

## Original Papers

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### Development Support Psychology: A New Branch of Psychology?

Development support is nothing new. It has been around since the beginning of humanity, although the subject, objectives, objects, methods and means of support have changed. Development support is common, although not always performed consciously and correctly. For this reason, a branch of applied psychology – development support psychology – has grown in popularity, with an objective to analyse this phenomenon to understand it better and more consciously and to benefit from this support.

To understand development support, one needs to understand properly the idea of development, which is perceived in its whole ontogenesis. It can already be seen in prenatal life and is particularly visible among children and adolescents. Recently, the right to development has also been given to adults. Development is thus a phenomenon which concerns the whole life. Charlotte Bühler described human development as a process that lasts for the entire life. This perspective, known as *life-span development*, makes it possible to support human development until the end of one's days. Such a universal presentation of a development process and the associated development support creates optimistic perspectives for everyone.

Looking back on the literature of the previous century, instead of the term *development support* we find the slightly different notion of *development stimulation*. Are these two terms the same? Although almost synonymous, there is a subtle difference between them. This is a consequence of a particular presentation of a person and their development. It is a humanistic approach, according to which a person is perceived as an active individual and not as an object of social impacts or educational methods forming their development, world view and in consequence, their behaviour. Such an approach is expressed in Maria Żebrowska's (1988) four-factor theory of development. According to this concept, the factors determining who a person will become are: genetic predisposition; social environment; upbringing, which is conscious and has a planned environmental impact; and one's own activity. The last factor, one's own

activity, ultimately determines who we become. It is also activated by human development support, because we are not able to support a person's development endlessly. We hope that at some point a person will be in charge of their own activity to continue the progressive changes aimed at a higher level of functioning. Maria Montessori famously said "Help me to do it alone". Even at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the founder of Montessori preschools and special education could notice the value of support, but only to a limited extent. The quoted sentence can be understood as: "Help me, but do not do it for me, so that I could learn to do it myself", which means functioning on a higher level. That is the core of proper helping, which is not limited to temporary benefits, but makes it possible to reach a higher level of development. The same trend regarding support and development support was shared by Lev Vygotsky, who in 1934 posited a concept of the zone of proximal development. According to this concept it is only acceptable and advisable to assist children in the activities, which they have not yet fully mastered. With a help from an adult, these activities will soon become independent, which means a development progress. Thus, having Maria Montessori's and Lev Vygotsky's ideas in mind, we can see consent and even encouragement to support the development of children, albeit performed moderately so this support would wake one's motivation and developmental possibilities.

The issues discussed here deserve serious consideration since there emerged a separate branch of applied psychology, namely *development support psychology*. This young and constantly changing discipline of theoretical knowledge and practice draws from such well-established branches of theoretical psychology as developmental psychology, health psychology, psychopathology and branches of applied psychology, such as clinical psychology and educational psychology. Distinguishing between these narrow disciplines in the previous century raises no doubts. It is now difficult to classify them properly, because there are still new *branches* and *shoots* appearing, such as *the*

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*psychology of dyslexia* (Krasowicz-Kupis, 2011), *the psychology of consumption* and *economic psychology* (Zawadzka, 2011). They grow out of traditional disciplines and their branches. At the same time, the boundaries between them become almost invisible. This indeed adds some difficulty, but is above all a good sign of our times, because it shows how the dynamic development of the psychological sciences and their implementation is in practice. It means we not only notice the most important problems, but also those that are smaller, which can sometimes be onerous and painful. Only after these problems are diagnosed can steps of a various scope be taken, depending on the nature of the problem.

Development support belongs to a wide field of scientific and practical activity: from prevention through diagnosis to support and therapeutic activities. These activities concern people of all ages and in all situations. It should be noted that it does not only feed on the achievements of psychology, but also on other scientific and professional disciplines. To be effective, activities supporting the children with various developmental problems must coexist with other types of assistance, training and therapy, such as education, speech therapy, medicine, physical education and art. Only through an interdisciplinary approach is it possible to get to know human beings comprehensively and orient support activities.

In Polish literature, the issue of development support has been discussed mainly in serial publications and only one book by Barbara M. Kaja (2010), *Development Support Psychology*, is worth noting. We can find there an attempt to define the activities known as development support by Maria Kielar-Turska. According to her: "From more general perspective development support in psychological literature is defined as a process of intentional influence of one man on another (by assisting, helpful behavior or support). It shows in different forms and leads to enhancing well-being (by promoting, stimulating), restraining factors threatening this well-being (through intervention, upbringing, education, prevention), correcting, removing abnormalities (by correction and therapy), or restoring an individual's lost well-being (in the form of re-education, rehabilitation, revalidation), which allow individuals to solve their life problems on their own and adequately to their abilities" (Kielar-Turska, 2003 as cited in: Kaja, 2010, p. 32).

Barbara M. Kaja herself defines development support and all it covers in the following way: "Development support is a process of intentional interactions aiming at enabling a supported person to solve his/her life problems by himself/herself. Its essence is a special kind of interaction between people (...) It is used when the former development and accompanying processes (upbringing, socialization) do not go properly and for this or other reasons (e.g., critical events) there appear problems in human life, which interfere with its progress" (Kaja, 2010, p. 33).

Among theoretical conceptions, which form the basis of *development support psychology* there is a conception of *mental health* and *positive disintegration* by Kazimierz Dąbrowski (1964). According to his theory, mental health does not mean no illness, but rather using one's

own resources and full development potential. Disorders may be a sign of *positive disintegration*, which makes it possible to build personality on a higher level of maturity in the future. A continuation of this positive approach to disorders and illnesses, which creates encouraging perspectives for development support, is *the salutogenic model* by Aaron Antonovsky (1997). Similar to Dąbrowski, Antonovsky remained opposed to the pathogenetic model, which concentrated on an illness and its causes and in which health was understood as a lack of illness. The salutogenic model presents health and illness as two extremes of a *continuum*, where health depends on the relationship between the demands (stressors) and resources of an individual. In this approach, health is based on the sense of coherence (comprising comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness) and one searches for factors that support health, by asking "What makes a person healthier?". Both above-mentioned theories stimulate activities that promote health and development.

Various needs mean diverse forms of support. They include: therapy, rehabilitation, revalidation, psycho-correction, stimulation, re-education, methods and techniques to directly influence a person who needs a certain type of help. Here arises a significant problem of the competence of a supporting person. The process of acquiring such competence is diversified. Thus, a pedagogic therapy specialist conducting correction and compensation classes among pupils with specific reading and writing difficulties gets their qualifications on the basis of three-semester postgraduate studies. The same applies to other professionals, although there are some who need many years of training, for example therapists dealing with behavioural disorders. However, regardless of the length of professional education, in all cases there is a need for continuing education to improve one's own skills.

Another issue of great importance is the need for expanding the scientific and theoretical foundations that explain professional activities or lead to their new forms. The need for empirical studies, which verify the correctness and the effectiveness of the activities supporting development is equally important. All these principles suggest a problem of development support as the subject of the current issue of *Polish Psychological Bulletin*. Perhaps this subject will become an inspiration to undertake scientific research, whereas the development of knowledge and practical experience will result in the fact that we will return to this issue in the future.

The opening article of this thematic issue is *New Psychological Method of Supporting the Development of Young Children and Their Families Based on a Video Technique Available in Poland* by Małgorzata Dacka and Magdalena Miotk-Mrozowska. The authors present a method that is still little known and rarely used in Poland: Video-feedback Intervention to Promote Positive Parenting and Sensitive Discipline (VIPP-SD). It has been developed by a team from Leiden University in the Netherlands and its effectiveness is well documented.

The second article, *Children with Language Disorders or Late Bloomers: The Problem of Differential*

**Diagnosis** by Ewa Czaplewska, is devoted to the most important issues connected to language disorders correlated with Specific Language Impairment (SLI). There are many descriptions of SLI based on recent literature, where criteria such as etiology, symptomatology and so-called markers helpful in differential diagnosis are considered.

Having analysed the subject literature along with Polish and global reports, in the third article **The Good Start Method for English or How to Prevent and Treat Risk of Developmental Dyslexia in Children Learning English as a Second Language**, Marta Bogdanowicz and Katarzyna Bogdanowicz present the use of the recognized and constantly improving Good Start Method for teaching English to pre-school children with dyslexia or a risk of dyslexia.

The next article by Katarzyna Bogdanowicz, Grażyna Krasowicz-Kupis and Katarzyna Wiejak – **In Search of Effective Remediation for Students with Developmental Dyslexia – A Review of Contemporary English Literature**, is a thorough overview of the therapeutic methods for specific reading difficulties in reference to English literature.

**Parents' Literacy Skills, Reading Preferences and the Risk of Dyslexia in Year 1 Students** by Marta Łockiewicz and Martyna Matuszkiewicz discusses the important issue of family histories of dyslexia and the risk of specific difficulties in reading and writing for children of parents diagnosed with developmental dyslexia, or manifesting symptoms of such difficulties but without a formal diagnosis issued by a psychological and educational clinic.

**Towards a Framework for Psychological Resilience in Children with Borderline Intellectual Functioning** by Anna Jankowska is an overview of approaches and research results on development and education of children with lower-than-average intelligence and slow learners, who constitute a *grey area* between state and special education systems.

**In Identity Dimensions versus Proactive Coping in Late Adolescence when Taking into Account Biological Sex and Psychological Gender**, Dorota Kalka and Bartek Karcz present research on youth in late adolescence. The

subjects of this study are identity formation and sexuality as well as ways of coping with potential difficulties.

Bolesław Niemierko in **Psychology Students Try on the Role of Educational Diagnosticians: Preliminary Studies** presents research results on the readiness of psychology students to take on the role of educational diagnosticians and connections with retrospective style of learning and ego-states models (in transactional analysis theory).

The next article by Aleksandra Fila-Jankowska and Agata Szawińska, **Suppression of Negative Affect in Cancer Patients: Trauma and Defensiveness of Self-Esteem as Predictors of Depression and Anxiety**, reports on research on the emotional functioning of people with cancer and their levels of anxiety, depression and self-esteem.

In **Quality of Life and Proactive Coping with Stress in a Group of Middle Adulthood Women with Type 2 Diabetes**, Dorota Kalka presents research on the level of satisfaction with quality of life, the frequency of proactive coping strategies as well as their importance for the satisfaction with life in a group of middle adulthood women with type 2 diabetes.

The issue closes with Edyta Bonk's **The Influence of Activeness and Independence on the Quality of Life of Senior Citizens**, which discusses research on the importance of activeness for the level of satisfaction with life in late adulthood.

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