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## **PRESSING WITHIN (AND ON) SPECIAL PEDAGOGY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Special pedagogy belongs to those subdisciplines of Polish pedagogy which traditions, achievements and social mission are particularly significant and valuable. Because of the subject and the entity of special pedagogy for which it carries out its theoretical, scientific and above all practical activity, it sets for professionals, but also for personally involved individuals, high requirements not only in terms of desired knowledge, specific skills, professionalism but also, prerequisites of ethical nature covering a broad spectrum of axiological norms without which the functioning in special pedagogy, and more so professional activity aimed at its development, are questionable. If the principles are not rigorously reflected it is raising legitimate doubts about priority issues in declared and actually implemented actions in each of the areas taking part of a widely defined special education. This means that the given obligations refer to the practice of special education as well as its theoretical, scientific component, focused on training and educating cadres or awarding further degrees of professional and scientific advancement.

The signalled determinants are specified by the definition of special pedagogy as a science of pedagogy, the subject of which is basically care, therapy, education and upbringing persons with reduced ability, regardless of the type, degree and complexity of symptoms and causes as well as consequences of abnormalities, disorders, difficulties or limitations (Dykcik 2009, p. 13). In addition, its historical and cultural identity and practical identification is signalled not only by Maria Grzegorzewska, the creator of Polish special pedagogy, but also by the outstanding continuators of her memorable work: Janina Doroszevska, Kazimierz Kirejczyk, Jan Pańczyk, Władysław Dykcik and many others. Therefore, there is an exceptional individual, professional, social and civilizational responsibility for special

pedagogy and the need to care for integrity, honesty, transparency of everything that happens in it as well as revealing, articulating, stigmatizing and loud speaking about current irregularities. And the violation or rules, gently speaking, happens very often and it does not concern only the sphere of practical, theoretical or scientific-research activities.

The abuse is also present in a context that embraces the essence of special pedagogy as a pedagogical subdiscipline and is expressed in the tendency of exerting pressure as well as manipulating conceptual and strategic orientation. It is the group of decision-makers who, through their activities, subordinate others to themselves, incapacitate them, and embroil in a spider's web of dependencies and connections. Those who do not find themselves in these connections or consciously do not want to get involved, are marginalized, fall out of influences, are perceived as troublemakers, marauders, and at best, are regarded as of no importance, with poor professional and scientific achievements, with substantive educational and even social limitations, not adapted to contemporary reality. Such a situation is undoubtedly pathological. It bears the characteristics of pressing and even mobbing on people who are not in agreement with those above, and generally it is mobbing on special pedagogy as such, which is constructed not only out of "the right connections", but of ordinary, honest work for the benefit of its development which is deprived of dependencies on others.

### THE CONCEPT OF MOBBING AND PRESSING

In what way the essence of mobbing and pressing can be defined and its possible interpretations to be transferred to special pedagogy? The term mobbing was coined in 1958 by the ethnologist K. Lorenz, describing the behaviour of animals gathering in groups in order to scare off the opponent (Ger 2016). In the 1960s, this term was used by P. Heinemann to describe the violent behaviour of the group directed at people and taking place at school. A pioneer in the study of mobbing in relation to the working environment (to identify actions bearing the hallmarks of "psychological terror") was a German psychiatrist living in Sweden H. Leymann, who at the turn of the 80s and 90s of the last century conducted research on people experiencing strong stress at work (Bultena, Whatcott 2008). One of the first investigators of violence in the workplace was American

psychiatrist C. Brodsky, who in the 1970s, (Matthiensen 2006) described repeated, attempts of intimidation, verbal attacks, tormenting one person by another. All that aimed at provoking pressure, humiliation and to arouse the feeling of discomfort. The term “mobbing” derives from the English verb “to mob” meaning to surround and attack, besiege, assault, tease. The noun “mob” in turn means: crowd, gathering, rabble, which immediately imposes the necessity of referring the term mobbing to the actions taking place in the group. H. Leymann, in his definition of mobbing, focuses on the interaction taking place between participants of mobbing and describes mobbing / psychological terror as “unethical communication” understood as dismissive, disrespectful attitude towards co-workers expressed both in verbal and non-verbal communication. He also emphasizes the definitional criterion of mobbing: the frequency of occurrence and the duration of mobbing activities. Less attention is focused on mobbing acts alone. “Mobbing is a psychological terror used in the workplace that engages hostile attitude and unethical communication, systematic repeated by one or several people in relation to another, which in turn pushes the victim to a position that prevents its effective defence. This situation is persistent (occurs at least once a week) and is repeating for a long period (at least half a year)” (Chomczyński 2008, p. 68). Similarly, German researcher D. Zapf, using the term “mobbing” draws attention to its longevity and immutability of the person at whom the mobbing activities are aimed. He emphasizes that the perpetrator does not let others forget who is the victim of this actions through the continuity and repetition of mobbing behaviour. “Mobbing is a long-lasting, escalated conflict with frequent harassing actions, systematically aimed at a person who is the target (ibid., p. 69). This concept has become popular in the Scandinavian countries and Germany. It is also used in Poland. In the English-speaking countries, the term “bullying” is used to describe violence in the workplace, but many researchers do not consider it as synonym for “mobbing”. Bullying is derived from the English verb “to bully”, which means to oppress, intimidate and mistreat, while as a noun “bully” means: brutal, tyrant, despot.

S. Einarsen in his definition of “bullying” differentiates it from the interpersonal social conflict, stressing three criteria of bullying phenomenon and paying attention to the stigmatization process of the victim, during which there is little chance of being free from the victim’s label. Among the definitional criteria Einarsen mentions: persistency (it is an immediate

and regular action), length of the process (lasting at least 6 months) and the imbalance of formal and informal strength between participants of bullying. He emphasizes that one should not confuse bullying, that is an escalating process, with a traditional conflict because it is an isolated event in which the strength of both sides of the conflict is approximately equal. "Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work tasks. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts" (O'Connell, Calvert, Watson 2007, p. 112).

French psychologist Marie France Hirigoyen introduced the term of moral harassment. She takes closer look on the physical and psychological aspects associated with mobbing, (Hirigoyen 2003, p. 1): „Moral harassment" at work is any abusive conduct (gesture, word, behaviour, attitude) which through its repetitive or systematic character, violates the dignity or the physical or psychical integrity of a person; also, any behaviour that endangers the employment of the individual or degrades the atmosphere of the workplace." Hirigoyen signals the importance of cumulative attacks directed at the victim. The author states that it is difficult to speak about moral harassment based on one subtle violent incident, but the strength of harassment increases with the amount of „microtraumas" and their repetition. Among the Polish definitions the one proposed by R. Talik should be mentioned. She interprets mobbing as „unethical, hostile, systematically repeated behaviour directed against one or several people. These are activities consisting of creating a hostile atmosphere at work, tyrannizing and discrediting people's actions or people who do not suit the team in some way" (Bechowska-Gabhardt, Stalewski 2004, p. 12). It is worth highlighting that this definition does not present criteria for evaluating activities as mobbing, and thus does not specify their duration and frequency. According to the definition presented, every hostile and unethical behaviour characterized by regularity and repeatability (even if it occurs once every six months), can be categorized as mobbing. H. Szewczyk (2002) and A. Bechowska-Gebhardt and T. Stalewski (2004) also do not specify these definition's criteria. One of the most common classifications of mobbing

activities was proposed by H. Leymann. It was created on the basis of conducted, long-term interviews with victims of mobbing. The author emphasizes that techniques used by perpetrators can occur in different combinations and with different frequency, depending on the situation (Walczak 2010, p. 104). Leymann lists 45 different behaviours of mobbing, depending on the effects they have on the victim, which are classified into five categories:

- a) Attacks on self expression and communication: the possibility of speaking out is hindered by the superior; continuous interruption of speech; limited opportunity to express oneself; responding to comments by shouting, abusing and cursing; constant disapproval of the work performed; regular criticism of private life; harassment by phone; oral threats and intimidation; threats in writing; limiting the contact by embarrassing and humiliating gestures and looks;
- b) Attacks on a person's social relations: avoidance of conversations with the victim by the superior; limiting the possibilities of maintaining contact with others, isolation from social relationships, the victim is treated as invisible;
- c) Attacks on a person's reputation: speaking badly behind the person's back; spreading rumours; making attempts to ridicule; suggesting a mental illness and sending the victim to psychiatric examinations; making fun of disability; parody of the way of walking, speaking or gesturing; mockery of political or religious beliefs and nationality; jokes mocking family life; forcing to perform works violating personal dignity; false assessment of work engagement; questioning the decisions made by the victim; calling names, inappropriate nicknames or other negative expressions; sexual innuendos;
- d) Attacks on the quality of a person's professional and life situation: The victim is not given any important tasks or previous assignments are taken back, meaningless jobs are given to carry out, constant reassigning/changing responsibilities, assigning tasks that are below qualifications; giving insulting tasks or tasks overgrowing the victim's abilities and competences in order to discredit that person;
- e) Direct attacks on person's health: assigning dangerous tasks, threats of physical violence, physical abuse, mistreatment, damage to the workplace or place of stay, sexual harassment (Gaweł-Luty 2008, p. 371).

Based on the above content, one can construct a hypothetical picture of the situation which we call mobbing and transfer the given considerations to the problem of pressing, where the concept of “pressing” should be identified with the circumstances of the presence of overwhelming pressure. The term “pressure” in turn, means enforcement, coercion, oppression. We can differentiate moral, physical, environmental or public opinion pressure, (Szymczak 1979, p. 920). Hence, while mobbing has a more open, instrumental, visually perceivable character, and thus it can be relatively quickly diagnosed, pressing is a highly subtle, sublime, mental, intergenerational, masked and consequently extremely difficult to prove, because often the written verbal declarations are drastically opposed to real actions. At this point, there arises the question of the manifestations and exemplification of the pressing issue, with its simultaneous identification as a sophisticated form of mobbing on contemporary special pedagogy as a pedagogical subdiscipline. Pressing is also one of the types of mobbing.

### **EXERTING PRESSURE WITHIN (ON) SPECIAL PEDAGOGY**

Analyzing the above-mentioned issue, it is worth giving the examples of the existence of pressing situations in the promoted theoretical solutions, as well as in recommended concepts seen as desired from the point of view of presser or pressers. If someone in these theoretical and conceptual tendencies does not want to get involved, immediately becomes marginalized, seen as less important, alienated. The person has no influence and is perceived as of no value. In the mind of the presser/pressers, the individual is not included in the “circle”, in the system of mental dependencies, sometimes associated with connections of private, friendly and, in some cases, family relations.

Another problem concerns the issue of getting a career promotion, academic degrees and titles. In this area all kinds of affinities or connections count, and, to put it straight, especially profitable is a deal with those who decide, by virtue of their functions, about the progress of the scientific promotion, setting a hypothetically possible duration and assumed final result. It refers to compliance (or non-compliance) with deadline, creation (or not) of aura, belief in the magnitude, importance, eminence of the candidate and innovation (even on a global scale) of the contribution to the development of theoretical, scientific and practical special pedagogy.

The procedure continues by appointing appropriate reviewers who are in a relationship with the decision-maker/decision-makers, reviewing everything and everyone, and thus transferring the pressure to those who are far away from the presser's or pressers' influence. Thus, it is assigned to such reviewer the status of co-decision maker, Delphic oracle, a person who cannot be exposed, because otherwise there will be punishment in the form of failure of the promotion procedure. Therefore, the pressure is chasing pressure, it propels and complicates the status and actions of dependencies, it builds and consolidates the phenomenon of pressing and contributes to its development, both in individual and group form.

In general, it is hidden and essentially exemplifies dissonance between articulated declarations and actually implemented actions, i.e. in the propagation of a spoken word with a behavioural component and even a component of non-verbal communication and is usually implemented outside the situation of verbalizing views and submitting declarations. It is nothing more than, colloquially speaking, a tendency characterized by doing something completely different, contrary to what is presented in words. In addition, it is essentially an indirect action, performed by subordinated persons, involved in dependence and dependent on the person/persons applying the pressure, who have their own gratifications, similar to the presser/pressers: domination over others, subordination of people, eliciting in them behaviours of subordination, anxiety, concerns about the possibility of falling out of favour, marginalization, rejection, negative evaluation of scientific activity, accumulated achievements, formally initiated promotion proceedings aimed at obtaining another scientific degree of professional promotion.

## CONCLUSION

In the summary, one should ask about the effects of pressing present in science and transfer this issue to the area of ethics comprising scientific activity. As for the outcome, the situation seems unambiguous. In addition to the rigged deals, backing and favouring the presser/pressers, the following observable facts are promoted: dishonesty, easy and non-factual ways of getting successive professional advancement; the conviction about the willingness to surrender to influential people, even at the price of crossing out yourself, losing your own personality and values as a significant



person with ambitions and specific tasks to be achieved. On the other side, competences, professionalism, the need to put effort into work aimed at achieving success, are devaluated. However, in the sphere of ethics, not only scientific but also humanistic, the problem of pressing has a transparent identification, is a reprehensible, harmful phenomenon, a pathology that should not take place, and if it occurs, it should be nipped in the bud through various achievable instruments, including legal steps, and in a less rigorous approach, it should be decidedly limited. That is why the Ministry of Science and Higher Education has established a Convent of Disciplinary Prosecutors. The convent deals with matters of ethics in science. It is a reaction to numerous signals about violation of ethics in universities as well as high number of low quality scientific papers, conflicts of interest in the selection of reviewers, rigged contests, extortion of subsidies, plagiarism and lobbying (Ministry of Science and Higher Education 2015). The importance of ethics in scientific promotion proceedings, especially habilitation (e.g. postdoctoral dissertation), is also emphasized by Bogusław Śliwerski who indicates, not only current pathological situations, but also possible solutions to prevent the existing state of affairs which he defines as cancer of academic dishonesty (2017, p. 161).

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## SUMMARY

The problem of pressing, bullying and the systemicity of the current reality of civilization is applied to various fields of social, economic and political, local and global, as well as many areas of general social activities and organizational structures of a national, non-governmental and charity associated. It also includes the issue of interpersonal relationships created on the basis of their systemic linkages, promoting specific visions, concepts, trends, or selected people. The phenomenon is present in specific areas of scientific, practical education – including higher education as well as special education. Hence, the aim of the article is to signal not only the existence of the problem in transferring to the Polish special education, but also sensitivity to the possible multidimensional consequences.

**Key words:** special education, special education mission, pressing, mobbing.