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Two Cultures of Inclusive Education of Learners with Disabilities as Two Borderland Cultures

ABSTRACT

Two currents of educational inclusion have been discussed in this study. The first one is built on the transformations of special education and constitutes the evolution of its basic assumptions. The second is viewed as the deconstruction of special education, it cuts off its traditions and its elaborated concepts. The thesis is put forward here that both currents can be described and explained with the use of the concept of cultural borderlands. The assumption is made that the space of inclusive school constitutes a certain borderland territory, where cultures get in touch. In the discussed case, this pertains to the dominating culture of full ability and the dominated culture of disability, as well as to the traditions of special education and mainstream (open access) education. Depending on the applied and fulfilled assumptions, these cultures differentiate the foundations of the discussed currents in inclusion. The hidden or explicit dimensions of the clashing, coexistence and integration of these cultures can be noticed, interpreted and understood by placing them in basic (due to the limited framework of this study – here: simplified) concepts of borderlands, elaborated within sociology and multicultural education. What is also assumed here is that no awareness of differences in understanding the cultures of inclusion leads to incommensurable methodological assumptions, which substantially undermines the organization of inclusive education in practice. The study is aimed not only at describing the assumptions of two currents of educational inclusion of learners with disability, but also at generating the awareness of the consequences of their theoretical assumptions in the daily routine at school.

In the first part of the text, the basic assumptions of school culture are characterized, with special regard to the culture of inclusive school. Then, the two currents of educational inclusion are described and confronted with the basic

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premises of borderland cultures. The whole is completed with the final conclusion concerning educational practice.

INTRODUCTION

Over several years, the culture of inclusive education has been one of the most frequently undertaken topics in scientific works (e.g., Corbett, 1999; Kugelmass, 2006; Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Hudgins, 2012; Zamkowska, 2017). The analysis of expert literature and reports on educational practice shows that this culture is developing in two currents. The first is a development (a form of reconstruction, sometimes also evolution) of special education. The second current is based on its deconstruction. It breaks away from the assumptions grounded in the output of special education. Both currents differ in many aspects. One of these aspects is the application of different ontological and epistemological assumptions. Other divergences stem from the use of various categories (or attributing a different status to the same categories) for describing the foundations of inclusion and its determinants. These categories comprise: special educational needs, disability, barriers, educational mainstream, diversity, individualization, support, adjustment, as well as some universal categories, such as time and space.

The variety of approaches, possible descriptions and definitions of the culture of educational inclusion encourages the search for concepts which constitute an interpretation tool, useful for understanding the processes taking place in inclusive school. My thesis is that the concepts of cultural borderland may become such a tool. The space of inclusion is a kind of borderland territory of contacting cultures. In the discussed case, this pertains to the dominating culture of full ability and the dominated culture of disability, as well as to the traditions of special education and mainstream (open access) education. Depending on the applied and fulfilled assumptions, these cultures differentiate the foundations of the discussed inclusion currents. The hidden or explicit dimensions of the clash, coexistence and integration of these cultures can be noticed, interpreted and understood by placing them in basic (due to the limited framework of this study – here: simplified) concepts of borderlands, elaborated within sociology and multicultural education. What is also assumed here is that the lack of awareness of differences in understanding the cultures of inclusion leads to incommensurable methodological assumptions, which substantially undermines the organization of inclusive educa-

tion in practice. The study is aimed not only at describing the assumptions of two currents of educational inclusion of learners with disability, but also at generating the awareness of the impact of their theoretical assumptions on the daily school routine.

In the first part of the text, the basic assumptions of school culture are characterized, with special regard to the culture of inclusive school. Then, the two currents of educational inclusion are described and confronted with the basic premises of borderland cultures. The whole is completed with the final conclusions concerning educational practice.

AN OUTLINE OF THE CULTURE OF (INCLUSIVE) SCHOOL

Culture shapes the human mind and determines its functioning (Bruner, 2010, p. 16) and, at the same time, it is a result of the learning process. Culture is made up, among many other components, of everything one should know or should believe in to conduct in life in an acceptable way (Burszta, 1998, p. 49). Therefore, culture is also identified with the socially accepted – or at least respected – knowledge of a particular group of people. It is both perpetuated and passed down within this group. Moreover, culture makes a particular sociocultural system function as an interdependent whole, it maintains stability and reproductive capacity (Burszta, 1998, p. 49). The acquisition of cultural competences (learning the culture) is always set in a particular environment and depends on the extent to which its resources are used (Bruner, 2010, p. 16). With no doubt, one of the most important developmental environments is school.

The culture of school, as an element of the broadly understood culture, comprises the whole set of views, attitudes, relations, and principles shaping all the aspects of functioning of school as an institution, organization and community (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2015, p. 80; Dudzikowa, 2010, p. 220). Obviously, what constitutes the basis for the maintenance and co-creation of school culture is the knowledge concerning these elements.

Describing the elements of school culture is a complex task. Some attempts, discussed in Polish literature (Chomczyńska-Rubacha, 2006; Adrjan, 2011), most often refer to Edgar Schein's model of organizational culture (1992). The author elaborated a method of diagnosing an organization, based on elements of culture to which he referred as levels. He assumes that organizational culture is a set of complex factors which can be influenced after diagnosing this culture accurately (Kostera, 2003, p. 31). Schein distinguished three basic levels of organizational

culture: the level of artefacts, of recognized values and of fundamental assumptions (Stoner, Freeman, & Gilbert, 2001, p. 190). This concept became the basis for David Tuohy's model of organizational culture of school (2002, pp. 25–26) – he distinguished three analogous levels of the organizational culture of school: the level of products, of values, and of assumptions. As this concept has been widely discussed also in Polish literature (e.g., Chomczyńska-Rubacha, 2006; Adrjan, 2011; Gajdzica, 2017; Zamkowska, 2017), its detailed characteristics will be omitted in this study – only a brief outline of the culture of inclusive school will be provided.

In graphic representations, the culture of inclusive school is usually based on a triangle. In most general terms, three versions are most frequently referred to. The first is associated with the earlier mentioned concept of organizational culture of school and it comprises the above specified levels: of artefacts and practices (of what is visible), of recognized values (what socially indicates activities), and of unconscious beliefs, values, thoughts and feelings (what constitutes basic hidden assumptions) (quoted in: Zamkowska, 2017, p. 22). The second version, most popular in Polish studies, also comprises three dimensions: creating the inclusive culture (building a community, establishing inclusive values), creating the inclusive policy (developing school for everyone, providing aid and support to meet different needs of learners), developing inclusive practices (working out the teaching method, activation of resources) (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 8). The third version is also based on a triangular graphic representation and comprises three groups of assumptions: the learning environment, availability and affordability of conditions, rights and possibilities of acting (Inclusive Education in Action…, 2010, p. 11). The assumptions discussed in the further part, constituting the two currents of inclusive education, concern all elements of inclusive culture, but with different intensity.

Leaving out an in-depth characterization of the culture of inclusive education, understood in such a way, its major qualities can be briefly specified as a set of headwords (Table 1).

Although these assumptions do not raise much controversy, their broader context – especially the ways of their implementation – is viewed differently. This can be seen in the analysis of two different currents of inclusive education. The analysis is based on the assumption that (also inclusive) school creates a microclimate which derives from social relations and attitudes, as well as the norms and rules that shape them. In inclusive school, the essence of this microclimate might consist in:

- distinctly outlined relations between the conceptual burden of special and mainstream education, or

Table 1. The foundations and qualities of inclusive culture

Foundations of the culture of inclusive education in mainstream school (Booth & Ainscow, 2011, p. 3).	Qualities of inclusive education in the culture of mainstream school (Corbett, 1999, p.58)
· Equal treatment and respect for all learners and workers at school. · Increasing learners' participation in culture, in curricula and in school community, as well as decreasing the phenomenon of exclusion in these fields. · Transforming the organizational culture and school functioning and practice so that the diversification of learners in a particular community can be taken into account. · Reducing educational barriers for all learners, not only disabled ones or learners "with special educational needs". · Making use of others' experience in eliminating barriers in the access to education for learners from different environments, introducing changes which are favourable for larger numbers of learners. · Viewing learners' diversification as wealth or a resource supporting education, not as a problem to solve. · Providing learners with the right to education in their residence place. · Improving the conditions of school work organization for both workers and learners. · Emphasizing the role of school in building the local community, in the development of values and in increasing educational achievements. · Promoting the collaboration of schools and local communities. · Being aware that inclusion and levelling the educational chances constitute an aspect of inclusive policy and of rebalancing of life chances in society.	· Total/uncompromising engagement and belief in inclusion. · Viewing the differences among learners and school staff as a potential. · Collaboration as the basis for teachers' team work and of the style of interaction between teachers and learners. · Staff's struggle for continuing the applied practices. · Viewing inclusion as a socio-political issue. · Engagement in the idea of inclusion at school and spreading it into the local environment.

Source: own elaboration based on Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Corbett, 1999.

- relations built on experiencing diversity, not rooted in the tradition of school segregating learners in regard to the level of their ability, their capability of implementing the general core curriculum or the decision concerning their need of special education.

This simple distinction brings about a large conceptual load, related to many other issues which constitute two currents of the culture of educational inclusion.

BORDERLAND AND THE PROCESS OF EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION

The idea of applying the concept of borderland in considering the educational situation of disabled learners educated in mainstream institutions (also integrated ones, the issue that remains on the margin of this study) is based on the assumption that the environment of inclusive school comprises:

- the contact space of two cultures (usually – of dominating full ability and dominated disability),
- the space between cultures, which is often divided by various borders (in the symbolic, cultural, as well as spatial dimension),
- cultural relations in various forms (most frequently, they co-create the foundations of the occurring socialization, educational and therapeutic processes),
- the borderland effect, which constitutes the foundations of the culture of inclusion.

In the geographical/spatial approach, borderland is often perceived as a territory distant from the centre and associated with peripheries. It is an area situated on the spatial outskirts of a politically, economically, socially and culturally organized system. Relative autonomy is a characteristic feature of borderlands, yet – it does not mean independence from the centre. The character of borderland is determined by the type of border (e.g., what seems important in the case of political borders is the degree of its openness, which regulates the flow of people and goods). The border fulfils the function of both joining and dividing particular territories (Machaj, 2000; Gołdyka, 2013). This feature of borderland is strictly related to the so called educational mainstream. As a rule, the mainstream indicates the characteristic centre of the physical space in classroom. Collateral currents, usually constructed as a result of individualization, seem to be written into peripheries – they are far apart from the central places in the room.

In the second approach, borderland is a sociocultural phenomenon and a space of symbolic culture (Machaj, 2000; Sadowski, 2004). However, the difficulties with separating them (during the conducted analyses, e.g., on the so called borderland effect) from economic and political factors are often emphasized these days (Gołdyka, 2013, p. 49). This in turn is associated with the invigorating trade exchange and developing entrepreneurship of borderland residents (Kurcz, 2011, pp. 276–277). This exchange is a metaphor of one of the traditionally approached basic dimensions of social and educational inclusion, often referred to as functional inclusion, which in the field of sociology is usually identified with integration (cf. Jacher, 1976).

Borderland is "a place of contact for various groups of people, characterized by different cultural traditions, diverse systems of values, different languages or dialects" (Kantor, 1989, p. 243). The essence of sociocultural borderland is the contact and mutual permeating of different cultures in the conditions of direct neighbourhood. It is the "between" area (in the territorial sense), which can be also referred to the states and acts of the awareness of individuals who "go to the borderlands of thought" (Nikitorowicz, 1995; Sadowski, 2007). The contact and mutual permeating of cultures reveals the communicative aspect of inclusion. It is worth mentioning that the limited number of communication links (also in school space) usually enhances isolation, stigmatization and prejudice (Jacher, 1976).

Borderland culture is built on mutual respect for values, norms and expectations, on the exchange of experiences and, as a result of this, on modifying the own attitudes and undertaking activities. Borderland is a heterogeneous space, where different areas co-exist in spite of different normative regulations, rules of the game, cultural codes, aesthetics, etc. (Jałowiecki & Karpalski, 2011, p. 21). This presents the essence of inclusion in the normative dimension, which comprises the coherence of the constructed and respected norms (Jacher, 1976), also in the space of such school that implements inclusive processes (Bełza, 2016).

BORDERLAND CULTURES VERSUS TWO CURRENTS OF THE CULTURE OF EDUCATIONAL INCLUSION

The earlier discussed basic features of borderland do not need to constitute a uniform model. Saying with slight simplification, two types of borderland can be distinguished.

The nature of the first is manifested in the simultaneous functioning of two languages in daily life and in specific customs of both groups. What seems its characteristic feature is maintaining negative national stereotypes and the impact of religious divisions on economic and political issues (Machaj, 2000, p. 126). This form of borderland does not generate the common, specific culture – it creates space only for competition of two different cultures, often developing in opposition to each other. Such borderland culture is based on stereotypes, prejudices, a low level of openness and tolerance to others, and – frequently – on mutual unwillingness of the members of different groups (cf. Janicka & Bojanowski, 2006, pp. 40–42).

The constitutive quality of the second form of sociocultural borderland is the diffusion of neighbouring cultures. As its result, the new, qualitatively dif-

ferent cultural entity of borderland is created – peculiar, clearly distinct quality (Babiński, 1994, p. 10). This is reflected in the specific identity of borderland residents, which combines both the attachment to the own distinctive features (ideological homeland) and the sharing of borderland values and interests (Machaj, 2000, p. 126). The unlikeness, uniqueness, and peculiarity generated in this way create the borderland effect. Depending on the analytical standpoint, this unlikeness may concern various personality and/or social phenomena, embedded in and determined by geographical, historical, cultural and economic factors. The space of borderland generates specific possibilities of fulfilling the needs and of implementing life strategies (Kurcz, 2008, p. 20).

The detailed analysis of two currents of educational inclusion pertaining to disabled learners reveals many common features with the above discussed description of the two types of borderland.

The foundation of the first current of inclusion is laid by specifying the features typical of educational inclusion, which differentiate it from other forms of education (e.g., Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Loreman, 2009; Szumski, 2010; Berlach & Chambers, 2011). Usually, these features are rooted in the references to special education. It can be said that this current is based on the evolution of the assumptions of special education and their reconstruction – tailoring them to the needs of inclusive education. What becomes its foundation is viewing educational inclusion as the continuation (development) of special and integrated education. As a result (despite such declarations from its authors), in many aspects it refers to the culture of integrated education with the recommendation to modify its organizational assumptions. Already at the starting point, this approach generates opposition of two cultures, typical of the first type of borderland. Thus, it hinders building the common platform, though does not negate collaboration. What seems typical of this form of borderland is the use of terminology which is frequent in the works on special education in certain opposition to the categories on which widely accessible education is based.

Such education is constituted by the categories of: disability, special educational needs, mainstream, the nearest environment (here: open access school), specialist support, individualization, adjustment, barriers, school for everyone, human rights, teachers' competences. This approach is more frequently manifested in some selected elements of the concepts of educational inclusion, constructed in Central Europe, also in Poland (cf., e.g., Zacharuk, 2008; Zamkowska, 2009; Kruk-Lasocka, 2012; Speck, 2013; Peng & Potměšil, 2015; Lechta, 2016).

Another characteristic feature of this current is bringing two cultures to one space – which takes place as well in the case of the first type of borderland – spe-

cial and open access education. A learner with special educational needs remains under the influence of the former, other learners – of the latter. Combining both fields of education requires certain structuring, therefore the notion of special educational needs (and disability, which is related to them in this sense) and the main current of work acquire a lot of significance. Thus, this current indicates a kind of centre and peripheries in the classroom space.

The assumptions of the discussed current of educational inclusion aim at fulfilling the main goal ensuring full inclusion in the educational and social mainstream of all learners, despite individual differences. This inclusion is treated as something more than physical presence in the mainstream classroom work and in the school community – it is active participation in the activities undertaken in classes, the exchange of services, collaboration in problem solving, in fulfilling group needs, and in the implementation of tasks, also those aimed at building the social capital of school (Mittler, 1995; Ainscow & Miles, 2008; Szumski, 2010; Hodkinson & Vickerman, 2016; cf. Gajdzica, in print). The criticism of this current is based on excessive focus on special educational needs, its significance in the organization of the educational process, and the need for support. Against many declarations of the representatives of the current, it generates conditions which enhance stigmatization (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). This is associated with the characterization of the borderland which creates conditions mostly for the coexistence of both cultures in one space (Janicka & Bojanowski, 2006, pp. 40–42). Paradoxically, offering substantial support (especially in classroom), emphasizing the main current of classes, highlighting differences, as well as establishing borders between the output of special and open access education generate barriers typical of the coexistence of cultures in the borderland environment based on competition and inner borders between cultures.

Therefore, it is not surprising that – in their preliminary assumptions – the representatives of the second current of inclusion mostly refer to identifying the barriers and exclusion or marginalization factors in educational processes (e.g., Slee, 2011; Mittler, 2012). The key categories constructing this concept are: diversity, justice, equal access, school for everyone, common core, culture of inclusive school (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). Thus, this means distancing from the reasoning rooted in the culture of inclusive school, built on two rival cultures – special and open access education. This assumption enhances the diffusion of cultures, which is a characteristic feature of the second type of borderland. What results from the construction of such a melting pot is an interesting, qualitatively new borderland culture – different from the included cultures, specific, but also evident (Babiński, 1994, p. 10).

What takes place in order to construct such an original culture of education is breaking away from the output of special education. As a result, a form of education comes into being, largely constituted on the criticism of special education (on its contradictions, selectiveness, weak points, neophytism of individualization, primitive revalidation, glorification of the medical model of disability, segregating practices, etc.). At the same time, this is the culture based on the negation of the mechanisms which generate barriers in open access education. Moreover, the origin of this culture is based on the criticism of the pluralistic (multisided) approach to the organization of the educational system (Thomas & Loxley, 2007; Slee, 2011; Hornby, 2015; cf. Gajdzica, in print).

These assumptions are compliant with the concept of borderland in which the glorification of one's own value (the ideological homeland) is not contradictory to sharing borderland values and interests (Machaj, 2000, p. 126). In other words, the constructed culture (of inclusion/borderland) is the superior value, for which its members are able to compromise – to diminish the importance of the values of home culture.

The headword in the discussed current of inclusion is building the culture of inclusive education from the basics. Thus, such school is neither the transformed open access school nor the modified special school. It is school without barriers which might be generated by the dominating culture (of full ability) and the dominated one (of disability). School dichotomy, described in the previous current, is not therefore a good solution in building the culture of inclusive education. This education cannot consist in trying to adjust a disabled learner to the system of mainstream education (Slee, 2004, pp. 77–78). It should be based on an in-depth reform of the system and on building the culture of inclusion from the basics (Slee, 2011, p. 164). The unlikeness, uniqueness, and peculiarity created in this way become the effect of new school – typical of the culture of the second type of borderland. It can be reminded here that, depending on the analytical perspective, this unlikeness may concern various phenomena or processes, generating in this way specific possibilities of fulfilling the needs and of implementing life strategies (Kurcz, 2008, p. 20).

INSTEAD OF THE ENDING

The presented discussion of two types of borderland reveals two ways of building the culture of inclusive school. Treating the space of inclusive school as a specific culture of borderland is justified not only in the aspect of the presented theoretical

assumptions, but it also has its source in practice. In the educational practice of the countries with bigger cultural and economic diversification, educational inclusion itself (in this study, viewed in the context of learners with disability) concerns many groups which are disfavoured due to: language, origin, race, religion, etc. These qualities make up a specific mosaic of needs, potentialities and expectations, which become a great challenge for educational methodologies. Slightly simplifying, their foundations are rooted in two separate cultures:

- the first one brings about the focus on special needs and the processes of learners' adjustment and inclusion into the educational mainstream, which constitutes the reference point for constructing the whole environment of learning. In practice, it is closer to education of disabled learners fulfilling their school duty in culturally not diversified (or slightly diversified) classes, which is still typical of most Polish schools. This environment can be called the two-dimensional borderland;

- the second depreciates the significance of the educational mainstream. It is based on the culture of multidimensional diversification. In this approach, support pertains to all learners, as all of them have specified educational needs. In practice, this culture is closer to the environment which is culturally diversified in many dimensions. This is typical of the space of multi-dimensional borderland.

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