

# MYTHS, ID EST FALSE KNOWLEDGE ON ABLE PUPILS AND ITS EDUCATIONAL CONSEQUENCES<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*The issue of giftedness occupies a prominent place in psychology and is developed in the context of various theoretical strands, among which the differential, developmental, and cognitive studies are dominant. An application of major statements, in turn, is the domain of educational psychology and related disciplines, especially pedagogy. A discussion about giftedness is also conducted by teachers and parents, solving various educational and didactic problems in their daily lives. The key assumption of this article is a statement that a common understanding of giftedness is full of myths and beliefs constructed as inconsistent with the current state of knowledge. Some of them are indicated in this essay, drawing attention to the adverse effects of their presence in the mind and behaviour of adults.*

**Key words:** ability, able pupils, popular and academic knowledge, regulative function of knowledge.

## Introduction

The issue of abilities has for many years held a prominent position in theoretical analyses and empirical research. Scientific research undertaken from the moment that the science of psychology emerged as a separate discipline, were particularly intensely conducted within the psychology of individual differences. This is a large and important branch of psychology that highlights the existence among people of a relatively constant diversity. Scientists stress not only the existence of diversities, but also the fact that it is sustained in time, encompassing above all two spheres: intelligence and temperament (Strelau, 1997; 2002). The intense development of cognitive psychology that has been taking place since the 1950s has led to changes in the field of concepts and paradigm of research, understood as an ideal model conduct (Sternberg, 2001). This current is very diverse, and the element combining given approaches remains the conviction about the human being as a subject actively seeking, receiving, processing and using information (Chlewiński, 1999; Maruszewski, 2001; Nećka, Orzechowski, Szymura, 2006). The supporters of the cognitive approaches are not interested in abilities but in the functioning of the mind, treated as device enabling the reception and transformation of data. They base on the assumption that the higher mental processes can be characterised as cognitive processes that are in essence processes that involve information processing. In research procedures they aim above all to come to know the specificity of processing, expressing an individual's intelligence as a process (Nećka, 1994; 2000; 2003). In experimental inventive empirical studies the dynamics and effectiveness of so-called elementary cognitive processes involved in the reception, processing and implementation of data is diagnosed. What constitutes the essence of the cognitive process in comparison with

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so-called traditional psychology? Within the latter, the basic psychic processes of perception, memory, thinking, imagination were treated as separate and qualitatively varying phenomena. In the meantime, in cognitive psychology, they are researched together and approached as different phases of information processing.

The crux of processing remains operating representations in such a way that will enable the received content to be interpreted in light of the knowledge held to date and used to create new representations (Maruszewski, 1996). In studies on the functioning of the cognitive sphere we have to deal with a plethora of approaches in today's times (Detterman, 1994). The basic research, however, is being conducted above all within cognitive psychology, psychology of differences and developmental psychology (Strelau, 2006). The application of the statements obtained constitutes the domain of behavioural psychology and amongst related sciences, in pedagogy, including general and detailed didactics. Parents and teachers alike that have to solve arising everyday problems are also taking care to consider its implementation. It should be noted that many of them refer to incidental experiences, social tradition and intuition. It is difficult not to notice that the common convictions about able pupils often consist of myths, namely, false statements, opinions that are incongruent with the current state of knowledge. Extrapolating this thesis, we will mention of few of them, indicating the disadvantageous effects of their presence in the institutional learning process.

### **Myths Understood as False Knowledge**

The idea of the presence of myths in the sphere of education has been formulated by the author many years ago, when it was approached in the perspective of much broader analyses (Ledzińska, 1999). The word myth (mythos) derived from the Greek language is an ambiguous term, meaning: word, saying, motto, counsel, order, legend, proverb (Kopaliński, 1985). Within the sphere of the European culture, the myth is usually understood as a story about legendary heroes and their supernatural adventures through which the nature of a human being and their destiny is attempted to be explained (Cotterell, 1993). Being grounded in the Mediterranean culture we above all come to know the myths of ancient Greece and Rome, constituting one of the fundamental links of cultural heritage (Graves, 1992). Conveyed by parents, and more commonly transmitted during the course of school education, they constitute an important element of overall education. The word myth functions also outside of school and is present in contemporary language, signifying a false conviction, a statement accepted without any evidence, a fabrication, and a false representation of reality. Utterances like: "what a myth", constitutes an equivalent of falsehood that pretends to be acknowledged as truth. In the liberal arts, the myth is understood as a message acknowledged being certain by different communities, despite the newest findings in science failing to confirm them.

Apart from myths connected with given civilisation spheres and historical periods, there are also "universal myths", namely, timeless myths (Sauvy, 1966). They are common to many civilisations and their constant presence constitutes a sign of the eternal and continuously reborn desires of Eden present in humans. Many contemporary ways of thinking and acting can be understood by coming to know these myths which includes, above all, the myth of the golden age, of the good old times, of the eternal return, of abundance, of fortune, or of the Promised Land (Sauvy, op. cit.). Some of the mentioned myths are interconnected; these relations are most evident between the myth of the golden age, the Promised Land and of abundance. The last of these is acknowledged as the most clear and distinctive; in primitive communities it was strongly marked by supernatural threads. It informs that the abundance of existence was lost from the fault of humans or as a result of divine anger. Nevertheless, abundance exists in mythical lands and it can be regained. It is therefore possible to overcome natural human limitations and once again achieve abundance. The multiplication of various goods has many faces, one of them being the incessant striving to perfection and the glorification of traits and behaviour that guarantee abundance. It can be assumed that the (mythical) image of able pupils present in the minds of many contemporary

A particularly interesting problem remains the role that the myth fulfils in everyday life. This is at the same time a question of the motives for accepting mythical content and its influence on shaping a person's convictions and behaviour. This highly complex issue requires reference to be made to the genesis and role of myths, studied by the representatives of various different disciplines (inter alia Eliade, 1976, 1994; Levi-Strauss, 1970). In numerous analyses, we can find a common interpretational explanation which is formed from the idea of historicity and functionality of myths arising in different eras (Barth, 1970). Although different, they fulfilled and continue to fulfil very important life functions. Below are several examples of this. Myths, understood as ideas about the beginning of the world, shape the interpersonal relationships in primitive communities. Jung (1993) already posited that archetypes result from human nature and exist from the beginning of human existence. Eliade (1994), however, thought that a myth – devised by primitive communities, constituted a group of norms that made a safe way of life possible. It can be stated that back in those times it laid the foundations of social life and culture. The existential aspects of the myth are also highlighted by researchers that accentuate its role as a means of depicting reality, therefore not only being limited to the beginnings and the story of creation. Wilhelm Wundt – the father of academic psychology – wrote that the myth constitutes a reflection of the world in the form of imaginary images. Others saw in it a way of conveying primitive teaching, id est an attempt to understand and interpret the world. Based on tradition, they became, with time, popular knowledge, creating an element of the basic education of the members of a given community (Roux, 1994). Authors understanding the myth as a stereotype shaped by human desires also perceive the myth as having an important role to play. In this sense, it is a group of dreams that often arise in difficult conditions of everyday life, which trigger compensation mechanisms. Generalising different interpretations of the role of the myth, it is possible to indicate a common link; the myth was and remains, throughout all historical eras, an important regulator of individual and social life. However, the thesis propounding the historicity and functionality of the myth nevertheless requires elaboration and supplementation that will take into account the specificity of the given epoch.

Some researchers point to the modification and even the modernisation of the myth that takes place in time (Bouzyk, 1994, Jung, 1992). The actualisation is expressed in, inter alia, stressing the allegedly rational, and justification of certain convictions. The mentioned myth of abundance, which is present in many forms, will serve as an example. The glorification of perfection, particularly of the body and mind seem to be particularly popular in this day and age. Signs of ageing, loss of ability and the slightest defects of the figure are frowned on. Employers seek and employ above all young people. In the macro-social perspective, the effectiveness of actions is what primarily counts. For many it constitutes a prerequisite of success in life, therefore it assumes the proportions of a supreme value. Moreover, it tends to be popularised in the mass media, promoted in education and it refers to the desires of perfection, abundance and of the Promised Land which are all lying dormant in our minds. One does not have to look far for explicit examples of this. Amongst the wide array of guides published conventionally and in electronic form, the numbers of “guides” to ways of achieving rapid success are particularly numerous. When the author was preparing the book entitled “Jak się uczyć” [How to learn] (Czerniawska, Ledzińska, 2007), of which she is co-author, she came across almost twenty titles offering “almost instantaneous memory improvement without much involvement or systematic mental effort on the part of the reader” A great number of authors offer equally as quick mastery of communication skills, negotiation, convincing, refusing, influencing others, as well as methods of achieving the perfect figure, physical performance and the like. **The earlier mentioned universal myths undoubtedly constitute the driving mechanisms of many valuable initiatives. A psychologist cannot disregard them, as they release individual and social actions and make them more dynamic, mobilising them to exert greater effort, enter into cooperation and be competitive. Thus, they make progressive changes possible in many areas of life. They sometimes can be dangerous, however, particularly when they dominate thinking, making it concrete, narrowing it down and weakening criticism.**

Understanding existence in the categories of success and a measurable external prosperity is characteristic for the western civilisation. In sociological analysis, it is sometimes referred to as the so-called “McDonaldization effect” (Ritzer, 1997).

### **Abilities or Able Pupils?**

For many decades, psychological studies were dominated by research on abilities: their essence, type, (particularly general and detailed) approach to other traits of cognitive functioning (intelligence and creativity), the possibility of measurement, developmental perspectives, and finally – their relationship with life achievements, particularly progress in school (inter alia Borzym, 1979; Popek, 1987; Sękowski, 2000; Tyszkowa, 1990). The knowledge that was collected in each of the abovementioned fields is vast, all the research trends still have their representatives, and numerous controversies are still being decided. One of the fundamental – stated here merely as an example – remains the essence of ability.

Already in the classic approach according to Pietrasiański, abilities are such “individual differences that result in given people being able to achieve unequal results in learning and action under comparable conditions and with equal motivation and prior preparation,” (1976, p. 736). Numerous definitions can be fundamentally reduced to four basic approaches:

- abilities as types of individual differences explaining diverse achievements in identical or similar situations, without stipulating the origin of those differences (cf. example provided above),
- abilities as the current ability to perform definite tasks, or as the aptitude, possibly the maximum level of competence that can be achieved thanks to innate capacity,
- abilities as a relatively permanent traits of cognitive processes that decide about a high level of achievements in solving tasks (essence of the cognitive approach),
- abilities as fundamental individual traits that make it possible to shape the remaining abilities.

One of the more important practical problems remains without doubt the identification of talented individuals. We are faced with the frequently recurring question of how extensive is this phenomenon. According to experts, the able category is capacious (Borzym & Kruszewski, 1993). This category above all includes those exceptionally able (1% of the population) and those, according to some, which have higher than average abilities (15%-20%). Others still, also qualify those people who are capable of completing higher education in this category (1/3 of the population). The interest of academics is focused mainly on the first two groups. It is assumed that in Poland 2%-3% are highly able children, whereas 25% possess significant developmental capacity. It is estimated that in a randomly selected population of pupils in a big city school, the percentage of children with above-average ability reaches approx. 10%-20%. This is a numerous group and poses a significant challenge for teachers on all levels of education. It goes without doubt that one of the first and more significant tasks remains recognising the discriminants of functioning of a given group of pupils.

Let us remain on the cognitive standpoints and the ability specificity found within them. They are comprised of good concentration of attention, the ability to select data on the data reception stage, rapid and effective assimilation of new content, the ability to think (conditioned by correct analysis and synthesis), ease of using symbols, proficiency in noticing dependencies and using them in own actions, speed and faultlessness of solutions employed, adaptation of methods of action to specificity of tasks, aggressiveness in relation to problem situations connected with perseverance in action (Nęcka, 1994; Ledzińska, 1996). Higher level abilities referred to as meta-cognitive abilities such as planning and monitoring the actions undertaken (including orientation in own cognitive processes and the ability to control them), and finally self regulations, have been attributed a significant role. A sign of the latter is protection of the objective, sustaining the method of attaining it and the possible correction or change, should no progress be made in fulfilment of

the objectives (Sternberg, 1985, 1998; Nęcka, 2003). The development of abilities is connected in this approach with the stimulation of development of selected operations and abilities (Matczak, 2001).

It was noticed relatively early – and constitutes one of the key problems in this paper – that able individuals are not only distinguished by the correct functioning of the brain. Stern himself already stated that significant achievements in any field require the cooperation of many characteristics (quoted after Stachowski, 2007). This viewpoint can be acknowledged as being decisive and corresponding to contemporary knowledge. Although it was clearly formulated a long time ago, it concentrated for many years mainly on the traits of mentality of the respondents who constituted above all pupils from all types and levels of education. **This tendency was attempted to be explained by the specificity of the European culture and civilisation including the role of Descartes philosophy (Biela, 1989).** In the development of science, there are also turning points, periods that begin new approaches, with a different way of thinking in comparison to current one (Popper, 2002). **Such a moment also arose in the history of coming to know human abilities. It is difficult to indicate the exact turning point in time; it has been accepted that the transition from research on abilities to studies on able pupils constitutes this transition period.** The modification was speeded up by results being collected with sometimes unexpected – due to being relatively weak – relationships between the efficient cognitive functioning and achievements in learning (Reis & Mc Caach, 2002; Rimm, 2000; Sękowski, 2000; Limont, 2004). In the methodological layer, this was connected with the introduction and dissemination of a new paradigm of action. The object of research became a person gifted with abilities, possessing other, numerous psychological characteristics, and finally functioning in a given milieu.

Changes in concepts took place gradually and fundamentally consisted in extending the research perspective. However, difficult issues remained unsolved regarding the mutual relationships of the faculties of the psyche, reference, reason, emotions, the will and behaviour. Various different solutions were proposed. The last quarter of a century saw the appearance of models of able pupils' functioning. One such example on the Polish front is the concept inspired by R. Cattell – the triadic model of Maria Tyszkowa (1990). The main emphasis in the Author's study was the thesis that the activity of a pupil depends on his/her characteristics. Abilities and personality which condition activity are shaped under the influence of reciprocal information on the results of activity and the outcomes of social interactions. An indicator of the latter remains, *inter alia*, the peer position in the group. It is easy to notice that this model attempts to approach an able individual in a comprehensive manner. Able pupils differ from their peers but it is impossible to present the full set of their characteristics. This is due to the fact that each time we are dealing with a construction comprised of elements interconnected by a network of many relationships, which is dynamic because it undergoes changes with time.

The model by J. Renzulli (2005) also belongs to such known approaches. In the starting point, the Author posed the fundamental question of what the effectiveness of action, including learning, depend on? He assumed that effectiveness does not constitute a simple function of ability. It remains the result of the joint action of as many as three groups of variables: above-average abilities, motivation and creativity. It is their joint action that yields high results. The mentioned variables have a common area of action and this is what designates the level of individual achievements. A researcher singles out various different abilities, including cognitive, artistic, psychomotor and social. Motivations, on the other hand, are approached contextually, as involvement in a concrete task solved in a given milieu. Considering those situational conditions, the Author highlights the significance of expectations and demands from the side of the surroundings – in relation to the capabilities of the pupil – as well as the role of acceptance from the side of significant persons. Abilities and motivation do not guarantee high results as creative attitude is also necessary. This is made manifest *inter alia* in divergent thinking, imagination and reflectiveness. Success in studies (and other forms of activity) results from the combination of high overall intelligence, personal involvement, openness of thinking and a favourable social context.

The role of life conditions in designating achievements has been particularly stressed by



F. Monks who points to the irreplaceable role of the family, school and peers (Monks & Klatzko, 2005). The greatest results in learning are ensured by abilities, motivation and creative thinking, which are rooted in a given milieu. If a certain element of the social context “does not cooperate” with the remaining elements then an able individual will not act effectively. There are many reasons for the low effectiveness, the most important of which the researcher indicates to be stunted development of abilities, limited scope of activity and restricted social contacts.

It is easy to notice that the brief presentation of the models of functioning of an able individual are characterised by many similarities. The most of important can be considered to be the simultaneous characterisation of the cognitive and beyond cognitive sphere (with a view to their mutual relations), accentuating the significance of social factors for development and functioning; presenting effectiveness of action as an interaction of distinct categories of variables. It can be stated without hesitation that the specificity of many contemporary studies remains comprehensiveness and extensiveness of approaches in the process of coming to know an able person. Can a similar way of thinking and acting be found in the attitudes of persons that are not psychologists?

### **Popular Knowledge on Able Persons and its Regulative Function**

There exists a significant dissonance between the popular way of thinking about able persons and scientific reflections and empirics. In science and the practice inspired thereby, the object of interest usually remains an able person functioning in their milieu, in everyday life, however, an often subjective and peculiar approach to abilities dominates. Psychologists want to come to know the subjectively treated able individual and cooperate with them and their milieu. In the meantime, they frequently come across requests for “a short recipe for coming to know and increasing the level of overall abilities”, with the question of “how quickly can the IQ level be increased?” **Concentration on a single ability or abilities understood as a group of traits is relatively common in our society.** This inclination is accompanied by numerous convictions that are incongruent with the state of contemporary knowledge. **Below are selected examples of this.**

A deeper analysis of utterances of so-called average people reveals that convictions about able persons constitute a characteristic syndrome of false knowledge. The scope of generalisations formulated in this area undoubtedly depends on individual observations; therefore the Reader can successfully fulfil this point in a unique manner. It is unnecessary to have the scientific instrumentarium at one’s disposal in order to state that in everyday discussions voices concerning general abilities that are closest to the intelligence of an individual prevail. It is often treated as the most important or especially important trait of a human being. Particularly its level is talked and written about, approached in the form of the intelligence quotient. This measure is sometimes treated as a selective criterion *inter alia* in selection processes to schools and workplaces. Many people endeavour to find out their result, inform others about it, make social comparisons and take it into account in interpersonal relationships. Certain countries even conduct national population intelligence tests. Elite groups are established which comprise of persons with very high test results. What is more, it is treated as an “individual, tangible entity” despite it only possessing a statistical value as it only informs of a person’s location in a group (Matczak, 1994). The critics of psychometric approaches therefore propose to abandon using this measure of cognitive functioning (cf. Sternberg, 1985). They accentuate the fundamental fault in their arguments, namely, the lack of information regarding the specificity of the mind’s operations. The supporters of this approach, however, are working on diagnostic instruments: they are construing new tests, revising (updating) existing ones and adapting those that were created in other research centres. The IQ myth is one of the strongest and most permanent in our culture. It seems highly unlikely that this myth will ever be refuted or even merely modified.

Moreover, the specificity of popular convictions remains also the one-sidedness of approaches to the functioning of the mind; the capacity dimension is above all highlighted, namely the threshold of human achievements. In the meantime, full characterisation requires

individual preferences to be also taken into account, those individual likes, and predilections to a certain way of reaching statements. They are referred to as cognitive styles (sometimes thinking styles), and they are classified and diagnosed (Matczak, 2006). As Nosal writes: “the fundamental discriminant of style is a specific principle of composition of elements or organisation of a series of cognitive operations creating some kind of intellectual activity (e.g. the course of attention, thinking and learning) or realistically observed action” (2000, p. 471). Knowledge on cognitive styles is very extensive today which does not make their systemization any easier. The mind is a complex system and can be described in many different ways. One of the attempts of structurally ordering the dimensions of style differentiates four basic groups. They constitute: the organisation styles of information fields (e.g. dependence – independence from the data field), information retrieval styles (e.g. reflection – impulsivity), the styles of concept categorisation and use of resources from experiences (e.g. analyticity – syntheticity) styles of cognitive control, monitoring and self regulation (e.g. specificity of self-direction). The cognitive styles shaped in the course of social training determine the individual nature of a human being and are an important feature of functioning that are decisive in the way that tasks are solved. **They should be cognized with equal care and attention as individual capabilities.**

The signalled earlier separation of the work of the mind from the remaining spheres of the psyche or their erroneous integration also constitutes mythical knowledge about able pupils. We shall remain with the latter mentioned phenomenon which shall serve as an example of a stereotype that is detrimental to able persons. Even a brief opinion poll delivers an image of an able pupil who is “not adapted too well, is sometimes eccentric, behaves strangely and is sometimes difficult to communicate with”. This description is further complemented by social alienation, permanent or periodic marginalisation as well as helplessness in undertaking and solving everyday problems. The way of thinking recalled herein may serve as an example of a thought slip termed as an error of excessively broad generalisation. Anecdotes about exceptional individuals are for some the basis for giving such over-generalized judgements. As an example, A.K. Wróblewski (1999) includes the following humorous descriptions of the behaviour of outstanding scientists.

He writes, inter alia, that “the great Isaac Newton was also absent minded. One time he invited some friends from Cambridge University for dinner and he left the table for a moment in order to bring a bottle of wine. However, on his way to the cellar, he started to deliberate about a certain mathematical problem, completely forgetting about the wine, and ended up going to his study in order to devote himself to his calculations” (op. cit., p. 11). In light of the results of psychological research, the opposite thesis should be deemed true, namely, that able persons are characterised by their ability and ease to adapt (particularly to new conditions), the plasticity of their thinking and behaviour as well as their social competences. Furthermore, the Authors of new concepts deliver certain conceptual categories that enable the description and explanation of the peculiar manner of behaviour of able persons (Ackerman & Heggestad, 1997; Collis & Messick, 2001). The essence of those approaches remains the ever so characteristic for the turn of the century attempt to integrate the “mind and heart”, namely, the cognitive and the personality sphere. The most popular include: the idea of emotional intelligence (inter alia Mayer & Salovey, 1997), social intelligence, typical intellectual involvement, convictions about intelligence, subjectively estimated intelligence, and finally - Mayer’s et al. concept of the so-called “grey zone” or “borderline intelligence and personality traits” (quoted after: Kossowska, Kozak & Szymura, 1996). We are referring to the latter, which is less familiar to the general public. The characteristic of the proposal remains the thesis in light of which certain dimensions of functioning can be allocated on the one hand to the area of personality, on the other to the sphere of intelligence. Meyer’s analysis reveals that they are above all connected with situations involving solving intellectual tasks. It is in such cases that we engage cognitive processes to an above-average degree. We experience situations of heightened intellectual effort in different ways. The researcher suggests the following categories to describe them: intellectual absorption, mental apathy and intellectual pleasure. Absorption describes the readiness to instil a deep internal experience, openness to cognitive and emotional experiences, and maximal involvement in internal activity with a block to external stimulation. We sometimes

say: “But he can’t hear what I’m saying to him, he’s so engrossed in what he’s doing, he’s living in his own world, etc.” Let us consider the school example of a maths test wherein the pupils have to solve a set of questions. Some are perceived to evidently be significantly involved and maximally concentrated, while others are distracted – they are looking in their friends’ books, at the board, or constantly checking their watches, etc. Others still assume a static attitude but they are not thinking about their tasks but about the possible consequences of getting a poor grade. In identical external conditions, people experience intellectual processes differently. If we disregard the issue of motivation we can see that a relatively constant, consistent approach to mental effort remains an undisputable fact. The anecdotes already signalled about renowned scientists are packed with descriptions of extreme absorption, full captivation by the tasks being solved. **Apathy on the other hand is revealed in reduced cognitive interests and the experience of powerlessness in the face of problems. It is accompanied by dejection, the sense of resignation, lack of belief in one’s own strength, and mental somnolence. Finally, pleasure describes an array of positive feelings accompanying mental activity, such as the joy of thinking, seeking solutions, and discovering. The absorption and pleasure often observed in the behaviour of persons (including able pupils) constitutes one of the many examples of the characteristic features of their way of functioning. The development of scientific research shall inevitably enrich the data concerning the functioning of such pupils, supplementing the descriptions known to date.**

The key question in this study remains the mechanism of false knowledge arising and being sustained. Referring to earlier statements, we can say that the myth of ability is an example of a stereotype shaped by human images and dreams. Who among people would not like to be specially gifted with attributes guaranteeing success? Who among people would not like to be Fortune’s darling? The search, creation and fostering of private concepts on ability is also a natural way of coping with the complexity.

The didactic experience – teachers have become used to sharing it in everyday work – supplies interesting views and stereotypic explanations (schematic, simplified) of the image of the functioning of able persons.

If an ability researcher is participating in the discussion, then talks usually end with the following conclusion: “the problem is becoming very complex”, this is a complex issue.” The personal, often single-dimensional image of a “holder of high intelligence quotient” seems to be much simpler. It may be said that the myth about the functioning in society of an able person is practically useful and due to its functionality, lasting. It is easier to understand it if the basic coping methods with the stream of different sorts of information that constitute the specific feature of our times, are recalled to mind. The attentive press wrote in a prestigious journal that “there are more and more jobs in the world.” Although some countries complain of having a negative birth rate, on a global scale, there are will be more and more people. When there are more and more people, there are more jobs also (...). This results in there being more of everything everywhere. It is therefore becoming more and more crowded in the world, more dense, cramped, gregarious, louder, faster and more stupid” (Szumańska, 2008, p. 39). In the face of the flood of information, basic mechanisms of coping with the overflow of information are triggered, which include: organisation – as a result of which selection can occur, integration and reduction of content occurs as well as the automatization of actions (Włodarski, 1985). The tendency to structuralise, namely to simplify reality, is a natural action undertaken in a situation when the cognitive system cannot cope with the overflow of information (including inter alia, information about pupils). However, individual differences exist in the intensity of the tendency to react in such a way; therefore, some academics formulate it in the category of need.

Kruglanski (1989) therefore writes of the need for cognitively closure as a tendency to seek for and possess knowledge that is clear and certain that reduces the sense of uncertainty, which arises in difficult situations in cognitive terms. The image of pupils, including a mental representation of able pupils, constitutes a significant factor in the learning process that influences the specificity of didactic and behavioural actions.

This statement refers to the cognitivist thesis stating that “we act the way we think.”



Personal convictions about pupil (s) “coexist” with the main theses of contemporary psychology of learning. It remains the idea of on-going life education, directed at stimulating development in all areas of human activity. A clear explanation of it is portrayed in the content of the Report by the Delores Committee on the so-called four pillars of education; to learn “in order to know, act, live with others and to exist” (1998). Within such an approach to education, respecting the psychological profile of a pupil remains an issue of fundamental importance. The postulate of individualising teaching belongs today to the most known and universally accepted directives (Włodarski, Hankała, 2004). Both psychologists and pedagogues write about its essence, double understanding (broad and narrow individualisation), as well as its methods of realisation. **Regarding the content**, many authors of university textbooks include and discuss the content. It is certain that a deepened understanding of the meaning of the postulate of differentiation of influences remains significant – firstly for communicating and building relations (cf. inter alia Kaczmarek, 2005). **Knowing the pupil** including the specificity of the functioning of his/her mind, the beyond cognitive sphere, conditions of life and conditions of development constitute a completely fundamental requirement in the learning and education process. It enables but it does not guarantee the materialisation of the postulate of individualisation. Overcoming stereotypic behaviour is a challenge for every person because everybody, in accordance with the words of the proverb constituting the motto of this essay, looks at the word through their own perspective. Sometimes they deform the image of reality also in its social layer. The individualisation of teaching although being clear conceptually, encounters many difficulties in its implementation. There are many obstacles but some of them are particularly clear today. We are witnesses of two phenomenons. On the one hand we can observe the dynamic growth of the sciences including the liberal arts; knowledge is becoming greater and new branches and specialisations are arising. Sometimes it is difficult to have orientation in the field of documented statements. This fact may initiate and intensify mechanisms protecting the current convictions, including those concerning able pupils.

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