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## THE DEFINITION OF BEHAVIOURAL AND EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

*The line among modifications in accepted behaviour of the children and adolescents many times doesn't differ from the unaccepted, even the one which leads them to an educational institution. Many children and adolescents sent to an educational institution show us the essence of their vulnerability and the reason for elimination of individuals under the paradigm of help. Social belonging, family relationships and relationships in school proved to be of principal importance. As a basic reason of the placing in an institution itself, the results point towards the social workers (their professional aim and their attitude towards the social help, especially in an educational institutions) who are placing children and thus finally define them as behaviourally and emotionally disturbed.*

### INTRODUCTION

"Why me? Why did the whole world turn against me? This is wrong." This is what children and youth defined as behaviourally and personally difficult are going through. Social stratification on one side and superficial work of the social work institutions on the other. An objective reflection of the true meaning of sociability in a country would be that a social worker is given a whole army of children to handle. Some can really handle it all, some cannot. The personal approach, engagement, professionalism and culture of every community centre also had an important role on defining and on the policy of placing children and adolescents in the educational institutions and at the same time to term who behaves how.

Before we get to more specific defining of behavioural and emotional problems of children and youth in the educational institutions, we will present some of the most important scientific discussions about the adequacy of the educational help to this population. The presented discussions give us a deeper insight into the demanding field of proceedings of the children and youth with behavioural and educational difficulties (1).

### THE NEEDS TO DEFINE GROUPS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH BEHAVIOURAL AND EMOTIONAL DIFFICULTIES

After a century of discussions about our work field, we know almost everything about the clientele, ourselves and the troubles of our work. We know that in helping young people, there is only little of pedagogy itself, because the main things are social and political influences. How could we otherwise explain the fact that already in the time of the Caesars, (seventies and eighties of the 19th century) the criminal children rapidly converted into abandoned and in need of care and saviours as well as victims of failed parental upbringing? How else can we understand the fact that for example, in the last stage of the Weimar Republic, (which means the renaissance in helping children and youth; in that time also our Milcinski worked) also the optimism went down the drain so quickly, even though it has been so proudly emphasized for the whole previous five decades, and it had to give space to the paradigm of uneducability?

How would it otherwise be in the time of fascism, when a youth, in love with a girl of non-Arian race, or a youth who liked swing, became asocial, in need of an environment which shields young people? Or a person who was extremely good at being cruel, became the so-called Hitler's hero, or hero of Serbian, Croatian or even Slovene or any other war?

How else would we— after we entered into the *political pluralization*, economical and social modernization – in one decade transform from neglected to the victim of social conditions, later into individuals in need of therapy and those who would earn a successful everyday life?

If such definition of difficulties can exist, as well as the determination that the help for children is limited by social, political, and also economical circumstances, we cannot find strange that the youth from the seventies, who are suffering and who deserve the same social care as everybody else, are again turning into perpetrators, work-haters, and rejecters of modernization. It is not surprising that we are again facing all the strictness of the laws or at least with the recognition that they will not be served everything on a silver plate. Why should the society and the economy, which for their own survival or recognition of the world criteria, bet on creating elite societies and productivity, or cowards and those who have difficulties establishing themselves in this society, or those who do not even possess enough sources to have enough chance in social integration?

In thinking forward: even if we are not amongst those who are crying for good old times, or those who in different thinking and behaviour of the growing generation also see the bad thinking and behaving, even then, if we do not see our present with nostalgic eyes, we know that the society does not at all help the young and their parents, that it is working even destructively towards their struggling. This is then reflected in the youth's behaviour and consciousness. Those who remember Marx from the school days, will see his theory of the objective progressive *subsumption* of life, including the body, socialization and consciousness as organised capital. For the young, it is enough if they turn their brain to some commercial TV channel or read in the newspapers about a dispute about turning the bank or a soccer club into a shareholder company in order to know what it all is about.

As professionals we surely know that our usual clientele – the ignorant and unlearned population which is burdened by its own past and fate – the process of real "subsumption" is running more directly than with us, who are in a better position than them. We also know that more and more people, beside their already existing affiliation to marginal social groups, are falling into the circle of psychological and spiritual poverty. We know that for those who have somehow failed in the process of individualization there are different rules than for those who are coming out of these processes of individualization and pluralization as the "winners" or profiteers. What to the latter means a possibility of restructuring and re-growth of the concepts of individualization, to the latter it means literally that their primary identity has been destined to fail or decay. Therefore, we also know that a century and a quarter of social partnership did not get rid of class contradictions, but has only strengthened them.

Besides, we also know that our methods of helping the young, we cannot succeed, despite all the modernization and continuous progress. Despite the contemporary situation we have always promised and were telling more than our true knowledge was, filled with practical experiences and scientific analysis. Those who are professionally helping the young, have always been less successful than it has been talked

about, and that the reality that is created as the clientele for helping the young is less useful and helpful than it is presented. Those who look into it, know that the institutions for helping the young tends to avoid challenges; that only a few pedagogues in conflict between personal interests and needs and needs of the youth choose for the youth; that cluster, mobile and other care mostly contributes to neglecting, rather than help to educate. We also know that rarely we find someone from the youth- social work projects who would later be found included into society and be employed throughout their lifetime, despite all the big word used for defining these helpful projects. It is also known that the projects for children from the streets are nothing but a drop into the ocean where most children are bound to drown. Unfortunately, we are also aware that the situation is drastically worsening. Even in the new millennium, help for children has the reputation of a dead-end street. It is becoming more and more true, that the children should be placed into an educational institution only in truly severe cases, when danger is present, if the press bit into the case or if police would give a complaint more than once.

The keyword, which had been used more and more these days against the will of the social workers is this: Less children and adults, which are not completely abandoned, neglected; not the worst gamblers and lost homeless people, or any little suffering we should let to be dealt with by themselves. If we want to get somewhere, we know that we have to overlook at a large amount, with a professional tolerance to any differentiating 'de-', of the original lifestyle and also know how to argument partiality towards the outcast.

Those who are practicing administration for helping the young, know that most of their hopes for administrative reforms have been more or less unsuccessful. That is why we also know that the new ways of directing will not be luckier. It is being naive who thinks that social workers are going to have the will and motivation for reforms, as well as great discussions and the presence of the victims. Theoreticians, empiricists and others who are helping children, and those who are teaching how to help children and the young, already know that their work passes unnoticed or taken as someone else's hardship, or even changed so much in practice, that it only has an aftertaste of the primary idea (Blandow, 2000).

It is naive to believe that today's social structure is rational, therefore, we have to look into some contemporary suppositions which enable that an unlawful children (a young person, decided upon by his/her parents, caretakers...) find themselves in an environment outside of their home, in such a strange institution as the educational institution (Simmen, 1988).

Children and youth are put into different institutions (kindergarten, schools, institutions). Those who are placing and locking them in such places, have to have really good criteria, by which they decide for which are defining the shutting, in modern language: 'placing' or 'giving away' (2) (Mrgole, 1992).

The question, which will at the same time be the first supposition, is referring to the continuity of institutionalism of the children who do not have a family shelter behind them, be that the financial or safety care. We may assume that such children since the roman times on, are objected to social and later also state interests. The institutional forms for treating children and youth with behavioural and emotional difficulties used nowadays, as well as those created a long time ago, are constant, which can also be seen in the relationship with the oppressed. The basic characteristics are unlawfulness, absolute subordination and helplessness (Mrgole, 1992).

The placing of the children and youth into the educational institution or cluster homes is never something easy for the child, and mostly it is not being done by them voluntarily.

So it is a kind of a force upon them, which directly or indirectly gives a message that those children are socially unwanted or unable. This is the reason why placing into an educational establishment is so stressful for the children. This is also why such placing ought to be the last option, done only when inevitable for the child in question.

This raises a question whether the frustration of placing can be won over. The educational institutions are discriminated against by the public. The children are therefore stigmatised, and the educational intentions seen as a punishment, as a verdict upon their own fault

It is impossible to take away a person's constitutive elements and at the same time expect from him/her to become a grown-up (Simmen, 1988). Or, as Bauer says (p.26) inhumanity has never attained humanity.

The existence of needs for defining a group of children or youth with behavioural or emotional difficulties is therefore depends on the point of view. The point of view of when it is necessary to outcast someone and why or what amount should be discharged and what are the limits of tolerance. It is also imperative to note that in the practice itself, there is a great need to define the previously mentioned difficulties, because their continuity is based on a medical model. The medical model is hard to root out for many reasons. The most important are the seeming exactness and the connection with the logic 'symptom (syndrome) – diagnose – therapy'. Why seeming – because with the behavioural and emotional difficulties, we cannot talk about symptoms to be taken out of the reality, which is such a dynamic and constantly changing field, which is also impossible to anticipate. It is only possible to say that the factors are creating different reactions with different intensity in different environments, that are therefore so unique, that we cannot imagine them all. Each child and youth have to be active in creating their own future, as well as everyone working with them, thus including the professionals who tell them to seek help outside of the family, as well as the specialists helping them. We are looking for a better way of defining behavioural and emotional difficulties, which demands constant checking of the child's state. Here, a dynamic role of the specialist and team work is very important and also encouraging the children and youth to a more active role.

Today's reality shows that there are great discrepancies in understanding educational help for children and youth with behavioural and emotional difficulties, (placing into an educational institution) as well as the resulting defining of the emotional and behavioural difficulties.

## RESULTS

### **The Method and the Sample**

The basic population is structured by all specialists in Slovene community centres who are working on the field of youth in Slovenia, and all the educators, children and youth placed in educational institutions, youth homes, cluster homes, and re-education institutions.

There are 61 community centres in Slovenia. After phone calls, we have found out the number of the social workers and the number of children and youth placed in educa-

tional institutions, cluster homes, youth homes and re-education institutions. There are 83 professional workers who are dealing with handling youth. (75 valid, i.e.90%)

There are 428 children and youth that are to be put into educational institutions, youth homes, cluster homes, and re-education institutions. (278 already there and valid, that is 65%)

We also gained data for the number of educators in the previously mentioned institutions and there are 161 of them, (133 valid, which is 83%), and 420 children and youth (333 already there and valid, that is 79%) (3).

### **Measure Instrument**

Many measure instruments are used in research work, which tell us which should be the next step in placing a child into an educational institution.

We are using certain standard instruments and steps to get to certain research goals. This instrumentalism originates from German environment, the title of the original being Ursachen der unterschiedlichen Inanspruchnahme von Heimerziehung (The reasons and different usage of institutional education). The original has been translated and adapted to our circumstances.

The instrumentalism has 7 questionnaires. There were first two parts of questions: the first being made of four sets of questions dedicated to in community centres and the second part, made of three sets of questions considering the educators in the educational institutions.

The questionnaires are created out of a combination of seven levelled scale. The Likert type contains nominal and interval variables, but there are also open type questions, where there was impossible to uniformly define the standpoint of the problems measured.

### **More important Results connected with defining Behavioural and Emotional Difficulties**

Who is defining the placing into an educational institution and which are the main criteria was an extremely important category for us. We are looking for the correct measurements that are affecting the placing, when teams are deciding whether to place a child in such an institution or not. The answers are equally diametrically opposite to each other. 48% (36) teams have formed certain measurements, while 48% (36) have not. To top it off, one (1,3%) does not even know if they have or have not.

The professional workers in the social work institutions have listed **their measurements, which have major impact on placing the child into an educational establishment** and we have put divided them in different groups:

1. placing the child into an educational institution, when all other options are ruled out ( all the dispensary options (3 answers) , all options inside social network, all options given in a domestic environment (3 answers), when other options are not enough (2 answers);
2. due to harmful family relations (home has no possibilities for being safe and healthy (6 answers), less **stimulating** environment, not appropriate breeding, the breeding weakness (3 answers) the physical and psychological violence and abuse is present (3 answers);
3. because of inefficiency in school (the child id refusing school (5 answers), is skipping school (4 answers), bad behaviour towards the teachers and refusing school rules (3 answers);

4. the behavioural difficulties of the child or youth (the grade of the disturbance (5 answers), the type of behavioural difficulties, negative behaviour, personal characteristics, criminal acts, drug abuse);
5. enabling the child to have a normal, healthy development (in the contemporary social environment there is no person whom the child would listen to, the reasons are good for the child, because of the child's needs)
6. suitability of the institution (the assurance of a constant environment in which he or she is attending school and has always the same people around as well as professional help, suitability of an institution due to the willing of the child or parents for such placing, an insight into other possible options, good practice (friendly relationship with other youth, good communication among the community service and the institution);
7. based on the medical psychological testing, commission's opinion for placing or previous information from the *pedo-psychiatrist*, or other professional and verified information
8. have no measurement, they are deciding each case according to reasons and circumstances.

Usually, institutional education is studied (because of the circumstances) in a content with opposing total care, because such help is financially extremely substantial and because of that we need optimisation. If we want to define the right help, we have to be really careful when raising questions. Only reducing this way of helping does not show us oppositely equal connection with strengthening non-stationary ways of helping. (Burger, 1997) This is our main guidance at defining the dimension of those behavioural and emotional difficulties, which only show how once institutions used to work, basic for defining the behavioural and emotional difficulties, where it is impossible to otherwise intervene than place a child or youth into an educational institution.

I am leaving one result aside, which shows the discrepancy of opinions about the competence and especially about the coordination between MŠZŠ (Ministry of Education, Science and Sport) and MZDD (Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs).

Based on the results of the factor analysis we get a specific scheme of how the reasons and the stem of the problems with children and youth which lead to placing in an educational institution are being graded by the professional workers at the community services. We have seen that the factorial structures are clean which has been achieved by rotating the oblimin. The similarity that we have achieved with the method of 'varimax', confirmed the stability of our dimensions or the eliminated factorial structures. The comparison of the factor structures of the estimates of educators and the estimates of professional workers show the same.



**Table 1: Overview of the factors achieved, which are determining the reasons for behavioural and emotional difficulties (4)**

Contents The parent – child relationship	Factors 1. non-acceptance (refusing) of the child 2. parental incapability, powerlessness 3. emotional coldness on the side of the parents 4. negative identification factors 5. bad school results 6. over demanding parental education	Contents Relationship Difficulties	Factors 1. stubborn profiteering behaviour ( egocentricity) 2. social anxiety 3. conflict social behaviour 4. disturbances in maintaining relationships 5. unable to control oneself verbally 6. infantile behaviour, irresponsibility 7. behavioural moods
Child abuse	1. out of family torturing 2. family is an endangering environment 3. the child has not experienced sexual abuse 4. family torturing	un-social behaviour	1. extremely agressive behaviour 2. di-social behaviour 3. un-social normative orientation 4. search for the adrenaline rush and satisfaction with criminal acts 5. physical and psychological abuse of others
The relation towards school and mates	1. conflicts with school and mates 2. negative relation towards school 3. loneliness, isolation from friends	Specific personal, emotional and psychosomatic difficulties	1. specific psycho-pathogenic deviations 2. sexual development crises 3. abuse of psycho-active substances 4. depressive disturbances (pre-psychotic difficulties) 5. disturbances for MCD (compulsive behaviour) 6. disturbances in 'quitting the habit'
Frightening experiences that lead to lower self-respect	1. existential problems and felonies of the father 2. no chronic torturing of the child 3. bad material conditions and mother's unemployment 4. being unsuccessful at school 5. accidents and sicknesses of the important people around 6. divorce problems (the child is stressed and among parents' disagreements)	Difficulties, connected with school	1. no motivation and an unsuitable relation towards school. 2. specific learning difficulties 3. extremely excessive behaviour

The **table shows** mainly out of the reason that we want to warn that there is a variety of reasons and to confirm the supposition that the definition of the behavioural and emotional difficulties exists only on the acceptable level.



We did not choose a more detailed structure of the table for we did not want to show that we could not come up with new reasons for emotional and behavioural difficulties, as in the practice there is a lot of such tendency, that the aetiology and the phenomenology of the behavioural and emotional difficulties should be redefined.

It is also important that our results have shown: that the professional worker at the community service has the key role in deciding; that some community services are placing more children than the others and that certain community services are placing children and youth only in certain educational institutions.

## CONCLUSION

The complexity and hardship of defining the interaction between the causal factors and the occurring types of emotional and behavioural difficulties and despite the expectation it is hard to find a homogenous criteria for placing the child and youth into educational establishments, which confirmed to be true.

It can be crucial for a child to be placed in an educational institutions. This step labels the child or youth and also changes their whole life. The decision of the professional workers to put a child or youth into educational institutions is therefore extremely responsible and it remains a complicated and difficult question. However, practical work has no specific and homogenous rules and criteria.

The research, done by Burger, which is closest to ours, has found out that the most important criteria for deciding upon placing are the decisions, made by the professional workers, from where it stems the fact that there are absolutely no uniform measures and that the children are placed into the institutions with completely different biographies.

Burger (1998) has in his research measured those factors for placing a child or youth to an care outside the family (educational institution) which are important for the professional workers at the community services.:

1. the most important thing in deciding who is in need of an care outside the family, is the professional worker, who has to define the need for the placing;
2. the relation of different social work institutions towards placing a child or youth are very different;
3. there is great connection among the population which is given the chance of social help, large cities and unemployment, with placing children and youth into the institutions, but there is a smaller connection with children from families where children have moved in or incomplete families.
4. Unimportant difference between the spectre, the amount of ambulatory help and placing into an educational institution
5. A big diversity between the professional understanding of out-of-family help and the sensing of this help of the users of institutional education.

Defining emotional and behavioural difficulties remains laying on thick ice or better said, questioning its reliability and adequacy. Too many times this kind of questions are left to agility and professional qualification and orientation of the social worker. The child and youth it too little involved into the active searching for a suitable help for himself. We cannot pass the feeling that the work of professional workers at the community services is not adjusted enough and that the net of educational help does not have its own inspection and differentiation. The results are literally calling for actors to a more harmonized action. Defining the behavioural and emotional difficul-

ties would therefore get a more real insight into the indefiniteness of their functioning. At the same time this would gain effect with the systems in individual work with each child and youth, at any and all time the child or youth are in need of help.

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## ENDNOTES

- 1 The term of behavioural or emotional difficulties is used throughout the text, because we believe that it defines best a population of children and youth, placed in the educational institutions. We are trying to avoid the term behavioural and emotional disturbance, because the sound pejorative and stigmatising. A suitable term is also difficulties of children and youth in social integration. We are using it only where certain authors placed them. Because it includes different groups of people with difficulties in social integration (deaf, blind, mental disturbance) we remain using the above mentioned term. The term delinquent or criminal children and youth or youth with repulsive or offensive behaviour is rarely used, mainly when it is about some culpable act.
- 2 also directing
- 3 The discrepancy between the number of the children placed must have occurred because of the time difference between the first and the second sequence of the achieved data or because of the different statistics of discharging children and youth, led at the institutions.
- 4 detailed factorial analysis is shown in the Doctor's dissertation of the author with the title Analysis of the Criteria for placing Children and Youth in Educational Establishments.

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