

## INTRODUCTION

For many years people have believed that the individual's education ends as soon as he or she graduates from school or university. What came next was seen as the time of acquiring professional experience, which was not necessarily associated with education or the individual's development. However, human life is lived in constantly changing conditions and circumstances. We can observe changes in the natural environment, infrastructure, economics or politics. Also, the individual, throughout his or her life, undergoes the process of changes – human behaviour is connected with various transformations and development resulting from human ability to change himself or herself and capability of changing his or her environment. It can be said that change is one of the fundamental principles of the universe.

*Development* is not a goal but a long-term process which in its course constantly produces new and different achievements<sup>1</sup>. *Process* is “a series of transformational changes of a certain reality leading to a new and, at least temporarily, finished state”<sup>2</sup>. Thus, *development* is such a process of transformations in which the last situation, deemed the final one, will be more valuable than the preceding ones from which it has resulted. The process of development understood in such a way can be divided into the following consecutive stages: initial situation, process of changes and final, resultant state.

Differentiation between *development* and *process* seems to be necessary in order to capture the direction of observed transformations. In consequence, development (understood as a process) leads to achieving a new state of quality, higher in respect of its value than the previous one. Hence, values and their levels become a criterion for the proper nature of developmental changes<sup>3</sup>.

Life-span developmental psychology regards *development* as a process taking place throughout the individual's life. The essence of development is a change in adaptive skills (most commonly understood as an ability to build relations with people around the individual), while its characteristic feature is plasticity that allows various directions of individual development depending on individual and environmental resources at the person's disposal<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Maslow A. H., (1978) *Obrona i rozwój* [In:] K. Jankowski (Eds.), *Przełom w psychologii*. Warszawa: Czytelnik.

<sup>2</sup> Dąbrowski K., (1985) *Zdrowie psychiczne*. Warszawa: PWN.

<sup>3</sup> Zieliński K., (1985) *Zdrowie psychiczne młodzieży*. [In:] Dąbrowski K., (Eds) *Zdrowie psychiczne*. Warszawa: PWN.

<sup>4</sup> Trempała J., (1997) *Koncepcje rozwoju psychicznego wiele czy jedna psychologia rozwoju?* [In:] *Forum Psychologiczne*, t. 2, Nr 2, s. 3-21.

The paradigm of development and course of life, considering the course of human life to be a process of using potential developmental opportunities, assumes virtually unlimited capabilities of self-improvement at every stage of human life.

As it arises from presented deliberations – human development is not only possible but also necessary, taking into account the dynamics of changes happening in the universe. The individual's adaptation to constantly changing conditions of the environment determines his or her existence.

A question arises, however, what one should do so that actions consciously taken by him or her can be effective.

Resistance may often occur at the beginning, i.e. at the time of making a decision on change. The resistance is connected with a disturbed sense of security – all things new are unknown and different from the existing ones; they have never been checked; they inspire fear. Moreover, many behaviours, due to the fact of their frequent repetition, become habitual and are often referred to as “one's second nature”. Habits are very difficult to change as a performed action or displayed behaviour are associated with a kind of automatism, thus occurring without the participation of our consciousness. Positive effects of a change in behaviour may also be delayed in time, i.e. we have to wait to see effects of our actions.

It should be kept in mind that development is a process that, along with the individual's knowledge and skills, consists also of experience acquired in the course of education (trainings, courses) as well as throughout one's career. An important component is the assimilation of new experience, which requires time.

The monograph analyses selected directions and perspectives of human development, taking into account, in particular, individuals with special educational needs. The issues become especially important in the context of changes in the contemporary world which, on one hand, create new opportunities and prospects, and, on the other hand, can be a source of frustration, anxiety or various pathologies. The monograph contains articles, authored by educationalists, psychologists, academics and practitioners, and grouped into four parts of the publication. Titles of specific parts determine issues covered by articles assigned to them. Subjects discussed in part one are defined by its title *Human Educational Needs versus Human Developmental Needs*. Part two is dedicated to the subject of development support professionalization. Part three entitled *More Dynamic Development of the Disabled: between Tradition and Innovation in Special Needs Education* offers a new look at the development and social functioning of individuals with disabilities. *Dilemmas of Contemporary Prophylaxis and Resocialization – Supporting Human Development in Social Isolation Conditions and Open Environment* are covered by the fourth part of the monograph.

Anna Sobczak, Marta Znajmiecka-Sikora