



Teacher as Giver and Receiver of Support in Difficult Situations at Polish Schools in the Subcarpathian Voivodeship

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Abstract

Teacher and school have to assist students in development and provide support and help, when they can't manage, teach them to solve problems and deal with difficult situations. However the students must want the assistance and trust the teacher, count on him when their strength fails. This help cannot be one-sided, since partnership is said to be. School as an institution from the assumption helps students, but as a human system should be mutually supported. So to what extent is the teacher a giver and receiver of support in difficult situations? Empirical research conducted amongst several hundreds of students and teachers in polish schools in the area of Subcarpathia proves that these two subjects rely little on each other and have limited trust! Conclusions of the research lead to seeking answer to the fundamental and downright question: how to (re)build student's trust in teacher and his educational authority (influence), which is indeed based on trust? Therefore a need of thorough research appears, in order to seek vision of the school, student and teacher, who will be accompanied by trust, engagement and responsibility.

Keywords: school, student, teacher, difficult situations, support, authority

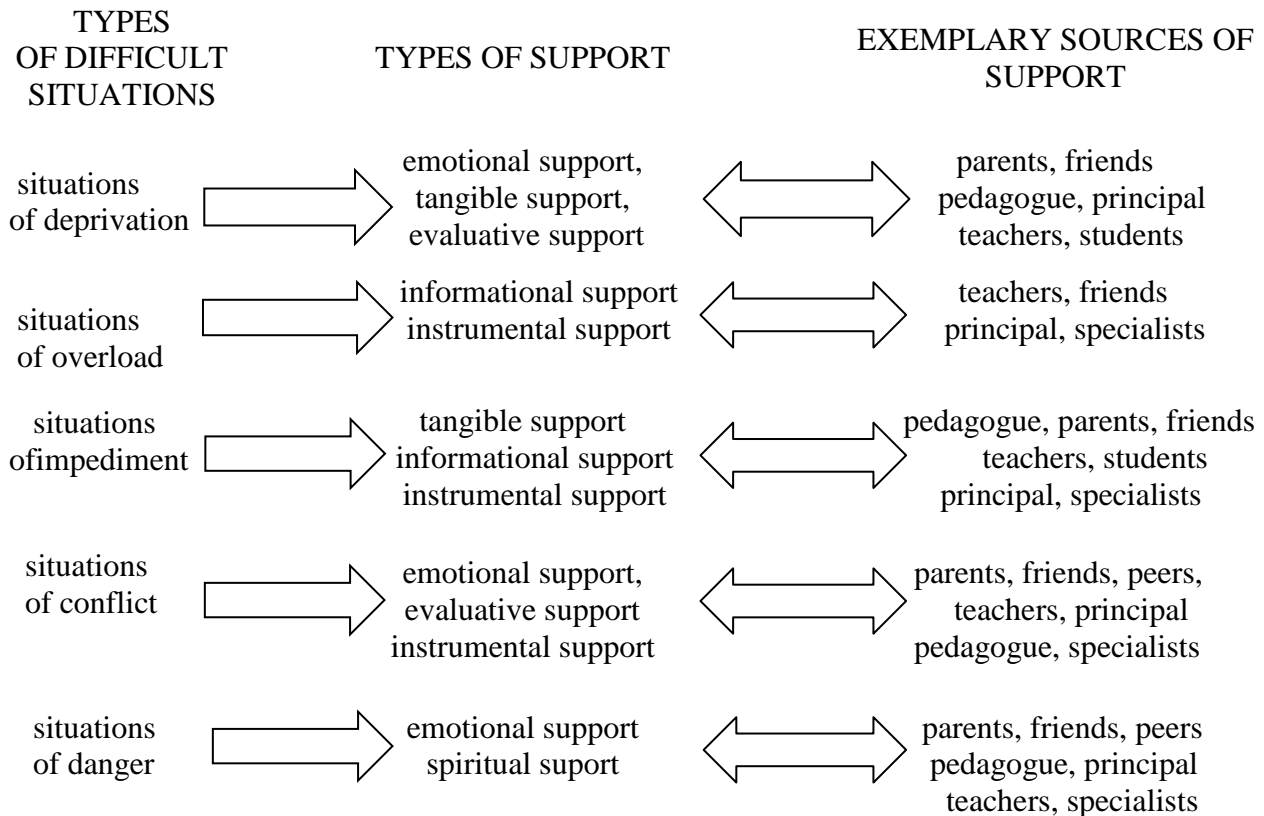
Introduction

The need of support in difficult situations is described on the basis of many humanistic and social sciences, including: psychology, sociology, social pedagogy, social work. Many research are conducted concerning this subject (Kawula, 1996; Kantowicz, 1997; Sęk, 2003; Sęk-Cieślak, 2004; Korlak-Łukasiewicz & Zdaniewicz, 2016). They relate more to the elder, sick or disabled people than to school and it's subject (Cywińska, 2008; Szczęsna, 2010; Gajdzica, 2011; Lisiewicz, 2012; Czekaj & Świech, 2013; Kocór, 2013a; Furmanek, 2015; Socha & Podhájek & Gerka, 2015). More often they regard to the student than teacher too, assuming that as a professional should be strong to support student and parent, but forgetting that if he is not strong, he will not be able to support others.

In psychology (Tomaszewski, 1978) difficult situations causing stress are said to be ones, that exceed the capabilities and requirements from outside, threaten of loss something important, not fulfilling the conditions and set tasks. They consist of: situations of deprivation related to inability to satisfy various needs, situations of quantity and quality overload - study, work and household duties; situations of impediments, which causes obstacles and deficits, encountered in implementations of specific roles and tasks, such as: physical, mental, informational, social, cultural, legal and political. Their supplement and defeat require additional resources and constrictive actions. In student's education or teacher's work also situations of conflict occur related with disrupted communication in relations: teacher-student, student-student, teacher-parent and vice versa. These are conflict of role, internal conflict, conflict of student's generation with teacher's and parent's. At school both students and teachers often experience situations of danger of loss of cherished values, a sense of security, current position and fulfilled role. In school environment, mainly teacher should be support, whose student and parent as *educational partners* can also support in miscellaneous ways. So how to understand support at school? What are his sources and types in regard to student and teacher?

In Poland, S. Kawula (1996) presented the famous *spiral of kindness*, which is focused on regeneration and activation of forces, on adequacy of support type to the needs. It is assumed that support will be justified and effective, if the unit becomes active. Support is to

serve a mobilization of forces to cope with difficulties. It is 'a type of social interaction, during which a transfer or mutual exchange occurs, transposing emotions, information, instruments of action and tangible goods, undertaken by one or both participants in difficult situation; the purpose of this transposition is to sustain and reduce stress, overcome crisis by accompaniment, create the sense of belonging, security, hope and approach to solving a problem and overcome hardships' (Sęk, 2003, p. 2; Kocór, 2013b).



Scheme no. 1. Difficult situations and types of needed support and its sources at school
Source: Own study based on literature (Tomaszewski, 1978; Sęk, 2003)

Support is a condition that gives relief, certainty and a sense of security, when one is weak and cannot cope with difficulties. Support can concern units, groups or communities. In this article I will restrain my reasoning to the area of school and its' main subjects, student and teacher. Depending on what makes the content of support interaction, and from which type of difficult situation results in his need, we can distinguish:

-emotional support- is the so-called 'charge of positive feelings', which gives a person, who was found in threatening situation- a sense of belonging, security, boost of self-esteem and hope so important for solving the problem. Through support interaction one can express his fears and negative feelings, which can help to relieve the tension.

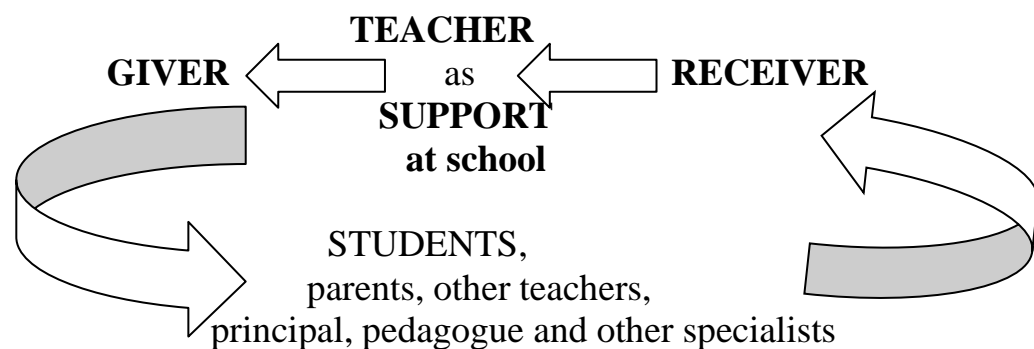
-evaluative support - is expressing acceptance and recognition towards the unit, who feels helpless, endangered and found in situation of deprivation. These are the communications: *You are somebody important to us, irreplaceable; You are right and act this way* etc. (Kawula, 1999, p. 399).

-informational support related to exchange of information, that can help understand the problem and situations, as well as to know the efficacy of the undertaken countermeasure actions. It is sharing own opinions, assessment and experiences by persons, who experienced similar situations, but it is also legal assistance concerning their rights, possible actions and complaints;

-tangible support means offering or lending money or other substantial thing, like sharing an interesting book, movie, that will show specific way, offering things, that will work as a lucky charm and bring back pleasant memories;

-spiritual support is a help in traumatic situations, that are accompanied by fear and suffering. It can be caused by the death of a close person, serious illness, family or relationship breakdown. It is an uplifting, cheering somebody and pointing the meaning of life (Sęk, 2004, pp. 18-20).

Another division is expected support and received support. The first one concerns a type of insatiable needs and problems of person, who is found in the crisis, while the second one is about the needs in difficult situations fulfilled with the help of significant people (Kocór, 2013b). In reference to school environment I would like to point out with the help of schemes 1 and 2 main links between the types of difficult situations' most important subject of the school, so student and teacher and the types of needed support and its source.



Source: Own research M. Kocór

Figure 2. *Supported and supporting at school by the teacher*

Thanks to the support the tension and stress is lowered, and self-esteem is boosted, a sense of resourcefulness, control over situations which affects the effectiveness of actions. These effects are achieved, when there is a compatibility with expected and received support, between the type of needs resulting from difficult situations and a type of particular support. The more sources of support and links between them, the more effective it is, although too dense net of support can lead to addiction from others and helplessness (Kawula, 1996, pp. 15-16).

Method

To know the experiences regarding teacher as a giver and receiver of support at school the verbal indicators were applied. Such possibility was given by the method of diagnostic survey and technique of questionnaire, which ensured the surveyed anonymity and allowed for fast investigation of groups that are territorially dispersed at schools in the area of

Subcarpathian Voivodeship in Poland. In the following part of research interview and analysis of *a page from the diary* content were used.

First the procedure of quantitative research was applied. Empirical research was conducted in the years 2012-2013 amongst 150 teachers, and in 2012-2014 amongst 292 students of different types of urban and rural schools in the area of Subcarpathian Voivodeship. The research concerned school stress, coping with it and support in difficult situations of students and teachers. Its results became a theme of closer diagnosis of trust, that student should have for the teacher. On the other hand the teachers should be seen as a receiver of support, when he cannot manage with stress at work, thus knowing the most important sources and range of teacher's support became interesting.

Second phase of research was conducted in the academic year 2015/2016 within the statutory research conducted at the Faculty of Pedagogy at the University of Rzeszów. These were the quality research conducted amongst 89 teachers through interviews and autobiographic narrations in form of *a page from the diary*. Their goal was to understand the experiences connected with stress and support at school. The interviews had categorized nature, because the order of questions was substantial. First, general questions were asked, about school experiences, difficulties and ways to cope with them. The research was conducted in the area of: Rzeszów, Tarnów, Dębica, Jasło, Sanok, Krosno, Przeworsk, Jarosław, Przemyśl and other surrounding towns, where different types of schools are functioning: primary schools, secondary schools, general preparatory high schools and vocational schools.

In this article it is not possible to present the results of the whole research (Kocór, 2013a; 2013b, in press), hence I chose data for analysis, that is connected with difficult situations, stress, student and teacher support. The purpose of the research was to know the experiences, their connections and conclusions for perfecting the educational practice and further scientific penetration of the phenomenon. My main research problem was question: To which extend are the teachers giver and receivers of support at school? Who do they support and who supports them, when they cannot manage? Therefore, assuming that in difficult situations of a student, the teacher should support him, but also the teacher, when he is unable to cope, should receive this help. That is why I was concerned about the sources of support for student and teacher, but mainly the teacher as the giver and receiver of support at school and student's trust in him.

Results and Discussion

In difficult and complex work of teacher often effects are spread in time and, if he encounters many obstacles: tangible-economic, social, cultural and legal, and he has high aspiration and ambitions, he can get discourage from work and disappointed by its reality. Hence the building the network of support, understanding and good communication. It is extremely important for the teacher to have a sense of acceptance and security. In the table 1 I concluded the results of research concerning declared frequency of receiving support, either it is informational, instrumental, evaluative, emotional or spiritual. Teachers have had to define on a five-point scale the frequency of received support. Research data confirms that teachers most often ask family members and co-workers for support and they get it just in this hierarchy. Significantly rarer is their support from the superiors, and already completely distant support from specialists- pedagogue, psychologist, therapist or single people, who found themselves in their lives once or accidentally.

Table 1. *Frequency of teacher's received support*

How often do you receive support from:	Average frequency on the scale from 1 to 5*
Closest members of family	4,1
Coworkers	3,9
Superiors	3,2
Psychologist, specialists	2,4
Other people, groups	1,4

*5 - very often, 4 – often, 3 - rarely, 2 - very rarely, 1- never

Source: Own elaboration based on research conducted in 2012-2013

As yet it has not been noticed that surveyed teachers are receivers of student's and parent's support, because they do not have the courage to admit to problems, helplessness and stress. For often students and parents do not allow a thought, that teacher as a professional from assumption can act unprofessionally! But basically teachers receive relatives' emotional support, informational support from co-workers, and rarely evaluative and instrumental.

These considerations refer to the teacher as a receiver of support in difficult situations, mainly family and peer. Therefore a question arises: what is the students' support from the side of the teacher? An attempt to answer this question was made with the help of data from the table 2. The analysis shows that teachers often support others. Almost three fourth of the surveyed thinks that way, while every fourth of them rarely supports, helps, advises, offers assistance in difficult situations. However, it was hard to recognise whether it is a support from own initiative or at the request of teacher, parent, co-worker. Frequency of providing support is connected with its type and addressees. Therefore I was interested in the next question: Who surveyed teachers most often support?

Table 2. *Frequency of support provided by teachers*

How often do you provide support to the others?	Teachers	
	N	%
Very often	22	14,7
Often	88	58,7
Rarely	31	20,6
Very rarely	6	4,0
Never	-	-
No answer	3	2,0
Total	150	100,0

Source: Own elaboration based on the research conducted in 2012-2013

Table data informs, that there are mainly closest family members, so parents and siblings, who need emotional support. Nowadays many families have problems, but this area of support is beyond school as a workplace for the teacher. Second source of support are co-workers, who teachers help with problems. It is an informational support and relates to the didactic, educational, protective work, and encountered hardships and problems. Many of them are connected to the so-called *stress-free education*, addiction to the electronic media,

overprotectiveness in the family. But there are also difficult matters concerning inefficient procedure of promotions or reform policy.

For the credibility, I confronted research data conducted amongst teaching staff with the question directed at the 292 students of various types of school from Subcarpathian Voivodeship, about their most common source of support in difficult situations, for I was interested , to what extent were the teachers indicated as support givers to the student, who first should be supported and surrounded with care.

As it is shown in the table, in hard moments, majority of youth expect help and support from relatives - parents, grandparents, siblings. In this case it is also emotional and sensitive support, which gives an injection of energy in coping problems, in expressing what they currently feel, what are their experiences, etc. Also majority, but slight smaller percentage of student's pointed at peers, who advise them, uphold their spirit when they experience anxiety, frustration. In difficult situations related with conflicts with teachers, friends or family they can always count on their understanding and support. It is frequent in adolescence, when the rebellion and criticism towards the adult intensifies. Youth has common subjects, priorities and supports itself in striving to their implementation, entrusts secrets, passes the experiences about first relationship, with studying, passing tests, exams, teacher's requirements, skipping classes, etc.

Table 3. *Groups of support used most often by students*

Who do you usually ask for support in difficult situations?	Students; N=292	
	N	%
To closest members of family	152	58,5
To friends, peers, schoolmates	167	64,2
To teachers, educators	4!	1,5!
To specialists such as: psychologist, therapist, etc.	-	-
To girlfriend/boyfriend	13	5,0
To other people	13	5,0

Source: Own study based on research carried out in 2012-2014

While analysing the data the same little optimistic conclusion arises, about the loss of student's trust to the teacher. Since for the question: *Who do you usually ask for support in difficult situations?* Only four out of 292 surveyed student indicated teacher's support! This result seems to be a strong argument in further penetration of this phenomenon. Limited trust to the teacher and school confirms another result concerning the rating of family and school support level by the surveyed youth. Also for a question: *How do you rate the role of family and school in organising support for you in difficult situations?* the teenagers answered not directly, with a frequent indication on a family that loves, supports and motivates them. Majority (70,0%) expressed positive opinion about them. But school was criticised by 67,1% of surveyed students in terms of understanding and support. While some students had doubts about school environment and teacher, because only every twelfth pupil expressed satisfaction towards the supporting role of the school.

Conclusion

Undertaken research deal with low level of trust in each other main subjects- students and teachers, whose in difficult situations barely, on a trace level, count on each other. As the source of support in difficult situations mainly friends and family members are pointed. Because the questions: *Who can you count on in difficult situations? Whose support do you reach? Who do you usually ask for help and support difficult situations? Who does help you and who do you trust?* both students and teachers pointed at the closest family members, peers of co-workers. Student, as well as teacher, at infinitesimal level considered themselves as the source of trust and support. I think that this is the most important reason for many students and teachers is that school is the source of stress, that acts destructively on their frames of mind and engagement in implementation of cherished values. Therefore it is about time to change that school will not create myths of its' own functioning. What school is needed to rebuild student's trust for teacher? Answers to these questions are to be sought in *heart's pedagogy* by Łopatkowa (1992), who is missed today. We must strive to education based on love and kindness, high awareness of own emotions, desires, but also feelings of other people and an ability to control them in order to have inner motivation of doing good, derive satisfaction from it and high self-esteem (Kocór, in press).

Briefly presented research are only an example and voice in discussion of shape and purpose of new school, teacher and education based on building not only outer, but mainly inner authority, which means voluntary submission to the teacher's influence. However without trust, understanding, engagement, responsibility and support it is difficult to build a school, where everyone will come with joy, without anxiety and fears. Acquired data lead to a ruling to place on other criteria of valuable education, school and a good teacher. So how to rebuild trust for school subjects? - this is a question that should be the reason for wider, thorough quantity and quality, theoretical and practical, historical and comparative research in from the border of pedagogy, auxiliary sciences and creativity in their conjunction. They need organisational, tangible and sociocultural designation and legal form of school- their protecting factors and risk for seeking developmental changes.

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