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EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF THE YOUTH INCLUSIVE CLASSES

ASPIRACJE EDUKACYJNE I ZAWODOWE MŁODZIEŻY KLAS INTEGRACYJNYCH

Abstract: This article is an attempt to show the educational and professional aspirations students attending integration classes. The first part of the article focuses on the issues of aspiration and contains their basic definitions, demonstrates the types and conditions

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defining their development. The second part presents the methodology of own research and their results. Based on the analysis, it is concluded that the young people shows aspirations relating to education and future professional work. In spite of the fact that the respondents are characterized by a varied attitude to schooling, most of them show the aspiration to obtain higher education. In addition to educational aspirations, the subjects also demonstrate their willingness to start working even during the planned studies. Work should be undemanding, with little responsibility calm, which would, however guarantee high earnings and satisfaction. The results of research on the aspirations and intentions of young people at the dawn of their adult life, from the point of view of counseling practice, may become an indispensable determinant of organizing and planning the further path of education.

Keywords: educational aspirations, career aspirations, youth of inclusive classes

Streszczenie: Artykuł jest próbą ukazania aspiracji edukacyjnych i zawodowych uczniów uczęszczających do klas integracyjnych. Pierwsza część artykułu koncentruje się na problematyce aspiracji i zawiera ich podstawowe definicje, demonstrowa typy, a także warunki określające ich rozwój. Druga zaś część przedstawia metodologię badań własnych oraz ich wyniki. Na podstawie dokonanej analizy wnioskuję się, że badana młodzież wykazuje aspiracje w zakresie edukacji i przyszłej pracy zawodowej. Pomimo iż badani odznaczają się zróżnicowanym stosunkiem do nauki szkolnej, to w większości wykazują dążenie w zakresie uzyskania wyższego wykształcenia. Poza aspiracjami edukacyjnymi badana młodzież wykazuje się również dążeniami w zakresie pracy zawodowej, którą są gotowi podjąć nawet w trakcie planowanych studiów. Praca powinna być niewymagająca, mało odpowiedzialna, spokojna, przy czym gwarantująca wysokie zarobki i satysfakcję. Ukazane wyniki badań w zakresie aspiracji i zamierzeń młodzieży stojącej na progu dorosłego życia, z punktu widzenia praktyki doradczej, mogą stać się niezbędnym wyznacznikiem organizowania i planowania dalszej ścieżki kształcenia.

Słowa kluczowe: aspiracje edukacyjne, aspiracje zawodowe, młodzież klas integracyjnych

INTRODUCTION

The social sciences have researched the subject of aspirations for many years. In the individual dimension, aspirations are a component of personality and then they become the subject of psychological research. They determine the direction of society's development and are therefore the subject of sociologists' research, and finally, their significant role in the process of education and upbringing enables to undertake research in the field of pedagogy. Moreover, the changeability of social life, permanent organisational and curricular changes in teaching necessitate updates of research in the area of youth aspirations.

Particular importance is attached to the educational and professional aspirations of young people attending school. In the literature of the subject, one will find the results of research describing the conditions of educational and professional aspirations, such as: a place of residence (town/rural), origin, media influence, parents, teachers, peers and schools. Students of secondary schools, non-public schools, talented and even

foreign students have been researched. The elaborations did not address the issue of educational and professional aspirations of students attending integration classes. This article will therefore be a response to the perceived cognitive gap.

The environment of an inclusive school through the individualization of education has a chance to turn out to be the one that creates the best conditions for personal development. By studying educational and professional aspirations, we learn about the potential of the students and their intentions on what to do after finishing school. Indirectly, the level of students' aspirations can demonstrate the effectiveness of an inclusive education model. The results obtained can be used by the family environment, teachers and vocational guidance specialists to design educational and counselling strategies. All the more so because aspirations are revealed when students make their first decisions, and when the aspirations are properly shaped, they will trigger the creativity of an individual, thus becoming a motive for taking action (Pichalski, 1992).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of aspiration, due to its complexity, is a subject of interest for psychology, sociology and pedagogy. From the psychological point of view, aspirations are understood as "the pursuit of plans, intentions, goals, life ideals, the desire to achieve something meaningful" (Czyżowska, 2005, p. 32).

In pedagogy aspirations are understood as "intentions, desires, striving to achieve an ambitious goal" (Kupisiewicz, 2014, p. 30). For W. Okoń (2004, p. 34) aspiration is "(Latin *aspiratio* – breath), the pursuit of goals, the realization of some life ideals. [...] is connected [...] with the motivation of tasks set by the individual". Aspirations are "what an individual hopes will come true in the future" (Gorard, See, Davies, 2012, p. 6).

For the purposes of this article, a definition has been adopted according to which aspirations are "the strivings, intentions, desires, wishes, needs and interests of the individual which he or she plans to implement in the future, which influence his or her behaviour and plans and condition his or her further life course, and which are conditioned by factors of a psychological, sociological and pedagogical nature" (Musialska, 2008, p. 14).

The tradition of research on aspirations has focused on the careers and educational ambitions of young people. "They were usually measured with questions about how long someone intends to go to school or what level of education they want to achieve. Professional aspirations may be classified according to the type of work to which young people aspire in the future" (Gutman, Akerman, 2008, p. 3).

S. Kowalski (1970, p. 355) to describe aspirations for learning outcomes uses the adjective school and defines them as "the desire to achieve an imagined far-reaching school success as judged in a given culture or subculture as a life-important goal".

Educational aspirations, on the other hand, would concern the desire for future learning. As Z. Skorny believes (1980, p. 35) “they relate to the level of education that a given individual wishes or intends to achieve in the future”, and “to the educational attainment, degrees held, school completion”. The author (1993) also identifies professional aspirations related to the choice of future work, the position held, the tasks carried out, accompanied by aspirations towards self-education, complementing the knowledge already possessed, raising and gaining new professional qualifications.

Particular importance is attached to the role of parents in shaping the educational and professional aspirations of young people. “Parents and families play a key role; there is a clear link between what young people’s parents want and what young people are striving for” (Kintrea et al. 2011, p. 9). The literature on the subject has confirmed that: “[...] parents’ education is important for the development of educational aspirations. [...] Parents with higher education have greater potential to create an environment that stimulates higher educational aspirations, offering incentives for the development of educational abilities” (Madarasova et al., 2010, p. 7).

A special environment that influences the formation of aspirations in young people is school. According to W. Sikorski (2005, p. 14), school “influences aspirations not only through specific teaching content, but also through the educational interaction between teacher and a student”. At school, the student learns about his or her abilities, develops his or her passions and interests, develops the ability to cooperate with others, makes friends, succeeds and fails (Wawrzczak-Gazda, 2012).

The integrative character of the educational institution may become a factor that promotes the formation of aspirations in students. The integration school through the full individualization of the processes taking place in it is a field of shaping of the personality postulated in the literature on the subject “[...] characterized by self-confidence and self-awareness” (Wagner, 1998, p. 63). As shown by research, there are no significant differences in school performance and social functioning and behavioural disorders among the students with special educational needs (Friedmann, Lazarová, 2013). However, attention is drawn to the fact that as a result of adolescence and, above all, better knowledge of the world by children, aspirations may be weakened. This process is particularly noticeable in this group of people who encounter numerous barriers (Gutman, Akerman, 2008).

METHODOLOGY

In own research, the main aim was to recognise and describe the educational and professional aspirations declared by the group of students surveyed finishing the first educational stage, attending integration classes. Due to the descriptive nature of the research, the diagnostic survey method was used and the empirical material was analysed by describing the collected statistical data. Research hypotheses were abandoned because the opinions and judgments of students regarding aspirations

were examined. A questionnaire on students' aspirations and life plans developed by S. Korczyński (2013) was used. For the purposes of the conducted research, the questions included in the category of educational aspirations (four questions) and professional aspirations (two questions). Questions relating to educational aspirations were aimed at learning about the educational results desired by students. They were able to express their views on their attitude towards school and schooling and their aspirations for school grades. Next, the authors' research task was to get to know and describe the declared desires of students to obtain education. An indicator of these aspirations would be the declared level of education, also in relation to the educational level of parents. Since the educational desires are associated with professional plans, the intended effect of the research was to describe students' expectations of their future work – how they see it, what it is for them, what its functions are. It was also interesting to learn students' opinions on the source of their professional success. All this was to formulate practical recommendations that could be used by parents, teachers and career advisors.

The research group consisted of 73 students of integration classes finishing primary school. Of these, nearly 63% are students with special educational needs (having a certificate or psychological and pedagogical opinion). All of them attended a school located in a large city in the Małopolska voivodeship. The research did not include the gender criterion.

RESULTS

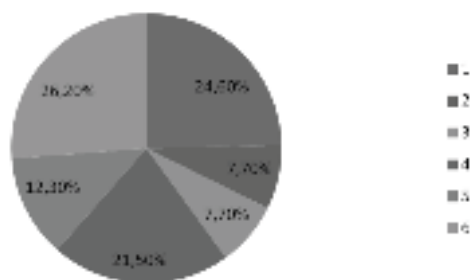
As far as educational aspirations are concerned, it was first and foremost important to recognise the attitude of students towards schooling. Figure 1 presents the answer to the question: what aspirations are expressed by students in the field of school education. Students had six answers to choose from.

In the percentage distribution, the most popular answer (26%) turned out to be the one requiring expressing own opinions. These included statements in which students show reluctance to learn while liking the school – they do not like to learn but like the school, they feel good about it and treat learning as an unpleasant necessity.

In general, it is worth noting the high percentage, being the sum of answers No 4 and No 6, of students declaring aversion to learning (50%). This is a lot considering the integrative character of the class, which determines the individualization of education. In the study group there was also a considerable group of students who like to learn and like school (16 students).

To sum up, there are students who do not like learning and dislike school as two separate sets and students who do not like learning but accept school as a friendly place. In general, most of the students surveyed like to stay on school grounds, meeting their social and affiliate needs.

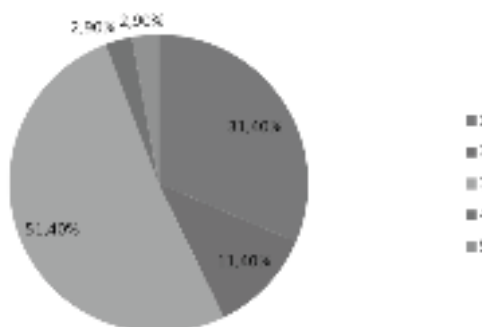
The educational aspirations of students expressed in the desire to obtain the best possible grades may result from their attitude to learning and school environment (Figure 2).



Possible answers: 1. I like to study and go to school, 2. I go to school because that is what my parents want, 3. I would prefer to drop out of school, 4. I do not like learning, 5. I like to learn, but I do not like the school I go to, and 6. Other answers – indicated by students

Figure 1. Educational aspirations. The attitude of the examined students to school and schooling

Source: own study.



Possible answers: 1. I care about high grades from all subjects, 2. I do not care much about grades, 3. I care about grades from some subjects, 4. I am satisfied with satisfactory and pass grades, 5. Other answers – indicated by students

Figure 2. Education aspirations. Students' grading aspirations in school

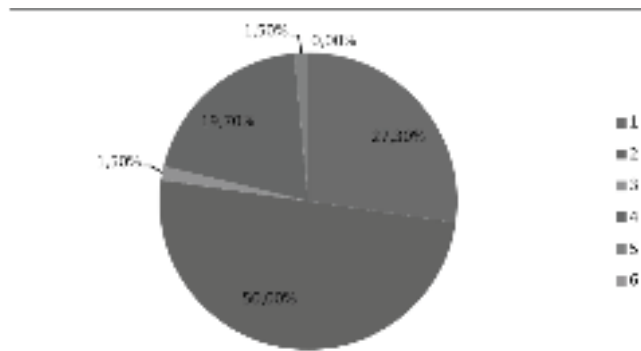
Source: own study.

The results of the research show that more than half of the students are satisfied with getting high grades from only some subjects. In addition, 1/3 of the students are willing to receive high grades in all subjects included in the core curriculum. Approximately 3% of the respondents are satisfied with sufficient and pass

grades, and one in ten students does not pay much attention at all to the educational results obtained.

The survey results indicate that the vast majority of the respondents declare their aspirations in terms of their learning outcomes (82.8% of respondents – which is the sum of answers 1 and 3). It is worth emphasizing that most of them are students who want to achieve high scores in only some subjects. This may indicate specific educational choices (scores for some subjects in high school admissions) or it may be a kind of “calculation” of the work’s contribution to the results obtained (when choosing a class profile it is worth focusing on some subjects).

In view of the attitude to learning and the resulting effects, further questions involved specification of the desires for post-school education plans, without specifying the timeframe (Figure 3).



Possible answers: 1. Taking up a dreamt job 2. Taking up studies, 3. Studying in post-secondary school, 4. Taking up a job and study extramurally, 5. I am not sure I want to finish school, 6. Other answers – indicated by students

Figure 3. Educational aspirations. Students’ plans after finishing school

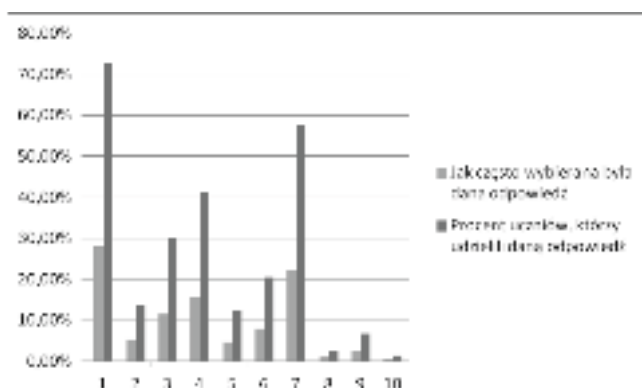
Source: own study.

The observed significant percentage of students (70%) declaring to continue their education up to the level of higher education may confirm the high educational aspirations of students. Half of them declare their willingness to start studies just after high school, and nearly 20% with the possibility of taking up a job. For every fourth student surveyed, it is important to work in a dream job, regardless of the chosen educational path. Only one person was unsure about continuing education, regardless of the level of education.

Among the environmental factors influencing educational aspirations, family has a special place. It is not uncommon for children to continue or duplicate their parents’ careers. Thus, the question was asked about the desire for education in relation to the parents’ education. Three answer options were possible: I want to get at least the same education as my parents, to get a higher level of education than my parents, or a variant where students do not intend to exceed their parents’ education.

A particular level of aspiration for parents' education is shown by almost every third student who wants to achieve a higher level of education than their parents. However, if we add up the first two answers, we get as much as 60 percent of students who want to have the same or higher education than their parents. For 40%, parents' level of education is not a reference point for their own educational plans.

The high educational aspirations revealed by the research, expressed through the willingness to undertake the effort of obtaining an education that surpasses parents, may directly correspond to declared expectations for their future work. These aspirations are shown in Figure 4.

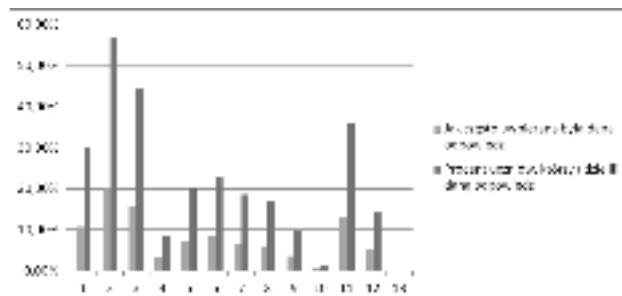


Three out of the following possible answers could be chosen from: 1. Work that provides high wages, 2. Less paid work, but no fear of termination, 3. Work where there is a possibility of promotion, 4. Quiet work, no tensions, 5. Providing opportunities for further education, 6. Work in which the correct relations between employees and superiors prevail, 7. Interesting and rewarding work, 8. With the ability to manage others, 9. Independent work, 10. Another answer – indicated by students

Figure 4. Professional aspirations. Expectations of the students surveyed with regard to their future work

Source: own study.

For most of the respondents, work is seen mainly as a source of income, hence the most frequently chosen answer concerned the expected high earnings guaranteed by work. Such an indication was made by nearly 73% of students (53 persons), which constituted 28% of all the possible answers. Then, in the opinion of the students, the work should be interesting and rewarding, while being calm and not a source of tension. Ideally, it should not require continuing education or decision making for others (as evidenced by the low rates in replies No. 5 and No. 8). Students do not choose a model of work that requires promotion, and interestingly, they do not expect to be independent at work.



Three out of the six possible answers could be chosen from: 1. Reliability at work, 2. Diligence and sense of responsibility, 3. Professional competence, knowledge, good preparation, 4. Resourcefulness, go-aheadness, 5. Self-confidence, 6. Cleverness, 7. Speed and efficiency, 8. Contacts, connections, 9. Having money, 10. Physical attraction, 11. Intelligence, 12. Adaptive skills, 13. Other

Figure 5. Professional aspirations. Factors for professional success

Source: own study.

In the pursuit of life's plans, intentions and goals, young people see factors that may contribute to this (Figure 5). More than half of the students considered diligence and sense of responsibility, and not resourcefulness and go-aheadness (in answer No. 4 only 8% of students) to be the most important factors that guarantee success in future professional work, and according to the students this should be supported by high professional competences, knowledge and good preparation. A comparable selection indicator was obtained for answer No. 11, concerning intelligence as a condition for success at work. Particularly interesting is the lowest percentage rate for the answer referring to physical attractiveness as necessary and indispensable for professional success.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research conducted so far shows that the greatest influence on the choice of the school has the ambitions of young people (and only later parents and peers), and that all students want to improve their qualifications in the future (Kunikowski, Kamińska et al., 2016).

The results of the own research indicate that the vast majority of students declare their willingness to achieve high grades in their schooling. Although half of the respondents only studied selected subjects, the vast majority simply enjoy going to school. This would be in line with the results of other studies, which indicate that the popularity of school and its subjects among students is not related to academic performance (Friedmann, Lazarová, 2013, p. 300).

It is significant that the students surveyed attending integration classes, despite their declarations of continuing education up to the level of higher education,

i.e. showing high educational aspirations, do not make them dependent on school aspirations, i.e. those related to self-improvement and self-education. And yet other studies show “[...] that students with high aspirations or high expectations have better learning outcomes than students with low aspirations or low expectations” (Khattab, 2015, p. 731).

The observed declared aversion to intellectual effort, while at the same time perceiving the studies as a determinant of life success, may indicate a misconception of the source of this success (the observed inconsistency between the obtained answers presented in Figures 1 and 3). Similar research results for high school students were obtained by J. Ogrodnik (2017), where the high aspirations of high school graduates in terms of long-term goals did not coincide with the level of aspirations in terms of school achievements and independent broadening of knowledge. The author of the research noted that “the intention to continue learning within the framework of higher education, accompanied at the same time by the conviction that there is no need to expand knowledge and limiting oneself to the necessary cognitive effort, indicates aspirations remaining in the sphere of desires” (Ogrodnik, 2017, p. 154). In the own research, the students of primary school classes were taken into account, so maybe all is not lost yet because in the literature of the subject, it turns out also “[...] that low expectations do not affect the future behaviour of students when they have high aspirations accompanied by high school achievements” (Khattab, 2015 p. 731).

As the results of our own research indicate, a very high rate of students in integration classes want to complete higher education. This is in somehow contrary to the research conducted by K. Wasilewski (2012) in the years 2003–2009, where it was observed that “[...] the percentage of young people interested in obtaining at least a master’s degree decreased by 8.1% in the six researched years” (Wasilewski, 2012, p. 74). The conclusions of other studies are similar and their authors observe that the poorer performance of students with special educational needs predisposes them to move towards more realistic occupations, and that these students are less likely to attend higher education than their non-disabled peers (Friedmann, Lazarová, 2013, p. 300–301).

As a consequence of high educational aspirations, as shown by own research, there are specific expectations for future work. It is to be a source of pleasure and satisfaction. Students surveyed see the work as easy and pleasant, giving a high financial reward above all. They declare their reluctance to work that requires independence, responsibility for others, requiring continuous training. This is confirmed by other research results in which young people mention the willingness to develop their interests, certainty of employment and high earnings after graduation as the most important criterion taken into account when deciding on the choice of e.g. a field of study (Chudnicki, 2019, p. 41).

As Polish research shows, parents are indeed present as a point of reference in school selection (Kunikowski, Kamińska et al., 2016). In the literature there is an opinion that “the probability of choosing a prestigious university grows with parents’ expectations about their child’s education, which partly mediate the influence of education on the choice” (Czarnecki, 2015, p. 180). Also in the English literature there are statistically significant links with educational aspirations for such factors as the level of education of parents (Madarasova Geckova et al., 2010). The results of our own research confirmed a significant impact of the family environment on the aspirations of young people. Parents’ education is a reference point for the educational aspirations of the examined young people. Most of them want to achieve a position in higher education or at least the same as their parents. The literature emphasizes that this may be due to the fact that the majority of parents want their child to have a university degree (Kozłowski, Matczak, 2014).

On the basis of the results obtained, it was found that the examined youth of integration classes is only at the stage of constructing their own dreams, desires for the future, both educational and professional. This is evidenced by inconsistencies in the declared school aspirations and quite wishful thinking about future work. Despite this, students want to follow a path that enables them to fulfil their own needs, i.e. to continue their studies and take up a satisfactory professional career. It seems that an inclusive school creates conditions for the development and formation of young people’s aspirations for education and choice of future profession.

Although the results of the research are limited in scope, the research has implications for parental influence, for the work of the supervising teacher, the teacher organizing the process of education of students with special educational needs and the vocational counsellor in an inclusive school.

The high aspirations of young people in integration classes should be used in the pedagogical strategies. It turns out that students with special educational needs may have a high level of aspirations both in the educational and professional sphere. According to the state of knowledge: “aspirations are likely to help students improve their performance, but they will be much more effective if accompanied by high expectations” (Khattab, 2015, p. 732). Thus, one should not be afraid to place high demands on students. In the educational and didactic work, set ambitious goals, outline interesting proposals, set interesting tasks, motivate to learn, so that the educational potential of students is later transformed into professional potential.

In the pedagogical strategies, students should be made aware that having ambitious plans and life goals implies high educational aspirations, but also that a degree of consistency between the aspirations for school grades and the expected level of education is necessary for the success of these plans. Higher education is based on the desire to learn and the school grades resulting from it.

The observed reference point for educational plans of young people is parents. Parents should therefore be supported in developing the high aspirations of their

children. Parents should be made aware of their important influence on their children and the fact that even if they are children with special educational needs, they can have high expectations of themselves. Maintaining high aspirations with parental support can be a value in itself.

Career advisers working in schools (including integration schools) should, in particular, recognise the aspirations of students, which foster their self-awareness, allow them to build their own image, realistically determine their own capabilities and limitations, and allow them to plan real actions and anticipate their consequences. The knowledge of students' aspirations can be used in the proposed diagnostic models such as "I can – I want – need" (Rosalska, 2012). In this model, aspirations are one of the three necessary subset of resources (in addition to individual capital and working conditions) when planning the choice of profession. Aspirations are an essential factor in optimising the right decisions of young people. However, in order for them to fulfil their task, it is necessary to focus not only on the content of individual aspirations, but above all on the advisory process at the level of coherence of all of them. The career advisor's task is to make young people aware that it is impossible to implement plans without a certain level of consistency of school, educational and professional aspirations.

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