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## **“ECOLOGY OF MIND” AND HEALTH PROMOTION**

The aim of this sketch is to show the meaning of the concept of the “ecology of mind” created by Gregory Bateson which is available to teachers thanks to the analyses of Lech Witkowski, of how it could be used in the school practice of health promotion and a theoretical reflection on this topic, if health pedagogues would pay attention to it.

The “ecology of mind” is an idea developed by Gregory Bateson (1904–1980), anthropology, distinguished humanist, who had a great influence on social sciences, including family therapy and known in Poland only through one translated book<sup>1</sup> but close to a small group of experts. The “ecology of mind” is linked with a new, broader than before understanding of the category of environment, as not only the “natural environment” but also the “invisible environment” so the cultural environment of humans. That is why ecology should today be understood broader than before, not only as protection of natural resources but as a new philosophy, pedagogy and social practice<sup>2</sup>. And in order to do this we need a new education, not reduced to job preparation but one which would think ecologically in the individual-society, society-culture, culture-upbringing, upbringing-ideas, ideas-mind relations<sup>3</sup>.

That is why it is important to care about the quality of communication in the hermeneutic approach as “the skill of reading and decoding meanings arriving in experiences, processes and education in different modes”<sup>4</sup>.

Lech Witkowski is a researcher who applies the interdisciplinary tropes to pedagogy. The paradigm of duality has been creatively developed in many

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<sup>1</sup> G. Bateson, *Umysł i przyroda, jedność konieczna*, transl. A. Tanalska-Dulęba, PIW, Warszawa 1996.

<sup>2</sup> L. Witkowski, *O nową postać ekologii. Między tradycją a współczesnością*, „Ekologia” 2015, no 2, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

forms in *Przełom dwoistości...*<sup>5</sup>, *Niewidzialne środowisko...*<sup>6</sup> and finally in *Versus*<sup>7</sup>. His analyses brought Bateson closer to many readers. Furthermore the topics discussed by Witkowski and published in “Ekologia” develop the theses of Gregory Bateson in the direction which are of the most interest to practising pedagogues because the “ecology of mind” is linked with communication and its contexts, education, ecology of the spiritual sphere, civilisation addictions, health. And as is proven in the book titled *Humanistyczne wyzwania ekologii umysłu...*<sup>8</sup>, with biology and neurobiology (the currently trendy aspects of the functioning of the brain), ecology of art and therapeutic issues.

As in the current times the relations between human sensitivity and engineering and technology, which are not only related to the world of nature and the social world, we have also turned to the environment of the human thought and the processes of learning because the toxic phenomena in those domains may lead to the destruction of spiritual life. That is why ecology should bring together the protection of natural environment with the protection of the cultural environment<sup>9</sup>.

As similar approach to ecology was found by Lech Witkowski in the works to Zbigniew Kwieciński in the form of the idea of “pedagogical ecology” related to the 1960s research of peripheral countryside. This ecology means research on the functioning of educational institutions which includes the mutual conditions of these institutions and the existing system of environmental interactions. The author also cause this ecology the “ecology of education”<sup>10</sup>. Marek Rembierz refers to this research and

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<sup>5</sup> L. Witkowski, *Przełom dwoistości w pedagogice polskiej. Historia, teoria, krytyka*, Kraków 2013.

<sup>6</sup> L. Witkowski, *Niewidzialne środowisko. Pedagogika kompletna Heleny Radlińskiej jako krytyczna ekologia idei, umysłu i wychowania. O miejscu pedagogiki w przełomie dwoistości w humanistyce*, Kraków 2014.

<sup>7</sup> L. Witkowski, *Versus. O dwoistości strukturalnej faz rozwoju w ekologicznym cyklu życia psychodynamicznego modelu Erika H. Eriksona*, Kraków 2015.

<sup>8</sup> M. Jaworska-Witkowska, L. Witkowski (ed.), *Humanistyczne wyzwania ekologii umysłu: Gregory Bateson w Polsce*, Wyd. Fundacja na Rzecz Myślenia im. Barbary Skargi, Warszawa 2016.

<sup>9</sup> L. Witkowski, *W stronę ekologii umysłu*, „Ekologia” 2016, nr 2, p. 10–11.

<sup>10</sup> L. Witkowski, *Niewidzialne środowisko. Pedagogika kompletna Heleny Radlińskiej jako krytyczna ekologia idei, umysłu i wychowania. O miejscu pedagogiki w przełomie dwoistości w humanistyce*, Of. Wyd. Impuls, Kraków 2014, p. 101. See Z. Kwieciński

says that “pedagogical ecology and ecological pedagogy may help to design and support human development so that in a long-term perspective this development would bring mostly positive and not destructive results”<sup>11</sup>.

M. Rembierz presents the view that: “Bateson’s inquiries are focused on the similarity of the holistically treated world of nature and man as part of this world, but H. Radlińska pays a lot more attention to the similarities which make, as can be paradoxically stated, the difference, and a significant one at that, between man and his autodeterminism [...] and the word of nature as man’s environment[...]”<sup>12</sup>. This difference in its pedagogical aspects is the issue of human value and axiological choices.

In relation to the pedagogy of health and the school promotion of health, one can also assume the ecological perspective because the pedagogues of health gain two or even three types in relation to the spheres which they cover. The narrowest of them is ecology understood as the science of the protection of the natural environment. It is hard to object to this problematic, especially for the students who are usually sensitive to different aspects of the closer and further surroundings (water, air, trees, flowers). A wider perspective can be found in the views of Kwieciński, as there are still not enough positive experiences and mutual contacts, understanding of stresses and dilemmas related to the cooperation of the family and school environment when it comes to area of the students’ health.

However, in order for those two perspective to work it is necessary to change the way of thinking of teachers and pedagogues and their subordinates and their parents and thus it would be important to start educational actions which would be aimed at achieving the “ecology of mind” effect.

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(red.), *Warunki pracy szkoły we wsi peryferyjnej*. Materiały z Ogólnopolskiego Seminarium Pedagogicznego – Toruń, kwiecień 1967, Wyd. ZSP SAW, Warszawa 1967, p. 7–8.

<sup>11</sup> M. Rembierz, *Krytyczna ekologia umysłu i dwoistość (w) edukacji. Batesonowskie tropy, reinterpretacje i dylematy w sprzężeniu zwrotnym*, [in:] M. Jaworska-Witkowska, L. Witkowski (ed.), *Humanistyczne wyzwania ekologii umysłu: Gregory Bateson w Polsce*, op. cit., p. 450–451. See Z. Kwieciński, *Ku odnowie ekologii pedagogicznej. O początkach i upadku pewnego programu badawczo-rozwojowego i możliwości jego pełniejszej reaktywacji. O błędnym odczytaniu Heleny Radlińskiej i szkodliwym zawężeniu tzw. pedagogiki społecznej. Nowe perspektywy ekologii pedagogicznej*, „Studia Edukacyjne” 2013, no 26.

<sup>12</sup> M. Rembierz, *Krytyczna ekologia umysłu i dwoistość (w) edukacji. Batesonowskie tropy, reinterpretacje i dylematy w sprzężeniu zwrotnym*, op. cit., p. 455.

The relation after all between the health of students and their school achievements or between the health and the conditions in the school or home, have been noticed a hundred years ago; great attempts have been made to better school conditions, to build schools meeting hygienic standards<sup>13</sup>, for the enabling of physical activity in school<sup>14</sup>, the relation between nature (life, health, energy, happiness) and culture (education, ideas, creativity) have been seen<sup>15</sup>. There is a reason why one of the New Education's recommendations was to build schools in rural areas. The continuation of this way of thinking was designing schools which made it possible to move walls so that the students would not lose touch with nature (open air schools), creating school neighbourhoods, creating school ships, going to sleep-aways, the idea of forest schools and kindergartens, etc.<sup>16</sup> The effects of these attempts were mostly dependent on the degree to which the oscillation between two extreme values, freedom and nature versus duty and education, was felt. Today we can say that the minds of those activists and doctors were mostly ecological, feeling the need for the harmony between what is offered by nature and brought by culture. During the whole 20th century the relationship between health and education oscillated and changed, during this whole time invisible barriers existed which made it harder to promote health in school and causing a low effectiveness, discouraging teacher from further action. These barriers have been and are created, as it may be assumed, by the way of thinking about the world, not noticing the duality in the world, which may lead to oversimplification and fundamentalism, as is stated by Witkowski.

That is why today it is important to see all of the intellectual impulses and ideas which can support this important and difficult area of education,

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<sup>13</sup> J. Holewiński, *Budynki szkolne*. Odbitka ze zbiorowego podręcznika pt. *Higiena szkolna*. Wydawnictwo M. Arcta w Warszawie, Warszawa 1921.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ogrodjordanowski.pl/strona.147421.html> [02.05.17].

<sup>15</sup> M. Demel, *Pedagogika zdrowia*, WSiP, Warszawa 1980, p. 158 and further. B. Woynarowska (red.), *Zdrowie i szkoła*, Wyd. Lek. PZWL, Warszawa 2000.

<sup>16</sup> For example A. Rondthaler (based on a survey), *Osiedla szkolne w Polsce. Opis stanu osiedli, praca dydaktyczna i wychowawcza na osiedlach*, Nakładem Zespołu Szkół posiadających własne osiedla. Skład Główny w Księgarni J. Lisowskiej, Warszawa 1936; J. Sobczak, *Recepcja idei Nowego Wychowania w polskiej pedagogice okresu między wojnami*, part II, Bydgoszcz 1979, p. 83.

the creation of a “personality which cares for health”, or seeing the body as a pedagogical category.

Reminding about the idea of the “ecology of mind” may be an initiation of reflection upon the topic. Among the challenges of the “ecology of mind” one can mention civilisational addictions which influence the attitude towards water, air, plants and animals as well as being blissfully ignorant of their state and the need to seek help. Witkowski even calls this state a “metacrisis” as it is the inability to recognise the symptoms of the growing downfall<sup>17</sup>. That is why new technology is not necessary but rather a new consciousness, new mentality and identity which do not eliminate the differences and otherness because “the ecology of the spirit is an imperative of the moment”<sup>18</sup>.

Addictions were historically seen threefold: as disturbances, weakness and sickness. The fourth kind of approach sees addiction as a critical disturbance of the process of teaching which can be attributed to a lack of access to higher levels of cognition according to Gregory Bateson<sup>19</sup>.

“Adaptation and pathology are incorporated as poles of a field in which addiction can be perceived as a total adaptation to one stimulus with a stifling or block of access to other stimuli”<sup>20</sup>. Sometimes a shock, trauma can be helpful to come out of addiction but one should rather work so that the traumatic experiences will not be necessary to make changes.

Witkowski thinks that a new level of learning is needed because even poetry can be useful in waking one’s aesthetic sensitivity. That is a broadening of the linguistic potential of social narration, enrichment of the world of metaphors, which influence imagination and can be a start of new thinking.

The next challenge is – as it has been called by the author – working on hope as the ecology of mind must pay special attention to the “minimum of energy needed to reduce fears, uncertainties and a feeling of endangerment”<sup>21</sup> of modern man. The statement of Nora Bateson related to “symmathesy” can be helpful here and it is related to interactive learning along with one’s imperfections. “We need a place for symmathesy so for

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<sup>17</sup> L. Witkowski, *Ekologia wobec uzależnień cywilizacyjnych*, „Ekologia” 2017, no 2, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Ibidem, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem.

common learning through sharing experiences joining people in a sense of fate that may always become our share: a healthy person can be permanently ill [...] someone who denies help may need it at some point”<sup>22</sup>.

According to the author it is recognized that addiction is linked to being caught up in constraints and so called “double bind” traps and one needs to start learning to get out of them. This requires inner energy to change, as much of it as needed to oppose the dominant civilisational trends, lifestyle and mode of thinking. This encompasses the ecology of change, which allows one to stay empathetic in situations which generate dual states. For example someone suffering from cancer or dying wants to see a sense in their existence as a person in pain.

The author states “It is necessary to care in some way for the state against reductive determinants in healthcare”<sup>23</sup>.

He also sees the need of inspiration to see education in a new way, through media and new social institutions and, what should be emphasized, in the light of the significant influence of the media on the education of the young generation.

How should be the ideas of the “ecology of mind” translated to the needs of the school promotion of health, using the impulses coming from the analyses of the texts of this prominent humanists? The answer can be found in a fragment of the statement of Stanisław Kawula quoted by Witkowski as it refers to the research he conducted but it can be also related to specific research in action like school initiatives which bring change in the environment of the students and their lifestyle, designed with the promotion of health in mind, for example in a chain of schools promoting health: “A pedagogue should supplement the descriptive character of the research with the normative one, researches phenomena not limiting oneself to just stating the current condition of things but such research should be a basis for the creation of a new educational reality in the local society”<sup>24</sup>. This means showing students and parents as well as oneself the

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>24</sup> S. Kawula, *Funkcja wychowawcza rodziny wiejskiej na tle innych funkcji rodziny (Z badań pedagogicznych nad rodziną podhalańską)*, [in:] Z. Kwieciński (ed.), *Warunki pracy szkoły we wsi peryferyjnej. Materiały z Ogólnopolskiego Seminarium Pedagogicznego – Toruń, kwiecień 1967*, Wyd. ZSP SAW, Warszawa 1967, p. 43–45, cit. as L. Witkowski, *Niewidzialne środowisko...*, op. cit., p. 102.

school, family and social conditions of students' health, the existing dilemmas and difficulties in making changes, seeking such solutions which take into consideration the variety of needs and abilities together with them. This encompasses for example the protection of natural environment, caring for water usage, energy and noise regulations.

Another way is through analysis, for example with students or school youth, the discourse of health coming from magazines and other media. The discourse surrounding the mandatory vaccination of children<sup>25</sup>, breastfeeding in public places<sup>26</sup>, school nutrition<sup>27</sup> are only three recent examples which show not only the obvious dualities in their specificity and the handling of such topics by journalists but also a number of tensions between the standpoints shown, and the tensions cannot be simply reduced by choosing one of the options. Should one individually resign from the fear for one's child, being a conscious of the social importance of vaccinations for the whole population? Is breastfeeding a baby in public in the interest of the baby or the mother who does not want to change her lifestyle? And nutrition in school: what is more risky for the student: being able to choose from the products from the ones offered by the vendor or trusting a brand of products available in a vending machine and advertised as "healthy"?

Another way is to creatively and diligently use, as part of caring for the health of the children, the older forms which contribute to their health and are still present in schools but are often unappreciated, like school tourism<sup>28</sup>, fresh air recreation, sleep-aways, school trips, school breaks, mid-class exercise and relaxation (according to Szyszko-Bohusz) which connect what is natural with what is cultural, making use of generational dialogue and other forms of mutual communication, giving a choice of classes and interests, raising sensitivity to beauty and the importance of the natural environment, linking this with care about the future of the

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<sup>25</sup> [http://niezdrowybiznes.pl/lekarze-prawie-jednomyslnei-szczepienia-niestety-saniebezpieczne/\[25.08.17\]](http://niezdrowybiznes.pl/lekarze-prawie-jednomyslnei-szczepienia-niestety-saniebezpieczne/[25.08.17]); [https://parenting.pl/szczepic-czy-nie-szczepic \[25.08.17\]](https://parenting.pl/szczepic-czy-nie-szczepic [25.08.17]).

<sup>26</sup> [https://parenting.pl/cycek-w-wielkim-miescie-czyli-savoir-vivre-publicznego-karmienia \[25.08.17\]](https://parenting.pl/cycek-w-wielkim-miescie-czyli-savoir-vivre-publicznego-karmienia [25.08.17]).

<sup>27</sup> M. Kaliszewska, *Dyskurs medialny o odżywianiu się uczniów w szkołach i skutkach rozporządzenia ministra zdrowia. Wprowadzenie do badań, cz. 1*, „Naukowy Przegląd Dziennikarski” 2016, no 1.

<sup>28</sup> K. Denek, *Edukacja pozalekcyjna i pozaszkolna*, WSPiA, Poznań 2011.



Earth, using beautiful texts to do this, like “Pamiętajmy o ogrodach” by Janusz Kofta – this can fully realize the idea of the “ecology of the mind” in relation to politics.

I would also add the impulses coming from the hermeneutics of biology, used by Piotr Błajet in the description of the pedagogical category<sup>29</sup> and other concepts pointed out by this author, like the paradigm to the four quarters of the cosmos of Ken Wilber, the brain function organization model of Aleksandr Łuria and the concept of contextualising by Edward T. Hall. Only later we can debate on the range of content and strategies as well as the methodology of the health education of children.

There still remain areas which have not been mentioned here and are related to the psychical health of the children and teachers, like stress, aggression, tiredness, professional burnout, coping in life for the analysis and solution finding of which the “ecology of mind” is a necessary trait.

The new way of thinking, a new look on reality and reevaluation of one’s way of thinking toward the “ecology of mind” will require pedagogues’ and teachers’ effort to understand such a need and mobilize one’s intellectual resources, enabling a deeper readership striving to attain a goal which should be humanity which would be intelligent and open to multiplicity. This is especially important in the area of school health promotion when the number of students with special needs is on the increase, when the teacher has an ambivalent role: without medical preparation, without the right to interfere (apart from first responder level care) he is often the first person who can notice a danger to the student’s health and needs to make the right decisions.

In the last couple of years there have been a number of scientific initiatives oriented about Bateson’s heritage and increasing interest in it. The 1st Bateson Symposium in Poland organised on the WSB University in Dąbrowa Górnicza on the 13–15 of May 2016 started an international cooperation of experts, researches of Bateson’s legacy and resulted in the *Bateson w Polsce* book<sup>30</sup>. The 2nd Bateson Symposium in Poland took place in the Silesian Botanical Garden in Mikołów, on the 1–4 of June 2017, and

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<sup>29</sup> P. Błajet, *Ciało jako kategoria pedagogiczna. W poszukiwaniu integralnego modelu edukacji*, Wyd. UMK, Toruń 2006.

<sup>30</sup> M. Jaworska-Witkowska, L. Witkowski (red.), *Humanistyczne wyzwania ekologii umysłu: Gregory Bateson w Polsce*, Warszawa 2016.



was the introduction to the next initiative: The Ecology of Mind World Congress which was planned for July 2018 in Katowice.

The first issue of *Batesoniana Polonica* was created for this occasion as the start of the presenting of the cooperation. The English edition of the *Transdisciplinary Studies on Culture and Education* journal was also created. We hope that the active promoting of the ideas of the great humanist will increase the number of readers of his work and will raise the quality of the references to the important pedagogical issues also in the field of pedagogy and health promotion.

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### SUMMARY

The ideas of Gregory Bateson popularized in Poland by Lech Witkowski, especially the concept of “the ecology of mind” can also inspire health pedagogues. The “ecology of mind” is linked with a new, broader than before understanding of the category of environment, as not only the “natural environment” but also the “invisible environment” so the cultural environment of humans. That is why ecology should today be understood broader than before, not only as protection of natural resources but as a new philosophy, pedagogy and social practice. The promotion of health should come from the consciousness of its ecological roots and the new, changed way of thinking of teachers and pedagogues and their pupils and parents when it comes to the relation of man, his social surroundings and nature as well as the existence of dualities which cannot be reduced and have significance for the health of man and his future in this world. Among the challenges of the “ecology of mind” one can men-

tion the attitude towards civilizational addictions, and looking for power in oneself to oppose the dominant, risky style of life. That is why it is especially important to initiate educational actions leading to the “ecology of mind” effect. They will require from the teachers an understanding of such a need and self-education as the number of students with special needs is on the increase and the teacher has been put in an ambivalent role: without medical preparation, without the right to interfere (apart from first responder level care) he is often the first person who can notice a danger to the student’s health and needs to make the right decisions.

**Key words:** Gregory Bateson, ecology of mind, double bind, invisible environment, pedagogical ecology, health promotion, discourse on health.