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**TRAINING PEDAGOGICAL THERAPISTS IN POLAND**

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*Abstract*

The Maria Grzegorzewska University is a leading Polish university for teachers and special pedagogues training, offering dozens of different educational specialisations, and among them is pedagogical therapy. Pedagogical therapy is a new subdiscipline that has been emerging in Poland since the 1990s and that has been creating its identity drawing on the theory, methodology, and conceptual framework of general education, special education, psychology, and psychotherapy. The developing status of pedagogical therapy as an "in-between" subdiscipline is both its strength and its weakness. Pedagogical therapy is facing numerous challenges, among which defining the scope of its interventions is particularly important. Specifying the subject of pedagogical therapy is a starting point for the development of curricula for university training. This article is aimed at presenting the development of pedagogical therapy as a subdiscipline in The Maria Grzegorzewska University that has several master degree program with majors in pedagogical therapy. As a result, a specific definition of pedagogical therapy was proposed.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. History of Special Pedagogy Education in Poland

History of educating teachers for working with children and teenagers with disabilities can be traced back to 1920s and are connected mainly with Maria Grzegorzewska. In 1922, on her initiative, the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment decided to merge Siestrzyński State



Phonetic Institute with the State School of Special Education and created the State Institute of Special Education (SISE). The classes for SISE students were conducted by the important authorities in pedagogy, e.g.: Józef Joteyko, Janusz Korczak, Janina Doroszevska, Halina Jankowska, and Natalia Han-Ilgiewicz.

Pursuant to the Regulation of the Council of Ministers of May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1970, the SISE obtained the status of a vocational college, which in turn resulted in master's degree programs being introduced in 1973. Pursuant to the Regulation of April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1976, the SISE was transformed into the Maria Grzegorzewska College of Special Education (Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiki Specjalnej im. Marii Grzegorzewskiej – original Polish name). In 1989, the school was granted the right to award doctoral degrees in pedagogy.

Transformation of the College into the Maria Grzegorzewska University (Akademia Pedagogiki Specjalnej im. Marii Grzegorzewskiej – original Polish name), was the next step in its development. Due to this important change, the university rose. Since 2005, the Maria Grzegorzewska University (MGU) has been implementing the principles of the Bologna Process, e.g. the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and two-cycle programs were introduced.

In the 2006/2007 academic year, the MGU opened another department besides the Department of Pedagogical Sciences, i.e. the Department of Applied Social Sciences, and created two new majors: Visual Arts Education and Social Work. In the same academic year, the MGU was entitled to award postdoctoral degrees in pedagogy. In the 2007/2008 academic year, majors in Sociology were introduced, and in 2008/2009 academic year - majors in Psychology.

Since the academic year 2009/2010, the Department of Pedagogical Sciences of MGU has also been offering doctoral programs, which means the implementation of a complete cycle of higher education in accordance with the guidelines of the Bologna Process. Currently, there are over 7,000 full-time and part-time students in the two departments in first, second, and third stage degree programs. The University also offers a number of qualification studies and graduate programs.

The MGU's goal is to educate its students to be open-minded and creative professionals who care about developing their own personality, academic passions, and practical professional skills, as well as care about the people and environments for the welfare of which they will be working. The University aspires to the role of a leading national and European centre for exchange of thoughts and ideas in the areas of modern pedagogy, special education, and social sciences, orientated towards professional support for people with various difficulties resulting from their health conditions and social situations ([www.aps.edu.pl](http://www.aps.edu.pl); Kulesza & Gosk, 2015, p. 86-87).

## **1.2. Specializations in special education as a majors in the Maria Grzegorzewska University**

Developing its educational offer, the University is guided both by its long tradition and experience and by the changing needs of the labour market. Students may choose numerous useful specialisations and electives, while workshops and internships enable them to gain their first professional experiences.

The Maria Grzegorzewska University is currently a leading Polish university for teachers and special training for pedagogues, offering dozens of different educational specialisations. Main educational specialities implemented in the Special Pedagogy Institute as part of Special Education majors are listed below together with their scope of teaching speciality:

## SPECIAL EDUCATION

### LEADING EDUCATIONAL SPECIALISATIONS:

1. Education and Rehabilitation of People with Intellectual Disabilities – students with intellectual disabilities and other special educational needs
2. Speech Therapy – students with speech disorders
3. Therapeutic Education – students with chronic illness and other special educational needs
4. Resocialization Pedagogy – socially maladjusted students and other special educational needs
5. Typhlo-pedagogy – students with visual impairments and other special educational needs
6. Vision Rehabilitation – persons with visual impairments
7. Early Intervention – children younger than 7 years old with developmental disorders
8. Career Counselling in Rehabilitation – persons with disabilities
9. Career Counselling in Education – students with and without disabilities
10. Integrated and Inclusive Education – students with special educational needs
11. Pedagogical Therapy – students with specific learning difficulties and children in a risk group of specific learning difficulties
12. Pedagogical Therapy and Early Intervention – students with specific learning difficulties and children in a risk group of specific learning difficulties, children younger than 7 years old with developmental disorders, students with other special educational needs
13. Surdo-pedagogy with pedagogical therapy – students with hearing impairments and students with other special educational needs

It is a commonplace in Poland to educate students to have two different specialties, which increases their chances in the job market. It is reflected in, for instance, specialisations no. 12 and 13. Students who have multiple specialisations, aside from additional entitlements for working with students suffering from disabilities also gain the right to be supporting teachers for students with special educational needs in integrated classes. Polish law lists 11 types of students with special educational needs:

1) students with disabilities, 2) socially maladjusted students, 3) students at risk of social maladjustment, 4) students with special gifts and talents, 5) students with specific learning difficulties, 6) students with language communication disorders, 7) students with chronic diseases, 8) students in crisis or traumatic situations, 9) students experiencing academic failures, 10) students experiencing environmental neglect connected with the living conditions, the way of spending free time or community interactions, and 11) students experiencing adaptation difficulties related to cultural differences or to a change of educational setting (Regulation of the Minister of National Education of April 30, 2013).

The result is that many specialisations define the scope of Special Pedagogue's influence very widely – students with special educational needs. At the same time Special Pedagogues' training lasts only 3 years (undergraduate studies) or 2 years (masters) in which time the students should be ready to work.

The problem with narrowing the scope of actions is especially true for those specialties where students are bordering “normal” and “disability” and therefore require subdisciplinary knowledge, i.e. knowledge from General and Special Pedagogy, Didactics, Methodology, Psychology, and Psychotherapy. This issue is equally true for Pedagogical Therapy.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Pedagogical therapy is a new subdiscipline that has been emerging in Poland since the 1990s and that has been creating its identity drawing on the theory, methodology, and conceptual framework of general education, special education, psychology, and psychotherapy. The developing status of pedagogical therapy as an "in-between" subdiscipline is both its strength and its weakness. Defining the subject, scope of interventions, and specific nature of educational therapy is a difficult task itself (Kaja, 2001; Skałbania and Lewandowska-Kidoń, 2015). At the same time, the need to train educators-therapists who have interdisciplinary knowledge and competences, and therefore will be able to support students in various educational and therapeutic settings is glaringly apparent.

The Maria Grzegorzewska University created a five-year master's degree program with majors in pedagogical therapy in 2003 as one of the first universities in Poland. Since then, important changes have occurred both in the educational system, and in pedagogical therapy teacher training.

## **3. Purpose of the Study**

This article aims to present the development of pedagogical therapy as a subdiscipline in The Maria Grzegorzewska University.

## **4. Research Methods**

A wide variety of qualitative and quantitative methods complementing each other were used: analysis of The Maria Grzegorzewska University's documents and other state universities' documents, analysis of legislative documents, and statistical data.

## **5. Findings**

Analysis of the literature shows that there is still no agreement among authors as to the subject of pedagogical therapy interventions: its subject are students with disabilities, students with developmental disorders, students with both “normal” and specific learning difficulties, or students at risk of specific learning difficulties.

A review of state educational universities' websites in Poland proved that wide range of approaches to the subject of pedagogical therapy is directly reflected in the pedagogical therapy teacher training curricula for bachelor's and master's degree programs as well as postgraduate programs.

Recently, there have been a clear trend in examining pedagogical therapy in terms of support for nondisabled children/students who, nevertheless, experience developmental difficulties and problems with learning to read, write, and count.

State universities, including The Maria Grzegorzewska University, offer "two-in-one" teacher training programs, i.e. they combine pedagogical therapy and early elementary education, educational therapy and deaf education, and pedagogical therapy and early intervention. Analysis of the employment of The Maria Grzegorzewska University's graduates showed that the high quality of training and the combination of majors make graduates non-competitive in the labour market.

## 6. Conclusion

As a new subdiscipline, pedagogical therapy is facing numerous challenges, among which defining the scope of its interventions is particularly important. Specifying the subject of pedagogical therapy is a starting point for the development of curricula for university training.

Based on the analysis of the literature, the following definition of pedagogical therapy is proposed:

Broadly understood, pedagogical therapy refers to deliberate interventions made for students who - due to external or internal factors - have potentially less chance than their peers to perform/gain their developmental tasks and who manifest disorders in interactions with their environment. Pedagogical therapy is organised based on prior assessment and conducted with the use of special remedial measures (building motivation, compensation, correction, stimulation, and maintenance therapy - after M. Grzegorzewska and S. Dziedzic), principles, forms, methods and means of an educational and therapeutic nature in order to prevent, eliminate, reduce or alleviate various developmental difficulties, problems with learning and disorders of social functioning. Therapeutic interventions cover a perception and a motor sphere, a cognitive sphere, emotional and motivation sphere, social sphere, and academic knowledge and skills.

Lack of its own theoretical and methodological base hinders the development of the pedagogical therapy as a subdiscipline. This is the greatest challenge faced by the academic teachers and scientists, dealing with Pedagogical Therapy.

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