

University of Silesia in Katowice. Faculty of Social Sciences

AGATA RZYMELKA-FRĄCKIEWICZ

ORCID: 0000-0002-7173-2407; agata.rzymelka-frackiewicz@us.edu.pl

Teachers as Key Professionals in Safeguarding Children and Young Adults Against Contemporary Threats

Nauczyciele jako kluczowi specjaliści w ochronie dzieci i młodzieży przed współczesnymi zagrożeniami

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ABSTRACT

The study addresses the special role of the teacher/school in the area of safeguarding against contemporary social and health threats (such as, for example, modern drugs and legal highs, cyberbullying, gambling, mutilation of body, eating disorders). The modern world is full of civilisation threats, which as consequences – directly or indirectly – affect the development of children and young people. Because of the dynamically changing reality, more and more often the consequences for preparing young people for everyday life or future, lie upon teachers. It is them – teachers/educators – who have (or should have) extensive knowledge about correct development of young people as well as about contemporary threats. At the same time, all preventive measures should not eliminate from this process parents, who do not always have sufficient knowledge about the world in which their children function.

Keywords: teacher; school; parents; contemporary threats; safeguarding; children and young people

INTRODUCTION

For many years, threat prevention has played a significant role in upbringing process, understood as shaping the quality of pupils/students. It is a way that motivates the behavioural aspect of young people to make responsible individual choices, as

well as the one that equips them with the necessary dispositions to minimise, avoid or distance themselves from socially disapproved behaviours and choose competitive ones, postulated and accepted by groups of positive reference (Kozaczuk, 1997).

Safeguarding means, generally speaking, a number of projects to prevent creation of negative states. Among many definitions, Kozaczuk (1997) writes about safeguarding as an opportunity to protect people against phenomena and processes that threaten their lives, health and proper development of social relations.

Today, safeguarding has become an important element of family and school education. According to Dziewiecki,

this is not the result of a special fashion or accident, but the consequence of the fact that the cusp of the millennium proved to be a time of a clear crisis of educators and education, which led to the appearance of problem behaviours, on a previously unknown scale, among children and adolescents. (Dziewiecki, 2003, p. 4)

The modern world is full of civilisation threats, which as a result – directly or indirectly – affect the development of children and young people.

With the emergence of new types of threats/addictions and the growing number of children and adolescents that require supportive measures in the field of threat prevention, it seems necessary to provide more comprehensive analysis of the aetiology of threats in developmental age. It is also necessary to develop new generation safeguarding programmes that take into account the whole reality in which pupils/students function in their everyday life, and not only or mainly their attitude towards addictive factors. As a consequence, according to Dziewiecki (2003), it is necessary to introduce a qualitative leap in the knowledge and competences of persons professionally involved in safeguarding.

Education understood as a process involving intentional interactions, has a multidimensional character, with the diversity of interacting entities being greater in the conditions of modern life, characterised, among others, by the diversity of social participation.

This multi-subjectivity encourages pedagogical reflection on responsibility for the organisation of education, its course and effects. (...) Among the entities being educated there are those which have been appointed by the society in a special way to carry out educational tasks, therefore, the educational functions occupy leading positions in their activities – these include family and school. (Chodkowska, 2012, p. 13)

Appointment to specific tasks is associated with granting appropriate rights to perform them, but also with liability for the results obtained.

In traditional communities, both parenting and responsibility for its results were primarily assigned to the family. School education supplemented family upbringing, showing complete agreement with it regarding cultural ideals and methods of their internalisation. (...) This coherence in the reality of modern society practically does not exist, which does not mean that the problem of shared responsibilities of parenting entities is losing significance. (Chodkowska, 2012, pp. 13–14)

So, how to solve the problem – who is responsible for the proper development of the young generation and their preparation for life nowadays and in the unknown future?

TEACHERS AND PARENTS IN THE FACE OF CONTEMPORARY THREATS

Seeing school from the perspective of the need to create safeguarding programs, the task of which is to protect young people against new unknown types of modern addictions, it is worth asking a question whether today's school is able to shape features that provide an individual with civilisational competences adequate to post-industrial reality (Wilk, Rzymelka-Frąckiewicz, 2010). Does contemporary school educate and train the way that young people acquire the ability to move in the present and future, consciously avoiding threats? The same question can be applied to parents – adults formed in a completely different reality. As Mead wrote:

(...) the older generation must recognize that its past is not transferable. (...) Parents do not know how to teach children who are so fundamentally different from them in their youth, and most children cannot learn from parents and elders they will never be like. (Mead, 1978, pp. 122–123, 130)

A similar opinion was expressed by Bauman:

(...) the children usually grow up in a world different from the one their parents remember from their own childhood, and to which they got accustomed and which they learned to recognize as “normal”. Children will never enter this other, lost world of their parents' youth. What one generation may seem as “natural” – “it is just like that”, “that is how it is done”, “it should be done” – the next generation may consider it aberration: a deviation from the norm, a bizarre, and maybe even groundless and ridiculous state of affairs, unfair, disgusting, vile or absurd, crying for a search. (...) Today no one expects young people to be adults in our way. They are rather perceived as a different species of people. (Bauman, 2010, p. 21–22)

The dynamics of changes in everyday life makes it impossible to apply the life pattern of parents to lives of present and future generations. According to Wysoka (2010, pp. 190–191) “one can risk the statement that the intergenerational gap obviously and logically translates into the gap between the education system and the requirements of the reality, for which the young generation wants to prepare”.

Who, then, should take responsibility for the education of children and youth understood as preparation for active participation in often unspecified process of occurring and changes that often surprise us? (Radziewicz-Winnicki, 1999, p. 22). “The world is changing faster than teaching standards in schools” (Radziewicz-Winnicki, 2001, p. 27).

Many social institutions take part in complicated and long-term development process of an individual. However, an increasing share of the sense of responsibility for preparation of young people is “shifting” from parents, who cannot know everything and be familiar with everything, competent, experienced and aware of the pace of changes of professionals who have much greater awareness and knowledge of threats – modern addictions. Parents, due to the lack of sufficient and substantive knowledge, more and more frequently and willingly “agree” to help children in determining a way of their life that would be possible to implement. Under a multi-stage agreement, they “agree and require” specialists to help in the process of raising and shaping their children (Rzymelka-Frąckiewicz, 2010).

THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL/TEACHERS IN THE FIELD OF SAFEGUARDING

Polish families have changed significantly in recent decades and these changes are also irreversible in terms of minimising their functions. Therefore, responsibility for solving numerous educational problems is transferred to school. It is theoretically assumed that fulfilling its educational functions is just as important as the implementation of teaching tasks. In practice, however, the former ones “go down” to the background. The teacher is rewarded primarily for the results of education, while possibly punished for educational failures (Chodkowska, 2012). The basic weaknesses of Polish school in the field of safeguarding measures include: lack of a carefully developed and annually improved school educational programme; “detachment” of safeguarding activities from other forms of education; involvement of schools in nationwide actions; limiting school safeguarding to some selected groups of students; narrowing down preventive measures only for one type of dysfunction; no solid evaluation of the school’s safeguarding measures. Schools usually do not prepare their own safeguarding activities programme that would be built on knowledge of their own resources and needs, but they operate from action to action, often *ad hoc* forced by crisis or disturbing behaviour of students. In addition, schools rarely involve parents and local communities in educational and safeguarding measures (Dziewiecki, 2003). The success of a school’s safeguarding activities depends on the consistency of cooperation with parents. Although parents often do not have adequate knowledge about contemporary social or health threats, skipping them in safeguarding measures will certainly not contribute to their success (see Nowak, Krawczyk, 2014; Olubiński, Zaworska-Nikoniuk, 2019).

In this sense, safeguarding measures should be directed not only to young people, but also to adult generation, so that they would become able to support their children in making only positive and valuable decisions, at the same time avoiding risky behaviour. It is, therefore, important and needed at all sages that the school becomes a place connecting knowledge about modern and new threats.

TEACHER/EDUCATOR – SAFEGUARDING SPECIALIST ADVISOR

Can any teacher be a good safeguarding specialist? According to Borzucka-Sitkiewicz and Kowalczywska-Grabowska (2013) – not everyone can deal with safeguarding.

It has to be a person who knows the class or school well and is able to diagnose the problem and develop an adequate action plan tailored to the needs of the group. Conducting safeguarding actions requires from those who implement them primarily substantive predisposition and knowledge of the appropriate methodological skills. (Borzucka-Sitkiewicz, Kowalczywska-Grabowska, 2013, p. 80)

People involved in safeguarding should: know mechanisms and regularities of human development; have extensive knowledge of protective factors; demonstrate their ability to identify risk factors and be sensitive to them (Gaś, 2003). In addition, a person dealing with organisation of school safeguarding activities should be aware of themselves and their system of values, the ability to experience and show feelings, be a model of attitudes and behaviour for children and young people. Educators cannot be unfamiliar with human matters – not only must they possess knowledge of contemporary social problems, but they also should show commitment to solving them. No less should they have ethical principles and a sense of responsibility for themselves (for their work) and for the behaviour of their pupils. Among the necessary professional skills Borzucka-Sitkiewicz and Kowalczywska-Grabowska (2013) distinguish the following three groups: the ability to understand students and their behaviour and show them their interest; ability to ensure safety in difficult situations; ability to foster positive action.

The effectiveness of safeguarding measures depends also on the methodological workshop of a teacher. Activating methods based on the use of the student's knowledge and skills in real or similar situation are the most effective in safeguarding activities. Activating methods are characterised by shifting focus from teaching to learning process, taking into account emotional aspect and creating space for learners to think and act independently (Borzucka-Sitkiewicz, Kowalczywska-Grabowska, 2013).

The literature on the subject has various qualifications of activating methods and techniques. Klimowicz (2005) lists the following methods: discussion, entering the role, analysing and solving problems, learning in small teams, project, task stations, portfolio, visualisation (*Jak zwiększyć...*, 2018).

In addition, as various scholars (Gaś, 1994; Pasek, 2000; Drożdż, Grzesiak-Witek, Witek, 2019) believe, all teaching, especially preventive teaching, should be characterised by: the need for creative approach to the topic, not just its schematic implementation; teaching by means of activating methods, which are

in opposition to the teacher's monologue; using intellectual potential of students, their experiences, thoughts and views; ability to build a cooperative rather than a rival group, encouraging them to cooperate; individual approach to students, without tendency to lower or increase requirements; ability to notice atmosphere in the classroom and adapt activities to it; need to identify learners' strengths, which rises motivation to participate in classes; introducing clear evaluation criteria and ongoing clarification.

THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN SAFEGUARDING ACTIONS

The necessity of cooperation with parents should certainly be added to such an extensive list of features of hazard prevention / school prevention regulations. Without their support, effects of undertaken actions may turn out to be negligible. Most of the activities proposed as part of safeguarding are addressed directly to students, but parents should not be forgotten. The family environment is the basic area of prevention of risky behaviours. According to Gaś (2006), skipping family in preventive actions is a highly vulnerable activity, and preventing risky behaviour with complete resignation from supporting the family environment is a "defective" action. A similar position is presented by Śliwa who believes that

if prevention means helping children and young people to shape a mature attitude in all the basic areas of human life, then undoubtedly the first place of its implementation should be family. It is the most important environment where the personality and behaviour of a young person are formed. (...) In family circle, the degree of school, moral, spiritual, religious and social maturity is largely determined. Family as the first school of life is a place to achieve the basic goals of integral prevention. (Śliwa, 2015, p. 69)

Social prevention currently understood as supporting the upbringing process is only possible when parents are involved. Thus, the success of educational and safeguarding programmes implemented in school environments is not possible without the parallel participation and support of parents.

The success of safeguarding school activities will depend primarily on supporting parents in acquiring skills that are conducive to better organisation of family life and the educational process. Additionally, it is worth supporting parents in the field of comprehensive knowledge of developmental regularities and their disorders of children and adolescents (Gaś, 1993).

In the context of ongoing transformations, increasing threats, diversity and addictions, it is the school that could become a place combining educational and safeguarding activities of parents and teachers. A teacher prepared professionally for safeguarding activities could become an invaluable support for parents' activities. Regardless of the system solutions adopted (parent-teacher/tutor relationship) or

lack thereof, we must absolutely consider the practical possibilities of developing new standards of safeguarding measures implemented by teachers in cooperation with family, which will be adequate to contemporary threats.

CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary youth have almost become synonymous with someone addicted nowadays (Front-Dziurkowska, 2014). In our reality, not only alcoholism and drug addiction are serious threats. Educational problems of young people are also associated with other addictions, often neglected or simply marginalised, not noticed first of all by parents, but also often by teachers and educators (Grabowska, Gwiazda, 2017; Grabowska, Gwiazda, 2019). New forms of addiction (such as, for example, modern drugs and legal highs, cyberbullying, gambling, mutilation of body, eating disorders) require the same structured, determined fight for the proper development of the young generation in the form of professional preventive measures, even though the percentage of people exhibiting risky behaviour, or the percentage of people who are already addicted seem to be small at the moment in the whole society. Contemporary safeguarding is based on the assumption that it is not pathologies (e.g. alcoholism, drug addiction) that are dangerous but human imperfections in dealing with them. The goal of these activities is primarily to develop general psychosocial skills (Borzucka-Sitkiewicz, Kowalczevska-Grabowska, 2013).

Today, safeguarding should be understood as activities that give people the opportunity to actively accumulate various experiences that increase their ability to cope with difficult life situations (Pasek, 2000) or as a process that supports a person in proper development and healthy life by providing help needed in confrontation with complex, stressful living conditions, and as a result enabling them to achieve a subjectively satisfying, socially accepted, wealthy life (Pasek, 2000; Kowalski, Śliwa, Kania, 2018).

Certainly the most suitable place to carry out safeguarding measures is the school, especially when we are talking about primary prevention. It is at school where young people meet their peers, exchange views and experiences; they also have contact with teachers and educators who can provide professional knowledge, advice and help. School with the support of specialists, authorities or external experts – from the local environment, from professional institutions should be the initiator of safeguarding actions. When organising preventive classes, special attention should be paid if their direct executor has substantive knowledge in a given area, proper predispositions, and if this person is distinguished by knowledge of an appropriate methodological workshop (Borzucka-Sitkiewicz, Kowalczevska-Grabowska, 2014). The role and form of a teacher-educator-safeguarding specialist who is equipped with professional knowledge and appropriate competences in the field of integral prevention of problem behaviours and addictions is key issue for the effectiveness of

all actions for education of the young generation in freedom and responsibility. The main purpose of these activities should be to strengthen the personality of students by acquiring the skills of refusing, raising self-esteem, ordering or creating from scratch their own addicted value system (Front-Dziurkowska, 2014). The school's activities in creating proprietary safeguarding programmes should not be limited to creating another paper document, often not used in practice. Traditional readings, handing out leaflets, lectures in crowded assembly halls – they can only become an additional form. These classes should, above all, take active and attractive form depending on who the recipient is. It remains to be determined who should be the recipient of such activities. First of all, children and young people basically at every stage of education. However, it is also worth thinking first of all about parents and a group of teachers who do not necessarily fulfil the role of class teacher at a given time. In the era of numerous threats, including parents should become a permanent obligation on the part of school, not just an act of good, occasional will. Equipping representatives of the mentioned educational environment with necessary knowledge and skills, we gain confidence that they will become the first and proper support for young people who enter the period of adolescence and youth rebellion and become to be interested in all the available “attractions” of our reality.

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ABSTRAKT

W opracowaniu omówniono szczególną rolę nauczyciela/szkoły w zakresie szkolnej profilaktyki współczesnych zagrożeń społecznych i zdrowotnych (takich jak na przykład współczesne narkotyki i dopalacze, cyberprzemoc, hazard, okaleczanie ciała, zaburzenia odżywiania). Współczesny świat jest pełen zagrożeń cywilizacyjnych, które w sposób bezpośredni lub pośredni wpływają na rozwój dzieci i młodzieży. Dynamicznie zmieniająca się rzeczywistość sprawia, że coraz częściej odpowiedzialność za przygotowanie młodych ludzi do codziennego życia, do przyszłości, spoczywa na nauczycielach. To właśnie oni – nauczyciele, wychowawcy – dysponują (lub powinni dysponować) szeroką wiedzą na temat prawidłowego rozwoju młodego człowieka i współczesnych zagrożeń. Zarazem wszelkie działania profilaktyczne nie powinny eliminować z tego procesu rodziców, którzy nie zawsze posiadają wystarczający zakres wiedzy na temat świata, w którym funkcjonują ich dzieci.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciel; szkoła; rodzice; współczesne zagrożenia; szkolna profilaktyka; dzieci i młodzież