



Article

The *Eight Dark Side* Patterns of Building Bonds Between Undergraduate Students of Special Education and Adults with Intellectual Disabilities: Qualitative Research Report

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Abstract

The main purpose of the entire qualitative research report illustrated in the article was to analyze and describe generated after fieldwork the *eight dark sides* patterns related to the process of forming the relationships and bonds between the special education 6 undergraduate students of Faculty of Education Sciences, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland and adults both sexes with intellectual disabilities, participants of Polish rehabilitation facilities. Research project and report are results of joint academic seminar work of both authors involved. The core of qualitative research project was focused on the context of the bonds related to the difficulties and burdens in establishing relationships between undergraduate special education students and adults with disabilities that were encoded as the dark side category. The purposive sample of participants in the projects consisted of 6 of special education students (5 females and 1 male), attending a Nicolaus Copernicus University and Faculty of Education Sciences courses in 2017 year. The research report illustrate also in its theoretical part, basic description of the difficulties and problems arising from the desire to create bonds and interpersonal relationships, that has changed over the centuries and were noticed by academics. The main research question formulated in the qualitative project was: what are the dark sides of the process of building bonds between undergraduate students and adults with intellectual disabilities?

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical problems of relationships, bonds exist in the social science literature on many levels, such as: psychological, sociological, we also distinguish between family, social and emotional ties. According to Turowski (1993) it is the overall relationship and interpersonal relations as well as related expectations, duties and powers. The author also believes that “social bond is a structural-consciousness bond, which refers to the internal organization of the group, as well as unifying people around certain values or functions” (p. 165). On the other hand Grotowska-Leder (2014) perceives bond as some norms that should be respected. Not only do they need to maintain relationships, but also selfless assistance and support to the other person (p.34). Meanwhile Żywczok (2014), traced the meaning of the bond (e.g., social bond) in Polish literature, author characterizes it as the existing interrelation between people. Moreover, the effect is the realization of similar values (symbolic or utilitarian) (p.125). The concept of Kelm (described by Żywczok 2014) is closer to our considerations, because author listed various types of social ties. One of them is a personal bond, which appears as a network of relationships between people, ties are reciprocated and have their own dynamics. Another component is contact, where we actually see the other person and start to communicate with her. This in turn leads to the formation of a personal bond, saturated with acceptance of the unit. In the end, the community emerges thanks to which relationships are formed (p. 127). Reaction and interaction can occur, when people deal with a minimum of two people. In this research project they are: students and adults with intellectual disability. The next issue is an intellectual disability of various levels. According to American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, intellectual disability is a “disability characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, which covers many everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18” (Luckasson, 2002: after Deutsch-Smith 2008 p. 225). Meanwhile, Kościelska (1998) believes that people with intellectual disability have problems using and analyzing the activity based on their own experience. This is a condition that results from anomalies, that occur in the stages of human development (p. 37). Speaking of adults with intellectual disability, it cannot be forgotten that despite some limitations, they have great potential and their needs are close to the needs of the non-disabled.

Many researches in Poland (e.g. Kościelska 1995, 2004, Borowska-Beszta 2013, Stelter 2010 et al.) has already shown that every person with intellectual disabilities feels the need to be loved, accepted and understood. He/she wants to build relationships with his neighbors and participate in social life. Often hustle and chase after a career, money desensitize us for the dreams and needs of others. Non-disabled people embrace stereotypes about people with intellectual disabilities, they are afraid of the collision of these two different but not so distant worlds. According to Woynarowska (2010) the fear of being different from a person with intellectual disabilities makes abled bodies to negate his/her emotional needs, focusing solely on his unhappy fate and mercy, which we should bestow upon him (p. 190). In our opinion the need of building the interpersonal bonds is elementary and one of the most important elements of all human lives. Kościelska (1998) pointed out the problem of communication of people with intellectual disabilities, which depreciates the inclusion of contacts with others. As Kościelska has shown (1998) the purpose of establishing a relationship becomes “emotional exchange, exchange of information, exchange of things: sharing of experience” (p. 120). On the other hand Stelter (2010) believes that adults with intellectual disabilities like everyone feel “the need for close contact with others and the need for love. The need for love and the need to bond are the basic needs of each one of us:



physically and intellectually disabled” (p. 134). Below is presented a brief historical outline in the context of the readiness of society to connect with people with intellectual disabilities, as part of the research.

According to Borowska-Beszta (2012: after Witkowski, 1993) who has mentioned, that in times when Poland became independent of the Soviet Union, the population was isolated from people with intellectual disabilities. It was very difficult to meet them in the public space, because care was taken to ensure that people with disabilities were invisible to the public (p. 47). This made it impossible to establish any kind of bond or even contact. In addition, people did not know how to behave towards people with disabilities, because they were very rare. Kulbaka (2012) emphasizes the fact, that at the turn of the 19th century in Europe society became aware of the presence of people with intellectual disabilities and, consequently, the needs of this disability. The author does not mention the origins of relationship building, but about the awakening of people's consciousness and taking real action to gradually improve the lives of people with intellectual and motor disabilities (p.9). Moreover Kulbaka considers that "disability was, is and will be an important phenomenon of social life" (p.11). Kościelska (2004), on the basis of research on intellectual disability in various social groups, concludes that for the majority of the population intellectual disability their life situation is a terrible thing. The author mention, that entire situation of Polish people with intellectual disabilities is defined by pejorative qualities: hopelessness, isolation from the world, the crossing of chances for normal life, and even as a disgrace to parents (p. 91). Kościelska (2004) admits that this attitude is not conducive to making relationships with people with intellectual disabilities, and more so on building good bonds. The dark side of the process of building bonds with an adult with an intellectual disability often they result from communication barriers that are both a consequence of the nature of the disability itself as well as the attitude of the carer, his/her attitude towards an adult with an intellectual disability, which we often perceive solely through the disability. Gumienny (2010) emphasizes that it is precisely the speech disorders of adults with intellectual disabilities that are the main cause of communication difficulties. The problem is also the poor vocabulary, unreadable content and difficult to receive form of communication (p.30). Communication difficulties are a challenge for a special educator who should learn to describe the world using simple, understandable messages, and also accept the difficulty of an adult with intellectual disability in communication. The physical and bodily side of person with disabilities is also a dark side of the process of bonding.

Konarska (2007) points out, that the deformed proportions of the bodies of people with disabilities significantly differ from stereotypes of perception of the human body by the majority of the population. Most people have specific expectations about the appearance and function of the human body (p.35). According to Borowska-Beszta (2008a, b) a sort of uncertainty and anxiety that accompanies those who engage with people with disabilities is a natural process similar to initial phase of the fieldwork in any cultural scene. Moreover, the author emphasizes, that aversion towards people with disabilities, deeper difficulties in reading and reacting to their behavior distorts the image of a person with disabilities, as seen from the perspective of a person outside the therapeutic community. From a non-disabled person's point of view, especially without any experiences with longer direct contact, the person with disabilities "can sometimes be weird, dangerous and ugly" (p.128). The core conclusion of theoretical analysis was clear and fruitful that the proposed research was needed, because the problem of building ties between students – future special educators and an adults with intellectual disability is still up to date.



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Entire qualitative research project devoted to the dark side of the bonds between 6 undergraduate students and adults with intellectual disabilities was based on constructionist epistemology and qualitative research (Denzin, Lincoln 2009; Flick, 2010; Kvale, 2010; Paluchowski, 2010; Smith, 1994; Jemielniak 2012a, 2012b; et al.) based on ethnographic method (Spradley, 1979; Hammersley, Atkinson, 2000; Angrosino, 2010; Borowska-Beszta, 2005, 2013;) and narrative interviews technique of the data collection (Konecki 2000, Kvale, 2010, Gudkova 2012; Gajek 2013). The data analysis were undertaken as narrative analysis according to Gibbs (2011). The main research question formulated in the project was as:

- What are the dark sides of the process of building bonds between undergraduate students and adults with intellectual disabilities?
- The detailed research questions were concerned with following aspects and formulated as:
 - What elements are involved in the bonding process?
 - How do special education undergraduate students prepare for the process of building relationships with adults with intellectual disabilities?
 - What are the basic concerns undergraduate students regarding contacts with adults with intellectual disabilities?
 - What difficulties do undergraduate students encounter when developing relationships with adults with intellectual disabilities?
 - What were the failures of the special education undergraduate students in terms of contact and relationships with adults with intellectual disabilities?
 - What are the bond symbols?

In presented research report we refer only to the difficulties and the dark sides of mentioned research goals.

METHOD

Qualitative research

Qualitative inquiry requires the researchers to focus on the text and use it as an empirical material. According to Denzin & Lincoln (2009) and Flick (2010) qualitative research is perceived as “studying things in their natural environment, trying to make sense or interpret phenomena using terms that people use to study” (p.22). On the other hand, Smith (1994), believe that qualitative research “they seek to understand the quality or the things that really exist, which is worth stressing in a particular context” (p.19). Qualitative research should focus on the individual nature of each case, because the research participants, their experience or point of view are unique and unique. It is precisely the individuality of each researcher that makes it possible to describe the meaning and extract the contents of the research object. With the ongoing investigation process, the investigator has the opportunity to look at the problem from different planes, so he can see the nuances that initially could have escaped him.

Paluchowski (2010) believes that qualitative research serves to develop and analyze concepts that bring the researcher closer to learning about the phenomenon being developed in the environment in which it occurs naturally. This allows them to be seen from the perspective of different people, with a view to their personal experience, emotional staining, and current state of knowledge about the problem (p.53). According to Flick (2010) the assumptions of qualitative research include:

- establishing a close relationship between the researcher and the research participant, which will build the trust that is the foundation for the start and the end of the research, and possible future cooperation
- seeking answers about the generation and conferment of human experience, in its natural context
- matching the method and theory of research on the basis of the subject matter and correcting it as necessary will allow for a more precise problem-solving and updating of data
- the research problem and its hypotheses arise and evolve during the research (p.13-14)

Ethnographic method

Another point of view for qualitative research is the one proposed by Angrosino (2010). The investigator points out points such as: unit experience analysis, document analysis, and interaction analysis, which in turn will answer the question of how individuals create the surrounding world and their own environment (p.11). Designing a qualitative research requires the use of appropriate methods that will facilitate both the researcher and the reader a thorough analysis of the content, understanding and reflection on the main problems presented by the researcher. In this case, entire reported research was based on the narrative and ethnographic research method. The purposive sample of informants consisted of 6 undergraduate students (5 females and 1 male), who shared their narratives and opinions of the dark sides of the bonds between them and adults with intellectual disabilities.

According to Angrosino (2010) the ethnographic research allows to explore and decomposition into first process factors of emerging social situations (p. 155). It should be noted that ethnographic method implements a large amount of time of the researcher. It requires him to work in the field and direct contact with the research participants (p. 45). The basis for success is to create an atmosphere of mutual trust (during the fieldwork) between individuals and preparing for unexpected situations, which may occur during interviews. Angrosino (2010) and Author (2005) mention that the research area is not laboratory space, in which researcher will be able to control everything, but the everyday living environment of the research participants. The ethnographic method raises certain requirements for the researcher, because it is not grounded on existing theories, that would suffice to confirm by making the appropriate hypothesis. Angrosino (2010) indicates that this requires intellectual effort and a certain amount of innovation, in order to create an explanatory theory or provide general patterns of behavior and conduct (p.46). Thanks to them, the researcher will be able to offer the reader more than empty assertions. Angrosino (2010) and Borowska-Beszta (2005, 2013) mention that one of the most important elements of the ethnographic method is the dialogue between the researcher and the research participant, which allows for direct confrontation and analysis of conclusions or interpretations created during the conversation. That is why, as mentioned before Spradley (1979), Hammersley, Atkinson (2000), Jemielniak (2012a, 2012b), Kvale (2010), the most important thing is to gain the trust of the speaker, in order to provide as many valid and necessary information as we can.

Data Collection

Technique

The data collection and fieldwork was performed between May of 2016 and December 2016 at the Campus of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun. For the purpose of the research were used narrative interviews which are a universal technique appropriate in many

spheres of social sciences research including special education and disability studies. Qualitative narrative interview it is not an empty dialogue between two or more people, but according to Gudkova (2012) interview is a "data collection tool, separated from the process of their interpretation. Knowledge is hidden and waiting to be discovered, and the researcher already defined his structure before he started interviewing"(p.112). The interview is perceived as a process of knowledge formation, inherent in the process of its interpretation and narration. During a conversation, the researcher must remember that it has a specific purpose, and it is his question that sets the direction and impose the pace. There is an interaction between two people, therefore, researcher must respond to what the research participant says, and do not overwhelm him with too many questions. According to Gudkova (2012) the impact of the researcher on the informant's answer may be a problem (p. 112). The author continues that researcher can unconsciously manipulate the conversation, thus setting the research participant to the answers we want. The tone of the voice, the accent of the words are only exemplary factors, which can distort the actual character of the respondent's statements.

Considering the subject matter of the research, we believe that the best way to extract depth from data is to use a narrative interview. Thanks to its unstructured form, the research participant can answer questions in a convenient way for him/her, also he/her are not limited to yes/no statements. On the other hand, Borowska-Beszta (2005: after Spradley 1979) believes that asking especially descriptive questions, in which researcher would like have an example or own experience related to the aspects he/she are interested in, author suggests that it can provide significant data (p. 145). In presented research report a narrative interview was used to enable the respondents to tell broadly their own stories, concerning building their relationship with adults with intellectual disabilities. The research participants were free in terms of speech, length and content of their dialogue, but the hints were questions to guide them on the subject of the interview. According to Konecki (2000) narrative interview gives the participant the opportunity to tell his/her different life experiences, in any way, not imposed by anyone. During this process the researcher should be primarily a listener and allows the interlocutors to express themselves freely (p.180). Through the use of narrative researcher is able to get a lot of interesting information and threads that could be omitted, if only focused on the rigid rules of the interview. Being aware that there is nothing to restrict an interlocutor can be crucial for the projects carried out and to radically change the results of the research. As Gajek showed (2013)

„the term narrative means a story if it refers to an utterance presenting events that are ordered in time and have their cause and effect (dynamic elements), and a description when it describes the characters and the environment associate with these events” (p.12).

The researcher must take care of the transparency of the interview, and did not quote the information he had obtained in private conversation with the research participant, because it is unethical and may discourage the respondent from further cooperation. According to Flick (2010) an important element of the interview is the selection of the sample, which should meet the following criteria: cooperation with people, who have contact or experience with the phenomena we surveyed, also it should include time for an interview and reflection on answers (p. 139-140). The next component of the narrative interview, is the appropriate construction of the questions; they should be formulated in such a way, that the participant understands what we expect from him. It would be good if the respondent had the opportunity

to develop his statement: the question in the form of "whether" only answers yes / no, therefore, you should ask the interlocutor for a statement of reasons. Following the instructions of Angrosino (2010) the researcher should not ask questions that suggest answers or in any way manipulate the speaker's statement. The lack of tact is also interrupt someone. In good tones, however, is the inquire, ask for clarification of incomprehensible content or develop the issue by giving examples (p. 90-91). Besides, the author continues the interview should not hurt the informants in any way or make them feel uncomfortable, therefore researcher should read non-verbal signals (facial expressions, posture).

Angrosino (2010), Gudkova (2012), Kvale (2010) indicate that it is also worth to keep eye contact and also nod to the interlocutor, which will confirm him in the belief, that we actually listen to him. According to Spradley (1979) and Jemielniak (2012 a, b) the researcher should be sensitive to the problem being investigated, at the same time, be able to be critical of what he has previously assumed. This will allow him/her to objectively analyze the content and extract from the statement what he considers most valuable. Moreover Borowska-Beszta (2008a) believes, that the use of narrative interview will facilitate the building of ties between interlocutors, and also get the necessary information (p.111). In summary, all cited authors believe that the interview technique should be tailored to the type of study performed, questions cannot be a form of oppression and should be designed so that they are legible and understandable. Interview is a free conversation that will allow the interlocutor to express and develop his or her opinion.

Data Analysis Technique

Narrative analysis

In analyzed narrative research was used a narrative analysis technique according to Gibbs (2011), which allowed to understand how the interviewee interprets and what the meaning imparts to the event (p.108). According to the author, narrative analysis allows the researcher not only to deepen the statement and information provided by the respondents, but allows him to analyze how the interlocutor perceives himself and his actions (p.109). Gibbs (2011) points out that, with this type of analysis, it is worthwhile to put together the views, feelings and interpretations of a particular subject of different people who took part in the research (p.119). In addition, the author reports that, during narrative analysis, a researcher sometimes encounters a secondary thread, spontaneously introduced to the interview by a research participants (p.127). This allows the researcher to create an additional category in research that he did not initially set up, and which could affect the final research effect. On the other hand Paluchowski (2010) indicates that narrative analysis is the way in, which person experiences a situation, gives it a concrete meaning and assigns a value. As a result, events and situations are located in time and form a certain structure, which allows to understand what the person experienced (p.55).

A similar statement to Paluchowski (2010) is made by Kozerska (2013), who believes that narrative analysis allows the researcher to look at the issue in question from a research participant perspective: it brings researcher closer to the subjective picture of the world and allows him/her to understand the motives of the person taking part in the research (p. 30). However, S. Kvale (2010) believes that narrative analysis focuses on the content provided by respondents during interviews, while exploring the linguistic structure (p. 181). A extremely important element of narrative analysis, as demonstrated by K. Kaźmierska (1997) is to

establish a communication scheme included in the interview. The research participant during the interview reconnects the course of events while arguing the motives behind their conduct and evaluating the actions. This enables the researcher to be able to know the subjective feelings of the respondent, the ideology he has chosen, and the thoughts that respondent has captured (p. 39).

RESEARCH RESULTS

To summarize what dark sides were decoded from the qualitative data, we were able to receive rich data from comprehensive written narrative interviews transcripts and drawing analysis after meetings with the 6 undergraduate students (5 females and 1 male) involved to research. We can conclude that, results certainly showed existing the eight dimensions pattern of researched dark sides. The analyzed data illustrated varieties of the way of how the students perceive and feel the issue of the process of building the ties and difficulties they are facing in contacts with adults with intellectual disabilities.

- As a matter of fact **first** dimension of the dark sides was mostly reported as problems in communication between students and adults with intellectual disabilities. Besides, inability to use alternative and supportive communication methods narrows the students the field of work. The research showed that such collapse is mainly due to a lack of knowledge and experience, which unfortunately has a bearing on building relationships with people with intellectual disabilities. Using inappropriate vocabulary (categories not understood by adults with intellectual disabilities) also were mentioned as the dark sides by students from FES NCU in Torun. Fortunately, the students were aware that their language should be assimilable and easy for the people they wanted to communicate with.
- **Second** dark side area was related to overcoming the inner barrier of discomfort, confusion and personal disgust, because adults with intellectual disabilities may not always were able to control their reflexes, their physiology. Students had to overcome their unwillingness to salivate or to attend to toilets where they helped disabled person with hygiene. In addition, some students did not feel comfortable when an adult with intellectual disability seemed strange, unspecified sounds. Students did not know, whether it was an additional form of communication that they were unable to decipher, or whether not.
- **Third** dimension of the dark side of the ties related to the state of health of adults with intellectual disabilities and lack of students' knowledge of how to behave in the event of a life threatening. Such situation also terrified students, because as they themselves claimed did not always have assured the access to medical and diagnostic documentation in facilities for adults with intellectual disabilities. The impediment to building relationships could also be associated with the nature and personal features of the students, we believe: their excessive openness, their energy, sometimes their determination, which could be confused with aggression. On the other hand, we notice that too much shyness or closeness also did not help in building relationships with people with intellectual disabilities and caused some sphere of the dark sides. For students of special education, it was sometimes difficult to center their behavior in such a way, that they would not scare anyone, but in turn encourage them and mobilize them to work. Such lack of certainty on students side was confusing element of the dark side of ties as well.



- **Fourth** dimension of the dark sides showed, that what most students fear is that they will not be able to handle the new and unknown situation. Their knowledge, as undergraduate students, was in fact not complete enough to always know how to deal with an adult with intellectual disability, especially since each case and personality is different and unique.
- **Fifth** dimension and another fear in the dark side of building the relationships was definitely related to getting in touch and being understood by adults with intellectual disabilities. Students feared that they would be rejected at the very beginning and no one from adults with disabilities would accept them. More than that, they frightened appearance and behavior of adults with intellectual disability, which strengthened their belief that they would not be able to handle it.
- **Sixth** element of the dark sides was associated with the difficulty of working with the parents of the persons with intellectual disabilities and the fact, that they are constantly caring deeply for their children, which makes students work harder. Difficulties and dark sides also stemmed from the young age of students, which was translated into not being seen as an authority among also young adults but with intellectual disabilities.
- **Seventh** dimension of the dark side was the problem of not to skip. It was a physical one issue because sometimes the disabled person surpassed the weight and growth of a student who, despite sincerity and determination, could not help. He/she simply lacked the strength to actively spend time with his/her ward. Another problems related to fact that students also have problems with meals, because adults with intellectual disability refused to eat. There was a situation, where person with disabilities only accepted what she liked (sweets) and student could do nothing to change it.
- **Eight** dimension of the dark sides was related to the ignorance and lack of specific medical or pedagogical knowledge, which conditioned that the students did not know what caused the outbreaks and attacks of adults with intellectual disability and could not remedy it, because they did not know what was causing such rapid behavior. In addition, another dark side of the ties was indicated by the lack of determination and insistence to persuade the person to take part in the task or the game, which was a failure. Most students, as claimed, have drawn conclusions from the failures and already know how to proceed in the future, and that there is still a long way to go, before them to become professional special educators.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The research project analyzed in this report allowed us to get broad image of the dark sides of the relationship building and get to know, what makes students the most difficult to deal with an adult persons both sexes with intellectual disabilities. The answers of informants were complemented, which shows that they face similar problems, such as the inability to use alternative and supportive communication methods or overcome the inner barrier of discomfort. Entire narrative research about vulnerable issues in the support and care of adults with intellectual disabilities let us also analyze the opinions of 6 informants in the context of results obtained by other researchers as Gumienny (2010), who emphasized that speech disorder are the main cause of communication difficulties (p. 30). On the other hand, Konarska (2007) has stated that it is the physical appearance of people with intellectual disabilities that may be difficult to accept by people with non-disabilities. Borowska-Beszta (2005, 2008b) who mentioned phenomena of cultural shock in the field of disability culture areas of practice and highlighted need for individual linguistic adjustment to individual person



with disabilities. By compiling the opinions of students of special education from FES NCU in Torun and the words mentioned by the authors of the research, we understood, that the fears and difficulties that arise, when building relationships with people with intellectual disabilities are broader patterns and can be similar, in the field and facilities for adults with intellectual disabilities, regardless of the degree and time of former personal experiences in disability cultures.

The main conclusion we would show is, that building bond is related to dark sides as the part of process similar to the cultural shock described by the anthropologists and in Polish disability studies by Borowska-Beszta (2008b). Besides, much attention, theoretical knowledge and care for building the proper bonds between students and adults with intellectual disability can bring mutual benefits: raise positive experience of persons without disabilities cooperating and working with persons with intellectual disabilities. Such professional attitude will also point to the needs, feelings of the other and will help break the communication barriers within public and private dimensions of the social interactions.

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