



# Demanding disability – an analysis of opportunities and threats related to the functioning of people with mild intellectual disabilities

## Part 1

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The thesis considered in the article is the statement that mild intellectual disability is a demanding disability. Three dimensions were distinguished in the description of the situation of persons with a mild intellectual disability:

1. Attributes of the phenomenon of mild intellectual disability
2. Attributes of the population of people with mild intellectual disabilities
3. Attributes of selected elements of the mesosystem of people with mild intellectual disabilities

The key phenomena for these dimensions were analysed. The ambiguity of these phenomena has become the basis for considering the opportunities and threats that they may pose.

Due to the extensiveness of the issues raised, the issues discussed are presented in two parts. The present text considers the first two of the dimensions listed.

**KEY WORDS:** mild intellectual disability, educational disability, 'intellectual disability' label

## Introduction

The objective of considerations making up the present article is to highlight the complexity of the situation of persons with mild intellectual disability, and, hence, to issue a reminder to provide them with the necessary attention. It seems that the specifics of the property of the population, the characteristics of the communities in which people with mild intellectual disability function, the influences that they are subjected to, give rise to the threat of neglect by their environment. In relation to the challenges generated by mild intellectual disability it is substantiated to refer to it as a „demanding disability”.<sup>1</sup> The quoted thesis shall be verified by the arguments referred to and analysed.

Striving to present the situation of persons with mild intellectual disability, the following dimensions of description were assumed<sup>2</sup>:

- Attributes of the phenomenon of mild intellectual disability
- Attributes of the population of people with mild intellectual disabilities
- Attributes of selected elements of the mesosystem of people with mild intellectual disabilities.

The content discussed by us is variedly assessed within subject literature. We do not aim at eliminating the ambiguities that emerge, but we hope to expose the existing differences, and we even make an attempt at questioning attitudes, which, due to them having been repeated over and over again, took on the form of statements being accepted as the truth. We see in this mode of progress the possibility of thoughtful reflection on reality. Hence, dur-

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<sup>1</sup> The usage of this term does not equal the consideration of mild intellectual disability as being more demanding than other forms of disability.

<sup>2</sup> Due to the breadth of the issues, the topics analysed shall be presented in two parts. The dimension “Attributes of selected elements of the mesosystem of people with mild intellectual disabilities” shall be presented in the article entitled *Demanding disability – an analysis of opportunities and threats related to the functioning of people with mild intellectual disabilities. Part 2*. The Reader shall find a summary of the discussed issues there.

ing our analysis concerning persons with mild intellectual disability, we will seek and disclose both opportunities as well as threats for the functioning of these people and their environment.

## Properties of the phenomenon of mild intellectual disability

### Educational disability

Mild intellectual disability is a phenomenon tightly related to the education process. Difficulties stemming from the inability to handle education requirements become the basis for undertaking diagnostic work, as a result of which the discussed disability is more often than not discovered, with education and rehabilitation activity taken afterwards. Mild intellectual disability is hence diagnosed due to and for the purposes of the education process. Disclosed and named in the school period, after the conclusion of the obligatory education stages it ceases to be the object of attention of the environment, it “disappears”.<sup>3</sup> This type of phenomenon can be referred to be as the “paradox of mild intellectual disability”.

As a consequence of the above, mild intellectual disability should be identified with the concept of “educational disability” as introduced by Ulrich Bleidick.<sup>4</sup> It also emerges in a situation of discrepancy between requirements of the school on the one hand and the capacity to cope with these requirements by the pupil without special paedagogical aid, if this discrepancy cannot be tolerated by the school (due to its long duration, extensiveness and intensity).<sup>5</sup> It must be noted that within the Polish realm, the existence of this

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<sup>3</sup> K. Parys, *Osoby z diagnozą upośledzenia umysłowego w stopniu lekkim – w kręgu pytań i odpowiedzi*, [in:] *Poznajemy ludzi z niepełnosprawnością*, ed. by D. Gorajewska, Stowarzyszenie Przyjaciół Integracji, Warszawa 2007, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> U. Bleidick 1977, za: G. Szumski, *Integracyjne kształcenie niepełnosprawnych*, Wydawnictwo APS, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009, pp. 112–113.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

phenomenon was described by Małgorzata Kościelska<sup>6</sup>, who suggested that children “diverging” from the common education system due to mild mental disability should be referred to as educationally-disabled children.

How can the mentioned discrepancy be minimised for pupils diagnosed with mild intellectual disability? On the one hand, the organisational assumptions of education of pupils with mild intellectual disability do not diverge from those based on the education of their fully-able peers (common curriculum of general education, the same stages of education, common assessment or external exam system). On the other hand, the label of intellectual disability that is valid throughout the education period allows for the introduction of solutions actually implementing the possibility of coping with such requirements. Among the solutions foreseen by the legislator aimed at the adaptation of teaching to the mental and physical skills of the pupil and the pace of teaching that would be appropriate for them, one can list the following:

- the obligation to execute multi-field assessments of the level of functioning of the pupil, and the preparation of an individual educational and therapeutic programme on this basis, aimed at the analysis of potential, and, as a result, the selection of suitable forms of individualisation of teaching. In this manner, described is the scope and mode of adaptation of education requirements to individual development and educational needs as well as the psychological and physical capacities of the pupil, in particular through the usage of suitable methods and forms of work with this pupil<sup>7</sup>;
- a selection of exercises being the consequence of the diagnosis made, with the exercises not exceeding the capacities of the

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<sup>6</sup> M. Kościelska, *Upośledzenie umysłowe a rozwój społeczny. Badania uczniów szkół specjalnych*, PWN, Warszawa 1984, p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> Regulation of the Polish Ministry of Education of 9.08.2017 *on the conditions of organisation of education, upbringing and care for disabled, socially maladapted and threatened by social maladaptation children and youths*, Polish Journal of Laws of 2017, item no. 1578, § 6.

- pupil, so as not to reduce the motivation to cope with challenges<sup>8</sup>;
- the option of extending the time of execution of the individual stages of education<sup>9</sup>;
  - execution of additional educational activities (re-validation classes), aimed at the equalisation of shortcomings and reinforcement of resources held by the pupil<sup>10</sup>;
  - organisation of specialised activities (correction and compensation, speech therapy classes, courses to develop emotional and social competences and other therapeutic classes) as part of psychological and pedagogical aid provided to pupils with special education needs<sup>11</sup>;
  - a different mode of implementation of the curriculum: learning a second modern foreign language in 7th and 8th grade of primary school does not apply to pupils with mild intellectual disability. In place of learning a second foreign language, the legislator planned a technical handicraft course. However, this is not an obligatory solution – the parent, legal custodian or fully aged pupil may forgo the described change<sup>12</sup>;

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<sup>8</sup> Regulation of the Polish Ministry of Education of 14.02.2017 *on the pre-school curriculum and the basic curriculum for primary schools, including for pupils with moderate or major intellectual disability, the curriculum of general education for industry branch-specific first level schools, general education for special schools preparing for work and general education for post-secondary schools*, Polish Journal of Laws of 24.02.2017, item no. 356.

<sup>9</sup> Regulation of the Polish Ministry of Education of 28.03.2017 *on the framework curricula for public schools*, Polish Journal of Laws of 31.03.2017, item no. 703, § 5, s. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Regulation of the Polish Ministry of Education of 9.08.2017 *on the conditions of organisation of education, upbringing and care for disabled, socially maladapted and threatened by social maladaptation children and youths*, Polish Journal of Laws of 2017, item no. 1578, § 5.

<sup>11</sup> Regulation of the Polish Ministry of Education of 9.08.2017 *on the rules of organisation and provision of psychological and pedagogical aid at public preschools, schools and related institutions*, Polish Journal of Laws of 2017, item no. 1591, § 6.2.

<sup>12</sup> Regulation of the Polish Ministry of Education of 28.03.2017 *on the framework curricula for public schools*, Polish Journal of Laws of 31.03.2017, item no. 703, s. 7.

- adaptation of the form and external conditions of the obligatory exam – the 8th grade exam (test sheet adapted to the dysfunction, extension of the exam time, the modern foreign language exam sheets with an attached CD with a recording adapted to the needs of this group of pupils, meaning, with appropriately extended pauses to get acquainted with the tests controlling listening comprehension and to do them; marking responses to closed questions in the exam task booklet, without having to transfer them over to the answer sheet; assurance of the presence of a disability specialist). For voluntary exams (test confirming qualifications in a profession, maturity exam), the adaptation applies exclusively to the execution conditions. In this regard, foreseen is an extension of the exam duration, usage of specialised equipment and relevant educational resources that the person taking the exam uses every day, including a computer, and assurance of the presence of a specialist in education of intellectually disabled persons<sup>13</sup>;
- education on the first stage industry-specific school level also in professions reserved solely for persons with mild intellectual disability. This applies to the following single-qualification professions foreseen for employees providing simple work: auxiliary employee of hotel services, tailor's auxiliary employee, mechanic's auxiliary employee, locksmith's auxiliary employee, carpenter's auxiliary employee, hairdresser's assis-

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<sup>13</sup> Communication of the general manager of the Polish Central Examination Board of August 20th, 2018 *on the detailed modes of adaptation of conditions and forms of execution of exams of primary school eight-graders and the lower secondary school exam in the academic year 2018/2019*.

<[https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_KOMUNIKATY/20180820%20E8%20EG%20Komunikat%20o%20dostosowaniach.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_KOMUNIKATY/20180820%20E8%20EG%20Komunikat%20o%20dostosowaniach.pdf)> [access: 13.05.2019]; Communication of the general manager of the Polish Central Examination Board of August 20th, 2018 *on the detailed modes of adaptation of conditions and forms of execution of exams confirming professional qualifications in the academic year 2018/2019*.

<[https://cke.gov.pl/images/\\_KOMUNIKATY/20180820%20EZ%20Komunikat%20o%20dostosowaniach.pdf](https://cke.gov.pl/images/_KOMUNIKATY/20180820%20EZ%20Komunikat%20o%20dostosowaniach.pdf)> [access: 13.05.2019].

tant.<sup>14</sup> Such a solution is aimed at protecting against failure in the competition on the open job market, adaptation of requirements to pupil capacities. At the same time, however, it may be seen as a sign of certain segregation.

The described solutions may be treated as suggestions of normalisation work that are to lead to social integration, activities that function as an example of normalisation both in terms of personality, as well as the environment.<sup>15</sup> In this context, bringing mild intellectual disability to the sphere of education, perceiving it solely through the lens of time and tasks of formal education, as well as solutions used for pupils touched by the phenomenon of educational disability, may constitute both a source of potential development risks as well as opportunities.

Potential threats must include excess focus on the improvement of orientation and cognition processes. The causes of this state of affairs may be sought in the following facts:

- the image of intellectual disability is dominated by disturbances in orientation and cognition processes;
- the leading role in school education is assigned to tasks based on intellectual faculties;
- the greatest differences between curriculum requirements of the school and the achievements of pupils with mild intellectual disabilities apply to cognitive functioning.

Excess focus on the facilitation of orientation and cognition processes runs the risk of neglecting the stimulation of the remaining areas of functioning, as a result of omission of solutions enabling the optimisation of development.

A further threat needs to be tied to the risk of making the beneficiaries dependent on aid work. Becoming accustomed to special aid during education can in the future lead to continued expecta-

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<sup>14</sup> Regulation of the Polish Ministry of Education of 13.03.2017 *on the classification of professions in vocational education*, Polish Journal of Laws of 2017, item no. 622.

<sup>15</sup> Conf. S. Olszewski, K. Parys, *Rozumieć chaos. Rzecz o terminach i znaczeniach im nadawanych w pedagogice specjalnej*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, Kraków 2016, pp. 169–171.

tions of aid from the outside, the feeling of helplessness, lack of belief in one's own capabilities, in the effectiveness of activities undertaken of own accord, cause passivity, even cause a sort of secondary disability. The consequences of these last threats seem to be the most pressing. They lead to resignation from activities facilitating development, the struggle to self-development.

Solutions used in the education of pupils with mild intellectual disability, however, create a chance to establish conditions facilitating the coping with the same requirements that are set for fully able pupils. The assumptions suggest that they allow efficient execution of education tasks, allow the experience of success, and, in the further perspective, preparation ahead of independent functioning in adult life with the label of disability. The presented assumptions are as logical and substantiated from the point of view of didactic indications as they consider the fluid movement from the stage dominated by outside aid to the stage of independent coping with requirements of the world. The gradual acquisition of independence in actions is in place to acquire in the end a form of functioning that remains in line with rules in force for the entirety of society, without the need of excess "specialising" aid.

It would be worthwhile if these assumptions didn't only remain in the area of theory, and if they actually constituted the basis for practical activity, in course of which the focus, and, at the same time, the key to effectiveness of progress would be placed in the period of education. In order for the activities undertaken in this period to be effective, in order for them to fulfil perspective objectives, they should be substantiated by understanding the foundations of actions, by seeking the sense of them, by the conviction of their reasonability and correctness.

### **Distinguishing label**

The discrepancy between pupil capabilities and requirements of the school is a problem situation for all entities experiencing the discrepancy (pupil, parents, siblings, teachers, the peer group).



A chance of solving this problem is to name the problem and finding the causes that lie at its core. As a result of diagnostic work, a medical certificate may emerge that would confirm the need for special education, which begins to play the role of a *label*. The presence of a label in turn can cause diverse consequences, provoke the assignment of new meanings to the phenomenon that it describes, shape the perception of persons distinguished through the label and, through this, influence actions undertaken with them and with respect to them.

A different threat that must be tied to the diagnosis of disability can be difficulties in accepting the diagnosis, both by the person stigmatised in this way as well as by their environment. An expression of these difficulties may be shock, rebellion, consequently leading to resignation or undertaking excess activity.

The fact of acquisition of a medical certificate is related to the risk of the perception of such a person being dominated by the label that *marks* them. This may facilitate generalisation, as a result of which activities may be undertaken that are inadequate, not adapted to the capacities and needs of that person, and, hence, ineffective, such as: excess focus on the problem or unfounded reduction of requirements related to the imposition of development limitations, and, as a consequence, limiting development.<sup>16</sup> Due to the way that such a label is treated by its users, the risk that its presence brings with itself can be related to the label functioning as a replacement of the process of getting to know the pupil, as an alibi or as a poison.

Treating the label as a replacement of the process of getting to know the pupil is equal to a weakening of the conviction of the need to know a person, any sort of omission of verification of the information included in the label. The label, formed as a result of specialised diagnostic work, may impose a specific mode of perceiving of

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<sup>16</sup> Conf. A. Sadownik, *Na rozstajnych drogach. Studium etnopedagogiczne kontrastowych karier szkolnych młodzieży*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Dolnośląskiej Szkoły Wyższej, Wrocław 2011.

a person, excessively aligning daily diagnostic work or even contributing to it being simulated. Hence, the label may replace any reliable, comprehensive, development-oriented diagnosis of the education capacities and needs of aid.

The label functions as an alibi if its existence is perceived as the justification of the lack of effects of rehabilitation stemming from the use of improper solutions or the failure to undertake any actions at all. Responsibility for failure is shifted onto the disability, as a result of which "it becomes possible to treat individual events in pupil school careers as stemming specifically from intellectual disability".<sup>17</sup>

The label functions like poison of the awareness of its existence and of being perceived through the lens of the disability deepens or in certain times creates the conviction about one's own difference, more limited capabilities. Releasing, shaping and reinforcing low self-esteem, it may as a consequence lead to passivity or disturbances in behaviour. In case of persons with mild intellectual disability, the label of "intellectual disability" seems to be particularly hurtful. The state of self-awareness that these people have allows them to compare themselves with others, to evaluate themselves against the background of others, both belonging to the same group as well as to persons outside it. This comparison allows them to notice similarities and differences, and, as a result, build an image of themselves on the foundation of remaining identification with the group to which they were assigned. The unfavourable effect of comparisons, the awareness of own shortcomings, can cause or reinforce emotional difficulties aligning with the clinical presentation of mild intellectual disability.<sup>18</sup>

The consequences of the appearance of the label can be also seen in the emergence or reinforcement of the phenomenon of learned helplessness, or the demanding attitude. This phenomenon may

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<sup>17</sup> A. Sadownik, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>18</sup> Conf. R. Kościelak, *Psychologiczne podstawy rewalidacji upośledzonych umysłowo*, PWN, Warszawa 1989, p. 53.

concern not only people with disabilities, but also their environments. The effect of a label being assigned to a person may also cause their environment to undertake efforts at segregation, most likely leading to exclusion.

A label is distinguishing. However, this distinction need not necessarily be negative, it need not be a mark or stigma. One may even conclude that a label should not be considered branding at all, but stimulus generating specific expectations<sup>19</sup>, as a result of which development chances may arise for individuals distinguished in this way. Consideration of the label of intellectual disability in positive categories allows one to notice within it an ordering factor of reality that potentially facilitates development. This applies to many people who were branded in this way, including their families, teachers or even peers. The label „demands” or “claims” the person distinguished by it. It exposes this person, it attracts attention to them. The presence of the label is a chance at solving a problem, makes the possibility of success much more real. One must thus conclude that the label of intellectual disability can fulfil diverse, complementary and intertwining functions. Among these, one can name: the causative, informative, motivational, the ergonomisational and the protective function.

The label allows one to obtain aid, and, in case of certain types of aid, it is even necessary in order for it to be provided (causative function of the label). Without the branding it caused, it would be impossible, in the current education system, to organise and implement aid work. The disability label is related to specific privileged, for instance, the right to make use of solutions reserved for the selected group (special education, higher education financing).

The label is a form of message concerning the causes of difficulties experienced by the given person (informative function of the label). Diagnosing of intellectual disability makes one aware of the

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<sup>19</sup> G. Stobart, *Czy psychologia potrafi uzasadnić ideę integracji dzieci o specjalnych potrzebach?*, [in:] *Integracja dzieci o specjalnych potrzebach. Wybrane zagadnienia etyczne*, ed. by G. Fairbairn, S. Fairbairn, CMPPP, Warszawa 2000, p. 56.

source of the problem, shifts responsibility for the emergence of difficulties from the person to the disability that was assigned to them.

The emergence of the label causes interest in the labelled person, mobilises one to make an effort, obligates one to undertake action, forces activity of all the participating entities (motivational function of the label).

The label creates a chance at ergonomisation of activities (ergonomising function of the label), allowing the creation of homogeneous groups. It thus becomes simpler to seek solutions suitable for the needs of all persons making up the relevant group. At the same time, this group creates a much more real chance at individualisation of influences than a heterogeneous group. In addition, from the point of view of education authorities, the presence of a label allows the estimation of the resources that are necessary. The functioning of the label "introduces greater system clarity and facilitates the evaluation of its efficiency, and finally – a fact that cannot be underappreciated – it simplifies the execution of scientific research in the area of special education".<sup>20</sup>

The presence of the label secures each component of the school system against the voluntarism of teachers in terms of organisation of activity, selection of curriculum assumptions, forms of work and methods of education of disabled pupils<sup>21</sup> (protective function of the label).

## Discovery time

A symptom leading to the discovery of mild intellectual disability are difficulties experienced by the pupil during the execution of tasks imposed by requirements of the curriculum. The expansion of

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<sup>20</sup> A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz, G. Szumski, *Pedagogika specjalna i system kształcenia osób z niepełnosprawnościami w Polsce*, [in:] D.D. Smith, *Pedagogika specjalna*, vol. 2, Wydawnictwo APS, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2008, p. 335.

<sup>21</sup> A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz, G. Szumski, op. cit., p. 335.

education requirements at subsequent stages of education causes that the group of pupils that are unable to cope with these requirements becomes more and more numerous, as a result of which diagnostic work is being undertaken<sup>22</sup> that more often than not leads to the conclusion of mild intellectual disability. In relation to the above, along with the individual stages of education, the number of pupils with certified mild intellectual disability rises.<sup>23</sup> Diagnosing this disability takes place at different stages in course of education<sup>24</sup> sometimes only during vocational education. Irrespective of the time, when the diagnosis of mild intellectual disability is conducted, it must be concluded that it is a late diagnosis. It is usually performed following the period when the brain's flexibility is greatest.<sup>25</sup> Hence, it may be difficult to seek solutions stimulating development suitably early on so as to counteract the solidification of existing problems in functioning. As a consequence of late diagnosis, and, hence, the lack of suitably early rehabilitation work, a sort of "vicious cycle of pathology" may perhaps be started up, some "empty years" can emerge in the education process – years that go wasted from the point of view education and development stimulation.<sup>26</sup>

The time of diagnosis also constitutes a factor conditioning the mode of reception of the diagnosis, and, accordingly, the actions undertaken as a result. The later the diagnosis is made, the more probable becomes the awareness of shortcomings, the lack of belief in the possibility to make up for the lost time, resulting in discouragement, passivity. A different rule, however, may also take hold. It is founded on the struggle to make up for the accrued backlog at all cost, and expresses itself through hyperactivity entailing the

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<sup>22</sup> It must be noted that diagnostic work may be initiated only following the motion of the parents, legal custodians or the pupil themselves.

<sup>23</sup> A. Firkowska-Mankiewicz, G. Szumski, op. cit., p. 336.

<sup>24</sup> A. Sadownik, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>25</sup> O. Speck, *Niepełnosprawni w społeczeństwie. Podstawy ortopedagogiki*, Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2005, pp. 443–444.

<sup>26</sup> M. Kościelska, op. cit., p. 103.

acceptance or initiation of tasks exceeding the current capacities of the individual.

It is a paradox that late diagnosis of mild intellectual disability may also have positive consequences. The later the defining label emerges, the shorter it will cause stigma, the more difficult it is to “settle in” into disability, the lower the risk of identification with the disability, and the transformation of identity will be less permanent. The risk of perception of that person through the lens of the disability that accompanies them becomes lower, and will be more delayed in time.

## **Properties of the population of people with mild intellectual disability**

### **Population size**

Mild intellectual disability concerns the largest group within the population of disabled pupils<sup>27</sup> as compared to other types of disabilities. At this stage of compulsory education, every third disabled pupil is a pupil with mild intellectual disability (conf. table 1).

Considering potential opportunities and threats that are provoked by the ubiquity of the phenomenon, one must note that mild intellectual disability, specifically due to its ubiquity, is a social problem. As a result, this phenomenon cannot be omitted, glossed over or downplayed. This in turn should imply searching for organisational and legal, didactic and educational as well as rehabilitation solutions foreseen for the discussed group of people. In addition, the ease of access to persons with mild intellectual disability makes undertaking research exploration much more probable. The fact of ubiquity of the phenomenon should also be tied mainly to its cost intensity, generation of a higher volume of resources that allow the

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<sup>27</sup> A discussion only with respect to pupils substantiates the fact that the diagnosis of mild intellectual disability is made only for education purposes.

**Table 1.** Number of pupils belonging to individually distinguished groups due to the type of disability – obligatory education stage (primary and lower secondary schools)

	2015/2016		2016/2017		2017/2018	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Deaf	1182	1.1	1094	1	1088	0.9
Hard of hearing	6748	6.4	6939	6.3	7351	6.3
Blind	153	0.2	149	0.1	133	0.1
Visually impaired	5684	5.4	5763	5.3	6051	5.2
Persons with mobility disability, including aphasia	10 272	9.8	11 203	10.2	12 630	10.9
Persons with mild intellectual disability	33 704	32.1	33 726	30.8	33 670	29
Persons with moderate or significant intellectual disability	15 921	15.2	14 895	13.6	13 970	12.1
Persons with autism, including Asperger syndrome	12 458	11.9	15 627	14.3	19 542	16.9
Persons with multiple disabilities	18 790	17.9	20 005	18.3	21 537	18.6
Total	104 912	100	109 401	100	115 972	100

Source: own work based on *Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2015/2016*; *Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2016/2017*; *Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2017/2018*.

securing, appropriately for a large population, of the education process. The ubiquity of the phenomenon, when it is studied and analysed, can contribute to its 'normalisation', both in the social as well as in the individual perception. There is no doubt that this encourages acceptance of disability, and reduces the consequences of branding. At the same time, persons with mild intellectual disability have a chance at not feeling alienated. The ubiquity of the phenomenon, however, may at the same time result in acquaintance with the problem, the emergence of passivity with respect to it, and, as a result, ignorance towards it.

## Selected bio-psycho-social properties of persons with mild intellectual disability – an aggregated view of the population

The consideration of properties of functioning of a specific group of people bears with itself the risk of making simplifications, generalisations. Not all properties assigned to persons with mild intellectual disability emerge with the same intensity in each person diagnosed as having mild intellectual disability. Some of the discussed properties are primary characteristics, some are their derivatives, making up the consequences of interactions of primary characteristics and properties of the environment.

The majority of indicated properties is usually considered unilaterally as undesirable properties, hindering functioning in the environment, threatening one's development. It is, however, worth thinking, whether this is the only possible mode of looking at these properties, could they not perhaps bring with themselves a chance of development, of good functioning, or even fulfil the role of a unique stimulator in the difficulties of development. Such a perception, however, requires the reality around us to be provided with different meanings, it requires breaking with stereotypes, changes to the solidified mode of thinking about man, the reevaluation of expectations against them, their deuniformisation. In persons with mild intellectual disability, the act of transforming the earnings of selected bio-psycho-social properties allowed them to be seen not only as threats, but also as opportunities (table 2).

**Table 2.** List of potential opportunities and threats generated by way of bio-psycho-socially properties of persons with mild intellectual disability

Consequences Properties	Threats	Opportunities
No visible differences in external appearance, disability invisible	failure to see lesser opportunities, making unreasonable demands	removal of the risk of stigmatisation, one's image doesn't constitute a factor decisive for the removal
Disturbances to orientation and cognition processes	risk of education failures, The limitation of possibilities with respect to one's education career, some of its ranges, commonly associated to	The resources held: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- do not indicate functional illiteracy</li> <li>- allow self-realisation, independent and good functioning in life com-</li> </ul>



Consequences Properties	Threats	Opportunities
	success in line (higher education, occupations allowing one to acquire a higher social status), become unavailable.	manding respect in life; they prevent exclusion. The quality of functioning in reality are also decisive for other properties, e.g. emotional intelligence, which for the discussed group does not have to be impacted upon.
Domination of re-creative imagination over creative imagination	difficulty undertaking creative activities, blocking of these by the tendency towards acting according to routines, higher helplessness in new situations	reliance on the experienced situations, realism of thinking, of acting, protects against removal from reality in the perception of the same, against escape into a world of fiction, fantasy
Well-functioning mechanic memory	difficulty making logical connections between phenomena noticed earlier. Reduced memory capacity prevents the collection of content necessary for efficient functioning in various situations	possibility of learning and effectively recalling information as well as repetitive, schematic skills allowing the automation of actions
Ability to make comparisons, noticing imperfections in own functioning	low self-esteem, frustration, passivity	Ability to make comparisons allows the acquisition of information and skills. Noticing imperfections of own actions can form mobilisation to undertake the effort necessary for development
Difficulty in the estimation of consequences of own actions	risk of taking reckless, risky actions, and, as a consequence, risk of making errors, risk of becoming the object of ridicule, risk of failure	Higher courage in action, no blocks or limitations crossing borders, taking risks that might end in success
Holding on to routines in thinking and in actions	- difficulty adapting to changes, acquiring new skills (e.g. difficulty requalifying in work) - holding on to fixed habits	chance of social acceptance, of solidified modes of thinking and of acting enjoy social approval, failure to consider acquired, fixed rules, modes of thinking and acting, not questioning them helps to understand the world, bring reality in order, gives rise to a feeling of safety repetitive activities ending in success gain the approval of the executor and the environment
Frequent failures	blocking diagnostic information about own capacities and skills, forgoing activity, low general success expectation level, expectation of failure reducing the capaci-	under the right conditions (own motivation, favourable ambient reactions) it may result in multiple attempts, shape the perseverance towards achieving goals, resistance to difficult situations,

Consequences Properties	Threats	Opportunities
	ty to oppose difficulties, reduction of self-esteem	the ability to cope with negative emotions, teaches valuing success, joy of achievements possibility of analysing the causes of failures, drawing conclusions, learning from errors
Lack of faith in the possibility of success	passivity, avoiding task-based coping strategies	protection of self-esteem against its reduction, dismay
Domination of an external feeling of control, susceptibility to outside influences	susceptibility to socially unacceptable environmental influences lack of initiative, passivity, solidification and expansion of learned helplessness	respecting the attitudes of others dispositions for the effective functioning as executor of commands
In case of encountering difficulties - usage of avoidance strategies (changing the topic, engaging in replacement activity)	inability to solve problems, reduction to replacement solutions	Ability to reduce emotional tension, protection against failure, emerging problems
Feeling of own disability	awareness of limitations leading to passivity, lack of faith in own power, feeling of helplessness, even frustration and the feeling of injustice	chance at a rational suitable evaluation of own resources and shortcomings planning activity according to own capacities that could lead to avoidance of failure or even to success in activities

Source: own work.

The executed analysis makes one aware of the possibilities that can lie in negatively valuated properties of persons with mild intellectual disability, and shows that in certain situations these properties can become assets. The suggested mode of thinking allows one to tame this difference, this *otherness*, and notice in the described properties a chance at changing the environment by perfecting its actions, by undertaking uncommon methods of work, by increased flexibility of utilised resources and at the same time the expansion of their range.

## Inter-group differentiation

The group of pupils with mild intellectual disability is not homogeneous; it is made up by persons representing various levels of psycho-social functioning, from a level similar to the one characterising persons in the intellectual norm, all the way to a level more like persons with deeper intellectual disability. The heterogeneity within the group is also influenced by differentiation of individual and environmental resources. As a result, even among pupils representing a comparable level of functioning one could find people exhibiting dysfunctions of various intensity (from the clear ones that significantly hinder functioning, to lighter ones that are barely noticeable) as well as persons experiencing different levels of care by the environment (persons not cared for by their environment as well as those experiencing a lot of support from the environment they function in). Awareness of this rule forces one to note both individual persons making up a group as well as subgroups distinguished due to various criteria. It is only on this basis that it becomes possible to undertake activities corresponding to the needs of these persons and subgroups.

The existence of differences within the group, making up a particularly significant factor from the point of view of organising and executing educational activity and its effectiveness, provokes one to voice their opinion on the issue of individualisation. This opinion may be placed along a continuum, the ends of which are described by opposing modes of perception of mild intellectual disability. One end can be identified with maximum individualisation, focusing only on differences, stressing uniqueness, with the other describing generalisation related to noticing exclusively similarities, downplaying differences, completely omitting individualisation.

Individualisation of influences utilised in the work with persons with mild intellectual disability creates an opportunity at adapting work to the needs and capacities of these persons, their subjective treatment, and, accordingly, the hope for real effectiveness of the relevant procedures. At the same time, however, individualisation

may be a factor hindering development, threatening well-being; indeed, due to the consequences that emerge in stressing existing differences, individualisation can be seen as a factor facilitating stigmatisation, isolation, a factor that could shape helplessness<sup>28</sup> or even egotistical or demanding attitudes.

Inter-group differentiation may also form a unique asset. It motivates through the possibility of referring to examples of persons included in the same group, conquering limitations, achieving successes, being examples to be followed. It can encourage not only pupils, but also their parents or teachers, to make an effort.

It must be noted, however, that the use of individualisation, due to the context that accompanies it, may prove to be too difficult, even impossible to execute. Its implementation requires preparation, thoroughness, skill, knowledge and time.

### **Closeness to the norm – no uniqueness, no spectacularity**

Greater similarity to the norm than in case of persons with other disabilities, lack of clear symptoms that are associated solely with intellectual disability, make mild intellectual disability invisible to the environment, and, hence, illegible. The indicated situation may provoke the emergence of wrong environmental attitudes, expressed as erroneous evaluations or through the lack of interest leading to failure to note the problem and to neglect it.

Within this context, it is worth recalling the relationship between the clear presentation of disability and the number of years of delay in education, as noted by Małgorzata Kościelska who analysed the situation of pupils attending special schools.<sup>29</sup> The mentioned author formulates and considers the following thesis: the clearer the symptoms of disability are for the environment, the low-

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<sup>28</sup> Z. Gajdzica, *Antynomie edukacji integracyjnej – od idei do praktyki*, [in:] *Integracja edukacyjna. Oczekiwania i rzeczywistość*, ed. by M. Klaczak, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, Kraków 2010, pp. 15-16.

<sup>29</sup> M. Kościelska, op. cit., p. 102.

er the delay in education as expressed in years. Kościelska explains the indicated rule by earlier undertaking of diagnostic and rehabilitation work in case of disability that is more clearly seen. Referring to this explanation, one could conclude that aid becomes clearer in a situation, if difficulties emerge more clearly. It is their visibility, and, hence, readability, that implies the reactions of the environment.

The lack of spectacularity of the presentation of mild intellectual disability may reduce the motivation to make an effort, and may also be the cause, or the justification, of the failure to undertake diagnostic and rehabilitation work. In addition, the invisibility of the described disability makes failures or lack of success in work with persons with mild intellectual disability difficult to accept by the environment.

On the other hand, a consequence of the lack of spectacularity may be lack of interest, protecting against activities that stigmatise this group of people. As a result of the failure to note the difference, the tendency to focus on similarities to the norm becomes clear, facilitating the treatment of persons with mild intellectual disability just like others, without differentiating them, “[s]ocial expectations of them will hence be analogous as those of the general population”.<sup>30</sup> These expectations may be expressed both in the formulated objectives of education as well as the resources of execution. A situation of this kind may form a hazard factor if expectations are excessive, exaggerated or constitute a chance at development, if expectations fit in with the capacities of the person. Failure to individualise activities undertaken with respect to persons with mild intellectual disability, failure to stress their uniqueness, failure to brand them, all of this allows the stimulation of development, the activation of available potential. A slight difference from the norm in case of the discussed group of persons causes that work with

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<sup>30</sup> B. Jachimczak, *Spółeczno-edukacyjne uwarunkowania startu zawodowego młodych osób niepełnosprawnych. Studium empiryczne z regionu łódzkiego*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2011, p. 143.

these persons does not require one to undertake any sort of excess additional effort related to searching for different, specialised solutions that could be applied with respect to persons with other disabilities. The task that is to be faced when commencing work with persons with mild intellectual disability usually entails the implementation of standard solutions. However, one cannot exclude the necessity to introduce necessary modifications, in terms of the implemented solutions or the modes of their application.

The fact that differences in biopsychosocial functioning of persons with mild intellectual disability is not as clearly visible as is the case in persons with other disabilities, reinforces the probability of cooperation, and even allows one to undertake a challenge on equal footing, enabling success at the same time. Thanks to this, the risk of alienation is reduced, and the perception of difference – less threatening.

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