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Embeddedness as a substantial condition of integrative education

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Embeddedness in a local community is one of many factors that can improve or even enable building inclusive environments at schools. This article is a theoretical search of roots of embeddedness as a scientific term. It also reviews the factors of its growth and dystrophy. In conclusion, it shows the impact of embeddedness in a local community at the level of social inclusion.

KEY WORDS: embeddedness, inclusive education, integrative education

This article was written in the context of my own theoretical search of factors that essentially influence the quality of integrative education of able and disabled people. The multiple voices of crushing criticism regarding the implementation of the integrative and inclusive model of education give rise to questions about the underlying causes. One can look for those causes at many levels. They are certainly complex and embedded in multiple contexts. The one which are most frequently identified in the discourse of academy and practice include:

- – Shortcomings in teacher education. Opinions regarding this particular problem are widespread. They convince me and run parallel to my on reflections on school in general.

– Insufficiencies in creating a positive image of disabled people through other channels. The issue here is the very low readiness of the society for school integration.
– Maintaining the traditional didactic order at school that is inadequate to the needs of heterogeneous groups, which, in consequence, prevents the implementation of didactic activities for students with special needs and creates a negative stereotype of school integration as didactically impossible or extremely difficult.
– Insufficient funds for increasing the integration effectiveness (including the areas specified above).

The topics seem to be extensively explored in specialist publications and in practical debate within all the circles related to inclusion at school. This debate also comprises opinions that move away from my way of thinking about integrative education, e.g. rejection of both the ineffective implementation of this idea as well as its theoretical assumptions or seeking reasons for failures of students with special needs based on the theory of two groups that leads to the promotion of segregation as the only correct approach.

The school and the local community

The aspect that is rarely brought up in the pedagogical discourse is the low degree of embeddedness of the Polish school within local communities. The significance of this process for how the institution of school is built and how it influences individuals is never questioned. True, this significance is admitted, but never analysed in detail. The reason is that the relations between the local rooting of the school institution and the quality of self-identification, community creation and other processes happening at schools are ambiguous, complex and difficult to grasp within a short time-frame. The positive aspects of strong local embeddedness of schools are sensed intuitively, but no efforts are taken to explain them.

The importance of the local rooting of the integrative school model in the contemporary discourse on pedagogy is particularly emphasised by Z. Gajdzica. He writes that the school is naturally a vital element within a community. It constitutes a centre around which many local activities and initiatives are undertaken, including sports, culture, learning or entertainment. As a result, the educational environment created by the school facility become extended and covers the wider context related to informal education. *Despite multiple social transformations, the school as the institution of professional education can function much better in collaboration with the local community.* (…) *It cannot be denied that the unique features of the local community related to professions, regional or local culture and specific historical processes actually shape and influence the internal school environment.*[1]

The author also points out the devastating effects of the lack of local embeddedness for the school facility and its employees. These include, e.g. the lack of trust in the institution, unreported social demand for its services as well as its poor reputation. Teachers at such facilities feel uncomfortable due to the low social evaluation of their profession. *Working in a school with relatively high social evaluation is usually ennobling, while it becomes frustrating when the school has low esteem in the local community.*[2]

The need for rooting in a local community is deemed immanent for teachers in general, e.g. in the already classic reflections of W. Dróżka. She believes that this particular need has always been a part of the teacher profession, so now it is perceived as its natural component. If any activities based on interactions with the closest environment of the school and the students are impossible, the out-

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[1] Z. Gajdzica, *Kategorie sukcesów w opiniach nauczycieli klas integracyjnych jako przyczynek do poszukiwania koncepcji edukacji integracyjnej*, Wydawnictwo "Impuls", Kraków 2013, p. 103.

[2] Z. Gajdzica, *Kategorie sukcesów w opiniach nauczycieli klas integracyjnych jako przyczynek do poszukiwania koncepcji edukacji integracyjnej*, Wydawnictwo "Impuls", Kraków 2013, p. 104.

come is general frustration which, in the long run, leads to the occupational burnout.[3]

I had the opportunity to see the importance of locality for school facilities, while doing research on teachers' identity. There was a significant difference between how employees of "non-regional" schools spoke about their work and roles in comparison to teachers who treated the local community as an essential factor in the way the school operated. This difference was manifest in the perception of disabled students and the reduction of the context of their functioning mainly to school or the closest family. *The children seem to be perceived exclusively in the space of school and family. Importantly, this situation may be reflected in their everyday lives. The necessity of daily transport (via specialist means that require some waiting time in the day room) pulls the child out of its natural, local environment. It is still a fact that teachers in such "non-regional" facilities fail to give it any proper thought.*[4] On the other hand, the life of students in facilities strongly embedded within the local community is markedly different.

As regards the strong connections between the school institution and the closest local community that I postulate, one can observe other type teachers' engagement in their work. I perceive this engagement as essentially more positive for the purposes of building the environment of a diverse community that the integrative or inclusive school should become. (…) *the emergence of the local community in the respondents' thinking as an important element of their work broadens the context in which they view their work. The very notion of the "teacher" gains new and significant meanings for those who work in this profession. Importantly (…) these meanings go beyond the typical teacher role in the group identities of such persons. Thus, the teacher is not only an educator, but also an activist. He or she is more of an initiator than just a lecturer. All those <disappointed female teachers> who have no oppor-*

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[3] W. Dróżka, *Pokolenia nauczycieli*, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Pedagogicznej im. Jana Kochanowskiego, Kielce 1993.

[4] K. Tersa, *Grupowe konteksty nauczycielskiej tożsamości,* Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Katedra", Gdańsk 2015, p. 325.

tunity to work within the local community say: <my job is to teach>. While <initiators> say: <we want to change the world>.[5]

The significance of this approach to locality is confirmed by post-structuralist concepts. They say that a locally rooted discourse opens up the ways to emancipation, creation of non-standard systems of meaning and the shaping of identity to all individuals who use such a discourse. This mutual understanding within the local environment allows for discovery, resilience to externally imposed ideas and bottom-up initiatives.[6] One could conclude that it also enables consolidating integration that needs bottom-up identity creation for the new community that is based on internal diversity.

The reflections presented below refer to integration as consolidation. Therefore, I shall no speak about the presence of disabled people in a school in any separate mode. The school that is my subject matter follows the assumptions of the *Salamanca Statement*: it is a school for everybody, heterogeneous and based on the recognition of and response to needs. The causes of those needs are left in the background.

Embeddedness as a concept in social sciences

When the importance of locality in an inclusive school is explored, the concept of embeddedness often appears. I was inspired to delve into the sources of this idea and its various senses within the academic discourse. However, a linguistic reflection preceded the research into social sciences. When tracking notions associated with embeddedness, I found such words and expressions as *identity*, *locality*, *community*, *strength of weak ties*, *social capital*, *socialization* and *civic responsibility*. They refer to the positive sense of community and its building. On the other hand, the opposite no-

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[5] K. Tersa, *Grupowe konteksty nauczycielskiej tożsamości,* Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Katedra", Gdańsk 2015, p. 327.

[6] J. Rzeźnicka-Krupa, *Komunikacja – edukacja – społeczeństwo. O dyskursie dzieci z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną,* Wydawnictwo "Impuls", Kraków 2007, p. 88.

tions, as noticed by A. Lompart, are linguistically dramatic and nearly always negative.[7] Such words as *disembedding*, *exclusion*, *marginalization*, *ghettoization*, *alienation* and *isolation* indicate the lack of communication with dimensions vital for humanity. They refer to the disconnection of social relations from the local contexts of interaction.[8]

My research within social sciences has led me to the conclusion that the concept of *embeddedness* is used in three basic meanings:

1. A notion and/or a metaphor in pedagogy.
2. An individual process of identity building.
3. A feature of an institution (here it is the institution of school).

As regards the first meaning, it refers to the following question about the discourse of pedagogy: to what extent embeddedness is a linguistic metaphor or a functional notion. As noted by A. Lampart cited above, a majority of academic notions (especially in social sciences) often traces its source to metaphors used in everyday language. The subsequent research and theoretical endeavours regarding such metaphors transform them into relatively strict notions.[9] A reverse process can also be observed: academic concepts start their new life as widely used metaphors (also within ordinary, colloquial discourse).

In this case, embeddedness plays a double role, since a given concept can be new or already grounded in a specific field. Therefore the question is: to what extent the notion of embeddedness is embedded in pedagogy? The answer is far from obvious. The idea is widely used in everyday language. However, if we take a closer look at social psychology or economics where this notion has a pre-

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[7] A. Lompart, *Zakorzenienie, wykorzenienie. Metafora w refleksji socjologicznej*, [in:] *Jednostka zakorzeniona? Wykorzeniona?*, ed. A. Lompart, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2010, p. 13.

[8] A. Giddens, *Konsekwencje nowoczesności*, Wydawnictwo UJ, Kraków 2008, p. 15.

[9] A. Lompart, *Zakorzenienie, wykorzenienie. Metafora w refleksji socjologicznej*, [in:] *Jednostka zakorzeniona? Wykorzeniona?*, ed. A. Lompart, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2010, p. 8.

cise contextual meaning, we can assume the the idea of embed-dedness is fairly new in pedagogy. One could go so far as to claim it functions as a metaphor. Its senses need be imported from other fields. As Lompart says, *the metaphor of <embeddedness> applied to an individual or a group suggests its simplest interpretation by referring to the context of the <social ground> that provides the founding elements for properties and features, while <disembedding> will indicate the loss of such properties and features, often with dramatic consequences. The sociological notions of habitus, the self or identity strive to pinpoint this connection in various ways*.[10]

As regards the second meaning of the notion under scrutiny, i.e. the individual understanding of embeddedness, it is often referred to in specialist literature. It can be found in the above definition by Lompart. The notion is similarly discussed by A. Giddens who, however, focuses on the negative aspect of the process, i.e. disem-bedding.[11] The individual interpretation of the idea of embed-dedness is also explored by E. Fromm who defines it as one of the basic human needs.[12]

The latter, similarly to H. Spencer, perceives the individual's embeddedness in institutions of the visible world as well as within the implied spiritual world that emanates through religious be-liefs.[13]

These are the closing remarks regarding this particular interpre-tation of embeddedness. Its extensive presentation can be found in social sciences. Probably, it is also best understood intuitively by persons familiar with this branch of knowledge. For the purposes of this article, the most relevant area concerns the social embed-

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[10] A. Lompart, *Zakorzenienie, wykorzenienie. Metafora w refleksji socjologicznej*, [in:] *Jednostka zakorzeniona? Wykorzeniona?*, ed. A. Lompart, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2010, p. 13.

[11] Cf. A. Giddens, *Konsekwencje nowoczesności*, Wydawnictwo UJ, Kraków 2008.

[12] E. Fromm, *Zdrowe społeczeństwo*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warsza-wa 1996.

[13] K. Kaczmarek, *Herbert Spencer a problemy socjologii religii*, Wydawnictwo Uni-wersytetu Adama Mickiewicza, Poznań 2007.

dedness of the school institution. This topic is rarely investigated in publications and, in my opinion, it requires empirical explorations. It is also particularly interesting from my point of view. My intention, therefore, is to delve into theoretical aspects of what is the embeddedness of the school in a local community and what are its implications.

The potential of an institution embedded in a local community

The scientific rigour and theoretical foundations for the idea of embedded institution are best exemplified in economics. This is where one should look for theoretical and empirical inspirations regarding the social placement of the school as an institution.

M. Granovetter, the author of this concept in economics, says that the social embeddedness of institutions means they cannot exist outside the social framework. Contrary to the earlier economic theory based on the positivist separation of these two realities, in line with the classic anthropological reflections by B. Malinowski or R. Thurnwald, Granovetter describes strong networks of relations and dependencies between the economy and the social structure in a given place.[14] His analysis included two meanings of the *social embeddedness* of economic institutions:

– a theoretical concept describing the shifting place of economy in a society, and
– a methodological principle similar to holism (i.e. one cannot speak about economy outside the context of social structures).[15]

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[14] M. Granovetter, *The Old and the New Economic Sociology: a History and an Agenda*, [in:] *Beyond the Marketplace: Rethinking Economy and Society,* ed. R.O. Friedland, A.F. Robertson, Walter de Gruytner Inc., New York 1990.

[15] M. Granovetter, *The Old and the New Economic Sociology: a History and an Agenda*, [in:] *Beyond the Marketplace: Rethinking Economy and Society,* ed. R.O. Friedland, A.F. Robertson, Walter de Gruytner Inc., New York 1990, p. 120.

The principles of socially embedded economy were reused in social sciences to explain how social institutions actually functions. One of examples is the new institutionalism. H. White, its representative, successfully uses Granovetter's terminology to describe a family. He remarks in passing that similar methods can be applied to other social institutions.[16]

Following these assumptions, one can claim the social embeddedness of the school institution is not only a positive postulate in terms of its functioning, but simply a fact. Every school is locally embedded. One can only make use of this fact for good or waste its potential.

Any theoretical analysis must take into consideration the mechanisms of the contemporary world where locality is weakened. These processes can be easily seen in places where civic attitudes have long traditions. A. Giddens described the contemporary institution as follows: *the key trace is <the disembedding of social relations> from the local interaction contexts and specific properties of the locality, which is a shift away from ready models and established practices, resulting in a devaluation of skills that individuals need in everyday life. The basic disembedding mechanisms are symbolic tokens, particularly money and expert systems, that form the foundations for the organisation of the material and social environment in which we live*.[17]

Undoubtedly, one can observe the current global tendency to weaken local ties. According to A. Sosnowski, the causes of this tendency include:
- poor civic traditions;
- accelerating urbanisation (the city hinders locality, it is too large and the individual's contribution is too limited to make the city feel like one's own place);

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[16] H. White, *Dynamika sieci powiązań społecznych. Procesy kulturowe i rodzina*, *Rodzina w zmieniającym się społeczeństwie*, ed. P. Kryczka, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 1997.

[17] A. Giddens, *Nowoczesność i tożsamość: „ja" i społeczeństwo w epoce późnej nowoczesności*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2001, p. 14.

– post-modernism;

– corporatism.[18]

Simultaneously, one can observe reverse movements that tend to bring back locality as the principle of social life. They are mainly related to social revolts against the negative effects of globalisation and date back to the 1980s. Direct sources of such movements include:

– reactions to the centralised control of economic growth;

– the increasing lack of control over large structures;

– threats to the natural environment;

– limitations related to the imitation of external models;

– criticism of the welfare state;

– the economic, political and civic centralisation that deprives individuals of the sense of control over everyday matters.[19]

Furthermore, although the new institutionalism takes away many functions from the family or the school to hand them over institutions such as corporations, one can notice a renewal of traditional models within their structures. It seems that local commitment is somehow inscribed into the human society, just as the need for food is a part of the human DNA. One can do it in new ways, but the need is basic and it will not go away. J. Coleman writes that *the natural social organisation along with its informal relations, social norms and status systems does not disappear when the primary family and church institutions are replaced with constructed organisations. The natural social organisation has its renewal within the constructed organisation and, as shown by many sociologists, including Peter Blau and Michel Crozier (…), it can be very powerful. The problem of optimal organisation design becomes all the more interesting, even if more difficult at the same time.*[20]

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[18] A. Sosnowski, *Wyznaczniki przemian życia społecznego,* Wydawnictwo Uczelniane WSIiE TWP, Olsztyn 2016, p. 178.

[19] A. Sosnowski, *Wyznaczniki przemian życia społecznego,* Wydawnictwo Uczelniane WSIiE TWP, Olsztyn 2016, p. 178.

[20] J. Coleman, *Racjonalna rekonstrukcja społeczeństwa,* „Studia Socjologiczne" 1993, Issue 3, p. 23.

It must be said that Poland is in a particularly adverse situation in terms of people's engagement within the local structures. The global locality crisis coincided with the forestalling of locality in our country, preceded by long years of centralised control over all aspects of life. The rebirth of civic responsibility and locality in the world was the time when the Polish people started to become familiar with those concepts and principles. To create small-scale social structures in a global world is a great challenge and a difficult task.

One can often encounter criticism of citizens' engagement in the life of local communities. These structures are referred to in terms of façade or enclave. J. Szacki writes: *Even if we have been speaking about civil society in our country, it is a postulate for the future or a metaphor used to describe that fact that already in the Communist era we had some areas of independence. The form of the civil society was not and is not an adequate description of our social and economic situation. What we have is the ideology of the civil society, limited to a relatively small group of people who seem to envision our future political system.*[21]

This situation makes it difficult fro any institution, including the school, to take up a leading role or become an important element of the local landscape. Instead, one can notice the model familiar from the previous social system, i.e. relying too heavily on the central authority. Meanwhile, institutions which, by definition, should control power and drive innovation as well as indicate significant social problems remain on the side track and thus become absent agents or even sources of pathology.

In 2008, the Klon/Jawor Association conducted a survey to measure the potential of the Polish people's engagement in local communities and civic attitudes. This potential was to be an indicator of the possibilities for further development of non-government organisations which essentially rely on this type of embeddedness. This indicator may also prove useful in my own research. The survey covered three attitudes conducive to local embeddedness. The first one was *social trust*. The survey confirmed the findings of other simi-

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[21] J. Szacki, *Złudzenia i rzeczywistość polskiej demokracji*, "Res Publica" 1991, Issue 3.

lar analyses: social trust in the Polish society is extremely low. More optimistic results were recorded for the *faith in the effectiveness of joint actions*. This indicator for this attitude is high even in comparison with other contemporary societies. Fairly good results were recorded for the *readiness to collaborate*; however, this indicator has been dropping, as shown by the Association's longitudinal studies.[22]

One conclusion that can be drawn from these analyses is that we mainly need social trust to build strong local ties and embed institutions within local communities. As evidenced by a large number of sociological studies, this factor has always been low in our society. To make it grow, the state needs to implement a careful, consistent and long-term policy regarding transparency and accessibility of institutions as well as to support grassroots initiatives. The policy would have to be included in the mission of the Polish school.

It must also be noted that in many countries that have long traditions of local engagement but are now undergoing the crisis of locality, it is the school that appears to be the stronghold of locality. One could even go so far as to claim that is the last locally embedded institution. Being generally accessible to the majority of the population, it helps to support the local culture and becomes the centre of the community wherein it is embedded. One could, therefore, presume that in Poland, with no tradition of the civil society, the school should be the starting point for building such a society.

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Returning to the significance of local embeddedness for creating the school institution that is open to diversity, inclusive and *for everybody*, I would like to remind that the key goals of school integration are community building and social integration of individuals. These goals cannot be achieved if we consider social contacts in the macro scale. In this scale, institutions have no identity and they be-

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[22] *Zakorzenienie i uspołecznienie działań organizacji pozarządowych*, ed. Stowarzyszenie Klon/Jawor, Biblioteka Pożytku Publicznego, Warszawa 2009.

come inaccessible, while people tend to be alienated. According to A. Sosnowski, it is only within locality that an individual can become a CO-CREATOR of the world around.[23] In turn, Z. Gajdzica points out that the socialising elements of integration are heavily influenced by relations in the environment, including the local community.[24]

In view of the presented studies, it seems correct to conclude that one cannot imagine consolidating integration in a school that is locally disembedded. Such an institution becomes, in a way, a laboratory of social relations without any possibility to transfer them onto a wider social ground. Even the best relations that end when the students leave the school building cannot be indicators of any functional or real integration between individuals or, the more so, of any social change that would lead to a coherent society which should be the effect of the school integration.

One of the ways to build functional integration in a group and to limit stereotypes and prejudices between groups is to allow for the emergence of a group identity among the able and disabled students that attend classes together.[25] The group identity can be complete when it is embedded in wider social contexts that become translated into conditions within a small group.[26] Otherwise, the group identity will not be interiorized by the individuals that belong to the group, which makes it only a role to play and not a real identity.[27]

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[23] A. Sosnowski, *Wyznaczniki przemian życia społecznego,* Wydawnictwo Uczelniane WSIiE TWP, Olsztyn 2016.

[24] Z. Gajdzica, *Kategorie sukcesów w opiniach nauczycieli klas integracyjnych jako przyczynek do poszukiwania koncepcji edukacji integracyjnej*, Wydawnictwo "Impuls", Kraków 2013, p. 206.

[25] S. Sadowska, *Ku edukacji zorientowanej na zmianę społecznego obrazu osób niepełnosprawnych*, Wydawnictwo Edukacyjne "Akapit", Toruń 2005, p. 132.

[26] P. Berger, T. Luckmann, *Społeczne tworzenie rzeczywistości*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 1989, p. 140.

[27] H. Kwiatkowska, *Tożsamość nauczycieli. Między anomią i autonomią*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2005, p. 43.

Therefore, the emphasis on the local embeddedness of schools alongside other equally vital factors such as education of teachers, opening the society to disability, changing the didactic paradigm or relevant financing is, in my view, one of the key tasks of the current educational policy and pedagogical practice oriented towards increasing the effectiveness of integration at school. In consequence, there emerges a possibility of a real bond between the able and the disables, i.e. two groups that have been treated separately so far, and of a society that is based on the understanding of and respect for diversity.

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