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The Nature of Sociotherapeutic Influence at the St. Anna's Brotherhood in Staszów (Poland)

Sławomir CHROST¹

Abstract

Nowadays, the situation of some Polish families is very difficult. Poverty, unemployment, all sorts of addictions, violence, no future perspectives, lack of appropriate role models and help penetrate each other becoming the cause and effect of pathological behaviors. Children – usually innocent and helpless – consequently become the victims of social isolation. The institution supporting families in those situations is the St. Anna's Brotherhood in Staszów (Poland). The paper presents the main objectives of the fraternity, programs and daily work (a set of caring, upbringing and therapeutic actions; an example of sociotherapeutic classes held at St. Anna's Brotherhood).

Keywords: socialization of children, social integration, St. Anna's Brotherhood.

1. Preface

What would happen with Jaś, what would happen with Maciek and Kasia and Józek? - if it was not for the St. Anna's Brotherhood. The answer is simple! Jaś's sight would probably get worse to reach a point when any kind of action might not be effective. Raised only by his grandmother, Maciek, would certainly never be accepted in his class. And as it often happens in cases like these he would start going truant perhaps ending in becoming a child of the street having issues with law enforcement. Kasia, whose both parents abuse alcohol – probably would never learn to write or read and outside the Brotherhood she would never have a real home. And there is Józio, who did everything just to draw attention to himself, and thanks to the Brotherhood "got his mother back".²

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² Names of the children were changed due to their own personal wellbeing

2. The light and dark side of socialization

Socialization is “a process of adjusting an individual to a life in the society. It is that part of the influence of the surrounding, which introduces an individual to participate in a social life, teaches him or her to behave according to commonly accepted codes, and understanding of culture makes the individual able to act appropriately to his or her role in the society” (Sakowicz, 2006, p. 206).

Socialization is an essential element in the development process of a man. Everyone is subordinate to it. Even those who relent to its antagonistic and destructive side are also socialised in a sense. The approach one has to the social reality is dependent on the courses the process takes. “Disorders in the process of socialization, deviation forms of social behavior, lack of knowledge and the negation of social standards are always the cause of conflicts and difficulties in social coexisting” (Lipkowski, 1980, p. 20). Such disorders may be an effect of a family’s dysfunction. Adverse development factors attached to peers’ and school’s environment additionally deepen the maladjustment process of an individual.

3. Childrens’ situation

Nowadays, the situation of some Polish families is very difficult. Poverty, unemployment, all sorts of addictions, violence, no future perspectives, lack of appropriate role models and help penetrate each other becoming the cause and effect of pathological behaviors. Children – usually innocent and helpless – consequently become the victims of social isolation.

Deviation among children and adolescents develop:

- because of dismissing a child in the period of childhood and adolescence (the paradigm of dismissal)
- when a relationship between children and parents is based on a strong, mutual opposition or conflict (the paradigm of conflict)
- when parents’ attitude is “deviational” together with their behavior towards a child, providing negative role models (the paradigm of deviational behavior and attitude)
- because of the family’s dissolution (e.g. divorce, illness, death, etc.) (the paradigm of destruction) (Adamczyk, 2013, pp. 125-139; Balandynowicz, 2011, p. 35).

Most of the children, with whom the problem of proper socialisation appears, are the ones with low self-esteem. The feeling of shame, constant pessimism, worrying about the future, inability to deal with critical opinions,

inability to make a decision, no personal satisfaction, sadness, the loss of trust towards other people, blaming oneself – those are the feelings that prevail in them.

4. Pedagogical aspects of social integration

Pedagogy is sometimes classified as one of the humanities, and sometimes as a social study. In both cases the basic concept is the human being, who he is, who he should be. A human being is the principal and subject of pedagogy.

Jacques Maritain claimed that “in reality the substance of behavior does not rely on adjusting the future citizen to conditions and interactions of social life, but above all on shaping a man and by it preparing a citizen” (Maritain, 1993, p. 70). Firstly the individual, secondly the society – are the aims of pedagogy in short according to Maritain. If an individual is to function properly in the society, firstly has to achieve an adequate level of self-development. The human being, who is a principal and not a subject can create a community and build a society. The function of pedagogy and suitable socialization is to form conditions for one’s subjectivity, which in consequence contributes to the society’s development.

5. Institutions supporting the process of socialization

“Social Assistance is an institution of the social policy of the country, which aim is to enable individuals and families overcome the difficulties of their life status, which they are not able to deal with on their own using their powers, resources and capabilities”. The family with a child who is having difficulties in performing their tasks receive help especially in the form of providing the child with care and upbringing outside of the family. “For supporting the family’s custody functions the child can be placed under the care of the following special education centers of daily support:

- 1) custody, managed in the form of clubrooms, clubs, daycare facilities, which help children to overcome obstacles at school and to organize their free time;

- 2) professional, in which the psycho-corrective or psychoprophylactic program is realized, with the pedagogical, psychological and rehabilitation therapy” (The Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Assistance (Journal of Laws No. 64, Text 593 as amended) article 2. 1; article 70. 1; article 71. 1 and 2).

The institution supporting families in distress is the St. Anna's Brotherhood in Staszów.

6. The history of St. Anna's Brotherhood

St. Anna's Brotherhood is one of the few entirely Polish religious associations. The Brotherhood was founded in 1578 by the archbishop of Lwów, Jan Dymitr z Solek Solikowskiego and thanks to the efforts of Anna Jagiellonka. A year later it was promoted to Archconfraternity by the Pope Sykstus V. It was educating the illiterate. Priest Szymon Haganów, canon of Wolbórz, added to his "Polish prayer book" a history of duties and laws of the brotherhood. The fraternity was initially introduced in Cracow, Lwów and Warsaw. It was founded in the parish of St. Bartholomew in Staszów in 1580. The main objective was to spread education. Due to the founding of the Brotherhood, a side altar for St. Anna Samotrzcę was built in St. Bartholomew's church. In the year 1622 Jan Tęczyński – contemporary governor of Cracow founded Literacy Brotherhood at the St. Bartholomew's church, which joined with St. Anna's Brotherhood. Both fraternities took the name of St. Anna's Literacy Brotherhood spreading education and help for the illiterate. The Brotherhood existed until the end of XIX century.

The Brotherhood was reactivated in Staszów thanks to the consent of the Bishop of Sandomierz and Chief Education Officer of Świętokrzyskie. With the beginning of the second term of 2005/2006 school year, the Brotherhood conducts an educational activity among children in Staszów. The work is entirely based on a community service. The care is provided by adults – retired and active teachers as well as people of good will together with volunteers from the Staszów highschoools.

Extraculicual activities are held in the facilities of Social Integration Center in Staszów from Monday to Friday, from three to five o'clock p.m. From October 2007 St. Anna's Brotherhood has the status of an Association.

7. The aims of the Brotherhood

The slogan of the Brotherhood are the paraphrased words from the rule of St. Benedykt – "Ora et disce" – "Pray and learn".

The main objectives of the fraternity are: helping children become mature people following Jesus footsteps, shaping the socio-ethical attitude, gaining knowledge and abilities essential for proper functioning in the modern world, and most importantly of all compensating the chances for

education for children from the poorest families and providing support for those families.

The Brotherhood's programme contains educational purposes, a review of predicted achievements and also the methods and forms of work; it is directed at the comprehensive development of a child and meeting its needs. The goal is to help children become mature people in the imitation of Jesus and teaching them "the art of a mature life" according to evangelical values. A prayer in childrens' intention, for help during the learning process as well as providing the testimony of Christian life; studying conscientiousness, dutifulness, goodness and love through the contacts with mature people are the means to an end.

Detailed objectives:

1. Providing help and support for the family.
2. Disseminating and familiarising the knowledge, and shaping educational skills needed to fulfill the role of a mother and father in the family
3. Counteracting alcoholism and other social pathologies
4. Counteracting violence and wrongdoings in the family
5. An attempt to compensate educational chances from children from alcoholic families and those affected by other pathologies
6. Improving, correcting and assisting the development of a child, its abilities and interests
7. Shaping the abilities which enable to gain knowledge (speaking, listening, writing, singing, reading, counting, observing, reproducing)
8. Shaping the proper socio-ethical attitude and the ability of social interaction
9. Sensitizing for the beauty of the environment
10. Raising awareness of necessity to take care for one's health, hygiene and safety
11. Recognizing emotions and ways to deal with them
12. Diagnosing own and others' needs
13. Learning cooperation and keeping one's autonomy
14. Learning how to better fulfill different life roles
15. Developing one's passions and gifts
16. Learning how to react in a conflict situation
17. Learning how to constructively spend free time

8. The process of gaining social abilities by the children of St. Anna's Brotherhood

Rehabilitaion in a modern sense can be viewed as a set of caring, upbringing and therapeutic actions. Custody influences – are those that appease needs, compensate the development deficiencies, shape the feeling of safety, positive self-assessment, self-realization.

A.Custody. To develop properly children's needs should be appeased. Not only the biological needs (meal, warmth, clothing), but also psychological needs (safety, control, belonging, acceptance, love). St. Anna's Brotherhood provides chidlren with care after school and during summer camps. Children receive meals, health care, warmth and love, they grow in the atmosphere of acceptance and are included into the "positive family", like the Botherhood.

Children say:

"I really liked it on the camp in Bieszczady, because nice volunteers and adults who took care of us were there. Without Mrs. Anna there would not be any songs or playing the guitar. Without Mrs. Pedagogue there would not be any nice stories like "The girl from the picture" or "The gourmand fox", and without the Priest there would not be any prayers, Holy Masses, discos, sightseeing of Bieszczady and Ulijanki. I did not like dumplings with cottage cheese and potatoes. Misiek was a great attendant!!! I really like: Misiek, Basia, Maciek, Ewa, Asia, Monika, Marysia. I would like to be a volunteer worker to help others in studying" Adrian

"No one bothers me here, I was able to improve myself in many subjects, I also improved my behavior. I want it to last as long as its possible" Kuba

B.Upbringing. Educational influences lead to acknowledgement and rebuilding of the subjectivity of wards, internalisation of a desirable system of values, shaping self-control in situations filled with temptation and pressure of pathogenic factors. "Theory" of upbringing in St. Anna's Brotherhood is included in the ten commandments of a child and a volunteer worker.

Ten commandments of a child:

1. I love God and I pray often
2. I love and respect my neighbour
3. I solve every conflict without violence
4. I speak the truth and I am polite
5. I reliably perform my duties at school and at home
6. I can listen attentively and be discreet
7. I am responsible and reliable

8. I call my friends by their names
9. I respect myself and care for my health
10. I keep my promises

Upbringing in St. Anna's Brotherhood in Staszów is combined with passing down of Christian values. Special moments are those of prayer and reflection before the meals, sermons during the Holy Masses and the meetings of formations at the trips. Most important, however, is the personal "testimony" – the life lead by the volunteers and adults accordingly to the Decalogue of the Brotherhood.

C.Therapy. A therapeutic influence is healing, compensating the states of illness, art therapy, occupational therapy, relaxing activities, therapy and sport.

In St. Anna's Brotherhood works a specialist in pedagogical therapy. Moreover, children are directed with the consent of parents to specialised out-patient clinics for further examination. Classes such as sport and recreation, music therapy and social therapy are also organized.

9. "I am someone" – the process of creating subjectivity

Prevention is protecting the human being from dangers, eliminating or confining pathological behaviors and promoting the ones desired. Thinking of the process of achieving subjectivity by children – a program was created – project of a "successful" life titled "I am someone" (Chrost & Łagosz, 2011).

It contains the bloc of issues:

- I am someone, because I care about health
- I am someone, because I can be obedient
- I am someone, because I can deal with failure and stress
- I am someone, because I can control my emotions and behaviors
- I am someone, because I can help and live in peace with others
- I am someone, because I can forgive myself and others
- I am someone, because I can choose what is valuable
- I am someone, because I can be assertive
- I am someone, because I can be tolerant
- I am someone, because I can fulfill my duties reliably

Every subject is developed through a therapeutic story, various exercises and games. Their goal is to strengthen self-assessment, give courage, teach empathy, assertiveness, abilities to solve problems, deal with stress, proper planning of free time. Classes conducted with these scenarios teach

responsibility, dutifulness, discipline, control of one's emotions, prosocial behaviours.

10. What is social therapy?

Social therapy is a conscious professional activity relying on operating various means (inter alia of the psychological character) for granting help to people who are suffering or in search of their own way of social and personal development. It is included as one of the correction processes of healing nature. It is addressed also to children and adolescents with behavioral or emotional disorders as well as any kind of troublesome behaviors. Social therapy is based on structural group meetings, which serve the realization of therapeutic, educational and development aims. The sources of changes are correctional experiences and emotional relief. Social therapy classes have the nature of group meetings composed of games and exercises chosen adequately. Every meeting has a detailed purpose, which is subordinate to the main goal and proposals of activity enabling to achieve established aims (Sawicka, 1998).

11. An example of sociotherapeutic classes held at St. Anna's Brotherhood

The basic purpose of sociotherapeutic classes is not only to prevent negative changes, but to free a child from depression, low self-esteem and loss of faith in its own abilities, enhancing better understanding of oneself and one's emotions, as well as sensitizing to the needs and experiences of other people (Bernard, Mackenzi, 2000, p. 15).

Subject: I am someone, because I can help others and live with them in peace

Exercises referring to the abilities to help others

a) On sheets of paper every child answers the questions:

- Who do you help most often?
- Why do you help others?
- Do you like to help?
- Is it worth to help others?

b) Children draw their hand on the sheets and write on every finger in what way they can help their friends from class.

c) Discussion

Children try to remember the first time they ever helped someone and present it to the group.

- Who was it?
- In what circumstances has the help occurred?
- How did you feel after helping that person?
- What was the person's reaction to your help?

A story

In a rainbow forest full of happy animals, flying butterflies and chirping birds, just next to the quietly humming creek, in a little hole under the old oak tree there lived a family of hares. Mother hare devoted herself to her family every day, fulfilling the duties of a good wife and mother. She cared for their tummies to be full, spreading feelings of warmth, love and cordiality all around, even her in free moments which did not occur very often she helped other animals, always with a smile on her face. The father hare as the head of the family worked hard amassing inventory for the winter, providing the family with existence. The marriage had also two children. Little daughter Balbinka and a balky and amazingly hopping boy Mleczyk. Mleczyk did not like duties and always managed to get out of them spending time on playing games in the forest. He did not like to help his father, even though his dad really needed it, especially when he cut down trees for wood and made little blocks from them so as to have something to throw into the furnace. It was a very hard task and although the father asked strongly for help, Mleczyk ran to the forest chasing butterflies. Thus the months went by, warm spring, hot summer, and when the autumn came and the time of hard work in gathering the inventory began, little forest animals helped their fathers in all those tedious, every year duties. Only Mleczyk, building castles in the air, was not interested in helping his tired and overworked father.

When winter came the little hare, warming himself in the house, played tricks on his baby sister Balbinka, impeding the mother hare in her kitchen chores. He was glad he did not have to do anything and that everything came easily to him. Late winter, when father hare was returning from the forest with a carriage full of branches, a hungry wolf suddenly attacked. Despite the quick help of his animal friends, father hare could not be saved. The family of hares, plunged into grief. Balinka and Mleczyk missed their father and it was hard for them come to terms with his absence. However, the life went forward, spring came, buds began to bloom and the forest turned green again, every day was becoming warmer and warmer, more colorful and cheerful, the sun delicately skimmed animals' faces. The

forest was alive again. The winter did not change Mleczyk at all, he was still hopping around carelessly through meadows, not realizing that he now became the head of the family. With the coming of autumn the inhabitants of the forest began their tedious duties of gathering stocks for winter. But it did not discourage Mleczyk from playing. Despite mother hare's requests, Mleczyk refused to help claiming that the wood gathered by his father for the previous winter is sufficient for the coming one. Thus passed the next weeks of cold winter and light-heartedness of Mleczyk. It did not last long, though. There came a day, in which Mleczyk threw the last piece of wood into the fire. He then sat sadly near the furnace watching the flames expire and crying. Mleczyk realized that because of his carelessness and absent-mindedness, he exposed his family to hunger and cold. Not knowing what to do, ashamed he knocked to the nearest hut, where his best friend hedgehog called Igielka lived. Learning the troubles of Mleczyk, Igielka advised him to go around the neighbouring huts and ask for some wood to survive till the end of winter. The idea was good – thus Igielka helped his friend. The moment the weather got warmer, the hare did not think about playing, any more and every morning went to the woods to gather stocks for winter. He did not yield to his friends' persuasions to play with them all day, but worked hard to help his mother and animals who did not turn away from him, despite his previous carelessness. All the arduous work did not discourage Mleczyk, as he knew that his efforts would be rewarded in winter – his mother, sister and friends would be proud of him. This thought filled him with strength and motivated him for work. When another winter came, Mleczyk was content that he provided his family with decent existence and that thanks to him they have food and no one would be cold any more.

This experience taught him responsibility for himself and others and raised his awareness that the ability to help others is more important than light-heartedness and games.

Now he knows there is a time for work and time for pleasure. Thus, let us not be scared to help or to ask for it.

Relaxing classes

A play entitled "Back massage"

Imagine that there are lots of little eyes on your backs, with which you can read what someone else writes or draws on them. Sit on the floor one after another so as one can draw on the other's back. The backs are the "blackboard" and the hand is the "chalk".

You will use the tip of your forefinger to draw. Draw in such a manner that the backs can read. “The blackboards” try to read what the “chalks” draw on them.

“Chalk” draws a big number one, four long lines, its own name, six lines from right to left, a big circle, lots of (small points, a triangle, a flower, a face), and now the “chalk” blows a trace of warm air into the hair of the partner...now the “chalk” puts both hands on the shoulders of the partner and says “goodbye”.

Afterwards there is a swap of places, the “chalk” becomes the “blackboard” and the “blackboard” becomes the “chalk”.

Exercise – “Support system”

In every man’s life (despite the age) happy and sad situations take place alternately. When they befall on us we want to share our feelings and emotions that accompany us.

We begin the exercise with difficult situations. The leading person asks children a question: “What situation in your life do you consider as truly hard?”

The answers are written on the board.

The examples of difficult situations:

1. a conflict between siblings
2. troubles in communicating with the class
3. you got a bad grade
4. your afraid of a test
5. someone mocks you
6. you were disappointed by a friend, etc.

The leading person deals the work charts and asks every child to choose four difficult situations for him and write them down in the chart, then fill the second column – if there are any troubles with it, proceed to the third column. It is an individual work, but if there are volunteers it can be discussed with the whole group.

WORK CHART:

Difficult situation	A person, who you can tell about it (a name or a nickname)	A person who you want to tell about
1.		

2.		
3.		
4.		
5. You made a mistake – “you have done something wrong”		

Caution! The last column is very important – it should also be filled. It is said that there are no people who make mistakes. It is essential to be able to admit to it and decide to change. We all learn from our mistakes.

The second part of the exercise applies to pleasant and cheerful situations, which can be called successes.

The exercise is conducted in groups of four people. Next, turn the charts to the other side, write down your name or nickname, then everyone writes three positive facts about themselves (merits, strong sides, positive aspects of the character, well mastered abilities).

Afterwards every child gives its chart to the other members of the group. Their task is to write down the good thing they find in the owner of the chart.

If it occurs that there will be children who will have troubles with finding their positive sides, the leading person can use a previously prepared list of general statements, like: I can never be bored, I am sensitive, I can help others, I have a sense of humour, I can ride a bicycle like a champion, I am a good friend, I like animals etc.

In the closing part of the exercise, it would be adequate to answer few questions e.g.:

1. What was it like – to write nice things about yourself?
2. What was it like – to read nice things about yourself?
3. What was pleasant?
4. What was unpleasant?

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