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The Gifted Student in the Post-Pandemic Situation

Abstract

This article focuses on the functioning of gifted students during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The subject of interest are the developmental opportunities created for them during online learning, the well-being of students, the problems they were confronted with, and above all – their condition after the lockdown ended. This issue was explored by analysing research on gifted students carried out during and after the pandemic in Poland as well in other countries, by studying ministerial recommendations regarding working with gifted students and materials for teachers, as well as by comparing the situation of students during the lockdown with their needs presented in scientific literature. On this basis, conclusions were drawn regarding the impact of the pandemic on the functioning of gifted students, while taking into account the significant diversity of this group as well as the fact that, apart from the often analysed negative consequences, lockdown also had some beneficial effects. The observations made should be taken into consideration after coming back to full-time education; the article contains specific suggestions for pedagogical practice.

Keywords: gifted students, COVID-19, lockdown, remote education, emergency e-learning.

Uczeń zdolny w sytuacji postpandemicznej

Abstrakt

Tematyka niniejszego artykułu koncentruje się na funkcjonowaniu uczniów zdolnych podczas pandemii koronawirusa COVID-19 i po niej. Przedmiotem zainteresowania są możliwości rozwoju stworzone im w czasie nauki zdalnej, dobrostan uczniów i problemy, z jakimi musieli się mierzyć, a przede wszystkim – ich kondycja po zakończeniu

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lockdownu. Zgłębienie tego zagadnienia jest możliwe dzięki analizie wyników badań uczniów zdolnych, wykonanych przed i podczas pandemii w Polsce i innych krajach świata, przeglądowi zaleceń ministerialnych dotyczących pracy z uczniami zdolnymi, materiałów dla nauczycieli, a także porównaniu sytuacji uczniów w czasie lockdownu z potrzebami dzieci zdolnych, przedstawionymi w literaturze przedmiotu. Na tej podstawie sformułowano wnioski dotyczące wpływu pandemii na funkcjonowanie uczniów zdolnych, biorąc pod uwagę dużą różnorodność tej grupy osób oraz zwracając uwagę na fakt, że – obok często analizowanych następstw negatywnych – lockdown miał też pewne korzystne skutki. Poczynione spostrzeżenia należy uwzględnić przy modyfikowaniu kształcenia uczniów zdolnych po powrocie do nauki stacjonarnej; artykuł zawiera konkretne sugestie dla praktyki pedagogicznej.

Słowa kluczowe: uczniowie zdolni, COVID-19, lockdown, nauka zdalna, kryzysowa edukacja zdalna.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought changes in almost every sphere of life. Some of them, for instance restrictions on movement or the requirement to wear masks in public places, were limited only to the duration of the epidemic (which in Poland officially ended on May 16, 2022). However, many of them – perhaps even most – had more long-term consequences. This is in part because the pandemic resulted in the overlapping of the crisis on various levels: global, national, and individual. Furthermore, some of its effects can manifest themselves only after some time has passed. In some ways, the social effects of the pandemic could be compared to its effects on health: they are long-term, impossible to predict with certainty, and often surprising, similarly as the fact that in Poland, the number of unrelated excess deaths was equal to the number of deaths due to COVID-19 (Gałązkiewicz 2022), while in the United Kingdom, the non-covid effects of the lockdown caused more deaths than the deadly virus it was supposed to protect against (Knapton 2022).

Changes resulting from the introduction of online learning in schools should undoubtedly be considered among the long-term effects of the pandemic. Suspension of didactic and educational activities in kindergartens, schools and other types of educational institutions was introduced on March 12, 2020 as a result of the decision of the Minister of National Education (*Rozporządzenie…* 2020). Both the 2020/2021 and 2021/2022 academic years were characterized by interchanging periods of remote and stationary teaching, in proportions that differed between student age groups, their place of residence, and the epidemic situation in a given institution (a temporary shift to online teaching for individual classes was necessary in cases when either students or teachers were diagnosed with the virus).

Even though the pandemic and the resulting lockdown have ended recently, we cannot be certain that it will not happen again (in August 2022, when writing this article, a state of epidemic threat was in force in Poland, after being introduced on

May 16, 2022 in place of the previous state of epidemic). There are already numerous academic publications on remote teaching, difficulties and possibilities related to it, opinions of both teachers and students. The authors of both Polish and foreign studies have analyzed the impact of the lockdown on students from different age groups (from kindergartens to universities). There are also publications focusing primarily on the interests of students with disabilities (Tędziagolska, Haczewska-Wierzbicka 2021), however, not a lot has been written on the ways in which the lockdown has impacted gifted students. We are only now seeing texts appearing that address the topic of how schools are functioning after, rather than during the pandemic.

A lot has been written already on the effects of the forced shift to remote education introduced in a great hurry during the lockdown. Some scholars even refer to it as a "crisis" in education – to set it apart from remote education which is planned in advance, taking place in normal social conditions and not during a pandemic (Pyżalski, Walter 2021). Although no one is questioning the need to prioritize the health of citizens, including children and adolescents, the conclusions about the effects of remote education are mostly negative (Długosz 2021). Among these, scholars most frequently point to social isolation, excessive use of electronic media, and the limited scope of the program being realized. It is still possible that not all of the negative effects have been revealed to us; for the foreseeable future, we should be carefully monitoring especially the mental state of students, as well as their social functioning.

The topic of this article focuses on gifted students as individuals with specific educational needs. Its subject matter are the possibilities of development created during remote education, their well-being and problems they had to face, and most importantly – their condition after the lockdown. In order to explore this, the author analyzed the results of research studies on gifted students, conducted before and during the pandemic in Poland and in other countries, and studied ministerial recommendations on teaching gifted students, as well as materials made available to teachers, and finally, compared the situation of students during lockdown with the needs of gifted children discussed in academic literature.

The specificity of the functioning of gifted students

Gifted students are a unique group. Edwarda Nęcka (2003: 168–169) describes four groups of features that characterize prominent and talented persons: general cognitive abilities (often expressed by a high IQ), special talents in a given discipline (e.g. mathematics, music, chess playing, but also psychomotor skills), creativity, and leadership skills.[1] People are rarely gifted in all of these areas at once. Developing one's talents requires possessing general, social and practical intelligence, as well as a high and stable level of motivation. Motivation is a particularly significant factor,

[1] Wiesława Limon in turn argues that the term „abilities" most often refers to general abilities which are connected with the speed of learning, remembering and logical thinking, while abilities specific for a given field are called "gifts" (Limont 2012: 16–17).

with Joseph Renzulli including it in his three-ring concept of outstanding giftedness (next to general and specific cognitive abilities, as well as creativity) (Nęcka 2003: 171–172). According to Renzulli, there is no one specific feature that would allow for recognizing a gifted student; the most important are co-existence and interactions between above-average abilities, creative abilities and involvement in solving tasks. Being a gifted student is not a state but a process that leads to realizing one's potential thanks to specific environmental conditioning (Renzulli 2021).

Gifted students are considered as students with special educational needs (*Rozporządzenie...* 2017). In reality, however, they are rarely treated this way; the term "special educational needs" is most often associated with either health or developmental deficits, which require the support of an assistant teacher, additional equipment, more time to complete specific activities etc. (Chrzanowska 2015). The content of the chapter titled *Assisting students with special educational needs,* which is part of the Ministry of National Education's report *On ensuring the functioning of education system units during the COVID-19 epidemic* (*Raport...* 2020) suggests that even the Ministry does not include gifted students among the group of students with special educational needs; the chapter addresses only the needs of students with disabilities. Similarly, the publication *Remote learning/teaching and special educational needs...* (Domagała-Zyśk 2020) also concentrated on students with deficiencies.

In the case of students with disabilities, special educational needs refer to the necessity of identifying difficulties and compensating for shortcomings. When we talk about the special educational needs of gifted students, we are referring to the need to ensure their correct development and the possibility to realize their potential, primarily by diagnosing their non-standard predispositions and creating conditions for their flourishing without neglecting their comprehensive development; these requirements are a bit different than those affecting other students.

Some adults, including parents and teachers, wrongly assume that an above-average gifted student is also emotionally and socially developed above his or her age, and therefore expect them to behave more maturely than others. However, such a student frequently does not develop consistently and can face certain emotional and social challenges:

> Incongruent influence of the surroundings, but also an accelerated cognitive development paired with a normal or even delayed emotional and social development can make it harder to adhere to the requirements of the surroundings and result in educational problems (Nęcka 2003: 168).

In the first half of the 20th century Leta Hollingworth wrote about the developmental risks for gifted students (Gierczyk 2019, Klein 2000, Limont 2012): "To possess adult intelligence and a child's emotions connected in the body of a child, means to encounter specific problems" – she wrote in 1942 (Hollingworth 1942: 282, quoted in: Klein 2000: 197). The potential problems of gifted children are therefore a result of their uneven development, which is characterized as dyssynchrony or developmental asynchrony (Limont 2012). Their emotional or social development often lags behind

their intellectual development, or is stalled by it. This happens not only to toddlers, but also to gifted adolescents. Hollingworth showed that gifted children have particular social and emotional needs. They might have a heightened sense of justice (Klein 2000). They often struggle with forming social bonds: it is difficult for them to find their place among their peer group, and they communicate best with other persons who have similar intellectual capabilities. They demonstrate considerable involvement in the tasks they are performing, but at the same time are susceptible to perfectionism – a result of excessive pressure and imbalance in life (Potts 2018).

> Increased mental excitability and richness of experiences in the sensory, intellectual, emotional, psychomotor and imaginative spheres of gifted children require appropriate strategies for upbringing, therapy and education, and these should be pursued by parents, teachers and guardians in order to create optimal conditions for their development (Limont 2012: 88–89).

Polish schools do not address the needs of gifted students in an adequate way. We can still observe the privileging of teaching over learning, which was pointed out by Krzysztof J. Szmidt over twenty years ago (2001). Such an approach strengthens the pro-conservative changes taking place in education. A one-way transmission method of education and a replication model, which rewards learning by rote, is especially disadvantageous for gifted students, who strive best in an environment that encourages creativity and offers them challenges. It may lead to some problematic behaviors, for instance questioning authority or exhibiting boredom, which are perceived negatively by teachers since it makes their work more difficult. Some gifted students never fully realize their potential, and despite having high intellectual and creative abilities, they end up not achieving any success in education, which is known as the Syndrome of Inadequate Achievements in School (Nęcka 2003).

The oversensitivity of gifted students and their vulnerability to unfavorable factors may sometimes necessitate undertaking therapeutic actions (Limont 2012). Indeed, social skills and interpersonal intelligence are very important for the development of abilities and full realization of their potential, especially in later stages in life. Today it is often pointed out that emotional intelligence has an enormous, sometimes deciding impact on achieving success in life, indeed far superior to general intelligence (Dźwigoł-Barosz 2015).

Another major problem which exceeds the aims of this article is connected with twice-exceptional persons: these are outstanding individuals with simultaneous developmental deficits, e.g. in movement, hearing, vision, or who struggle with attention deficit disorder (Limont 2012: 20–21). For this reason, such students require special treatment – in order to both compensate for their deficits and to develop above-average abilities. Finding the right balance between these two goals is a considerable challenge. During the pandemic, twice-exceptional children found it particularly difficult to cope with the new conditions, especially since online teaching makes it harder for a teacher to employ non-standard teaching methods recommended for gifted students (Gierczyk 2019).

Gifted student during the pandemic – chances and risks

In any type of crisis situation in education – and the period of lockdown, as well as the need to suddenly switch to remote education, was definitely one – the problems of gifted children may reveal themselves after some time. Such individuals have developed compensating mechanisms, and their intelligence and creativity make it easier for them to cope with the extra burden, at least for some time. Research conducted in Germany has shown that during the pandemic, gifted students spent substantially more time on completing school activities than those who have learning problems, which demonstrates that they have better motivation and ability to organize their time outside of school (Grewenig et al. 2021). Educational problems, which teachers and parents of gifted students sometimes complain about, are often less severe during online classes. Indeed, if we compare it with the problems facing students who are at risk of not being promoted to the next grade, or those requiring medical assistance, or those who have "fallen out" of the educational system e.g. due to a lack of IT equipment, these problems might seem less urgent. This was the approach represented by not only many teachers, but also politicians: the activities of the Ministry of National Education aimed at supporting gifted students (*Raport*… 2020) were limited to changes in organization related to the schedules of tournaments and competitions and the recognition of their results by local governments and universities. However, after some time of an ongoing crisis, the problems of gifted students resurface with double strength, and their oversensitivity and perfectionism make them even more vulnerable to experiencing negative consequences of drastic changes. It can lead to less activity, discouragement, achieving worse results in competitions and tournaments (artistic, sport etc.), which altogether results with gifted children not realizing their potential, or even leads to emotional problems. Gifted students should be therefore considered as a group that is potentially very strongly affected by the crisis in education brought by the lockdown.

Formulating general conclusions about the functioning of gifted students during the pandemic is nevertheless risky. This is acknowledged by research studies conducted in different countries which provide conflicting results. When referring to results of scholarship done before the pandemic, we must consider the influence of social context. For example, research by Potts (2018) who examined online education of gifted students demonstrates that among the most important aspects were the following: a supportive environment, adequate requirements and interactions, even virtual, with similarly developing peers. If these particular needs are met, then the physical localization of the teaching environment is not as important. However, this study was conducted among students who engaged both in online as well as stationary classes, and what is more – they decided on it willingly and could resign at any moment. They could therefore meet their social needs in various ways, which was not an option available for students during state-sanctioned lockdown. It can be assumed that a supportive environment, adequate requirements and interactions with like-minded peers, although undoubtedly important, were not sufficient dur-

ing lockdown. A research study conducted among gifted adolescents participating in online courses which focused on their educational and cognitive motivations (Abakumova et al. 2019) shows that this method of teaching in fact stimulates cognitive interests, while simultaneously decreasing the role of "communication motivation," and as a result, "initially not very sociable young people with the introduction of distance education are even more isolated and reject communication" (Abakumova et al. 2019: 92).

During the pandemic, research studies were undertaken not only among students, but also among parents and teachers. The results of interviews with parents of gifted children from primary schools, conducted in Turkey (Kaya, Akgül 2022), show that opinions on remote education can be varied. Respondents differ in their assessment of the effectiveness of remote education and the necessity of parental support. When asked about positive aspects of the situation, most of them point to children spending more time with their parents, deepening their individual interests, and developing time management skills. Among the negative aspects, they mentioned weakening social relationships, decreased motivation, and difficulties in focusing attention. Studies in Saudi Arabia, based on case studies among gifted adolescents and their parents (Aboud 2021) show that there are differences in how this way of learning is perceived by children and parents. Adolescents much more frequently pointed to the freedom of being able to manage their time on their own, and the possibility to decide individually about the process of learning, while on the other hand – they complained about the monotony of assignments and lack of satisfactory challenges. Parents appreciated the fact that the content of lessons was better tailored to the interests and abilities of their children, while also mentioning a visible decrease in motivation as well as additional stress resulting from a lack of close interactions with peers. These research studies demonstrate that regardless of the positive assessment of the merits of how online learning was conducted, social difficulties and weakening ties with peers still come to the fore. Piotr Długosz (2021) undertook a comparative study on a large group of Polish and Ukrainian students. The results show that after lockdown, 20% of Polish students admit to a deterioration of their mental condition; these results are much worse than those of Ukrainian students, who in turn complained about their deteriorating physical condition. Approximately two-thirds of students from both countries would prefer to return to stationary education, while 15% of Poles and 11% of Ukrainians would choose remote education, and the rest – a hybrid version. To sum up, the advantages of remote education most often include more free time as well as more time spent with the family, more freedom in managing study time, epidemic safety, lack of rush. On the other hand, disadvantages include: too much time spent in front of the computer, decline in social relationships, trouble with concentrating during classes and understanding the teacher's instructions, mental exhaustion.

Inconsistencies in the research study results are connected e.g. with the diversity of environmental conditions influencing students during the pandemic. Furthermore, it should be also taken into consideration that the lockdown lasted for a long period,

and thus the recipients could present different approaches at the beginning of remote education, and other – after a year or a year and a half. Most importantly, however, we must remember that gifted students are a very diverse group whose educational needs, although "special," are in no way identical. A first-grader who is only starting school education will have different needs than a teenager entering puberty or a high-school graduate facing final exams and deciding on plans for higher education. Gifted students also differ significantly in terms of the field or domain in which they are gifted, and, last but not least, in terms of their personality, temperament, and emotional needs. Each one has different psychological resources mustered before the pandemic began, which will in large extent impact the ways that they react to the new and unexpected situations. Being a gifted students does not mean belonging to a homogenous group.

> Thus, it became clear that when dealing with such difficulties, diversity among gifted children can be considered. Rather than generalizing to all gifted children, educators might focus on each child's personality differences and personal preferences (Kaya, Akgül 2022: 153–154).

The diversity of gifted students means that even similar teaching methods may wield different results.

The condition of gifted students is also impacted by the attitudes of teachers, so their perspective cannot be ignored in these considerations. Interviews with Polish students have shown that the level of teachers' involvement in remote education, the degree of preparation for classes, and the form of teaching had significant impact on the assessment of online teaching by respondents (Długosz 2020). In the case of gifted children, especially those specializing in such fields as art, sport etc., the teacher-student relationship is often much stronger and more personal, almost resembling a master-student relationship. Therefore, the mental well-being of teachers, their approach to remote education, and their involvement in preparation for class has major influence on their pupils. Research studies carried out among teachers demonstrate that in the course of the pandemic, most of them complained about lowered mood, depression and anxiety symptoms, as well as physical ailments (Pyżalski, Poleszak 2022; Ptaszek et al. 2020).

It is also important to consider that student observation, although it is a crucial method of pedagogical diagnosis – indispensable for observing potential emotional or social problems of children – is much more difficult to conduct in the realities of distance education. On the one hand, there is an intensified need to form a close relationship with a student and offer emotional support, and on the other hand, achieving this is no easy feat.

Almost every publication about remote education during the pandemic focuses on the risks associated with this form of education. However, we should not dismiss the fact that for some people, this change could indeed prove to be positive. For instance, this is emphasized by Jacek Pyżalski (2021). As it was already mentioned, both parents and teachers acknowledge some positive aspects of the situation, although they mostly still admit that these do not counterweight the disadvantages of

a full lockdown. Pyżalski (2021), when analyzing the results of numerous research studies on the subject of mental health and well-being of young people during the period when schools were closed, concluded his findings by stating that over a dozen percent of students experienced serious damages in various areas of life, and at the same time about 5% of respondents gained something significant in return. Students who benefited from the situations were those who, due to online learning, were able to free themselves from an oppressive peer environment, or were able to strengthen emotional relations with their families, or finally those who, due to social inhibitions, discovered it was easier to function in an environment mediated by technology:

> I discover new talents in the course of distance education. It turns out that those students who participate actively in classes are those who are usually shy in school (Pac-Marcinkowska 2020: 21).

These advantages are generally related to the emotional sphere. They may be beneficial for gifted students, however, it seems that what is equally important for this group is the possibility of being able to manage their time and have better access to larger amounts of materials which help them develop their interests:

> It is important to acknowledge that students with diagnosed disabilities are not the only ones able to benefit from learning situations where they can work at their own pace (Ladson-Billings 2021: 75).

Gifted students more often than their peers are active and cognitively independent, breaking out of school routine. Due to the fact that a considerable amount of resources for developing interests are currently available on the internet, whose content grew even bigger during the lockdown, the period of distance education could be a time of freedom for some, conducive to the development of one's own potential.

When considering the situation of gifted students during the pandemic, it is important not to overlook its positive aspects. On this basis, it is possible to formulate conclusions for further teaching practice in order to maintain the positive effects later, and, if possible, extend them to a larger group of students.

Teaching gifted students after the pandemic – suggestions for pedagogical practice

A return to regular school activity after the end of remote education should not be equated with trying to recreate the situation from before the lockdown. The coronavirus pandemic was a serious crisis, and after experiencing a crisis, a return to the previous situation is very often not only pointless, but almost impossible. According to a classic definition, crisis is "a transitional state of internal imbalance, evoked by critical events or life situations, which requires considerable changes and solutions" (Badura-Madej 1996: 16). The very origin of the term (*krino* in Greek means a choice, deciding, struggling, fighting, when one has to act under the pressure of time) shows

us that a crisis demands action, activity, creativity, employing additional resources. The basic characteristic of a crisis that has been positively resolved is not a return to a prior situation but working out new developmental possibilities, first and foremost responding to those issues which revealed their weaknesses during the crisis. Even at the start of the pandemic, it was emphasized that the situation demands every educational environment to undertake particular efforts not only during lockdown, but also after it (Doucet et al. 2020).

Gloria Ladson-Billings postulates that we treat the post-lockdown situation as a "new opening" in education, and compares it to a resetting of an electronic device:

> [T]his article speaks to the need to fundamentally rethink education and consider the pandemic as an opportunity to restart, or more precisely reset, education using a more robust and culturally centered pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 2021: 68).

The most important observations regarding the education of gifted students made during the pandemic, paired with the conclusions that can be applied in the standard model of learning and teaching, are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Effects of remote education of gifted students during the pandemic and conclusions for pedagogical practice

The effects of remote education for gifted students		Suggestions for pedagogical practice after the pandemic
positive	possibility of taking classes with people with similar interests	• organizing classes for groups of gifted students with similar interests • in terms of organization, especially in smaller towns or in the case of students with less common interests, it might be easier to conduct classes online
	greater freedom in planning study time	• providing students with greater freedom in how they plan study time during stationary education, e.g. allowing them to co-decide about the deadlines of exams and homework assignments, and in the case of older students – also the possibility to formulate learning outcomes
	more time to develop own interests	• avoiding overburdening gifted students with time-consuming learning assignments: not emphasizing (by teachers and parents) that they receive top grades in every possible subject • teacher cooperation, so that students can focus on topics that interest them, especially when they are preparing for school contests, tournaments etc. • rational choice of the type and number of optional activities
	more time spent with family	• educating parents on issues of mental hygiene, the needs of gifted children, the importance of relations for the harmonious and comprehensive development of children • schools and other educational institutions offering possibilities for families to spend time together • assisting gifted children in acquiring rational time management skills

negative	lack of direct contact with peers	• creating possibilities for and need of contact with peers: organizing group work, discussions on message boards, team projects and other activities encouraging interactions, if remote learning is necessary (another wave of the pandemic, child's illness etc.) • in the case of stationary education, encouraging cooperation through group assignments carried out in the course of face-to-face meetings • encouraging the cultivation of friendships with peers • therapeutic sessions for students with social skills deficits
	decreased motivation, lack of involvement	• motivating gifted students to work and develop through setting up goals together, building interpersonal relationships, involvement in afterschool activities etc.
	trouble with concentrating during online classes	• media education of students, teachers and parents, regarding healthy use of electronic media (e.g. way of avoiding online distractions – scheduling and controlling amount of internet activity) • selection of both online and offline teaching methods, during remote as well as stationary education
	deterioration of mental condition; passivity, apathy, depressive symptoms	• preventive classes on mental hygiene, emotion regulation, critical thinking, relaxation techniques, coping with stressful situations • monitoring children's family and environmental situation • organizing psychological and psychiatric assistance when needed

Source: own study.

The conducted analysis and observations allow the following conclusions to be drawn regarding work with gifted children and assisting them in stationary education after a long period of the pandemic. These conclusions are in most part also relevant for gifted students in a standard situation (e.g. those who are beginning their education):

1. The research study revealed a significant discrepancy in how gifted students reacted to conditions brought by the pandemic. This points to their diverse mental resources accumulated before the pandemic, and different environmental conditions. Once again, this confirms that gifted students are not a homogenous group – each one is an individual and thus requires an individual approach not only because of the specific nature of his or her talents, but also his or her personalities and the conditions in which they function on a daily basis.

2. Inappropriately high expectations concerning all areas of their functioning are often formulated towards gifted students. There is no basis for assuming that, due to their abilities or fast intellectual development, gifted students will be able to better respond to social and emotional problems; on the contrary, many of them are over-sensitive and struggle with low self-esteem. Additionally, some gifted students struggle with "average" problems not unlike their peers, such as domestic violence, illness, poverty etc.

3. Many gifted students are emotionally oversensitive and may require additional support. The most common post-pandemic complications are students' social and emotional problems, resulting from limited interactions with peers and teachers which leads to a decrease in motivation and self-esteem. In the long run, this can lead to psychological problems (Pyżalski 2021). One of the ways of counteracting may be commuting with art, especially actively creating it (Sasin 2021). Research shows (Chan et al. 2022) that people involved in creating art during the COVID-19 crisis experienced stress reduction and mood improvement. Contact with art helps in constructive regulating of emotions and lessens the feeling of isolation. Art-therapy should become a common method of working with sensitive individuals not only during and after the pandemic, but also on a daily basis.

4. Gifted students should be closely observed after the pandemic, since both positive and negative effects of the lockdown can reveal themselves after time. Active interaction and cooperation with parents is necessary, especially for younger students.

5. The pandemic experiences could inspire a more frequent organizing of classes for gifted students with similar talents. The functioning of such groups during the pandemic, which was relatively easy to organize online, proved that close interactions with peers who share similar interests is a motivating factor for students, heartens their involvement, and improves learning outcomes. This should encourage teachers to organize such classes either directly or as online meetings. E-learning would enable people living far away (or in small towns) to work together and would facilitate contact with qualified pedagogues.

6. If it becomes necessary to go back to remote education (despite the end of the pandemic, this is still a reality of many schools in areas covered by military operations in Ukraine), it is important to pay special attention to the students' social interactions. Interpersonal contact can be stimulated with adequate teaching methods which promote team work and replace competition with cooperation. It is not true that gifted children always prefer autonomous work:

> The fact that all the participants expressed a preference for this type of interactive group as opposed to the self-directed but decidedly lonely experience of programs such as Khan Academy helps dispel the myths that gifted children either "do fine on their own," or prefer working autonomously (Potts 2018: 73).

It is also very important to maintain and strengthen the relationship between students and teachers (Doucet et al. 2020).

7. The pandemic exposed that distance education is significantly different from traditional learning and teaching, and this differences does not come down only to the use of technology. Mediation has a profound impact on the entire specificity of education. It is therefore not appropriate to automatically transfer classroom teaching methods to the online environment; e-learning requires a selection of different methods and ways of organizing work, as well as forms of interacting. Online class-

es should not be forced to resemble face-to-face classes, but on the contrary, their unique specificity should be put to best use. This should be taken into account in study programs for future teachers:

> However, online classes should not attempt to become proxies for brick-and-mortar classes, as insisting that they are the same detracts from the benefits of online learning. Instead, students should engage in critical discussions about the differences between these two learning environments, as being aware might entice them to consider the benefits of prolonged writing and thinking time, a more flexible and balanced schedule, and immediate access to both course content and the vastness of the Internet. This type of awareness not only plays to gifted students' ability to engage in and appreciation for meta-cognition, but it encourages them to become active agents in their own learning in that they often can make educational choices in an online environment (Potts 2018: 75).

8. One of the biggest problems experienced by students (not only gifted) during remote education is a difficulty in focusing attention for longer periods, resulting from too many online distractions commonly knowns as "attention distractors" (easy access to different online content, constant notifications on social media etc.). It is therefore particularly important to work on concentration during stationary teaching. This enables gifted students to create conditions for working at their own pace; some assignments that are considered easy can be completed faster, while others requiring more attention will demand substantially more time. Additionally, the possibility to plan study time (adequately to a student's age) teaches self-reliance, responsibility, greater involvement and satisfaction from achieved results.

9. An essential element is assisting the adults who are responsible for the gifted students, especially their parents and teachers. Following Edmund Trempała's insistence that "a school is neither the beginning nor the end of a person's education" (Trempała 1999: 157), it is also important to consider the child's environment beyond school – not only access to IT equipment and the internet, to which great importance was attached especially in the initial period of the pandemic and which is an easily measurable indicator, but most importantly to the social and emotional environment:

> One of the elements of the mental health support system for students must also be supporting adults who create an environment for the socialization of young people, especially teachers. Educational and systemic support of parents is also important (Pyżalski 2021: 103).

Gifted children have a chance to sufficiently develop their potential only if they function in an environment maintained by competent, emotionally stable and independent adults.

Conclusions

The pandemic not only brought to life new problems, it also revealed previously existing weaknesses in many areas of life, including education. Most of the people involved in the learning and teaching process – students, teachers, parents – struggled with additional problems. A group potentially exposed to greater than average difficulties were gifted students, who are often developing at a different pace than their peers.

This situation is undoubtedly one of crisis, and as such, it can be seen as a chance to work out new and better solutions. It can become an incentive to search for more modern ways of working with students, innovative methodological and organizational solutions, also by re-thinking the positive effects of forced distance education – less obvious than the risks commonly associated with it. The introduction of crucial legislative and practical changes has to be preceded by a comprehensive diagnosis of the state of children and teenagers. The functioning of gifted students demands both constant pedagogical observation, as well as systematic diagnoses whose results can change with time. All of the four basic areas of child development should be considered in the diagnosis: cognitive, emotional, social and physical. The following issues seem especially significant: freedom in time management in different age groups, symptoms of addiction to electronic media (including social media), social functioning of gifted students, both among their peers and among others with similar interests, and various aspects of their physical and mental health.

Despite the hardships, the experiences brought by the pandemic period can be perceived as a strengthening impulse, teaching us how to cope with difficult situations and effectively respond to changes. Indeed, as teacher-practitioners argued during the lockdown, "the pandemic will end, but the experiences from this period will remain" (Pac-Marcinkowska 2020: 6).

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