning at school. This diagnosis should be a result of psychological, pedagogical and speech therapy studies. On this basis, an opinion about the child and their difficulties is developed, and an indication of the strengths of the examined results is the basis for developing a therapeutic programme and launching compensatory classes with the pupils under the teacher's charge. The goal of each therapy session is to improve or reduce the disturbed function, for which the teacher working with the child is directly responsible. They should teach polisensorically, while using the senses of hearing, sight and kinaesthesia, choosing a variety of methods and forms of work. The essence of the work of an effective pedagogue in the current school system is the use of modern technologies, which, when properly selected, motivate pupils and show the effectiveness of their efforts. One of such tools supporting the learning process is a computer, the invaluable cognitive role of which allows

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> E. Górniewicz, Pedagogiczna diagnoza specyficznych trudności w czytaniu i pisaniu, Adam Marszałek, Toruń 1998, s. 28.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, s. 32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> W. Brejnak, K.J. Zabłocki, *Dysleksja w teorii i praktyce*, Warszawski Oddział Polskiego Towarzystwa Dysleksji, Warszawa 1999, s. 74-75.

for the development of a habit of creative thinking in children<sup>32</sup> and for supporting the learning process. Thanks to the interactive properties of the message, computers stimulate and focus the attention of pupils with disabilities, encouraging them to search and discover<sup>33</sup>. Thanks to visualisation, sounds and contact with the keyboard, the computer affects many of the pupil's senses, remaining in the memory of a child with educational difficulties for longer.

#### Conclusions

Awareness of the occurrence of educational difficulties among pupils imposes on the teacher the responsibility for the effectiveness of assistance activities directed towards pupils. The teacher's activity in this respect makes sense and fulfils their role, provided that its result is the constructive and multifaceted knowledge of the pupil. Each teacher should make an effort to improve their workshop skills to be able to decide if they do everything for their pupils. The teacher's role is therefore based on:

- Support for comprehensive learning in the cognitive, socio-emotional, motor and affective spheres.
- Organisation of classroom activities.
- Intentional preparation of a learning environment for children.
- Providing support and careful management of children's activities.
- Communicating with important entities: parents, other teachers, administration, authorities and the local community.
- Professional development.
- Engaging in public activities for children and education and care solutions for them and their families.
- Conducting systematic research on everyday educational events<sup>34</sup>.

The task of a teacher responsible for a pupil is to help the pupil learn and acquire responsibility for themselves and the achieved goals. A professional teacher helps, inspires and integrates a team of all pupils regardless of their abilities and capabilities.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> G. Squires, S. Mc Keown, *Pomóż dziecku z... dysleksją*, K.E. Liber, Warszawa 2006, s. 105.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> R. Logan, *Mikrokomputery w systemie edukacji szkolnej*, "Społeczeństwo Otwarte" 1996, nr 11, s. 28.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> C. Edwards, *The role of teacher*, [w:] The Hundred Languages of Children. The Reggio Emilia – Advanced Reflections (eds.) C. Edwards, L. Gandini, G. Forman, Greenwood Publishing Group, London 1998.

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