

Support, Leadership and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Education

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Introduction

Contemporary education operates in the context of profound social, cultural, and technological transformations that significantly reshape teaching, learning, and the functioning of educational institutions. Within this landscape, support, leadership, and professional learning communities form an interconnected conceptual and practical framework for understanding and developing schools as environments that foster both individual and organizational growth. Support provides the foundation for safe and inclusive learning conditions, leadership offers direction and coherence to collective efforts, and professional learning communities integrate individual professional experiences into processes of shared learning and continuous improvement.

The relationships among these three dimensions are reciprocal and dynamic. Effective educational leadership cannot be reduced to administration or supervision; rather, it is grounded in the capacity to create conditions that support the development of students and teachers and to cultivate relationships based on trust, responsibility, and collaboration. From this perspective, support is no longer merely a response to difficulties but becomes a stable component of an institution's organizational culture. Professional learning communities play a crucial role in sustaining this approach by embedding reflective practice, knowledge sharing, and collaborative problem solving in everyday educational work, thereby enhancing both teaching quality and teachers' sense of agency.

The significance of the book's key themes stems from the complex challenges facing contemporary education, including educational inequalities, diverse learner needs, teacher workload, and the necessity of lifelong professional learning. Integrating support, leadership, and professional learning communities enables educational systems to address these challenges in a coherent and sustainable manner rather than through fragmented interventions. Together, these concepts frame education as a relational and collaborative process grounded in shared responsibility and continuous learning, making them central to the development of resilient and future-oriented educational systems.

The first chapter of the monograph, by Beata Mydłowska, entitled *Educational Support*, is devoted to the theoretical foundations of understanding support from a pedagogical and interdisciplinary perspective and the analysis of formal and informal systems related to this form of assistance. The selection of content was subordinated to the goal of organizing basic concepts, taking into account the multifaceted approach and interpretative contexts related to the

category of support, as well as showing the importance of the discussed phenomenon for contemporary reflection on education, upbringing, and human development in changing social conditions.

The presented considerations are a contribution to the sciences in a particular way related to social pedagogy, which from the beginning of its development has been dealing with the analysis of human living conditions and relationships connecting the individual with the social and cultural institutional environment. In this context, it was considered reasonable when referring to the concept of support not only to include aid activities in the narrow sense. It was assumed that it constitutes an important category of description and interpretation of the ways of organizing the environment of upbringing, learning, and work. At the same time, the link between support and questions about social inequalities, mechanisms of marginalization, and the possibility of strengthening the resources of individuals and groups in difficult or temporary situations was indicated.

The issue of support is also related to the fact that contemporary educational and professional biographies are less and less linear. They are more often marked by breaks, changes in education directions, periods of uncertainty, and the need to redefine one's own life situation. In such conditions, support ceases to be only a response to the crisis, and increasingly appears as a permanent element of the social environment that accompanies the individual in various phases of life. From the perspective of social pedagogy, this means the need to think about support not only as a supportive relationship, but also as an element of local and institutional systems of action, inscribed in wider educational, care, and upbringing systems. An important point of reference for the undertaken considerations is the assumption that human development always takes place in a specific social and cultural context. The quality of this context—understood both as a network of interpersonal relationships and as a set of institutional conditions—significantly affects the opportunities for participation in education, work, and social life. In this sense, support does not boil down to compensating for deficiencies, but also includes activities aimed at strengthening subjectivity, agency, and the ability to cope independently in changing living conditions. The diversity and multiplicity of these contexts therefore requires ordering the basic theoretical approaches to pedagogical support, with particular emphasis on the tradition of social pedagogy. Hence, the first part discusses support as an interdisciplinary category, present in pedagogical, sociological, and psychological reflection, as well as a concept strongly rooted in thinking about social work and environmental education. A separate section will cover the issues of the relational and processual nature of support, its relationship with the subjectivity of the individual, and the ten-

sions emerging on the border between helping and the risk of perpetuating dependencies.

The second part of the chapter is devoted to the analysis of basic forms of support: emotional, instrumental, and informational. They will be presented not only as separate categories of interactions, but as elements of pedagogical practice that intertwine and complement each other in specific life and educational situations. The culmination of the considerations was an attempt to show how the integration of these forms of support can constitute an important resource in everyday, educational and social work. Such a theoretical perspective creates a starting point for the analysis of more specific organizational and institutional solutions, in which the idea of support takes the form of specific structures, procedures, and practices of action. This is important for various types of analysis of issues related to the functioning of modern education in the conditions of the increasing complexity of social problems, diversity of educational biographies, and growing inequalities in the access to cultural, social, and economic resources. In particular, the approach to support may be useful not only in the context of the goodwill of individual teachers or educators, but also systemic solutions, including both schools and universities, as well as institutions operating in the field of non-formal education and social assistance. This means looking at support as part of a broader institutional architecture where educational, care, prevention, and counseling activities intersect.

Such an approach is conducive to the transition from the level of conceptual approaches and general theoretical models to the analysis of specific systems and forms of organizing support in education. Particular attention was paid to both solutions functioning within formal education and those that develop in the area of non-formal education, community work, and interinstitutional cooperation. Important issues related to the support of students, teachers, and people entering the labor market were taken into account, as well as the role of cooperation networks connecting school, family, the local environment, and labor market institutions. In this sense, the discussed chapter is an attempt to show how the previously described categories of support—emotional, instrumental and informational—function in real organizational structures and what tensions arise between the logic of institutional activities and the individual needs of people receiving assistance. This analysis is also aimed at showing the limitations of existing solutions and indicating areas where support systems require further development and better coordination.

Chapter 2 of the monograph, entitled *Educational Leadership*, authored by Stefan M. Kwiatkowski, concerns broadly understood leadership in the school and its immediate environment.

First, it presents reflections on the place and role of leadership in education. Attention was paid to the interactions between groups of teachers, students, and parents and the relationships between them: objective, subjective, and behavioral. In particular, the focus was on the moral bond related to the subjective bond. It discusses three basic components: trust, loyalty, and solidarity. In the area of trust, institutional and personal trust were distinguished and defined, and the interrelationships between them were indicated. The opposite of trust, i.e., distrust, was also referred to—in the context of the relationship between the headmaster and teachers, teachers and students, parents and children, and parents and teachers. In the area of loyalty, the need to extend the field of existing relations (internal: intra-school relations) to the relations of the school head with local government units and curatorships (external relations) was indicated. The concepts of the *dilemma* and the *conflict of loyalty* and *apparent loyalty* were discussed, along with their practical exemplifications. In the area of solidarity, the focus was on openness and care for others, on an attitude emphasizing attachment to the common good—in all intra-school and external groups in relation to the school (parents, social, and institutional environment of the school). Against such a background, the leadership of the school headmaster, teachers, students, and parents was characterized in general terms.

Leadership typologies occupy a separate place in Chapter 2. It distinguishes typologies that have already gained widespread approval (existing typologies) and proposals for new typologies (typologies proposed in the author's approach). The former included: autocratic, democratic, and permissive leadership, as well as transactional and transformational leadership, emotional and rational, task-based and personal, formal and informal, legal and traditional, and permanent and periodic. More attention was paid to the proposed typologies—author typologies. These proposals include long-term and short-term leadership, generational and transgenerational, conventional and unconventional (transgressive), autonomous and non-autonomous, confrontational and stabilizing, individual and group, local and global, stationary and non-stationary, and natural, literary, and historical. Each of these proposals has been comprehensively described, with references to the social reality from which inspiration was drawn.

Chapter 2 closes with considerations related to the tasks of the school headmaster, analyzed from the point of view of leadership. The analysis was based on the layout of the school headmaster's tasks, which included the following components: planning, organizing, directing, controlling, and evaluating. Each of these components, together with their components, has been described with an emphasis on the level of necessary leadership activities. In the case of

planning, the components concerned objectives, resources, and results. For organizing, the components were structures, teams, activities, and cooperation, while for management, the following were distinguished: leadership, motivating, communicating, and representing; and for control and assessment: subject, expectations, diagnosis, and analysis. In this way, the desired relations between the components of individual tasks of the school head and the leadership competences necessary for their proper implementation were determined. This approach makes it possible to develop a standard of competence of the school headmaster, which can be the basis for modifying educational programs in pedagogical studies, as well as in postgraduate studies in the field of education management.

Chapter Three, *Professional learning communities (PLCs) in education*, authored by Inetta Nowosad, is devoted to professional learning communities as one of the key concepts of contemporary education, integrating teacher development, the improvement of teaching quality, and the long-term development of the school as a learning organization. The author presents PLCs as a coherent idea rooted in theories of organizational learning, constructivism, and social learning. From this perspective, the school ceases to be merely a site of knowledge transmission and becomes an environment of shared learning for teachers, students, and educational leaders, grounded in reflective practice, shared responsibility, and collaboration.

The opening part of the chapter presents the origins and theoretical foundations of the PLC concept. The author guides the reader from the idea of reflective teaching practice, through the development of organizational learning, to the emergence of a community-based approach to teachers' professional development. Particular importance is attributed to professional collegiality and teachers' participation in school decision-making processes, which allows PLCs to be understood as cultural and organizational structures rather than merely a form of cooperation. In this context, classic definitions of PLCs are discussed alongside their gradual reinterpretation and expansion in response to the changing conditions within educational systems.

The subsequent part of the chapter focuses on an analysis of theoretical models of professional learning communities. It presents the most influential approaches that have had a significant impact on educational practice, highlighting differences in the emphasis placed on leadership, collaboration, a focus on student learning, and collective responsibility for outcomes. These models are not treated as competing frameworks, but as complementary interpretative lenses that enable a deeper understanding of the complexity involved in building and sustaining PLCs in school settings. Particular attention is devoted to the role of supportive and distributed leadership,

which fosters collaborative learning and strengthens teachers' professional agency.

A key element of the chapter is the analysis of Singapore as the only country that has managed to sustain the full and systemic implementation of professional learning communities across all public schools. The author demonstrates that the success of the Singaporean model does not result solely from the consistent implementation of PLCs, but from their close integration with national policies on teachers' professional development, the high prestige of the teaching profession, and clearly defined career pathways. In this context, PLCs have become a foundation for teaching quality, innovation, and continuous improvement, contributing to the country's high positions in international educational rankings and consolidating its status as a world-class education system.

The chapter concludes with reflections on the conditions necessary for the effective development and sustainability of PLCs in school practice. The author identifies key factors that support the building of learning communities, such as a culture of trust, shared responsibility, coherence of actions, and leadership grounded in care and service. She emphasizes that PLCs cannot be imposed administratively nor function as short-term projects, but require long-term support, consistency, and a strong value base. Viewed in this way, professional learning communities become not only a tool for teacher development, but one of the pillars of modern, reflective, and equitable education.

• • •

The monograph offers a comprehensive perspective on contemporary education through an analysis of three interrelated domains: support, leadership, and professional learning communities. The adopted perspective makes it possible to present education as a complex relational process embedded in social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Support is conceptualized as the foundation of a safe and development-oriented learning environment; with leadership as a factor that provides direction, coherence, and meaning to educational action; and professional learning communities as a mechanism for the sustained improvement of practice and the quality of school work. Such a structure enables a transition from theoretical reflection to the analysis of systemic solutions, demonstrating how education can respond to contemporary challenges in an integrated and long-term manner.

The authors pose questions that are fundamental to the development of education: how to design support in ways that strengthen the subjectivity and agency of students and teachers rather than fostering dependency; how to

understand educational leadership in conditions of increasing complexity and responsibility placed on schools; and how to build a culture of collaboration and learning among teachers that leads to tangible improvements in educational quality. The book seeks to address how schools can be developed as learning organizations capable of reflecting on their own practice, adapting to change, and responsibly shaping students' futures. The analyses, models, and examples presented including systemic experiences from countries achieving high educational outcomes, are intended to help readers understand the conditions that foster sustainable educational development and the role played by relationships, trust, and shared responsibility in this process.

The monograph is addressed to a broad audience interested in education understood as a developmental and social process. It may serve as a valuable resource for researchers and students in relation to pedagogy, the social sciences, and educational management, as well as for practitioners such as school leaders, teachers, educational leaders, methodological advisers, and education policy decision makers. It may also be useful for those involved in designing educational policies and teacher professional development programs. The ambition of the book is not only to provide theoretical knowledge, but also to inspire reflection on practice and to encourage the development of education grounded in support, responsible leadership, and collective learning as the foundations of quality and sustainable development.

Support in Education

1 Theoretical Foundations of Pedagogical Support

1.1 The Concept of Social and Educational Support

Both in educational practice and in scientific reflection on education, the need to precisely define what social and educational support is and what functions it performs in the development of the individual is becoming increasingly apparent. These concepts do not belong to everyday language, although they are often treated as such; in regard to pedagogy, they require strict reference to the relationship, environment, and situations in which they appear. Therefore, it is not only an act of assistance, but a specific type of impact that assumes the possibility of strengthening, accompanying, and mobilizing the resources of the supported person. In school, or academic or rehabilitation practice, support is not an addition to the process of upbringing, but a constitutive element—a condition without which development, learning, and change would be significantly impeded. Social and educational support goes beyond the individual dimension. It includes both actions taken in a “one-to-one” relationship, as well as environmental, institutional, and organizational impacts. Therefore, its analysis requires reference to different levels of human functioning: personal, relational, group, and systemic. From a pedagogical perspective, it is particularly important to distinguish between support that strengthens independence and support that unconsciously weakens it. The criterion is not the mere presence of assistance, but its nature, quality, and adaptation to the needs of the supported person. That is why determining what social and educational support is requires reference to the achievements of psychological, pedagogical, and social research—both in theoretical and practical terms.

In the following, definitions that allow the capture of these two concepts in a way useful for the analysis of educational processes and working with people experiencing situations requiring intervention, assistance, or developmental accompaniment will be presented. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify how to understand social and educational support so that it can become a tool of real impact, and not just a declarative category. It should be assumed that *support* is the overarching concept, covering its various varieties found in the literature: social, educational, emotional, or institutional. In Polish discourse, this

concept most often functions in its basic form, without additional terms, and is sometimes identified with help directed to another person—both material and moral. In everyday terms, therefore, it means shaking hands in difficulties, providing assistance, but also accompanying and encouraging in moments of weakness or life destabilization.¹ A reference to etymology allows us to see that the meaning of the word “support” (from Latin *supportare*: *sub* – “under,” *portare* – “to carry”) indicates an action the essence of which is to support something or someone in a situation of threat to balance. This means not so much taking responsibility for the other person as providing help that prevents a “fall”—understood both literally and metaphorically.² In this sense, support is not passive; it is a dynamic act of accompaniment, aimed at keeping a person or situation in a state that allows actions to continue despite adversity. From a pedagogical perspective, this leads to a significant conclusion. Support has a social dimension, because it is born and implemented in relations with others; it assumes the presence of the entity providing the assistance and the recipient who needs it. It also has an objective dimension, as it is based on specific activities, resources, and forms of organization of assistance. The coexistence of these two levels—relational and practical—means that support can be treated as a phenomenon embedded in the social environment, and at the same time functional towards its participants. For this reason, it becomes an important category for pedagogy, including areas related to education.

In the literature, social support is defined as a resource present in interpersonal relationships, triggered in situations exceeding the ability of an individual to cope independently. Its appearance and intensity are directly related to the level of difficulty, stress, and demands placed on the person. As Sarason notes, support is assistance that becomes available to the individual in moments of crisis, tension, or uncertainty, i.e., in circumstances where the load exceeds the existing resources.³ In practical terms, the demand for support is not constant, but clearly increases in difficult, sudden situations threatening the continuity of functioning, as already indicated by the analyses of Jaworowska-Oblój and Skuza.⁴ Contemporary approaches emphasize that social support is not only an act of assistance, but a form of **social interaction**

1 J. Kirenko, *The faces of social support*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2002, p. 17.

2 E. Gindrich, *Etymological meanings of the concept of support*, [in:] *Studies in social pedagogy*, ed. T. Pilch, Fundacja Studiów i Badań Edukacyjnych, Warszawa 2011, p. 106.

3 I.G. Sarason, B.R. Sarason, *Social support: Insights from assessment and experimentation*, “Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology” 1982, pp. 273–276.

4 K. Jaworowska-Oblój, M. Skuza, *Social support and its importance in difficult situations*, “Przegląd Psychologiczny,” No. 3, 1986, pp. 14–18.

that requires the presence of at least two parties—the person providing the assistance and the person receiving it. Sęk and Cieślak emphasize that support is an emotional, informational, or instrumental exchange, which can be both one-sided and mutual.⁵ There is no one constant form or intensity—the support can be short term or continuous, ad hoc or systemic, and its effectiveness depends on matching the real needs of the person receiving the assistance. The correspondence between the type of support provided and the way in which the supported person defines their situation is crucial here. Failure to do so may lead to a sense of incomprehension, dependence, or ineffectiveness of the assistance activities. In this sense, social support is not neutral—it has a protective and causative function. It helps to reduce the power of tension, restore a sense of influence and open up the possibility of taking action aimed at solving the problem. Its developmental importance is also important: support can strengthen the individual's ability to function independently, increase their coping competences, and in the long run, contribute to improving their quality of life.⁶ A special role is attributed to the support of young people, especially in times of developmental crises and educational transitions. Properly provided support increases psychological resilience, reduces the risk of destructive behavior, and strengthens the ability to make decisions. In this approach, support is not a substitute—its purpose is not to replace the activity, but to enable it to be undertaken. Thus, it can be defined that social support can be understood as

conscious and deliberate action taken in the relationship between people or within the social environment, the purpose of which is to maintain, strengthen and enable the individual to function in a demanding situation. It includes both the relational dimension (the presence of the other person, readiness to accompany and understand) and the practical dimension (specific forms of help, resources and organizational solutions). Its effectiveness is based on matching the type of assistance provided to the real needs of the recipient, which allows not to replace, but to strengthen subjectivity, independence and the ability to act further.

This means that social support can be treated not only as an aid, but as a **condition for social and educational participation**. Thus, educational sup-

5 H. Sęk, R. Cieślak (ed.), *Social support, stress, and health*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2004, pp. 20–27.

6 S. Cohen, T.A. Wills, *Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis*, "Psychological Bulletin" 98(2), 1985, pp. 310–315.

port should be understood as a set of consciously planned activities undertaken towards a student, a student, or another learner, the purpose of which is to maintain, enable, and develop the learning process by providing adequate emotional, cognitive, organizational, and institutional resources. It includes two complementary dimensions: **formal**, implemented by the school or other institutions in the form of psychological and pedagogical assistance, adapted teaching methods, support programs, and the organization of the learning process; and **informal**, based on relationships with significant people—teachers, parents, peers, and specialists—who influence the course of learning through presence, accompaniment, and understanding.⁷ In this approach, educational support does not replace the activity of the learner, but aims to strengthen their subjectivity and responsibility for their own development. Its essence is to match the type and scope of assistance to the real needs of the recipient, so that the supporting action does not lead to dependence, but opens the possibility of overcoming barriers on one's own.⁸ The effectiveness of support depends on both the relational climate and the quality of the organization of the educational environment; therefore, the coexistence of the human dimension (contact, safety, understanding) and the structural one (procedures, resources, learning conditions) is important.⁹ Educational support is therefore a developmental activity aimed at enabling the learner to meet educational requirements, build competences, and experience agency. In pedagogical terms, it is not only a response to difficulty, but an element of the learning environment that enables participation in education and maintains the continuity of the education process.¹⁰ The understanding of social and educational support outlined above indicates that it is not only a helping action or a simple response to difficulty, but a complex category, functioning at the intersection of many disciplines and levels of influence. In order to grasp its importance in upbringing and educational practice, it is necessary to look at support not as a single act of assistance, but as an element of a larger structure—the

7 K. Chrzanowska, *Special education. From tradition to modernity*, Oficyna Wydawnicza, "Impuls," Kraków 2009, pp. 192–198; A.I. Brzezińska, *Social developmental psychology*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2000, pp. 211–216; B.M. Szulc, K. Pierzchała, *Man in contemporary society. Selected issues*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2022, ISBN: 978-83-8180-619-0.

8 E. Marynowicz-Hetka, *Social pedagogy. Academic textbook*, t. 1, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, pp. 121–130.

9 J. Hattie, *Visible Learning for Teachers*, Taylor & Francis Ltd., Taylor & Francis Ltd, London-New York 2012, pp. 67–74; R. Pianta, *Student-Teacher Relationships and Learning*, New York 2016, pp. 9–15.

10 L. Woolfolk, *Educational Psychology* (12th ed.), Pearson, Boston 2013, pp. 350–358.

environment, relationships, and development processes. At this point, there is a need for a broader reflection on the status of support in upbringing sciences and its place in the system of pedagogical concepts.

1.1.1 Support as a Pedagogical and Interdisciplinary Category

The category of support occupies an important place in pedagogical reflection, although its genesis and development are clearly interdisciplinary. This concept functions in parallel in pedagogy, sociology, psychology, and social work, assuming different meanings depending on the adopted theoretical perspective. In regard to pedagogy, support is understood not only as a form of assistance in deficit situations, but as a permanent element of the educational environment, conducive to the development of the individual and strengthening his/her ability to cope with development challenges on his/her own.¹¹ In classical approaches to social pedagogy, support is understood as a network of relationships, institutions, and resources that enable the individual to participate more fully in social life. Helena Radlińska pointed out that the educational environment should be organized in such a way as to strengthen the potential of a person, and not only compensate for their shortcomings.¹² Support understood in this way is of a developmental and environmental nature—its essence is to create conditions conducive to activation and independence. Contemporary social pedagogy develops this approach, emphasizing the relational and processual nature of support. As Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka emphasizes, support is not a one-off act of assistance, but a long-term process of cooperation, embedded in a specific institutional and cultural context.¹³ This means moving away from a paternalistic aid model towards actions based on partnership, dialogue, and shared responsibility.

Psychological and sociological studies have also made an important contribution to the conceptualization of support, especially those on social support as a factor protecting the individual from the negative effects of stress. Sidney Cobb's research and later analyses by Sheldon Cohen and Thomas A. Wills showed that access to supportive relationships reduces mental tension and

11 S. Kawula, *The individual in social support relationships*, Wydawnictwo, "Akapit," Toruń 2004, pp. 15–18.

12 H. Radlińska, *Social pedagogy*, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków 1961, pp. 92–98.

13 E. Marynowicz-Hetka, *Social pedagogy*, op. cit., pp. 121–128.

promotes better functioning in aggravating situations.¹⁴ Although these approaches were created outside pedagogy, they were widely used in the analysis of educational environments.

However, in pedagogy, support takes on a specific meaning. It does not boil down only to “buffering” difficulties, but becomes an integral part of the process of upbringing and education. As Stanisław Kawula notes, pedagogical support should be designed in such a way as to strengthen the individual’s sense of agency and their ability to make autonomous decisions.¹⁵ In this sense, support is not the opposite of independence, but its condition.

The interdisciplinarity of the category of support is also revealed in formal education, where it increasingly refers to ecological models of human development. The concept of interrelated systems, proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, allows for the recognition of support as the result of the interaction of different levels of the environment—from direct relations to institutional and cultural solutions.¹⁶ From a pedagogical perspective, this means the need to integrate the activities of the school, family, aid institutions, and the local environment. A school, university, or educational institution performs the function of institutions guaranteeing support structures, but it is not limited only to the organizational dimension. Equally important is the relational dimension, visible in the student’s daily contact with the teacher, parents, peers, or specialists. Therefore, educational support becomes an “interpersonal” experience, in which listening, understanding, and an adequate response to the needs of the learner are important. Its effectiveness depends not only on the tools, but on the quality of the relationship.

In regard to rehabilitation pedagogy, support gains an additional dimension—it becomes a tool for rebuilding identity and agency. It refers to people functioning in situations of deficit, crisis, or loss of control over their own biography. Supporting is not about taking over responsibilities, but about enabling the reconstruction of life and social competences, which is a condition for readaptation. In this context, support takes the form of an **accompanying process**, assuming the possibility of returning to social participation—also through education and work. In regard to rehabilitation pedagogy, the

14 S. Cobb, *Social support as a moderator of life stress*, “Psychosomatic Medicine” 38(5), 1976, pp. 300–314; S. Cohen, T.A. Wills, *Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis...*, op. cit., pp. 310–357.

15 S. Kawula, *Social support as a category of social pedagogy*, [in:] *Social pedagogy*, ed. S. Kawula, Wydawnictwo, “Adam Marszałek,” Toruń 1996, pp. 172–175.

16 U. Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*, MA: Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1979, pp. 22–25.

special context for the analysis of support is **the transmural model**,¹⁷ which extends the traditional approach to educational interactions carried out only in an isolation institution. In contrast to the approach focused on acting “behind the walls” of the institution, the transmural model assumes the flow and continuity of support—from the institutional environment, through semi-open conditions, to functioning in a libertarian environment. This means that the process of supporting a convicted person or a person at risk of marginalization does not end with the end of their activities in the penitentiary, but accompanies them in the form of a gradual transition to independence.¹⁸

In this approach, support is not a “point” intervention, but a **transition support process**, covering the areas of education, work, and social relations. Transmuralism assumes combining resources within institutions (e.g., formal education, readaptation programs, vocational guidance) with resources of the external environment (labor market institutions, non-governmental organizations, family, local community). Therefore, it is crucial to think of support not only as help offered “here and now,” but as a **continuum of activities** that is to lead to a real change in the functioning of the person leaving the institution. In the light of this model, support becomes a tool for restoring biographical continuity—it combines experiences from the period of isolation with the possibility of taking up social, professional, and family roles in the wild. This means the need to coordinate cross-sectoral activities, in which education and work are not separate corrective actions, but are treated as **elements of the reintegration process**, and support as their condition.¹⁹ Thus, the transmural model organizes thinking about support from the perspective of transition: from dependence to responsibility, from supervision to participation, from compensating deficiencies to rebuilding agency.

Consequently, support as a pedagogical category is not a descriptive concept, but an **analytical and operational** one. It allows one to examine how the

17 The definition “is an integrated support model that ensures the continuity of rehabilitation and reintegration activities, combining penitentiary interactions with environmental assistance, in order to effectively return a person to society after serving a sentence—which is associated with environmental transgression” (Mydłowska B., *Post-penitentiary assistant in the new model of rehabilitation support*, “Rehabilitation Poland,” No. 2 (30), 2025, pp. 39–40).

18 B. Mydłowska, *Post-penitentiary assistant in the new model ...*, op. cit., p. 40; K. Pierzchała, *Transitional homes as an innovative form of support for convicts leaving prison*, [in:] *In the circle of rehabilitation*, ed. Beata Mydłowska, Oficyna Wydawnicza, “Impuls,” Kraków 2024, pp. 241–250; K. Pierzchała, *Rehabilitation support provided by prison staff to mothers serving sentences in Polish prisons*, “The Prison Systems Review,” No. 117, ed. IV, 2022, pp. 177–196.

19 B. Mydłowska, *Post-penitentiary assistant in the new model...*, op. cit., p. 37.

environment, relationships, and institutions foster (or hinder) development; how ownership of the change process is shaped; and what conditions must be met for the supported person to act autonomously. The interdisciplinary nature of the concept does not weaken its pedagogical identity—on the contrary, it broadens it, enabling a fuller understanding of the relationship between education, individual development, and the social conditions in which this development takes place.

The above approaches show that support—regardless of whether it concerns the educational, social, or rehabilitation environment—cannot be considered only as a single intervention or a one-off activity. Its essence is revealed only when it is treated as an experience stretched over time, rooted in relationships and connections between people, institutions, and functional environments. Support thus becomes a process of moving from dependence to independence, from crisis to stabilization, from intervention to accompaniment. Therefore, the natural development of the previous findings is the transition to the analysis of support in its **relational and processual dimension**, where the emphasis is not only on the act of assistance provided, but above all on the quality of the relationship, continuity of accompaniment, and the dynamics of the change that takes place in the supported person and in their environment.

1.1.2 Relational and Processual Nature of Support

The analysis of support in a pedagogical context leads to the conclusion that its essence does not consist in a single gesture of help, but in the dynamics of relationships and continuity of activities that allow the supported person to gradually regain their agency. Support is relational because it is born in contact with another person—in the space of dialogue, trust, and mutual responsibility. At the same time, it has a processual dimension, as it is not limited to a one-off intervention, but accompanies the change that the individual experiences, covering their emotional, social, and educational functioning. An important dimension of support is also its temporary nature. It does not refer to a one-off act of assistance, but to a series of interrelated activities aimed at change—leading from the first diagnosis of difficulties to the independent functioning of the supported person. Such a perspective assumes that the effectiveness of support depends not only on *what* is done, but also *how long* and *what* method that it takes to accompany the change process. The relational dimension of support is revealed primarily in the quality of contact between the helping person and the supported person. It does not function as an exclusively one-sided activity, but as a form of co-presence in which it is

necessary to recognize the situation of another person and the readiness to respond to their experience.²⁰ Dialogue is an essential mechanism of communication here—not as a communication technique, but as a way of meeting, the foundation of which is mindfulness, respect, and recognition of the subjectivity of the other party.²¹ For this reason, relational support does not treat the recipient as a passive person; it assumes the possibility of expressing needs, defining boundaries, and co-determining the course of activities.²² Mutual recognition has a regulating function—it balances the relationship between help and autonomy. When left out, support can be reduced to surrogate activities, leading to a weakening of the supported person’s independence.²³ On the other hand, where the relationship is built on respect for experience and the individual pace of change, support becomes a space of co-responsibility, in which help does not take away the impact, but helps to regain it.²⁴ This means moving away from a perspective based solely on intervention to activities that foster a gradual takeover of one’s own educational or social functioning. The dialogical nature of support is also confirmed in research on educational environments. Teacher–student relationships based on trust and recognition correlate with increased readiness to expend effort and better school adaptation.²⁵ The English-language literature emphasizes that it is not the aid procedure itself, but the quality of contact and constancy of relations that predict the effects of support.²⁶ This shifts attention from technical activities to the way of being towards another person—support becomes a structure of relationships, not just a set of tools. This solution is found in educational concepts that assume the coexistence of many perspectives and the equivalence of experiences. In this context, an important reference is the distinction between multicultural and polyphonic education. The former focuses on learning about differences—values, languages, traditions,

20 H. Sęk, *Social support—structure, functions, consequences*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2003, pp. 9–15.

21 A. Barnat, *Support as a space for educational dialogue*, “Edukacja,” No. 4 (146), 2017, pp. 112–118.

22 R. Cieślak, *The interactive nature of social support*, “Nowiny Psychologiczne,” No. 3–4, 2005, pp. 67–72.

23 J. Grotowska-Leder, *The social environment as a space for support*, “Przegląd Pedagogiczny,” No. 1, 2008, pp. 77–81.

24 S. Kawula, *Support as a category of social pedagogy*, [in:] *Social pedagogy*, ed. S. Kawula i wsp., Wydawnictwo “Adam Marszałek,” Toruń 1996, pp. 41–45.

25 R. Pianta, *Enhancing Relationships Between Children and Teachers*, “School Psychology Review” 28(3), 1999, pp. 251–260.

26 H. Shin, *Relational support from teachers and peers*, “Journal of Educational Psychology” 92, 2022, pp. 4–7.

and history—and building attitudes of acceptance towards cultural differences. Its aim is to enable an understanding of the “other” and to shape the basis for intercultural dialogue. Polyphonic education goes a step further, because it is not limited to describing differences, but creates a space for their **participation**. Based on the metaphor of polyphony, it assumes that various voices, ways of thinking, and forms of experiencing the world can remain in a relationship without imposing the dominant narrative. The basis for action is not the assimilation or unification of participants, but the search for solutions in multi-perspective ones. Polyphony understood in this way strengthens relational support, because it allows us to recognize that the knowledge and experience of each person—regardless of their cultural or biographical anchorage—have value and can become an element of joint learning.²⁷ A similar relationship is visible in regard to rehabilitation pedagogy, where the help relationship is a condition for the restoration of identity and a sense of agency. In this approach, support does not boil down to controlling behavior, but consists in creating conditions in which it is possible to gradually move from dependence to independence.²⁸ As a result, support acts as a bridge between the experience of the crisis and the possibility of conscious functioning in a social or educational environment.

From the pedagogical perspective, support does not end at the moment of solving a single difficulty or with the closure of a specific educational stage. Its processual nature is revealed in the fact that the aid action is continued also when the environment, status, or role of the person receiving the support changes. This is particularly evident in the transmural model used in regard to rehabilitation pedagogy, where support is a “transitional” structure—leading from institutional space to an open environment. The transmural model assumes that support should take a different form at each stage of change. In the institution, its function is to stabilize and create conditions for the reconstruction of basic competences; at the transition stage—to monitor, accompany, and reduce the level of dependence; in a libertarian environment—to enable regaining control over one’s own actions. In this sense, support is neither an addition to interactions nor a replacement for them, but the **structural axis** of the entire process of change, which runs from leading to cooperation and then to responsible self-determination. This concept remains consistent with the step-by-step approach to support in the educational environment:

27 Mydlowska B., *Interaction of cultures in the school environment as a challenge for polyphonic education*, “Intercultural Education,” No. 4 (31), 2025, pp. 45–46.

28 B. Mydlowska, *Factors limiting the effectiveness of prisoner rehabilitation*, “Studia Pedagogika Ignatiana” 4, (28), 2025, pp. 189–206, <https://doi.org/10.12775/SPI.2025.4.009>.