



# Special pedagogy of individuals with intellectual disabilities and contemporary psychiatry – paths of development, interdependencies and contradictions

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**Abstract:** *Introduction:* Intellectual disability is an object of interest in both psychiatry and special pedagogy. Both these sciences have evolved from a stigmatizing approach, through a segregating one, towards full social inclusion. However, the path of paradigmatic reconstruction of either science was separate, and therefore it is interesting to compare them. *Aim:* The aim of the study is to compare the approach of special educators and psychiatrists from academic centers in Poland to the phenomenon of intellectual disability. *Methodology:* The comparison was carried out using a narrative method through a review of the key publications on the understanding of the phenomenon of intellectual disability by Polish special educators and psychiatrists. *Results:* In 1989, Poland underwent a political change and a departure from communism. Pedagogy also moved away from dialectical materialism towards a postmodern understanding of the phenomenon of disability. This change has led the formulation of the so-called humanistic paradigm of special education composed of four micro-paradigms. In pedagogy, the emphasis has been shifted from quantitative to qualitative research and the biomedical aspects of disability have been negated. Unfortunately, the research works in the field of pedagogy of people with intellectual disabilities of a qualitative and conceptual nature conducted in Poland have not entered the global circulation of scientific information and are known only in our country. Polish psychiatry has undergone an evolutionary change from biological psychiatry towards social environmental psychiatry. Poland has been included in a pilot program of running mental health centers providing care to the population with mental disorders, including people with intellectual disabilities. Since the times of real socialism, Polish psychiatrists have been publishing papers in English in international journals with an Impact Factor. This change was less radical than in special pedagogy and consisted in broadening the perspective rather than moving away from empirical research. *Conclusion:* Polish special education of individuals with intellectual disabilities and Polish psychiatry have undergone a significant paradigmatic reconstruction during the last few decades. Both sciences have adopted an inclusive model of understanding intellectual disability. The different paths of development of either science are reflected in publications and scientific research, as well as in certain terminological differences.

**Keywords:** intellectual disability, paradigms, psychiatry, special education

## Introduction

Traditional Polish intellectual thought took little account of Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialism. As a culturally Catholic country, Poland has always remained closer to various currents of Christian philosophy than to Marxist-Leninist dialectical materialism. The imposition of the communist system in Poland by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) was an attempt to instill dialectical materialism, atheism and collectivism in the Bolshevik sense, which was alien to Polish historiography. An interest-

ing issue of intercultural education is the research on the implementation of the idea of dialectical Marxism in Polish society, as well as on the departure from that materialism in the direction of ideological and methodological pluralism (Chrzanowska, 2015; Dykcik, 2001; Melosik, 2007). It is particularly interesting to see the departure of various disciplines of the social sciences from Marxist ideology and to compare these changes with analogous processes taking place at the same time in the field of other

sciences, e.g. medicine. This comparison can only be precise if it is based on a fairly specifically formulated problem, e.g. the approach to people with intellectual disabilities. It is difficult to compare sciences where the area of interest is different, e.g. musicology with special education (Chrzanowska, 2015; Dykcik, 2001).

In 1989, a political change took place in Poland. Along with it, the approach to people with mental disorders and intellectual disabilities has changed significantly (Pietras et al., 2019). The consequence of these changes was a departure from dialectical Marxism as a binding and only correct doctrine with Bolshevik roots towards ideological and paradigmatic pluralism. This also applied to two scientific subdisciplines dealing with subjects with intellectual disabilities – special pedagogy and psychiatry. A comparison of the changes that have taken place in the understanding of these sciences in relation to the phenomenon of intellectual disability is, on the one hand, an interesting issue in the history of science in Poland, and on the other, a reflection of the different paths of development of these two scientific subdisciplines and two different approaches (Dykcik, 2001; Pużyński, 2015). The common subject and object of interest of psychiatry and special pedagogy of individuals with intellectual disabilities should result in the development of a uniform interdisciplinary and even transdisciplinary approach and common standards of conduct towards the subject and object of research, also taking into account the usually overlooked Christian personalism (Głodkowska, 2015; Granat, 1985; Michalski, Zakrzewska, 2010; Salamucha, Magier, 2013). Meanwhile, these subdisciplines – both psychiatry and special pedagogy – developed in a different paradigmatic environment and in different academic centers. Psychiatry was developed primarily at medical universities and the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology, whereas special education was developed at the pedagogical faculties of universities, at the Institute of Educational Research and, above all, at the Academy of Special Education (Chrzanowska, 2015; Dykcik, 2001; Pużyński, 2015). Psychiatry has always developed with the use of the clinical base of psychiatric wards and clinics close to the patient, while special pedagogy

studied in academic centers is quite loosely related to the social practice of teaching and upbringing people with intellectual disabilities. It is true that researchers dealing with special education of people with intellectual disabilities have always declared their practical credentials and emphasized their own experience as teachers and educators. However, unlike medical universities, neither schools nor care and education centers, which were an integral part of the university, were ever created at the faculties of education. Psychiatric clinics have always worked on the basis of treatment of patients in wards and departments that are an integral part of these clinics constituting medical university facilities (Pużyński, 2015). In the aspect of individuals with intellectual disabilities, psychiatry was mainly focused on the treatment of behavioral disorders in these people, while educators were primarily concerned with teaching and upbringing, i.e. broadly understood education and revalidation (Chrzanowska, 2015; Pużyński, 2015). Thus, the representatives of both scientific subdisciplines rarely worked together in one team dealing with people with intellectual disabilities. The positions developed by representatives of both scientific subdisciplines differ significantly both in terms of conceptual system and methodological basis. It is true that scientific terminology is becoming nowadays more homogeneous than it used to be, and it is universal in character in accordance with the paradigm of the unity of science and the process of globalization of scientific achievements. Nevertheless, some phenomena are still defined and described using different concepts in different sciences, or these concepts differ in their semantic scope and boundaries. Currently, an interesting process of departure of special pedagogy from biomedical aspects towards social constructionism is observed (Chrzanowska, 2015), and in psychiatry, in turn, from a typical biomedical approach towards community psychiatry embedded in the achievements of social sciences (Pużyński, 2015). These two tendencies should result in the convergence of special education of people with intellectual disabilities with psychiatry in a systemic and environmental perspective. The aim of the paper is to discuss the similarities and differences between psychiatrists and special

educators in the conceptualization of intellectual disability in the context of paradigmatic changes that took place in Poland with the change of the socio-political system after 1989.

## 1. Paradigmatic evolution of Polish special pedagogy and psychology in understanding the phenomenon of intellectual disability

During the years of real communism, scientific research on the pedagogical aspects of teaching and upbringing of people with intellectual disabilities was conducted within the paradigm of dialectical materialism with the use of quantitative methods typical of modernist reasoning (Wyszyńska, 1987). The obtained results of quantitative research were a set of rather disorganized findings of a contributory nature. Soviet special pedagogy was called defectological pedagogy, and the science of damage to the human body and the effects of this damage was called defectology (*ibidem*). According to such understanding, disability was a “defect” that needed to be treated or repaired. This does not mean that among the researchers of that time there were no figures who made a significant contribution to the development of the subdiscipline of special education. There are widely known works of Maria Grzegorzewska – the creator of Polish special pedagogy and of Bohdan Suchodolski have permanently entered the history of pedagogy (Niemierko, 2021). The works of Bolesław Niemierko, who implemented psychometric methods to construct a quantitative measurement to check whether the controversial experiment of Heliodor Muszyński in Poznań, aimed at shaping a collectively and Marxist-minded citizen denying individualism and Christian personalism established in the Polish centuries-old tradition (Kowolik, 2007). It should also be strongly emphasized that in Poland, as the only country remaining under Soviet domination, Christian and personalistic pedagogy developed in such academic centers as the Catholic University of Lublin or the Academy of Catholic Theology in Warsaw (Michalski, Zakrzewska, 2010; Salamucha,

Magier, 2013). This pedagogy was the result of the development of Christian philosophy practiced at these universities in Poland by such famous figures as Idzi Radziszewski, Fr. Jacek Woroniecki, Sr. Zofia Zdybicka, Cardinal Karol Wojtyła, Fr. Mieczysław Krąpiec, Fr. Józef Tischner and many others (after: Janaczek, 1999). Unfortunately, Christian pedagogy, despite the significant opinion-forming position of the Catholic Church in Poland and the declared affiliation of the majority of Polish society to this Church or other Christian churches, did not play a major role in shaping contemporary pedagogical thought at Polish secular universities, which is why education in values was forgotten, promoting almost exclusively education for freedom (Michalski, Zakrzewska, 2010; Salamucha, Magier, 2013). The departure from Marxism-Leninism induced a paradigmatic emptiness in Polish special education, which opened the science in question to the modern and generally post-Marxist current of postmodern pedagogy popular at that time in the United States and in secularizing Western Europe (Śliwerski, 2003). Among the pioneers of the postmodern approach in pedagogy in Poland and the “opening” of Polish pedagogy to paradigmatic diversity were Tomasz Szkudlarek (1993), Zbyszko Melosik (2007), Bogusław Śliwerski (Szkudlarek, Śliwerski, 2009). Szkudlarek brought from the USA a “fresh breeze” of postmodern pedagogy, different from the outdated and discredited pedagogy of real socialism and completely incompatible with the Polish tradition of the pedagogy of values. Special pedagogy also adopted postmodern thinking as the basis around which knowledge in the field of “modern” understanding of the phenomenon of disability began to be built anew (Krause, 2017, 2019). As has been mentioned many times, in Poland, in parallel with special pedagogy understood in the spirit of postmodernism, personalistic special pedagogy has been developing since the communist era at the Catholic University of Lublin and at the Academy of Catholic Theology – now the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, referring to the pedagogy of Kazimierz Twardowski (Michalski, Zakrzewska, 2010; Salamucha, Magier, 2013; Traczykowski, 2016). A glorious realization of personalistic pedagogy in Poland is

the development of a typhlopedagogical center in Laski near Warsaw – the Róża Czacka School and Educational Center for Blind Children (Czacka, Stabińska, 1990). Unfortunately, university centers dealing with special education in Poland have not taken advantage of the opportunity to implement these original Polish achievements into the general pedagogical discourse in the university environment. A one-sided, postmodern approach to the phenomenon of disability in Polish special education was introduced in parallel at individual universities where there were scientific centers dealing with disability, including intellectual disability. Postmodern thinking is alien to the Polish tradition just as the philosophy of dialectical materialism in the Soviet distortion. The postmodern paradigmatic shift of Polish special education in university centers was verbalized and systematized by Amadeusz Krause, which allowed Polish postmodern special education to build its “identity” quite far from the social practice of the profession of a special educator. A coherent terminological grid for the understanding of disability based on the conceptual system of postmodernism has been developed (Krause, 2017, 2019). Amadeusz Krause (2010) formulated the so-called humanistic paradigm of special education consisting of four micro-paradigms. These are:

- the social micro-paradigm of disability – which captures the phenomenon of disability as a social construct,
- the micro-paradigm of normalization postulating the normalization of the social environment of a person with disabilities as a goal of special education, opposing the forced normalization of people with disabilities to the able-bodied majority,
- the emancipatory micro-paradigm indicating the need for the emancipation of people with disabilities and a shift from excessive focus on medical and therapeutic procedures in favor of participation in social life,
- the qualitative, i.e. interpretative microparadigm, postulating the departure of special education from quantitative research in favor of qualitative research and in favor of reflection on contexts,

discourses, narratives and paradigms, as well as the relativization of all scientific concepts in the field of pedagogy (Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013; Krause, 2017; Krause, 2019).

From the psychiatrist’s point of view, the departure of special education from medical contexts may raise concerns, especially since significant people in Polish pedagogy, such as Zbyszko Melosik or Amadeusz Krause, sharply criticize undertaking research in the field of special education in any medical context (Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013; Krause, 2017; Krause, 2019; Melosik, 2017; Melosik, Szkudlarek, 2009). These professors often refer to anti-psychiatrists and postmodern thinkers, such as Fritjow Capra (1987), Eric Parens (2013), or Petr Skrabanek (1990, 1994). The latter Irish researcher of Czech origin criticizes the obsessive fixation of modern man on “super health”, the maximum prolongation of life at all costs, the compulsion of all members of society to achieve the ideals of good health. Skrabanek negated the legitimacy of the combat against nicotine addiction, obesity, excessive alcohol and drug consumption, or obsessive health promotion. This controversial researcher and thinker found totalitarian tendencies in the health promotion policy. He noticed excessive interference of the state with the freedom of individuals to choose their preferred lifestyle and care for their own health (Skrabanek, 1990, 1994). Also in Poland, Krause and Melosik, as well as their numerous supporters and imitators (e.g. Ćwirynkało), use a similar narrative of pathological medicalization and pharmacologization of the society. They distance themselves from the modernist, evidence-based Cartesian medical model, proposing and glorifying the postmodern discourse of flickering meanings, lack of the central point, relativism of the norms, and transculturalism (Melosik, 2017; Melosik, Szkudlarek, 2009; Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013; Krause, 2010). Such an understanding of special pedagogy was a significant change at Polish universities dealing with education in the broadest sense at the beginning of the 21st century. Every breakthrough, every scientific revolution becomes sterile over time, if it is not accompanied by critical thinking and verification based on the social practice of the pro-

fession of special education teacher and the results of research. Unfortunately, the postmodern model of understanding the phenomenon of disability has been consolidated thanks to systematic support for like-minded people and a lack of empirical research performed on large groups.

The negation of the biomedical aspects of any type of disability, and intellectual disability in particular, leads to absurdities and aporetic contradictions. An effort has been made not to notice that at the source of every type of disability there is a medical problem and it is always the “center” of that disability. Pedagogy is “special” precisely because it deals with medical problems and their social consequences, such as stigmatization, exclusion, discrimination and many others. The postulated separation of pedagogy from medical problems also negates the need for the existence of special education itself (Krause, 2010; Melosik, 2017; Melosik, Szkudlarek, 2009; Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013). Thus, a paradox arises – the phenomenon defining a particular science is negated by that science at the same time. It should be remembered that the concept of disability originated at the intersection of medical and social sciences, and is understood as a cause-and-effect sequence from biological damage to its social and cultural consequences for the individual suffering from such biological damage (Kołątaj et al., 2023; Linden, 2017). Meanwhile, contemporary special educators, postulating the “de-medicalization” and “de-biologization” of the phenomenon of disability, including intellectual disability, turn only to the social aspects of the existence of this phenomenon (Krause, 2010; Melosik, 2017; Melosik, Szkudlarek, 2009; Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013). These authors emphasize that any type of disability, including intellectual disability, is not a biological aspect, but primarily a social and sociological one. Unfortunately, as practicing educators working with people affected by some type of disability know, the axial problems of these people are always medical problems. An attempt to deny this fact in any way is, unfortunately, a one-sided approach or even a scientific distortion. After all, no one denies the social aspects of the disability construct, but their “forced” separation from the biological aspect is, in our opinion, a dangerous half-truth that blurs what is important and peripheral issues.

In his monograph entitled *Paradigms of Special Education*, Amadeusz Krause (2010) deftly summarized what was happening at the beginning of the 21st century in Polish special pedagogy. It should be remembered that he is neither the creator of the postmodern trend in Polish special pedagogy, nor is he the only author of conceptual publications devoted to disability understood in this way. It should be emphasized here that the work of many researchers with a rich literary output and various orientations of research have contributed to the development of the humanistic paradigm of special pedagogy. In terms of intellectual disability, these were publications by such authors as Beata Cytowska (2012), Iwona Chrzanowska (2015), Katarzyna Ćwirynkało (Ćwirynkało, Kossakowski, Żywanowska, 2013; Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013), Władysław Dykcik (2001), Zenon Gajdzica (2007), Remigiusz Kijak (2013), Czesław Kossakowski (Kossakowski, Krause, Żyta, 2007), Barbara Marcinkowska (2016), Jan Pańczyk (1989), Janina Wyczesany (2009), Agnieszka Żyta (Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013; Kossakowski, Krause, Żyta, 2007), Teresa Żółkowska (2004), Hanna Żuraw (Żuraw, Ploch, 2019) and many others, not mentioned here. Amadeusz Krause skillfully summarized and exposed postmodern tendencies in Polish special pedagogy, formulating the discussed humanistic paradigm of special pedagogy based on analogous summaries concerning special education of the German-speaking area (Parys, Olszewski, 2013; Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013; Krause, 2017). Therefore, he was not their conceptual creator, although he was the only one who formulated and described them in a well-known monograph published by the Impuls Publishing House (Krause, 2010).

The question should be asked how this paradigmatic shift in the context of intellectual disability should be assessed fifteen years after the publication of Amadeusz Krause’s monograph (2010). This change has undoubtedly contributed to the social emancipation of people with intellectual disabilities and their exit from the “ghetto”, from a separate and hermetic reserve of public space aimed at isolation of this group of people from the mainstream of social participation. It has prepared individuals with disabilities for “freedom” but not for education in the context of

values and for values (Frankl, 2023). Postmodern destruction and multi-version narratives will not replace education in values and will not give meaning to the life of a person with a disability. At this point, it is necessary to consider whether this emancipation is only the merit of academic special pedagogy? Probably not only – also the fact of Polish accession to the European Union and grassroots initiatives of the community of people with intellectual disabilities themselves have contributed to the normalization of the social environment of this group. Perhaps Polish academic special pedagogy captured and codified these processes in the form of theoretical dissertations at the right time, but it was not their driving force and the main cause of change (Magier, 2021). An important part in emancipation was also the influence of social teaching of the Catholic Church, the development of modern medicine, including community psychiatry, as well as political activities (Pietras et al., 2025). The problem is open and difficult to resolve, because paradigmatic changes in the thinking of theorists and social initiatives of the third sector have interacted and occurred in parallel, often in a chaotic and unpredictable way. Therefore, the process of crystallization of the humanistic paradigm of special education was more circular than linear in character, more concerned the academic community than the practice of social work with a person with disabilities (ibidem). However, this thesis requires deeper analyses and a certain time distance in order to formulate a well-documented factual assessment and a balanced judgment (ibidem).

The focus of the community of special educators almost exclusively on qualitative research has become a limitation of contemporary special pedagogy in Poland over time. The almost complete lack of quantitative research has marginalized the importance of publications in the field of Polish special pedagogy in the global trend of research on disability, including intellectual disability (Pietras et al., 2025). Polish academic centers dealing with special pedagogy are not visible in the world's leading journals with a high *Impact Factor* (in the field of educational sciences). The publications of Polish researchers are known

only locally, in the community of Polish university teachers. The achievements of Polish special educators are not present in the global circulation of scientific information. There are few Polish authors publishing their works in international journals. This fact strongly marginalizes Polish special pedagogy, including special education for people with intellectual disabilities, giving it a local and peripheral character, far from the mainstream of global research in the field of education (ibidem). There are certainly also a few exceptions. Among special educators dealing with intellectual disabilities, there are only single authors who publish in English-language journals with the *Impact Factor* index: Beata Cytowska – one publication (Cytowska, Zierkiewicz, 2020), Joanna Smogorzewska and Grzegorz Szumski – 11 publications (Smogorzewska et al., 2022; Smogorzewska et al., 2024), Małgorzata Sekułowicz (Sobieski et al., 2022) – 5 papers, including one concerning people with intellectual disabilities<sup>1</sup>. There is also a small number of works concerning special education devoted to issues other than special pedagogy of intellectual disability. The papers by Jacek Pyżalski and Piotr Plichta – 16 works devoted to cyberbullying – are also noteworthy. Publications written by educators and published in journals with an impact factor usually contain reliable quantitative analyses, or validation of psychometric tools, which is criticized by the Polish special educators community in accordance with the doctrine of the interpretive microparadigm (Żyta, Ćwirynkało, 2013). They do not contain quasi-philosophical analyses of paradigms, discourses, contexts, meanings and narratives. Therefore, these works are not from the mainstream of considerations of contemporary special pedagogy in academic centers in Poland. However, there are relatively few such papers compared to the number of works published by psychiatrists. For example, Janusz Rybakowski published (from 2000 to 2025) over 350 papers in journals with an impact factor. The disproportion in the number of works between the pedagogues and psychiatrists is noteworthy and worth considering. It should also be remembered that Janusz Rybakowski, as well as other psychiatrists

<sup>1</sup> The analysis was based on the Pubmed database.

publishing in international scientific journals, also publish, like Polish special educators, in Polish-language periodicals and monographs not included in the Philadelphia list.

It is also puzzling why Polish special educators do not publish joint papers in the field of research on intellectual disability with Polish psychologists and psychiatrists. Both Polish psychiatry and psychology are focused on empirical and psychometric research (Citlak, 2023). Such a position does not fit into the interpretive paradigm of special pedagogy. Special pedagogy focused on qualitative research stands in opposition to psychometric research and the measurement of such constructs as intelligence or adaptability. Quantitative measurement of the intelligence quotient (IQ) and adaptability is a prerequisite for definition and diagnosis of intellectual disability and determination of the degree of its severity, as well as the resources and limitations of the subject. Psychometric methods of measuring intelligence are treated by special educators as a manifestation of population “segregation” and discrimination, which has been emphasized repeatedly by Amadeusz Krause (2010). Meanwhile, psychometric measurement of intelligence is a basic research tool both in clinical psychology and in psychological and pedagogical counselling centers adjudicating on special educational needs for schools and educational centers (Strelau, 2014). In Poland, many different psychometric tools have been adopted to work in psychological and pedagogical counselling centers, including the Wechsler test for adults and children (ibidem). It should be noted that Polish research on temperament is an important achievement of world psychology (ibidem). It does not depend on the measurement process itself, but on the non-substantive intentions of the researchers whether psychometric measurement serves to segregate and discriminate, or to determine the subject’s resources. A metaphor about the use of nuclear energy comes to mind here. Used well, it can serve for environmentally friendly electricity production and isotopic diagnostics of cancer, but in the wrong hands it can contribute to the outbreak of nuclear war and genocide. Likewise, psychometric measurements can also be used for socially unacceptable purposes, such as segregation,

discrimination or stigmatization. This does not mean that psychometrics should not be developed for pro-social purposes, just because these tests can be used to discriminate against a certain group of people. Psychology and pedagogy are to serve the human being, which psychological and pedagogical counselling centers have successfully implemented in Poland (Pietras et al., 2025). They employ practicing psychologists and special educators – at a considerable distance from academic centers dealing with special education, including special pedagogy for people with intellectual disabilities. Meanwhile, in academic education, analyses of discourses, meanings, contexts and paradigms are developed at the expense of practical and methodological knowledge. It is true, as rightly noted by Amadeusz Krause, that textbooks in the field of knowledge and practical skills emphasize the subjectivity and autonomy of people with intellectual disabilities to too little extent, they are of a technical nature, not obligatory (Krause, 2013). The author rightly remarks that students learn in lectures what modern humanistic pedagogy is, taking into account the subjectivity and emancipation of people with intellectual disabilities, while in practical training they get acquainted with working methods that take into account this emancipation and subjectivity to a small extent (ibidem). However, it should be remembered that methodological reflection, otherwise important and necessary, will not replace practical learning of methods of work with a person with intellectual disabilities and will not solve difficult problems that educators encounter in their professional work. They sometimes have to face such difficult problems occurring in their charges as aggression, agitation, epileptic seizures or fecal or urinary incontinence. Learning paradigms, contexts and discourses is no substitute for practical guidance on what to do in a specific situation of working with a person with an intellectual disability. This can be considered as a shallowness and trivialization of theoretical pedagogy, but it is precisely such problems that special educators who work with people with significant and profound intellectual disabilities sometimes encounter in their everyday work. Therefore, it is an important task to construct a study program in the field of special education preparing for the profes-

sion in such a way as to teach the pedagogue special respect for the autonomy of people with intellectual disabilities at every stage of practical work, taking into account their subjectivity and avoiding forced normalization in the spirit of the neoliberal cult of effectiveness and efficiency. Such a corporate attitude towards efficiency and effectiveness is criticized both by postmodern Polish special education and by the currents of personalistic pedagogy (Krause, 2017).

Polish academic psychology of people with intellectual disabilities developed from the Soviet so-called “defectological psychology”, which was then a subdiscipline of general psychology (Vašek, 2003; Wszyńska, 1987). The term “defect”, common in the psychology of post-Soviet countries, raised reservations among Polish psychologists from the beginning, because it is objectifying and stigmatizing when used to refer to a person. Currently, the term “revalidation psychology” is used, avoiding the stigmatizing word “defect” (Kowalik, 2018). Polish contemporary psychology has remained faithful to the tradition of psychological experiments and psychometric research (Strelau, 2014). It is not as radical in the emancipatory context as contemporary Polish special pedagogy. The development of Polish psychology took place rather evolutionarily, without a major paradigmatic revolution. Currently, psychology adopts a biopsychosocial model of understanding the phenomenon of disability, taking into account equally the biological, psychological and social aspects (Sęk, 2001). Polish psychology can boast of a perfectly prepared standardization of the Dawid Wechsler’s intelligence measurement test, in the versions both for adults and children, and the standardization of many psychometric tools necessary in the diagnosis of a child with disabilities, including intellectual disability (Strelau, 2014).

## **2. Paradigmatic evolution of Polish psychiatry in the understanding of the phenomenon of intellectual disability**

Let us consider the evolution that Polish psychiatry has undergone from the times of communism to the present. Unlike social sciences, Polish psychiatry in Soviet times was still present in English-language journals and functioned in the global circulation of scientific information (Pużyński, 2015; Rybakowski, 2004). It also resisted Sovietization and its use for political purposes, as was the case in the USSR and in some Eastern Bloc countries. Although the Institute of Psychiatry and Neurology established in Poland was created on the Soviet model, this institution contributed to the development of modern psychiatry with a pro-Western attitude. Already in the 1970s, psychotherapy and humanistic psychiatry, not based on the dialectical materialism in force at that time, developed within the walls of the Institute (Jankowski, 1994). After the political change, more and more Polish psychiatrists published in journals from the JCR list, and the achievements of such scholars as Janusz Rybakowski and Stanisław Pużyński are known and recognized in the world (Kornaj, 2023; Rybakowski, 2004). Two key Polish journals devoted to psychiatry: *Psychiatria Polska* [Polish Psychiatry] edited by Dominika Dudek and *Postępy Psychiatrii i Neurologii* [Advances in Psychiatry and Neurology] edited by Łukasz Mokros currently have an *Impact Factor*, which cannot be said about periodicals in the field of special pedagogy published in Poland. This means that the achievements of Polish psychiatry function in the global circulation of scientific information (Kornaj, 2023; Rybakowski, 2004).

The achievements of Polish special pedagogy, unlike psychiatry, are almost exclusively known locally in Poland and to a small extent in neighboring countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine (Dycht, 2006; Pietras et al., 2025). Polish psychiatry, like special pedagogy, has evolved from biomedical research to social research and environmental psychiatry (Rybakowski, 2004). Unlike pedagogy, the area of interest of psychiatry has been expanded to include social and humanistic aspects

without neglecting biomedical research (Pietras et al., 2025). This process was evolutionary, not revolutionary, as in the case of special pedagogy. Polish psychiatry also changed its attitude towards people with intellectual disabilities in an evolutionary way (Bilikiewicz, 1960; Pietras et al., 2025; Sipowicz et al., 2015). This is evidenced by the terminology used in psychiatry and its evolution. A psychiatry textbook published in 1960, edited by the distinguished researcher and physician Tadeusz Bilikiewicz, used such terms as imbecility, stupidity, idiocy, cretinism and foolishness to describe people with intellectual disabilities (Bilikiewicz, 1960; Pietras et al., 2025; Sipowicz et al., 2015). The terms mentioned have become vulgarisms in modern times, due to their stigmatizing character and the change in the scope of the semantic emotional sign from indifferent to extremely negative. The use of these terms for people with intellectual disabilities is now considered to be offensive to human dignity and vulgar. The image of a person with an intellectual disability in the textbook edited by Bilikiewicz was very negative, the authors warned against the “unpredictability”, “ingratitude”, “aggressiveness” and “sexual debauchery” of people with a low IQ (Bilikiewicz, 1960; Pietras et al., 2025; Sipowicz et al., 2015). They were considered to be “mean”, “debauched”, and “ungrateful” to their caregivers. It was not until the 1970s that the much more neutral term “mental retardation” began to be used, and the understanding of the essence of intellectual disability became more supportive of this group. The term “mental retardation” is also included in the international ICD-10 classification. It is still a term in force in Poland. The term “mental retardation” was initially emotionally neutral as compared to words such as stupidity, idiocy, imbecility, foolishness, and cretinism. Over time, this term also became slightly stigmatizing and unacceptable to the community of people with intellectual disabilities. In the second decade of the 21st century, the term “intellectual disability” began to be used in psychiatry. That was largely due to a monograph on intellectual disability published by the Continuo publishing house, edited by Kinga Bobińska, Tadeusz Pietras and Piotr Gałecki (Bobińska et al., 2012). In this monograph, the chapters devoted to the pedagogy of people with

intellectual disabilities were far from an extremely postmodern understanding of intellectual disability, and also took into account other perspectives of understanding this phenomenon. This was criticized by the pedagogical community (Krause, 2017). Despite the criticism, this monograph is the only comprehensive study of issues related to intellectual disability present on the Polish publishing market in the years 2012-2025 (Bobińska et al., 2012). It should probably be expected that the community of special educators will one day be tempted to write a new monograph in the spirit of glorified postmodern inclusion, with an invitation to Polish psychologists and psychiatrists to cooperate. However, criticism will not replace creative work, and on the Polish publishing market there are currently no significant comprehensive monographs on intellectual disability reflecting “modern” thinking of the educators. Thus, students do not have textbooks for learning special pedagogy for people with intellectual disabilities, with the exception of the textbook by Bobińska, Pietras and Gałecki, criticized by Amadeusz Krause. In the ICD-11 classification, the term “intellectual disability” is to be replaced by the term “intellectual development disorder”, which is considered to be much less stigmatizing than the term intellectual disability. The importance of research on intellectual disability for psychiatry is evidenced by the fact that the Polish Psychiatric Association established the Scientific Section of Mental Disorders in Patients with Intellectual Disabilities.

Polish community psychiatry has developed as a Hegelian synthesis of traditional biological psychiatry with selected postulates of antipsychiatry (Depukat, 2020). The assumption of community psychiatry is the therapy of the patient in his social environment, with as little participation as possible of a total institution in Goffman’s understanding, which is a psychiatric hospital. Isolation in a psychiatric hospital triggers the so-called syndrome of erroneous adaptation to a total institution in the patient (Depukat, 2020; Thornicroft, Tansella, 2010). Treatment of the patient and revalidation of the patient’s social skills in the conditions of hospital isolation is either impossible or not very effective, as it bears little resemblance to the environment in which

the patient will live. According to the assumptions of community psychiatry, the patient should recover in his or her social environment, which facilitates the return from the disease to normal functioning in own environment (Sipowicz, Pietras, 2017). In addition, many non-psychotic mental disorders have begun to be treated not as a disorder, but as a manifestation of the so-called neuroatypicality, understood as a different organization of the structure of the psyche of minorities from the organization of the psyche of the majority (ibidem). The construct of the neuroatypical minority is opposed to the normotypical majority (ibidem). Neuroatypical people include people with intellectual disabilities, general developmental disorders, people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Neuroatypicality is understood as the result of the neural network of the central nervous system that is different from most organizations and associated with it different cognitive, emotional and behavioral functioning. Neuroatypicality includes also such phenomena as left-handedness, sensory hypersensitivity, and special abilities. By including intellectual disability in the set of phenomena considered to be a manifestation of neuroatypicality, the stigma of mental disorder and the stigma of segregation and discrimination in this group of people are partially removed (ibidem).

It is difficult to identify unambiguously the founders of community psychiatry in Poland, which, like the postmodern and personalistic understanding of special pedagogy, contributed to the normalization of the environment of people with mental disorders, including people with intellectual disabilities. Environmental psychiatry has developed in two ways – both on the initiative of people with mental disorders and their families, and by the well-thought-out action of modern-thinking psychiatrists. Foundations, associations and informal groups dealing with people with mental disorders began to develop in Poland already at the end of the communist era. These were often grassroots initiatives, stemming from the social activity of citizens. Among the many names of people who have contributed to the development of community psychiatry, the following should certainly be mentioned: Jacek Wciórka, Andrzej Cechnicki, Joanna Meder, Maria Zahuska, Marek Balicki, Anna Depukat,

Beata Galińska-Skok, Joanna Krzyżanowska-Zbucka, Edwarda Patura, Agnieszka Niedźwiedzka, Bożenna Piotrowicz (Cechniki, Wciórka, 2025). We are aware of the fact that there are many more people of merit for community psychiatry and it is impossible to list all of them in the paper. Among the non-governmental organizations meritorious for the development of community psychiatry, we should mention the Society of Friends of the Disabled in Łódź, the Polish Association for People with Intellectual Disabilities, the eFkropka Foundation, the Association for the Development of Psychiatry and Community Care and many others. In contemporary Polish community psychiatry, a conceptual system describing the specific phenomena has developed, quite similar to the conceptual system developed in special pedagogy (Prot-Klinger, 2013). The partially independent development of both scientific subdisciplines – special pedagogy and community psychiatry – is evidenced by certain differences in terminology. For example: the term multiple disability, commonly used in publications in the field of pedagogy is replaced by the term co-morbidity in psychiatric literature.

Special educators rarely participate in conferences organized by psychiatrists. Similarly, at scientific conferences in the field of special pedagogy, there are usually no representatives of the psychiatric community. The exceptions here are psychiatrists such as Tadeusz Pietras, Krzysztof Krysta, Aleksandra Lewandowska, who often participate in conferences organized by educators. This indicates a lack of exchange of ideas between the two discussed communities, despite the fact that cooperation, mutual openness and interdisciplinarity are widely declared.

## **Conclusions**

A comparison of the path from stigmatization and exclusion to the integration and inclusion of Polish special pedagogy and Polish psychiatry allows to draw the following conclusions:

1. Polish special education of subjects with intellectual disabilities has adopted a postmodern model of conceptualization of basic scientific problems

summarized by Amadeusz Krause in the form of a humanistic paradigm of special pedagogy. In this model, qualitative research is preferred, hence the lack of representation of Polish special pedagogy of people with intellectual disabilities in the world literature. The paradigmatic shift that took place at the beginning of the 21st century in special education was creative and revolutionary, but at the moment it has become a factor limiting the development of this subdiscipline of pedagogy due to the lack of openness to other perspectives, such as contemporary community psychiatry or the personalistic trend aimed at educating in the value of the human person.

2. Polish psychiatry, like special pedagogy, has also undergone a paradigmatic shift from typically biological psychiatry to humanistic, environmental and social psychiatry. Unlike special education in Poland, psychiatry has not given up either the priority of quantitative over qualitative research, or its reference to the biological aspects of the genesis of mental disorders. The results of empirical research conducted by Polish psychiatrists are noticeable in the international literature, in contrast to the achievements of Polish special pedagogy, known almost exclusively locally at Polish universities.

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