Children's Problem Behaviors During Free Time as an Incentive for the Increase in Social Risks and Health Risks

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Abstract

Since children, as a rule, have more free time than adults, it is adults' responsibility to provide children with a chance to spend the time of relaxation, play, and fun in a beneficial way. Unfortunately, children's spare time is nowadays very frequently organized for the sake of brushing up children's knowledge, skills, and competences, which is accomplished by means of escalating extra-curriculum activities. When expressed by teacher and parents, these ambition-related attitudes pave the way for the disappearance of children's personal interests and motivations to perform complicated tasks which are perceived as unwanted or obscure by the affected children themselves. This form of adults' behavior may lead to the feelings of frustration, stress, demotivation, or rebellion on behalf of their children. The said emotional states, especially in relation to the lack of spontaneous play, give rise to serious psychic dysfunctions, and the instability of children's psychic balance. It may also pave the way for various forms of destructive behavior that mostly characterize children of younger school age who are about to start schooling.

Keywords

Problem behaviors, stimulants of behavioral disorders, destructive behaviors, health risks and social risks, free time

A child's world resembles a changing configuration of events in which painful moments frequently take place. Such hurting occurrences may pave the way for diversified disorders is the child's psycho-physical development. Hence, in order to prepare children to live in the contemporary world, one has to understand, classify, and cope with the existing educational problems. (Modrzejewska 2008: 131)

Time spent on educational development and a child's spare time—namely, a child's individual activities—are closely intertwined in the totality of temporal budget that characterizes school age children. In principle, spare time is at a given child's disposal, which means that he or she should be in a position to manage it freely and invest it in entertainment, leisure, or pursuing one's interests. A juvenile may take the

benefit of a vast offer of extra-class activities, for instance, he/she may take part in pupils' associations or special interest groups. Concurrently, tourism, recreation, or broadly understood leisure is not limited to the timespan of a school year and may refer to weekends, and, more importantly, to school vacations.

The pupil's budget of free time is shaped according to the amount of time spent on obligatory activities and it is channeled into optional tasks

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selected at a child's or their parents' will. A specific feature of children's free time is the fact that it is subject to adults' supervision and intervention that is performed by parents, teachers, educators, caretakers, and institutions which organize children's activities. This is especially true of schools (extra-class activities), cultural and entertainment institutions (youth clubs, sports associations, theatres, cinemas, and community centers), tour operators and other institutions responsible for organizing summer or winter break excursions for children and adolescents. Needless to say, intervention into children's temporal budget should be rational and skillful in a way that it should take a child's interests, aspirations, and ambitions into account in order to foster an ability to select valuable forms of spending spare time. The supervised activities are—in the case of children and teenagers—associated with a planned educational effort which renders possible the establishment of benevolent circumstances under which children's and educators' purposeful activities may flourish (Pindera 2007: 25). Since contemporary children tend to behave in various, not always anticipated ways, in the context of planned, purposeful activities, one may refer to the necessity of incorporating of elements of supervision and observation with respect to possible positive and negative behaviors.

Educators often face arrogance, unwillingness to comply or the outward contempt with reference to commands targeted at pupils. The youth are able to afford making comments or discussion with the teacher (...). Children are also willing to comment on the teacher's outfit, teaching style, or the choice of class activities (...). Children often listen to their beloved parents' comments, vulgarisms concerning teachers. As a consequence, they learn how to perceive their school and teachers in a negative way (Bulanda 2014: 186-187).

A debate concerning children's problem behaviors and their role in the actualization of various dangers is a necessity. A discussion like this should be concerned

with the possibility of exerting influence upon undesirable determinants of behaviors or behavioral patterns typical of the spare time, especially when it is related to planned educational activities taking place during organized trips.

PROBLEM BEHAVIORS AND THEIR CAUSES

The notion of "educational difficulties" is associated with multi-faceted attempts to delineate relevant definitions and typologies. Irena Obuchowska is willing to exchange the notion of educational difficulties with the term "a pupil's problem behaviors". The operation is justified by the sheer necessity to define a given child's specific problem behavior and provide a tangible solution to it. Obuchowska (2012) postulated a classification of educational difficulties that comprises categories related to children themselves (their psychic and somatic functions), their functioning at school, educational accomplishments, interpersonal relationships, as well as the lesson itself and any disturbances occurring in its duration (Obuchowska 2012: 375-376). A similar categorization has been proposed by Helena Izdebska who distinguished the following types of difficulties exerting influence upon children's problem behaviors:

- (1) Difficulties related to educational negligence and the negative impact of one's family background;
- (2) Difficulties associated with school failures;
- (3) Difficulties resulting from educational mistakes committed mostly in a child's family;
- (4) Difficulties resulting from family-related pathologies;
- (5) Difficulties perceived as an outcome of a child's developmental aberrations;
- (6) Difficulties resulting from one's growth;
- (7) Difficulties resulting from disparities in terms of the parents' own ambitions and aspirations and their children's personal aspirations or interests (Izdebska 1993: 88-89).

The understanding of educationally undesired phenomena is necessitated by getting to know the mechanisms that have given rise to them. This, at the same time, may be considered as a comfortable starting point with reference to therapeutic, preventive, and re-socialization activities. Mieczysław Łobocki claims that a problem child may be characterized in both psychological and social dimensions. When the psychological dimension is taken into consideration, problem children:

- (1) Are deeply frustrated and, as a result, cannot act according to his/her self-interest;
- (2) Their behavior pave the way for problems that cannot be dealt with single-handedly;
- (3) Their reactions are complicated, unpredictable, and not proportional with respect to stimuli that have triggered it;
- (4) Face various failures, are unable to enjoy success, which deprives them of an important motivating factor;
- (5) Are unhappy due to the inability to achieve success (this is the main sign of educational difficulties).

When the societal dimension is taken into account, a problem child:

- (1) Seldom faces approval and is disliked by his or her peers;
- (2) Is distrustful, suspicious and is not understood by others;
- (3) Is alienated in peer groups, faces problems with interactions and making friendships;
- (4) Cannot fulfill needs in a standard, natural way and, hence, does it in an unorthodox, very often unpleasant, way (Łobocki 2004: 182-183).

When educational difficulties are being defined, it is important, due to purely cognitive reasons, to understand the reasons paving the way for them. The reasons are usually subdivided into three basic categories:

Socio-economic factors, such as inadequate living and housing standards, family breakdowns and other

processes disturbing its functioning, parents' low human and cultural capital, and, first and foremost, parents' inability to assume adequate attitude toward their children which is manifested by the lack of understanding and satisfying of the child's needs or the lack of vesting interest in the child.

Educational factors which are related to the didactical process and are very often caused by the teacher's inadequate pedagogical qualifications, mistakes hindering the teaching process, and inadequate attitude toward children.

Bio-psycho factors related to developmental, health-related, and personality-related dysfunctions and disorders (Spionek 1975: 71-72).

A group of pedagogues in five distinct provinces of Poland were asked to take notice of problem behaviors during the period of one year in their own environments of action in order to make observations concerning the most frequent types of unnerving behaviors in the age group of 6-13. The research was concluded by constructing a specific enumeration of behaviors that were calling for relevant coping strategies according to the educators. The said list comprised the following items:

- (1) Dysfunctional nutritional habits, such as not having the habit of eating first and second breakfast, obesity, and overweight;
- (2) The lack of physical activity, addiction to computer;
- (3) The lack of propriety: misbehaving during meals and misbehaving in interpersonal relationships (disrespect toward others, avoiding salutations, verbal aggression);
- (4) Emotional disorders ("the internal scream") emotionally-based disturbances affecting a child's family life, aggression, nihilism, anxiety, inability to cope with one's emotions or existential problems;
- (5) Being engaged in various experiments: cutting one's body, smothering, pornography, smoking cigarettes, alcohol, other stimulants.

Furthermore, the group of pedagogues indicated

the following difficulties:

- (1) The disturbance (or their complete lack) of the child's relations with parents;
- (2) Disrespect and disregard of the teacher by the pupils and their parents;
- (3) Permanent lack of self-preparation for classroom activities;
- (4) The lack of any motivation with respect to school activities.

When the aforementioned conclusions are summarized, it is easy to notice, as Danuta Bulanda observed, that one cannot turn the blind eye on the enumerated forms of behavior. On the contrary, one is in a position to make other people aware of their potential disastrous consequences (Bulanda 2014: 180-187). Likewise, educational observation provides a necessary impetus for observing children during organized summer trips.

CONSEQUENCES OF CHILDREN'S PROBLEM BEHAVIORS

Problem behaviors (educational difficulties) may pave the way for risky behaviors that may, for instance, threaten one's health condition. Barbara Woynarowska defines health-related behavior in terms of any assumed or discarded activity that directly or indirectly influences an individual's health and the general state of being. Hence, one may indicate positive pro-health behaviors, such as favorable nutrition, physical activity, personal hygiene, psychic hygiene as related to the ability to maintain balanced relationships with others, ability to cope with stress, and environmental hygiene. Proper sexual practices and pro-safety behaviors may be also seen as categories falling within the scope of the said types of behavior. A contrary form of behavior is associated with the category of negative, health threatening behaviors, such as alcohol, drug and stimulant abuse, smoking, and the lack of pro-health behaviors (Woynarowska 1995: 10). Irena Izdebska refers to

such types of actions in terms of self-destructive behaviors which comprise smoking cigarettes, drug abuse, alcohol consumption, and suicide. Problem sexual behaviors are also described as improper because they are motivated by irrelevant recognition of one's needs or its manifestation in inappropriate situations (Obuchowska 2012: 398, 404). A similar viewpoint is represented by Mieczysław Wyględowski who defines children and adolescents health threatening behaviors in terms of unnerving phenomena which boil down to emulating foreign behavioral patterns. The relevant problems comprise dressing habits, smoking, drug and alcohol abuse, bad nutrition habits, dysfunctional forms of spending spare time (Wyględowski 1996: 22). An aspect of dysfunctional forms of spending spare time is nowadays inevitably related to the aversion with respect to forms of physical activities and, more importantly, the willingness to spend time indoors in front of a computer display or TV set.

BEHAVIORS IN FREE TIME

Children have much more spare time at their disposal than adults because learning is far less time consuming than working. Spare time and various ways of utilizing it are acquiring increasing importance because people have more free time at their disposal. Przeclawski perceives free time in terms of a time span in which an individual is granted a bigger freedom to choose (i.e., a wider selection of activities to choose from). Its main characteristics comprise arbitrariness of choice, non-profit character, feeling of joy (Walaszek 2010: 276).

Free time, when seen from a commonsensical point of view, is invested in entertainment or leisure. Hence, it may be seen as an instrumental value, not an autotelic one. Relaxation renders getting free of weariness, tiredness possible, it protects us against the monotony and routine of life due to the advantage of good play, experiencing emotions, thrills, and

escaping reality. Since relaxation (i.e., a system of activities taking place within the span of free time) is a very significant element of the child's development, in the course of diversified activities in their free time, children should be able to shape their interests, accumulate knowledge, find fulfillment in creativity, experience freedom, and prudent independence. The value of free time can hardly be overemphasized, and the contemporary organization of spare time has introduced a new form of dividing it into weekends and school vacations. Unfortunately, a natural need of psychical activity is nowadays very often replaced by passive relaxation whose outcome is low stamina, low physical capacity and the incapacity to give vent to the emotional burden of working hours (Walaszek-Latacz and Kisiel 2012: 62-63). Postmodern societies enjoy admission to bigger amounts of free time, but this tendency does not go hand-in-hand with its effective use. The results of this process are already visible, for instance, in changes affecting one's preferred lifestyle.

Spare time is a subjective category that is reflected in a human's (a child's) consciousness. Hence, the assumption of an agential perspective on the process of making qualifications with regard to children behaviors gives rise to a necessity to point significant strategies of utilizing the resource of free time—as opposed to the management of obligatory time—by a given child. The Latin word *otium* means time that is freed from duties and utilitarian activities, whereas the Greek term *skhole*, similarly to its Latin equivalent, referred to freedom from political duties; that is, the only civic responsibility ascribed to citizens of the antiquity. Since both notions are nowadays deployed in order to refer to freedom from work and existential obligations, the words also automatically indicate time that is unconstrained by cares and worries. When the youth's awareness is taken into consideration, the said nations unveil an important aspect of educational considerations; namely, they verify a critical assumption suggesting the prime importance of being born into favorable social conditions. Likewise,

individuals deprived of that privilege face marginalization, or even exclusion, which starts in the sphere of free time because this is precisely an aspect of human life in which social inequalities are most visible. Substandard cultural capital, the deficit of pro-developmental patterns, limited financial resources all can be perceived in terms of factors generating dysfunctional qualities of free time and, what is more observable, negative behaviors in its duration. Time in general and spare time in particular could be, as Jan Szczepański puts it, used for both good and evil ends, and when a child is not sufficiently safeguarded against human malevolence the advantage of having free time may deceive humans (i.e., children) who are inclined toward benevolent behaviors, for instance with respect to pro-social attitudes (Czerpaniak-Walczak 2009: 227). The deceptions of developmental isonomy can be precisely found within the plethora of functions associated with free time. A child's intellectual or emotional immaturity gives rise to the outbreak of destructive or self-destructive behaviors. Paraphrasing L. Witkowski's words one may say that a child who is “set free and does not have to do anything special” but, at the same time, is granted opportunity to participate in socio-cultural life freely, makes his/her own choices (very often of countercultural character) and is willing to acquire easily accessible behavioral patterns (Czerpaniak-Walczak 2009: 235). At this point, a necessity to assume corrective educational actions is visible. Such an intervention is possible, especially when a child is no longer in his/her everyday environment of action, as it is the case of taking part in summer trips.

PEDAGOGY STUDENTS' OPINIONS CONCERNING CHILDREN'S PROBLEM BEHAVIORS DURING FREE TIME AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON INCREASE IN SOCIAL RISKS AND HEALTH RISKS

A questionnaire-based survey study was conducted in

March 2015 among the sample of students from the University of Bielsko-Biala. The sample consisted of students whose major of studies were early education pedagogy and pre-school pedagogy (IV semester). Although, the research questionnaire consisted of 20 questions, this paper is concerned with five most suitable ones. The sample amounted to 41 female students.

The first problem area concerns the responsibility of adults and public institutions for the quality of free time that is spent by younger school age children. The table below presents the breakdown of obtained results (see Table 1).

The results indicate that the majority students believe that it is parents' responsibility to observe the quality of free time spent by younger children. At the same time, educational institutions (e.g., schools) and various community centers were chosen less frequently, so that these agencies occupied the second and third position in the provided breakdown.

The second problem in the research questionnaire concerns the most beneficial ways of time management with reference to needs expressed by younger school age children. The respondents' answers are represented as the following figure (see Figure 1).

The respondents were most willing to indicate that organizing time according to a child's interest. Likewise, spontaneous play and activities prearranged by specialized tourist and cultural agencies were indicated very frequently among the possible forms of time management with reference to needs expressed by children of younger school age.

The deployed research questionnaire contains a question concerning possible objectives that are associated with spending free time by younger children. The table below presents the relevant answers (see Table 2).

The table clearly shows that the group of priority objectives, as far as spending of free time is concerned, consists of spontaneous play and pursuing one's hobbies or interests (38 indications in each case).

Concurrently, opinions that were slightly less frequently indicated are taking part in sport activities and relaxation.

The research was also concerned with the negative consequences of misspending free time by younger children. The respondents were asked to indicate their answers on a scale ranging from least risky behaviors to most dangerous ones (see Table 3).

The respondents, as the table indicates, tend to believe that misspending of free time results, first and foremost, in disorders affecting one's physical health, stress, or the attitude of rebellion.

Last but not least, the study was concerned with the most intense health and social risks that may be perceived from a distinct perspective of children's problem behaviors taking place in the context of misspending a younger school age child's spare time. The table below presents the breakdown of relevant answers (see Table 4).

The respondents tend to believe that problem behaviors of children of younger school age result in aggression, obesity, decreased agility, and disorders affecting one's posture (most frequently chosen answers).

CONCLUSIONS

Educational pre-orientation is, in the main, concerned with prediction and diagnosis of dangers that may happen if a child is engaged in behaviors that may lead to negative outcomes. As W. Kojs warns us: "Dangerous situations renders visible the sequence of cognitive operations that may be represented as certain categories of questions and answers. In this respect, dangerous situations are educationally important events". When strategies of social development are taken into account, one should be concerned not only with providing solutions to problem situations, but also with the very sense of being at risk and educational efforts undertaken in this respect (Mazur 2013: 230).

Table 1. The Respondents' Opinions on Agents Responsible for the Quality of Free Time That Is Spent by Younger School Age Children

No.	Responsibility for the quality of free time is vested on	Number of indications
1	Parents	41
2	Teacher (Educators)	16
3	Educational institutions (e.g., schools)	23
4	Community centers	17
5	Mass media	4
6	Other—peers	4

Figure 1. The Most Beneficial Ways of Time Management With Reference to Needs Expressed by Younger School Age Children.

Table 2. The Respondents Opinions on the Objectives Associated With Spending Free Time by Younger Children

No.	Objectives associated with spending free time	Number of indications
1	Relaxation	28
2	Rest	21
3	Play	38
4	Extra training	19
5	Pursuing one's hobbies, interests	38
6	Sport activities	30
7	Additional education	13

Table 3. The Negative Consequences of Misspending Free Time by Younger Children

No.	Negative consequences as indicated by respondents	Number of indications
1	Stress	28
2	Frustration	17
3	Anxiety	17
4	Unwillingness	27
5	Rebellion	27
6	Passivity	19
7	Disorders affecting physical health	30
8	No negative consequences	0

Table 4. Health and Social Risks Associated With Children's Problem Behaviors Taking Place in Free Time

No.	The list of relevant dangers	Number of indications
1	Aggression	23
2	Passivity	4
3	Unwillingness	7
4	Anxiety	8
5	Disobedience	5
6	Alienation	5
7	Self-destruction	6
8	Obesity	23
9	Disorders of one's posture	16
10	Disorders of one's eyesight	10
11	Decreased agility	16

One has to mention specific strategies of filling spare time; that is, aid and self-help actions also with reference to children. This refers, for instance, to volunteering, or non-commercial support projects. Such initiatives are being systematically disseminated in society, and the purposeful channeling of educational actions in this direction may be considered as an incentive for the development of positive attitudes among younger school age children (Czerpaniak-Walczak 2009: 234).

"Young generation's health is a priority of contemporary societies. When the period of a child's psycho-physical development is taken into account, taking notice of relevant stimulation, external factors, as well as a possible correction of improper determinants should be a subject to broadly understood studies conducted in Poland" (Modrzejewska 2007: 143). Needleless to say, the sheer ability to take up such studies during free time, when a child is away on organized trips is valuable in itself.

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