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A Child in the Poznań “Łejery” Pedagogy of Jerzy Hamerski – an Example of Good Educational Practices

*Dziecko w poznańskiej pedagogice „lejerskiej” Jerzego
Hamerskiego – przykład dobrych praktyk edukacyjnych*

Abstract: The study aims to present the construct of the child in the Poznań “Łejery” pedagogy, created by Jerzy Hamerski. The work of Jerzy Hamerski, co-created in 1985 also with the participation of Elżbieta Drygas, is unique in the country and 1990 resulted in the establishment of Primary School No. 83 in Poznań, which focuses on education through art and is called the “Łejery Republic”. The institution is governed by the “Little Constitution of the Republic of Ł.”. The research problem of the study is contained in the question: How does the construct of the child appear in the Poznań “Łejery” pedagogy? To answer the research question, the method of individual case analysis was used using the technique of source analysis (existing and elicited) and participant observation carried out by the author in the 2024/2025 school year. Among the existing sources, we can list publications issued by Poznań’s “Łejery” popularizing the concept of Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas, press releases and scientific studies. Among the elicited sources, we should list interviews conducted with the founder of “Łejery” on the premises of Primary School No. 83 in Poznań in the school year 2023/2024 and 2024/2025. The observation consisted of participating in the broadly understood “school life”. The author participated in lessons, was present during breaks between classes, during special events, events planned in the school calendar, as well as during theatre rehearsals and performances by students of Primary School No. 83. Social relations in the school, actions undertaken by students and the general atmosphere prevailing in the described social space were observed. A child, both in the “Łejery” school and in the entire “Łejery” pedagogy, appears as an agentive, autonomous, strong individual. Teachers and parents actively support children’s development. Children in Hamerski’s concept are also perceived as responsible and capable of transforming the world.

Keywords: child; Poznań “Łejery” pedagogy; Primary School No. 83 named after Emilia Waśniowska in Poznań; Jerzy Hamerski

Abstrakt: Celem opracowania jest ukazanie konstruktu dziecka w poznańskiej pedagogice „łejerskiej”, której twórcą jest Jerzy Hamerski. Dzieło Jerzego Hamerskiego, współtworzone od 1985 roku także przy udziale Elżbiety Drygas, ma charakter unikatowy w skali kraju i w 1990 roku zaowocowało powołaniem do życia Szkoły Podstawowej nr 83 w Poznaniu, która koncentruje się na wychowaniu przez sztukę oraz nosi nazwę „Republiki Łejerskiej”. W placówce obowiązuje „Mała Konstytucja R.Ł.”. Problem badawczy opracowania zawiera się w pytaniu: W jaki sposób jawi się konstrukt dziecka w poznańskiej pedagogice „łejerskiej”? Aby odpowiedzieć na pytanie badawcze, posłużono się metodą analizy indywidualnego przypadku przy zastosowaniu techniki analizy źródeł (zastanych i wywołanych) oraz obserwacji uczestniczącej realizowanej przez autorkę w roku szkolnym 2024/2025. Wśród źródeł zastanych można wyszczególnić publikacje wydane przez poznańskie „Łejery”, upowszechniające koncepcję Jerzego Hamerskiego i Elżbiety Drygas, informacje prasowe oraz opracowania naukowe. Wśród źródeł wywołanych należy wyróżnić wywiady realizowane z założycielem „Łejerów” na terenie Szkoły Podstawowej nr 83 w Poznaniu w roku szkolnym 2023/2024 oraz 2024/2025. Obserwacja polegała na uczestniczeniu w szeroko pojętym „życiu szkoły”. Autorka uczestniczyła więc w lekcjach, była obecna podczas przerw międzylekcyjnych, podczas wydarzeń okolicznościowych, imprez przewidzianych w szkolnym kalendarium, a także podczas prób teatralnych oraz wystawianych przez uczniów Szkoły Podstawowej nr 83 spektakli. Obserwowano relacje społeczne w szkole, działania podejmowane przez uczniów oraz ogólną atmosferę panującą w opisywanej przestrzeni społecznej. Dziecko, zarówno w szkole „Łejery”, jak i w całej pedagogice „łejerskiej” jawi się jako jednostka sprawcza, autonomiczna, silna, a nauczyciele i rodzice aktywnie wspierają rozwój dzieci. Dzieci w koncepcji Hamerskiego są ponadto postrzegane jako odpowiedzialne i zdolne do przekształcania świata.

Słowa kluczowe: dziecko; poznańska pedagogika „łejerska”; Szkoła Podstawowa nr 83 im. Emilii Waśniowskiej w Poznaniu; Jerzy Hamerski

INTRODUCTION

The study aims to present the construct of the child in the Poznań “Łejery” pedagogy, created by Jerzy Hamerski. The “Łejery” pedagogy is currently celebrating its 50th anniversary and from the very beginning (despite its origins in the times of the Polish People’s Republic) it has been oriented towards openness (Hamerski, 1981, pp. 23–28), the subjectivity of the child, democracy and art, and was considered a “rental of wings” (<https://lejery.pl/2020/11/02/przepis-na-lejerskie-harcerstwo-teatr-i-szkole-czyli-moja-ksiazka-kucharska-czesc-9/>) and inspired adults to look at the world “through the eyes” of a child.

The work of Jerzy Hamerski, co-created in 1985 also with the participation of Elżbieta Drygas (Sadowska, 2024a, pp. 43–66), is unique in the country and 1990 resulted in the establishment of Primary School No. 83 in Poznań, which focuses on education through art and is called the “Republic of Łejery”. The school is governed by the “Little Constitution of the Republic of Ł.”, modelled on the Constitution of the Republic of Poland.

A child, both in the “Łejery” school and in the entire “Łejery” pedagogy, appears as an active, autonomous and strong individual, and teachers and parents actively support children’s development, bearing in mind that, as one of the very important songs from the “Łejery” repertoire says, “what the shell soaks up in youth, the same smacks of in old age” (Waśniowska, 2008, p. 12).

The school’s founders, Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas, believed that theater was an excellent way to integrate a group of children, develop positive relationships between

them, and shape their personalities. It should be noted that despite the findings of many international researchers (e.g. Dakhia, 2024; Falconi, 2015; Mages, 2018; Muhammad, 2019; Singh, 2009), these educators are pioneers in this field within Polish education, and the “Łejerska” school is, to date, the only institution with its own professional theater.

The research problem of the study is contained in the question: How does the construct of the child appear in Poznań’s “Łejery” pedagogy? To answer the research question, the method of individual case analysis was used using the technique of source analysis (existing and elicited) and participant observation carried out by the author in the 2024/2025 school year. Among the existing sources, we can list publications issued by Poznań’s “Łejery” popularizing the concept of Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas, press releases and scientific studies. Among the elicited sources, we should list interviews conducted with the founder of “Łejery” on the premises of Primary School No. 83 in Poznań in the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 school years.

The observation consisted of participating in the broadly understood “school life”. The author participated in lessons, was present during breaks between classes, during special events, events scheduled in the school calendar, as well as during theatre rehearsals and performances by students of Primary School No. 83. The main observations were social relations in the school, actions taken by students and the general atmosphere prevailing in the described social space.

THE CONSTRUCT OF THE CHILD AND CHILDHOOD – INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS

As Matyjas (2022) points out, “the issue of the child and childhood has been dealt with in Western literature, in the social sciences and humanities, since the end of the 1960s. In Poland, however, for at least the last four decades, especially since the 1980s, when the child and their childhood were »rediscovered«” (p. 9). It was then that the child began to be treated as “a humanum, a valuable person to whom dignity, freedom, rights, and subjectivity are assigned” (p. 19), and it was also recognized that it had “the potential to grow and develop, and importantly – its creative participation in these processes” (p. 19). Moreover, it has been emphasized, especially in the field of social pedagogy, that “the child and his or her childhood are deeply embedded in the realities of social life, in its everyday life, in its various varieties” (p. 19).

Segiet (2010), referring to Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, distinguishes five constructions of the child and childhood that have functioned throughout history:

- the child as a reproducer of knowledge, identity and culture (Locke’s child);
- the child as a naive, infantile, illogical, good, defenceless being (Rousseau’s child);
- the child as a person determined by biology;
- the child of learning or stages of development (Piaget’s child);
- the child as a factor in the labour market;

- the child as a creator of knowledge, identity and culture (Segiet, 2010, pp. 131–132).

The last way of perceiving the child is visible in the concept of Jerzy Hamerski, because “Jerzy Hamerski always dreamed of a school that you just want to go to” (Czekała, 2015). This school is a kind of exception in the Polish education system, because although Janusz Korczak also paid special attention to the value of childhood in the first half of the 20th century (Jamrożek, 2019, p. 701), in our domestic, still very directive education, regardless of the institution that children attend (whether it is a nursery, kindergarten or school), in practice the model of formal education dominates with the emphasis on “conducting” the so-called classes by an adult, and the concept commonly accepted in education is the “program-centric” concept. Following Klus-Stańska (2019), it should be emphasized here that the orientation towards the program (of upbringing and teaching) is always something external to children (their needs, will, interests, aspirations) (Klus-Stańska, 2019, p. 217). The implementation of the assumptions of the core curriculum, program, classes or lessons is associated with the preparation of resultant work plans with pre-established educational outcomes. In a child’s education, there is no shortage of attempts to construct outcome plans, ready-made scenarios or lesson plans that are implemented rigidly and, as a rule, do not assume the child’s free activity. A child’s learning in the Polish education system, which does not take into account the individuality of a person, is a reaction to the teacher’s activities, which must therefore be planned and implemented in advance in such a way that the child can observe and imitate them. Therefore, a child “using selected textbooks uses elementary pools of data” (Remiszewska, 2013, p. 45) and – as Remiszewska points out after Klus-Stańska – “walks in the footsteps” (Remiszewska, 2013, p. 45). It can be risked to say that “based on learned patterns of filling in the boxes and entering expected answers” (Remiszewska, 2013, p. 45) in the “a priori teaching process” (Remiszewska, 2013, p. 45), the student does all this in response to the expectations of others (and not, as it should be, his or her own) and gradually gives up his or her identity and creativity in favour of “adapting” to the standard.

JERZY HAMERSKI’S “ŁEJERY” PEDAGOGY

Jerzy Hamerski, currently 81 years old but still a very active teacher, has been breaking stereotypes since the beginning of his professional career (<https://radiopoznan.fm/audycja/porozmawiajmy-o/Lejery-co-to-takiego.html>). First, in the 1960s, as a young teacher, he organized happenings for children from Przyborów when they worked in the field and could not participate in school activities, then he developed the “Makusyn” in Zielona Góra under the supervision of Scoutmaster Zbigniew Czarnuch, experiencing unusual pedagogy for the times of the Polish People’s Republic, oriented towards dialogue and the strengths of the pupils (Sadowska, 2024b, pp. 51–69). When

he came under the wing of Heliodor Muszyński at the beginning of the 1970s, the vision of his extraordinary “Łejery” pedagogy crystallized very clearly, and in all subsequent decades it developed dynamically and captivated crowds of children and young people (https://uczotwartosci.ceo.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2022/07/2017_Jerzy-Hamerski-esej.pdf).

“Łejery” is a Poznań dialectal expression denoting a child’s amazement at the world – its beauty, potential and everything that an adult no longer sees (Sadowska, 2024b, p. 96). Jerzy Hamerski – laureate and (since 2024) member of the chapter of the Order of the Smile and the Irena Sendler Award, founded a children’s community theatre in Poznań in 1975, which was named “Łejery”. When the opportunity to establish a theatre school arose in 1990, Jerzy, together with Elżbieta Drygas (Dude of the Order of the Smile and laureate of the aforementioned Irena Sendler Award for “repairing the world”), founded a school that is currently celebrating its 35th anniversary.

Children in the “Łejery” school do not study under the supervision of “professors” but in the education process, students are accompanied by “companions” (*druhów*). The school, although marked with a “serial” number (no. 83), is an experimental school based on the concept of education through theatre, democratic education and education for cooperation in a human team (<https://lejery.pl/eksperyment-pedagogiczny/>). In the space of the facility, which is located on Brandstaettera Street in the Poznań Citadel, there are no marble floors or statues of patrons and important people, but there are distorting mirrors, sofas, armchairs obtained from the liquidated “Bałtyk” cinema in Poznań, there is a space filled with a soft carpet for the youngest “Łejery”. There are no bells at school, teachers do not reside in the teachers’ room but in the *druhówka*, lunches are eaten in the “dining room”, drama classes are held in a large or small “Łejernia”, and the students are not first-graders or seventh-graders but *pierwszaki*, *drugaki*, *ósmaki*, etc. There are also no classes marked as “A” or “B”, but there are “Mirabelki”, “Jagodziaki”, “Bratki”, and “Aksamitki”.

The atmosphere of warmth, safety and joy prevailing in the school is complemented by walls decorated with photos of all students, teachers, administration and service staff and “friends” of the school, the so-called “enrichers”, who, together with the “Łejery” teachers, care for the harmonious development of young people attending the school.

Primary School No. 83 in Poznań is referred to as a “school with a soul” (<https://lejery.pl/2020/11/02/przepis-na-lejerskie-harcerstwo-teatr-i-szkole-czyli-moja-ksiazka-kucharska-czesc-9/>), its building was brought on 13 trucks in 1995 from Mierlo in the Netherlands (Koral, 2016), and was dismantled thereby teachers and parents who did this work out of the goodness of their hearts. The school, the so-called “Dutch school” in Poznań, was built out of the same need by a group of parents and teachers, and when the school was opened, children and parents rubbed their eyes with amazement, and some officials – as Jerzy Hamerski says – “had a cactus grow on their palms”.

Czekała described the unusual facility for Polish conditions in the following words:

This formula is not only the lack of bells, the theatrical character and scouting traditions. The original program is also a lesson in democracy. Łejery is a small country called the Łejery Republic, in which a small constitution applies, the emblem is a green horse with wings, and the anthem Naszkonik with lyrics written by Wanda Chotomska (...). The school operates a tripartite division of power. (Czekąła, 2015)

In the “Łejery” pedagogy, the child is at the centre, and even though the school implements the standard core curriculum for primary school education, teachers are creative, focused on the individual capabilities and needs of their charges, and resolve conflicts using a “list of issues”, in the way Janusz Korczak constructed his “children’s courts” and “parliament” (Dąbrowska, 2016, p. 33).

Parents also play an extraordinary role in the educational process in the “Łejery” school, moving freely within the space of the facility, participating in many school events, and establishing authentic relationships with teachers based on respect, kindness, and cooperation.

THE CONSTRUCT OF THE CHILD IN THE “ŁEJERY” PEDAGOGY – THE CHILD AS A CREATOR AND CO-CREATOR OF THE CULTURE

The child in the “Łejery” pedagogy appears as an autonomous, agentic person, “rich” in resources. Each child is considered an individual (<https://lejery.pl/zajecia-teatralne/>). When constructing the children’s collective theatre, Hamerski and Drygas noted:

from the beginning, we were aware that the children’s individualities invited to our school would have difficulty adapting to team norms, to living in a group without conflict. From experience, we knew that the recipe for nurturing these individualities, while maintaining proper functioning in the group, is the formula of our group theatre. (<https://lejery.pl/zajecia-teatralne/>)

This group theatre, as a means of comprehensive education, is based on the following assumptions expressed by the founders of the school:

1. Playing theatre with children is not a goal, but a means, which means that we treat theatre as a “key”, a method of developing children through planned games and theatrical activities.
2. Playing theatre is a great way to integrate a group of children, creating an educational team out of it.
3. All children perform in the performance, and solo roles are limited to the bare minimum. We attach great importance to developing in children the ability to play in many planes, often without text. Thanks to this, they avoid “privacy” on stage.

4. In "Łejery" we take care to cultivate childishness, i.e. naturalness, spontaneity, and authenticity. We try to prevent children from "aping" adults without a justified reason.
5. During theatrical games, we watch children closely and participate in them without fear of being childish. It is children who most often come up with ideas for theatrical solutions.
6. We give a special role to the song. Each one is very carefully prepared both vocally and theatrically. We try to "tell" the song in a natural way, adding theatrical ideas. The song often becomes great theatrical material from which we build scenes for future performances.
7. When working on the staging, we try to construct the performances in such a way that there are no so-called dramatic "holes" (unnecessary breaks) that break the rhythm and pace of the performance. For example, breaks for changing the scenery are also played – they become elements of the performances.
8. Scenography, costumes, props:
The most beautiful scenography is created by children themselves on a clean, dark background. The costumes are simple, i.e. most often the children perform in their clothes, matched in colour with a costume element referring to the role, e.g. a real railwayman's cap or a fireman's helmet. Children like to dress up, but you have to find a justification for it. Props are simple objects, most often everyday objects, to which you can give different meanings (a paper tube, a stick, a newspaper, a paper bag, a chair, a table, a lamp, a ladder, etc.).
9. Places of action. The formula of our theatre means that the places of performance can be very different. From a scout campfire to the big stage. (<https://lejery.pl/zajecia-teatralne/>)

Children attending Primary School no. 83 attend theatre classes twice a week in a smaller group (up to 13 people). During theatre classes, not only are preparations for performances planned for the end of the year carried out, but children and young people learn how to function in a team, learn relaxation techniques, work on diction, and articulation, and learn how to present their ideas and feelings. Theatre classes also have a specific psychotherapy character and are often based on techniques taken from drama. In the process of school education (in the upper grades), "Łejery" children do receive grades, but each of them is preceded by feedback. Teachers of the lowest grades formulate only feedback and pay special attention to the individual resources of students, trying to give each child a clear message about their progress in learning. Education does not consist of filling in subsequent worksheets, these cards, if they appear, are sometimes differentiated, and the child, from the moment they cross the threshold of the facility, is often asked to creatively formulate statements in speech and writing. Students in grades 1–3 write diaries, letters, and stories, and write invitations, press releases, and other forms of expression.

The theatre also permeates modern foreign language classes; it can be seen in history, music and geography lessons, and the methods often used by teachers are the drama method and the project method.

THE CHILD IN THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL SPACE OF SCHOOL

Children move around the school building in an unrestricted way, spend time on sofas, in the theatre foyer, where there is a historic piano and a large cage with budgerigars, a foyer in which there are photos of the patron – Emilia Waśniowska, wooden owls, which are to remind students of her (Emilia Waśniowska collected owl figurines). The school also has spaces where you can play freely on the aforementioned large carpet, which is placed between the classes for the youngest, but is available to every student on condition that they change shoes. This space becomes a common room, a theatre room, a playroom, and a room for joint implementation of inter-class projects.

The advantage of the experiment carried out at the school is not only the theatre, but also volunteering, which is inscribed in the “Łejery” pedagogy. Each class takes care of a child from Tanzania from a distance, whom it supports in school education (<https://www.wayair.org/>). The children organize various initiatives (fairs, concerts, performances) on their own, so that the student can attend school, have the necessary equipment, and can eat a meal. During such initiatives, participants put money in jars, sometimes the jar stands unattended because the motto of such events is “selling based on trust”.¹

In the foyer of the building, there is a wardrobe with many mascots, bags, ties and other interesting products sewn by volunteers (parents and children). There is also a permanent transparent box with money in this wardrobe, but the wardrobe is always open.

Since “the example comes from above”, Elżbieta Drygas – co-founder of the school – presents to the youngest children every year her observations from her extraordinary expedition to Madagascar, during which (in cooperation with Ankiza Gasa’s foundation – “Children of Madagascar”) she volunteered in one of the Malagasy schools (Drygas, 2024). There are many aid initiatives, they also respond to the needs of the local community and often result from various random events affecting people related to the school environment, but also people in need who come from outside this environment.

Seventh-grade students are the “angels” of first-graders (<https://lejery.pl/koncepcja-szkoly-autorskiej/>). Every older student takes care of the “little one” for two years, and every student in the lowest grades lives in the belief that they can turn to their “angel” if a difficult situation occurs. Many of the educational lessons take place with both the youngest and the oldest students who accompany them on the aforementioned carpet, and the older students initiate several games for the youngest and also carry out various school projects together. Educational lessons are prepared very

¹ Information obtained from Jerzy Hamerski by the author during interviews and conversations in the 2024/2025 school year.

carefully, and there are two educators in the class (one leading, the other supporting). Many classes take place in the “outdoor” formula because the school is located near the Citadel – the largest park in Poznań with an area of approx. 100 ha, which also includes an old amphitheatre, a charming rose garden and fortifications (<https://regionwielkopolska.pl/katalog-obiektow/park-cytadela-w-poznaniu/>).

THE CHILD CONSTRUCT INCLUDED IN THE ARTISTIC REPERTOIRE OF “ŁEJERY”

Since in the “Łejery” pedagogy, songs are one of the leading educational means, for Jerzy Hamerski’s group, songs are usually created on a so-called request.² Among the creators of the “Łejery” repertoire, we can mention, among others, Wanda Chotomska, Emilia Waśniowska, Marcin Przewoźniak, Grzegorz Tomczak, the music is often composed by a Poznań artist – Mariusz Matuszewski (Sadowska, 2024c).

The lyrics of the songs are never random – they describe issues important to children and address current problems (Czekała, 2017). The “Łejery” repertoire includes joyful songs, telling about spring, fun, hiking (because “Łejery” comes from scouting traditions), holidays, Polish traditions, Poznań traditions, but there are also songs encouraging ecology and care for nature, sustainable development (the lyrics to the songs were created by, among others, Wanda Chotomska). The repertoire of students of Primary School no. 83 in Poznań includes, among others, songs from the play “Zielona Akademia Pana Łejera”, which was initially recorded in the 1990s on an audio cassette entitled “Malujemy Wiatr”, and then, in 2023, were included on the CD “Nadzieja ma kolor zielony”.³

Children sing about endangered butterflies and birds, and they ask “What will happen when there are no bees and flowers?”⁴; they sing about asphalt and concrete, and finally they also declare: “We are sorry for all the smoke and chimneys, when we grow up we will sort it out”.⁵

“Łejery” also sings about the needs and concerns of children – in the song *Mam prawo do swych praw* (“I Have a Right to My Rights”) children explain to adults how important it is for their development to respect children’s rights, and in the song *Jak to jest?* they ask parents why children are not loved or abused by some of their closest carers, where adults come from to drink alcohol or beat their children (Podolska, 2011; Roik, 2011). The aforementioned and other songs with similar themes were first presented by the band of Jerzy Hamerski and Elżbieta Drygas as part of the spectacle

² Information obtained from Jerzy Hamerski by the author during interviews and conversations in the 2023/2024 school year.

³ CD cover “Nadzieja ma kolor zielony” (2023). Łejery: Poznań.

⁴ Lyrics from the album “Nadzieja ma kolor zielony”...

⁵ CD cover “Nadzieja ma kolor zielony”...

“Masz prawo do swych praw” (“You Have a Right to Your Rights”) in the 1990s, among others in Rennes, France, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1999 (Roik, 2011).

“In 2003, another version of the performance was created, in which the character of Janusz Korczak appears. The song *We Are Only Children Once* was included as an addition to the performance, which was recorded under the patronage of Marek Michalak” (Roik, 2011). The new version of the performance “Masz prawo do swych praw” made the meetings of the European Ombudsmen for Children more attractive in 2011. The occasion for the event was the Polish presidency of the European Union at that time (Roik, 2011). The repertoire created by Emilia Waśniowska includes many children’s dilemmas, the poet tries to tame several children’s fears that are incomprehensible to adults, and above all to show the child’s perspective to adult recipients. Because children sing about difficult issues (including the aforementioned alcoholism, domestic violence, or the “bad touch” (<https://e-teatr.pl/poznan-spektakl-teatru-Lejery-o-prawach-dziecka-a121465>), “lejery” songs have a strong impact on the audience and constitute an important contribution to reflection on the needs of the child for the adult audience.

DEMOCRACY IN EDUCATION

“Łejery” is not a democratic school, but, as its creators point out: “a school of democracy” (<https://lejery.pl/>) operating based on the “Small Constitution of the Republic of Łejery” (“Mała Konstytucja Republiki Łejerskiej”). The preamble is contained in the following words:

We, Students:

We want learning at school while providing us with a high level of knowledge and skills, to be as much fun as possible for us, not stressful. We want school to prepare us well for life in the adult world, to be a second home for us, safe and friendly, and to have plenty of entertainment. We want schools to be tolerant of our views and interests.

We, Teachers:

We want to create a safe school, where students are not afraid of us, and we are not afraid of students and parents; a wise school, where learning becomes a way for students and teachers to develop, where children learn to know, to be able to, to acquire competences for work performed with joy. In such a school, the motivation to learn should not be competition, getting the best grades at all costs, or meeting someone’s expectations. We want to raise our students to be sensitive to other people, to art and nature, to know and like themselves, to cope with themselves and the world, to strive for their development, to be wise, independent and brave.

We, Parents:

Want to help create a friendly school for our children – a place for their comprehensive development, where to gain the knowledge they need, children will not have to experience fear and

humiliation, but where they will gain confidence in themselves and their abilities, will be able to fully recognize and express their personality, use their natural absorption, curiosity about the world and intelligence. We want our children to learn to value knowledge in such a school and learn how to acquire it. We want them to be able to learn.

A wise and good school is to help us raise wise and good people – optimistic, bold, tolerant and full of creative energy and goodwill, in a word – free people.⁶ (<https://lejery.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/mac581a-konstytucja-rc581.pdf>).

On the school’s website, we read:

Each class has its own Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. We have legislative power: the Sejm (students) and two chambers of the Senate (the first are teachers, the second – parents). The executive power is: the President and Vice President of the Republic of Łejery (school management). The Tribunal of the Republic of Łejery, composed of independent judges, is our judicial power. (<https://lejery.pl/>)

Children actively participate in constructing the school culture, and even though they can express their own opinions, and views and feel free at school, they achieve high academic results. The concept of the Author’s School, authored by Elżbieta Drygas and Jerzy Hamerski, contains the following words: “»Łejery« is a lesson in democracy – education for civil society, shaping shared responsibility for the common good. School is a truly democratic place, where students experience democracy in practice” (<https://lejery.pl/2022/10/07/zaprzysiezenie-sejmu-republiki-lejerskiej-2/>).

The “Łejery” Constitution is a joint work of children, teachers, and parents, and any changes must be agreed upon with their consent.⁷ To participate in the elections, a candidate for MP had to submit lists with the signatures of two “class compatriots” by September 16 of each school year.⁸ Three days later, the electoral lists are announced and the campaign begins. The campaign ends yesterday, after which there is an election silence. During the debate, the candidates present their election programs and answer questions asked by other students.⁹

Children actively participate in constructing the school culture, and school law and although they can express their own opinions, and views and feel comfortable at school, they achieve high academic results.

⁶ Information obtained from Jerzy Hamerski by the author during interviews and conversations in the 2024/2025 school year.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Information obtained from Jerzy Hamerski by the author during interviews and conversations in the 2023/2024 school year.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

CONCLUSIONS

Jerzy Hamerski, when creating the foundations of “Łejery” pedagogy and a school “with a soul”, openly said that his work was not intended for rich parents (hence the school is neither a private school nor a public school), but for rich children, because children, as the founder of the school says, are “rich inside”. The founder of the described institution intended to entrust the youngest with a “voice” in matters important to them. From the beginning, Hamerski was guided by the principle: “smart children make good people”. In Primary School no. 83 in Poznań, we are therefore dealing with the social participation of children. In “Łejery” pedagogy and the described institution, the attitude “for children” is replaced by the attitude “with children” called by Jarosz (2020, p. 22). In this school, we are dealing with the implementation of postulates that the aforementioned researcher calls cooperation, co-organization of reality and partnership-based solutions to various types of problems concerning children and their environment (Jarosz, 2020, p. 22). The shape of “Łejery” pedagogy also includes education through art, selected elements of scouting, democratic education, selected elements of Finnish pedagogy, and above all, pedagogy from the perspective of Janusz Korczak. Children in Hamerski’s concept appear as responsible and capable of transforming the world.

Due to its extraordinary potential for child development, the concept of “Łejery” pedagogy should certainly and without hesitation be implemented in Polish schools. All the values promoted by Jerzy Hamerski and “Łejery” educators seem to address the systemic shortcomings of Polish schools. Recognizing the potential of the “Łejery” educational concept and transferring it to mainstream education seems not only justified but also possible, as Primary School no. 83 in Poznań, a systemic implementation of Hamerski and Drygas’s idea, is a mainstream school and follows the ministerial core curriculum.

“Łejery” are often referred to in Poznań as “a rental service for wings”, and the first “Łejery” children (as 50 years of experience have shown) work in positions of high social trust and enjoy recognition and respect in adult life.

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