



The Development of Resources of Students in Adolescence as a Key Issue in Contemporary Education

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Received: 12.04.2015; Accepted: 07.17.2015

Abstract: *In the presented paper, the issue of recognition and building of resources in adolescent pupils was discussed, referring to salutogenic concept of A. Antonovsky and Conservation of Resources Theory of S. E. Hobfoll. Coming out from developmental pedagogy and positive orientation in social sciences, benefits of scientific and educational actions concentrated on identifying pupils' resources and supporting them in generating them, were shown. On the basis of Polish and foreign literature, empirical research treating about pupils' resource, was analyzed, with special attention put to the sense of coherence and its components, stress management and behavior fostering health.*

Keywords: Conservation of Resources Theory, sense of coherence, education, adolescence

The analysis of scientific information presented in both Polish and foreign scientific magazines as well as during lectures given on Polish and international conferences on the topics of psychology, education and widely understood social sciences, provides the basis to form a statement that the 21st century is an age of perceiving an *Individual* in the context of their resources. Such a direction of scientific thinking about the subject of pedagogical activities seems to fit well into the current of so-called pedagogy of growth or pedagogy of development, which, as K. J. Szmidi (2013:14) notices, “(...) *draws more attention to the resources of a human, their abilities, talents, creativity and life wisdom, on which you can and should build educational programmes*”. The basis of the developing movement draws mostly from the fundamentals of more and more strongly accented in Polish and world psycho-pedagogical literature – positive psychology, which strongly stresses the need of cooperation between three elements important in the context of didactic and educational work. These are: positive diagnosis “*which in essence is the broadening of the*

diagnostic perspective in order to include the resources of an individual and their environment and to identify strength, advantages, strong points and positive dispositions of a person”, positive prevention “*understood as a systematic support of the individual in the development of their competences, stimulating the growth of their personality powers and teaching how to use them to complete life goals and the state of full blossom*”, and positive psychological intervention, which should be seen as “*a form of help (...) which is not supposed to repair that which is weak and distorted but to enhance that which is strong and that helps us deal with difficulties we experience*” (Gulla & Tucholska, 2007:139-140).

From the perspective of a contemporary researcher and educator, positive psychology and education seem to create space for empirical search of those qualities of an individual and their broadly understood environment which foster not only health and wellbeing but first and foremost better quality of life of children and adolescents. The form of this space to a large extent is formulated by the Theory of Salutogenesis by A. Antonovsky (2005) and Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) by S. E. Hobfoll (2001, 2006; Quick & Gavin, 2001). These concepts significantly contribute to contemporary psycho-pedagogical thought, enriching it with a wide holistic look into a human, taking into account their resources.

The salutogenic paradigm of Antonovsky makes us search for causes of health – that is, protective factors – of the resources of the individual. Planning, the course of the research process, and interpretation of the results in this orientation allows us to look differently at the meaning of stressors in human life, not only as something unwanted, but also taking into account the function as a factor that mobilizes the organism. According to Antonovsky, people deal with stressors with the use of “*generalized resistance resources*”. Those resources can be “*everything - money, strong ego, cultural stabilization, social support etc. - which helps you to successfully face different stressors (...) from remedies to strengthen immunology to magic*” (Antonovsky, 2005:11). Antonovsky connects resources first of all to a stressful situation. Although the author of the theory of salutogenesis has not made a division of the resources in any of his works, on the basis of his descriptions one can conclude that they are almost all qualities of the human and the environment (the resources of an individual and surroundings), preventing the change of tension into stress (Seĭk, 2007:59). The researchers analyzing Antonovsky's theory created the following definition: “*Generally, resistance resources are the qualities of an individual, a group, environment and culture which have a functional quality which is the possibility of avoiding stressors and expediting the process of handling expectations so that they prevent changing tension into stress; helping to fight stressors, they foster health protection and the recovery process*” (Seĭk, 2007:59).

The answer to the basic question of the salutogenic attitude, which is: What factors influence the recovery?, is the sense of coherence (SOC) concept. Antonovsky (2005) defines the resource as a global orientation of an individual and their feeling that (1) the stimuli coming during life are predictable and explicable, that (2) an individual has access to resources both their own and their acquaintances, friends, which will help them face the challenges of the stimuli, and that (3) the demands of life are worth the engagement and effort. The sense of coherence is made of three

components: comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness. As J. Binnebesel (2006:69) points out, the sense of coherence “*has an educational value indeed*”, thus both doing research on the recognition of the level of this resource and the teachers' activity connected with forming it during adolescence, is an important task.

Another concept which determines the area of search of factors enhancing the person's wellbeing in their struggle with difficult situations is Conservation of Resources Theory. Hobfoll (2006:70) understands resources as “*things valued by people*”. This way, resources are “*items, conditions, personal traits and energy which either on their own are valued as needed for survival (directly or indirectly), or they serve as means to acquire the resources enabling survival*” (Hobfoll, 2006:70). According to the proposed concept, people are oriented toward acquiring, keeping and protecting resources. The course of the process of keeping the resources results from general life conditions of the person and the circumstances which cause long-term and instant losses.

Hobfoll (2006) suggests three independent classifications of resources: based on their location, effects and meaning. Researchers usually refer to a distinction connected with location – internal and external resources. The first of these means resources belonging to “I” or in the sphere of “I”. They are accessible directly (e.g. self-esteem, sense of control or competence). External resources are those which are beyond the border of “I”, and mobilizing them requires more time (e.g. social support, socioeconomic status).

Hobfoll (2002) presents various typologies of resources theory. First of all, he refers to 1) key resource theory, where one searches for one central resource which manages other resources (in Polish research, the word “*metaresource*” has been used; Heszek & Sęk, 2007:2) multicomponent resource theory, where the components of a given resource are analyzed, and 3) integrated resources theory, where resources are analyzed from a wider perspective, as well as mechanisms influencing health and wellbeing in a stressful situation (Jelonkiewicz, 2012).

In Polish literature, the issue of resources in a group of able-bodied adolescents has been raised, among others, by: M. Zwoliński (1996, 2003), A Frączek and M. Zwoliński (1999), I. Jelonkiewicz (2012), E. Talik and L. Szewczyk (2010), A Wilczyńska (2014), K. Kuracki (2014). Selected empirical research done among able-bodied adolescents is presented below. It must be emphasized that the topic is also a subject of special needs education research. Articles on it were presented among others by Joanna Głodkowska (2014).

Irena Jelonkiewicz (2012) tried to create a model of causal interdependence between individual and environmental resources, stress experience, handling it, and the health of adolescents. The author defines individual resources as the sense of coherence, while environmental resource as social support. The research group was adolescents between 15 and 20 years old. The aim of the author was the use of two perspectives on health: salutogenesis and pathogenesis. Salutogenic thinking was used to describe protection factors; pathogenic thinking was used to describe risk factors. As a result of the research, the correlation between individual and environmental resources of adolescents and their health was proven. It turns out that the higher sense of coherence, optimism, and strong points

of a family, the better health of examined adolescents. Moreover, it was proven that the sense of coherence is a variable which to the greatest extent influences the health of the researched adolescents and in this way it has a protective function in the relation between a resource and health. The results were a basis for the author to create an intervention programme which was supposed to offer influences that would help to handle stress. It is worth mentioning that in the programme, the researcher paid a lot of attention to increase the sense of coherence as a key resource.

The research by Elżbieta Talik and Leszek Szewczyk (2010) is also connected with the analyzed issue. The authors tried to find differences in the choice of a stress management strategy among teenagers, depending on the level of resources. They analyzed the following personal resources: the sense of personal effectiveness (personal competence) and the feeling of controlling a stressful situation. The research group was adolescents between the age of 16 and 18. The analysis of the research shows that for the choice of active stress management strategies it was more important to feel that one can control a stressful situation than to feel that one has got appropriate abilities. When an avoidance situation was chosen, the case was different. It turns out that a negative opinion on one's competences is more important than one's opinion on the ability to control the stressor. The research has proven that the choice of remedy depends on the level of personal resources.

A research by Beata Płaczkiewicz and Stanisław Tucholski (2009) was also dedicated to the correlation between resources. Styles of stress management, and the sense of coherence and its components, like comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness were analyzed. The research was done on a group of 192 secondary school pupils at the age of 17 to 18. The result of the research brings us to the conclusion that there is a clear interdependence between styles of stress management and global sense of coherence and its components. It turns out that the sense of coherence, both generally and incorporating its components, is connected with the use of task-centered style of stress management. In the interpretation, the authors emphasize that high level of sense of coherence and its components correlates with active attitudes and behavior in a stressful situation in the form of taking up tasks and efforts in order to handle the difficulty.

Magdalena Zadworna-Cieślak and Agnieszka Gutowska-Wyka (2009) have done research on the sense of coherence as a resource fostering pro-health behavior of adolescents. The aim of the research was to establish the interdependence between global sense of coherence and its components and pro-health behavior of adolescents, and forming conditions for educational use. The research was done in a group of secondary school pupils at the age of 17 to 19. The results prove the correlation between the sense of coherence and actions good/bad for health taken up by adolescents. The higher the level of coherence and stronger its components, the more often adolescents declare engaging into pro-health activities. This correlation is stronger in the female group. The data was a basis for the authors to formulate a practical implication that is, including personal resources in health promotion programmes targeted at adolescents. Moreover, they provided the ground for wider discussion on

recognizing factors important in forming high level of the sense of coherence.

Urszula Gosk, Monika Dominiak-Kochanek and Ewa M. Kulesza in 2014 undertook research which was aimed at recognition and comparison of the level of chosen outward and inward resources of adolescents with developmental dyslexia and without it, and showing the function of outward resources for the growth of the inward resources of an individual. In this research, an inward resource was the sense of coherence while on outward resource was social support. The research was done among 175 adolescents at the age of 13 to 16 (including 92 with diagnosed dyslexia and 83 without dyslexia). As a result of the analysis, it was proven that adolescents with developmental dyslexia have significantly lower level of global sense of coherence and two components: manageability and meaningfulness, in comparison to the researched group without dyslexia. Moreover, it was shown that evaluative support of a teacher and emotional support of the mother is a fundament of the sense of coherence among adolescents no matter if they have dyslexia or not.

The analysis of published empirical research more and more often leads us to the conclusion that it is unjustified to state explicitly that a low level of one variable is a pathogenic factor leading to a disorder/illness all the time. The question, of which resources, to what extent and in what configuration can become factors significantly positively/negatively influencing prosocial functioning, and this way be a basis to recognize protective/endangering, is still open. Thus, from the point of view of contemporary psychology and education, it seems to be essential to take up actions which could recognize resources, the process of forming them and a proper use for developmental and educational goals. These seem to be the challenges not only of the education of tomorrow but of education here and now. It is important that the contemporary teacher, beside the knowledge and didactic competences, has the ability to observe and identify early symptoms of the risk of upcoming dangers in the psychosocial development of adolescents, as well as competences connected with supporting development and minimalizing risk factors. Such qualities give a chance for completing the tasks connected with giving psychological and educational help in a competent way. As K. Ostrowska (2004:13) points out, in relation to pupils it is possible then to “(...) *extract and realize the biggest number of innate tendencies in the intellectual, emotional and activity spheres in order to reach the fullness of humanity*” (Ostrowska, 2004:17). Moreover, recognizing and forming pupils' resources, the modern teacher “(...) *builds scaffolding, thanks to which the pupil's constructions are stronger and more complex*” (Filipiak, 2012:48), thus he/she can really influence the quality of life and psychological wellbeing of the adolescents.

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