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Quality of human life in pedagogical sciences – theoretical considerations

Jakość życia człowieka w naukach pedagogicznych – rozważania teoretyczne

Abstract:

Since the beginning of time, people have been trying to lead a good life. They have been performing various tasks allowing them to experience joy, happiness, and pleasure on everyday basis. Nevertheless, not all of them have managed to reach such a state, because the problem with well-being is that it is extremely difficult to achieve. All endeavors aiming at leading a good life are also strictly connected with the necessity of taking its quality into consideration as well. The notion of the quality of life is present in many scientific disciplines, it also appears in the pedagogical sciences, becoming a significant scientific problem in the face of a new, humanistic view of people.

All of us deal with widely understood quality on daily basis. Such encounters are so frequent and natural that people are sometimes unaware of the fact that a given situation may have something to do with quality. The quality of life is a multidimensional and unequivocal term. The issue of quality is tackled by numerous fields of science. Life satisfaction has also become a point of interest of pedagogics, especially in the light of a completely new perception of a human being that is based on humanism. The quality of life is a way in which every person assesses his or her health condition, wellbeing, independence, quality of relations with the environment, personal views, and beliefs. The level of life satisfaction additionally provides information on the extent to which one's needs are satisfied.

Key words: human, quality of life, pedagogy, a sense of quality of life.

Abstrakt:

Człowiek od zarania dziejów zabiegał o dobre życie. Podejmował wiele działań, aby odczuwać radość, szczęście, zadowolenie na co dzień. Nie wszystkim udawało się ten stan osiągnąć, bowiem problem dobrego życia był i nadal jest trudny do rozwiązania. Wszelkie dążenia człowieka do dobrego życia zmuszają go bowiem do zastanowienia się nad jego jakością. Pojęcie jakości życia przewija się w wielu dyscyplinach naukowych, pojawia się także w naukach pedagogicznych, stając się znaczącym problemem naukowym w obliczu nowego, opartego na humanizmie, spojrzeniu na człowieka.

Z jakością każdy człowiek spotyka się wielokrotnie na co dzień. Spotkania te są na tyle częste i naturalne dla ludzi, że czasem nie zdają oni sobie sprawy, że dotyczą zagadnień związanych z jakością. Jakość życia jest pojęciem wieloznacznym i wielowymiarowym. Jakość życia to sposób w jaki każdy człowiek ocenia swój stan zdrowia, samopoczucia, samodzielności, jakość relacji ze środowiskiem, stan osobistych poglądów i przekonań. Poziom jakości życia człowieka informuje o zaspokojeniu jego potrzeb życiowych.

Słowa kluczowe: człowiek, jakość życia, pedagogika, poczucie jakości życia.

Introductory remarks

Since the beginning of time, people have been trying to lead a good life. They have been performing various tasks allowing them to experience joy, happiness, and pleasure on everyday basis. Nevertheless, not all of them have managed to reach such a state, because the problem with well-being is that it is extremely difficult to achieve. All endeavors aiming at leading a good life are also strictly connected with the necessity of taking its quality into consideration as well.

The „quality of life” notion is utilized by economists, politicians, psychologists, sociologists, and pedagogues (Daszykowska, 2007, p.18). It can be considered to be both qualitative and societal category. “Quality” is also a lexical item that is frequently utilized in our everyday life. It assumes the existence of a kind of pattern that specifies certain requirements and is a reference point for achieving a certain effect or performing a particular task. Quality can also be discussed while taking into account human life, as it can be described as: good, bad, joyful, sad, miserable, or unsuccessful. The issue of the quality of human life covers a myriad of aspects, among others (ibidem): wealth and poorness, health and illness, or successes and failures.

The quality of life is not only an entity in a physical sense, but is also the possibility of improving ones soul, working on one’s mind, obtaining new knowledge and experiences, as well as improving creativity and productivity. It is the sum of all human attempts, faced challenges, fights fought with one’s inner self, the ability to opt for compromises, and – most importantly – the ability to make decisions and assume responsibility for their outcomes (ibidem, p.19).

In the case of social sciences, the interest in the quality of life increased in the second half of the 20th century. It is not a modern problem, but rather the one that is rooted in ancient times, when philosophers started asking questions about one’s goal in life, its sense and value, as well as made first attempts to assess human existence. They also considered the possibilities of improving one’s wellbeing and making a person happier as a result. Throughout the ages, philosophical analyses have become increasingly more abstract and it has been gradually more difficult to find some concise pieces of information in them. It has resulted in the increased willingness to perform separate examinations by the representatives of other fields of science interested in satisfaction connected with being in possession of material possessions only. With time, the term has been expanded by adding such immaterial values as happiness, freedom, health, and education to it.

1. Quality of life – notion-specific dilemmas and conceptual approaches

Ancient scholars predominantly focused on what could be done to improve one's life and to make it more enjoyable. Modern pieces of research on widely understood wellbeing are characterized by dualism, for they refer to two major traditions: hedonism and eudemonia. The former can be explained as perceiving happiness exclusively through the prism of sensual satisfaction. Hedonists do not care what one's goals in life are and how they are realized. They only focus on the possibility of deriving happiness from such endeavors and allowing happiness to overshadow pain (Czapiński, 2004, p.35). The latter tradition is strongly connected with Aristotle and the Stoics, who considered happiness to be eudemonia, or in other words – the true „self” of a person. The measure happiness is then an authentic life, ensuring self-development. It may, however, not be truly enjoyable (ibidem).

While familiarizing oneself with the literature of the subject, one may come across various definitions of the quality of life, which leads to the possibility of focusing on various aspects of the issue. The number of available definitions is caused by the fact that the quality of life is an interdisciplinary term. According to T. Tomaszewski (1984), the quality of life should be perceived as a kind of outcome of both the quality of life and the quality of a given human being. In such a scenario, the quality of life becomes a „set of elements occurring in various proportions and with varying severity that incorporates, inter alia: abundance of experiences, level of awareness, level of activeness, creativity, and participation in societal life (Furmanek, 2016, p. 79). The notion of the „quality of life” is complex and understood differently by various scientific circles. It is frequently referred to as wellbeing, prosperity, life-related satisfaction, or good health (Bobkowicz-Lewartowska, 2013, p.34).

The quality of life is affected by a set of conditions that have an impact on one's mood, happiness, and self-awareness manifesting itself by the ability of completing tasks and challenges faced at various stages of life. At its consecutive stages, one may have to deal with societal, professional, or family-related tasks. The quality of life of a person is the sum of outcomes of actions taken, attempts made, challenges faced, the ability to make proper decisions, opt for compromises, and assume responsibility for all of the above. It is also a kind of quality perceived through the prism of one's environment and surroundings, which may manifest itself in how one lives, what one wears, what one eats, what mode of transportation one possesses, how one spends one's free time, and what is one's attitude towards other people (ibidem, p. 87).

The quality of life is affected by certain objective conditions, such as economic determinants, free time, social security, housing conditions, environment, health, social status, as well as by subjective conditions, including one's wellbeing. Self-assessment of living condition in terms of joy, happiness, anxiety, fear, and hope is paramount. A person should be satisfied with his or her life, because then he or she will be more determined to

discover the sense of his or her existence that will in turn be a source of joy for him or her (Furmanek, 2016, p.88). How does one define happiness, though? W. Tatarkiewicz (1966) claims that „happiness is a long-lasting, full, and justified life satisfaction. To be happy, one has to be satisfied with the life he or she leads” (ibidem, p. 44). Such an understanding of life is the most frequently utilized one in the case of social sciences. In common understanding, happiness is equivalent to positive events experienced by a given person.

The quality of life is strongly correlated with the way of leading one’s life. Each and every person is responsible for his or her life and can make something out of what he or she has been equipped with. The quality of efforts made manifests itself in life satisfaction or lack thereof (Gregorczyk, 1993, p. 69).

The discussed phenomena also points to the value reception level, as we are the only ones who can specify how we are going to lead our lives, what values will be paramount to us, which of them will be considered to be negligible, what the ultimate goal of our lives will be, and what paths we will opt for to achieve what we want. For a person to be able to develop in various fields and not to fall victim to his or her habits and thinking patterns, he or she has to open to the world, other people, as well as not to be afraid to establish new valuable relations, be constantly open and bold (Zaborowski, 2001, p.175).

As pointed out by Jakub Trzebiatowski, even though the interest in the concept of the quality of life has been gaining momentum since the 80s, there is still no definition that could be accepted without any reservations by the representatives of various fields of science. As of currently, there are many „qualities of life” identifiable that are interpreted in a different manner by psychologists, sociologists, pedagogues, and medical science experts. It has to be pointed out that scholars dealing with the quality of life have presented certain assumptions as to which all disciplines of science are in agreement (see also: Dziurawicz-Kozłowska, 2002, p. 77).

They are as follows:

- 1) Quality of life relates to all spheres of life of a person, including psychical, mental, spiritual, and societal one.
- 2) Each and every form of activeness of a person has two sides to it: a subjective and an objective one. The idea behind such activities is to develop personal traits and to grow as a person.
- 3) Subjective perception of a person is paramount when it comes to specifying the level of life satisfaction.
- 4) Quality of life is subject to change with time and can be influenced by a myriad of external and internal factors (ibidem).

The scope of understanding the quality of life is therefore exceptionally broad: from considering it to be equal to wellbeing, through treating it as prosperity, up to the state of self-satisfaction. There is no consensus in the literature as to what the quality of life should

ultimately mean. In the case of social sciences, the aforementioned term is utilized especially to answer the question of what the foundation of valuable and satisfying existence is.

For the purpose of this article, the following definition of the quality of life is opted for: „The quality of life is the feeling of life satisfaction manifesting itself by the possibility of shaping multidimensional development and self-growth, as well as allowing a person to achieve his or her personal goals in line with the assumed values and expectations while accounting for the material elements of social status” (Daszykowska, 2007, p. 47). „Everything we do affects the quality of life – either directly or indirectly (Borys, 2015, p. 1-18)”. The discussed term may be analyzed by taking advantage of three approaches: normative, processual, or interaction-based one.

In normative terms, the quality of life is understood as a level of satisfaction of basic needs of a person. It is therefore assumed that a person that is capable of living in certain conditions and meeting his or her expectations, following certain values, or behaving in a particular manner can be considered to be happy. When it comes to the aforementioned approach, certain areas in which the level of fulfillment of one’s needs is assessed can be identified, including: fitness and health condition, mental state and mood, interpersonal relations, and the achieved economic status. People tend to focus on various areas of the quality of life to a different extent, which means that the one that is vital for one human being may be of negligible importance for the other. It sometimes happen that people define identical areas of life satisfaction in a different manner. Their perception can change depending on age, sex, as well as on social and historical context (Rostowska, 2008, p. 27-32).

The processual approach is strongly rooted in the theory of motivation perceived as a process. It states that mental processes are the basis for reactions and assessments of events that may be considered to be beneficial, pleasant, joyful, or unpleasant. While taking into account this concept, one has to focus on the importance of such processes as comparing, perceiving, valuation, and assessment that are all subjective in nature. They help create a strong system of values, goals, expectations, and interests. The processual approach also focuses on the quality of life in the context of achievement of life goals being of utmost importance for a particular individual. It is, therefore, possible to assume that the quality of life is a dynamic process and its unusual nature is strictly connected with the modification of key goals of a person that may lead to changes in the subjective assessment of the quality of life. The basis of the assessment is then the observation of the level of divergence between person’s current situation and the desired state of affairs. The smaller the discrepancy, the higher the level of life satisfaction (ibidem, p.37-38).

The interactive approach takes into account objective conditions, the specificity of individuals and groups, as well as subjective methods of assessing the quality of life. In the case of examinations carried out, the concept in question requires considering the quality of life as a mutual interaction between general features that are common for all people and

those individual ones that are exclusive for given individuals. The approach in question assumes that there are areas of life that are of vital importance for almost all people. Subjective assessment has to be however taken into account, as well as differences between individual people (ibidem).

In the majority of cases, quality of life models take the form of comprehensive lists that incorporate enumerated areas affected by the quality of life, as well as subcomponents thereof. An intriguing concept of the quality of life is proposed by R. Veenhoven (1991), who considers it in three categories, namely: the one of a person, of a group, and of a person and a groups simultaneously. The author also indicates three major approaches to the quality of life surveying (ibidem, p.7-26):

- objective – it is typically opted for in the case of sociology and economy. It refers to objective criteria according to which researchers make arbitrary assessments and state when the quality of life is the highest;

- subjective – said approach assumes that each and every person is an expert and is capable of exhaustively assessing the quality of his or her life by opting for individual assessment criteria;

- mixed – in this case, both objective and subjective assessment aspects are taken into account. The approach in question is frequently utilized in medicine.

The creator of one of the very first Polish life satisfaction models was T. Tomaszewski (1984). In his opinion, to specify the individual level of the quality of life, one has to take into account objective, environmental, and subjective aspects. However, regardless of the ever changing circumstances, there are some constant psychological life satisfaction-related aspects, such as the abundance of experiences, activeness, creativity, and participation in societal life. The improvement of the overall life satisfaction is possible thanks to the constant development in all the aforementioned areas. The author also points to some objective criteria that make it possible to assess the quality of life. They are as follows:

- abundance of experiences – significant number of experiences and sensual events, as opposed to a boring and monotonous existence;

- level of awareness – connected with the need to understand the world and learn more about it;

- level of activeness – physical and mental undertakings being the sign of good health and development;

- creativity – unusual type of undertakings oriented towards the change of the environment and creation of new solutions;

- participation in the societal life – co-existence with other people and establishing meaningful relations, as opposed to single and unsatisfying life.

Said aspects complement one another and affect one another (ibidem, p. 28).

2. Quality of life as a category of pedagogical examinations

The quality of life of a person is also connected with focusing on societal attributes of one's existence and leading a socially useful life. Existence should be a source of pleasure, be connected with achieving certain goals, as well as with meeting needs that make life worth living (Syrek, 2001, p.18).

Birth – life – death. Those three words encapsulate the circle of life of a person perfectly. Between them, there are so many events having various meanings, sense, intensity, and frequency that it is simply unimaginable. Many of us decide to stop for a while at some point and ask ourselves the following: what is the meaning of life exactly? (Miksza, 1994, p. 5).

An inseparable element of a reflection-driven assessment of one's life is finding its sense and meaning. The feeling of a goal in life is the state of subjective satisfaction of a person that is connected with a purposeful and specific value-driven action performance. Due to its function, it is considered to be a meta-need, the fulfillment of which determines mental health and personality development (Bobkiewicz-Lewartowska, 2013, p. 35). The sense of life is the very core and major goal of human existence. It helps specify one's calling and justifies one's way of life. Said term is related to a transparent and acceptable way of future development. Finding one's sense in life is the necessity allowing for further development and self-fulfillment. The sense of life can be understood as: "the willingness to become engaged in or opt out of various functions and roles in societal and familial life, the ultimate purpose of a person, and ways of reaching the final goal by taking one's individual paths. It is the very sense of accepting or avoiding pain, inconveniences, difficulties, and limitations, the sense of both satisfaction and pleasure" (Furmanek, 2016, p.37).

The analysis of literature on examinations on the quality of life has shown that the term in question is considered to be of interest for philosophers, ethicists, economists, politicians, social workers, psychologists, and pedagogues. Said notion has also found its way to the vernacular as a theoretical construct that can be defined in various ways. People understand it differently, depending on their values, aspirations, goals, as well as both their expectations and expectations of other societal groups. For pedagogy-related sciences, the quality of life is strongly connected with the development of a person that is correlated with a specific hierarchy of values (ibidem, p. 43). The quality of life fits the interests of pedagogy-related fields of interest, for it focuses on a human being as such and his or her dignity. A proper care about the quality of life points to the humanistic dimension of pedagogics (Bańka, 1994, p.19-40). The major point of focus of the field is a person co-existing together with the world in the system of possibilities and trying to shape himself or herself properly. Increasing or maintaining the quality of life at a particular level makes human life more

meaningful. The task of pedagogues is to support people in their search for the meaning of their lives, solving problems and crises, as well as looking for lifelong goals. The all-round development of a person, according to T. Tomaszewski (1984), covers the creation of new possibilities of development, which in turn results in increasing the overall level of life satisfaction. The author identifies various criteria of said satisfaction: the abundance of subjective experiences, the level of awareness and activeness, creativity, as well as positive involvement in societal life. In his opinion, life should be filled to the brim with both cognitive and sensual experiences.

The criteria governing the quality of life by Tomaszewski can be additionally complemented with the ones provided by W. Furmanek (2016, p.79):

- widely understood freedom: freedom to follow certain values, openness to values, to science, norms, ethical principles, and cultural paradigms,
- responsibility being the moral compass of a person;
- dignity – way of behaving while faced with various situations that one should not neglect.

Shaping the quality of life of a person is, according to J. Kuźma (1993), the creation of a vision of a new person being the basic value. The full development of a person is possible when it takes the form of a continuous process. The pedagogical concept of the quality of life assumes that a person can achieve full self-worth, high life satisfaction, and quality through constant self-improvement and development. That is why pedagogics follows the definition of the quality of life provided below: „quality of life is the feeling of life satisfaction expressed by the possibility of developing in a comprehensive manner and improve oneself, as well as to achieve one’s aspirations and life goals in line with the assumed values and expectations while accounting for the material elements of one’s social status” (Daszykowska, 2007, p. 21).

The notion of the quality of life is relatively new. It was proposed for the first time after the Second World War in North America and was initially associated with material aspects of human life only. After some time, it was expanded upon by adding immaterial values to it, such as: education, happiness, freedom, and health (de Walden-Gałuszek, 1994, p.15). The quality of life is mainly approached from the humanistic point of view and is based on the assumption that a given person can assess his or her own life-related situation in the most accurate manner. The process of assessment is based on evaluating various elements being constituents of the quality of life. They can be classified into four major groups: physical fitness, wellbeing, mental condition, and societal functioning (Zelin, Zelionowa, 2001, p.195-201). More and more focus in the case of examinations is put on the subjective perception of the quality of life. The feeling of life satisfaction covers a certain global assessment of human functioning and own capabilities in a particular situation and

environment (Oleś, 2002, p. 10). Even people having a similar material and existential condition may assess the quality of their lives differently.

Subjective aspects are important when it comes to the assessment of the quality of life. They are connected with valuation and experiencing the sense of one's existence (ibidem). Subjectively perceived quality of life is the result of inner valuation processes and is similar to reflecting on one's life as such. It is an individual reaction to one's life experiences and widely understood life satisfaction. The valuation of life, as well as understanding its sense and purpose are both strictly connected with the societal experiences of a given person, his or her personality, self-acceptance, and the feeling of self-worth (Konarska, 1996, p.52). The quality of life predominantly incorporates wellbeing, self-development possibilities, and societal engagement. It is therefore a multidimensional category that is dependent on the subjective reception, experience, and valuation (Oleś, 2002, p. 12).

As stated by Iwona Cymerman (2007), the specification of the quality of life for the purpose of considerations and own examinations is on the one hand based on the intuitive perception of life satisfaction by the respondents and, on the other hand, strictly correlated with the interdisciplinary context of the term (ibidem, p.46). The author also points out that examinations to date have shown that even if a single definition of the quality of life was proposed, it would be just one of available ones from the myriad of existing definitions.

It turns out that the quality of life should be assessed by opting for subjective criteria, because each and every person has his or her own way of valuing life satisfaction. The assessment of the quality of life is the comparison of expectations and the factual state. Satisfaction is identified when the experienced feelings are in line with expectations or even exceed them. Otherwise, the overall balance is negative (ibidem).

Each and every person defines the quality of life by himself or herself by basing on his or her own perception and life situation.

Closing remarks

All of us deal with widely understood quality on daily basis. Such encounters are so frequent and natural that people are sometimes unaware of the fact that a given situation may have something to do with quality. The quality of life is a multidimensional and unequivocal term. The issue of quality is tackled by numerous fields of science. Life satisfaction has also become a point of interest of pedagogics, especially in the light of a completely new perception of a human being that is based on humanism. The quality of life is a way in which every person assesses his or her health condition, wellbeing, independence, quality of relations with the environment, personal views, and beliefs. The level of life satisfaction additionally provides information on the extent to which one's needs

are satisfied. It may also show the development of a person in time. The family-related sphere of life, being one of the key factors of the quality of life, has a notable impact on the mental state of a person. The level of life satisfaction may be dependent on a myriad of factors that are connected with personality traits of a human being, his or her way of functioning, as well as with societal and cultural context of his or her existence. To sum up, subjective aspects of the quality of life that are interwoven with objective conditions can be narrowed down to the specification of emotional states of a person, individual aspects affecting the possibility of meeting one's goals, and factors that have an impact on achieving set goals. The quality of life understood in such a way should be considered in the context of both emotional and cognitive experiences. It, however, requires the constant development of the field of science discussed within the scope of this article. Expanding knowledge on the quality of life and methods of its assessing in the future it seems to be mainly dependent on advancements in two major fields, namely – education and science.

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