

INTRODUCTIONARY ARTICLE

EDUCATIONAL PRIORITIES
IN A POST PANDEMIC WORLD

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to bring together the most important educational priorities which should be taken into consideration when planning education in a world recovering from a pandemic. Some of the priorities discussed here should have already been taken into account during the 20th century, whilst others are completely new and result from changes that have come about in the 21st century, such as increased arrogance, ignorance, authoritarianism, educational insecurity, contempt for nature, confusion and the promotion of the lies under the name of post-truth.

The authors propose a holistic approach to the education process, focused on priorities. In turn, the definition of those priorities should result from the most important problems that affect humanity.

Key words: education, key competences, educational priorities, school



Education is a system immersed within other systems, being constantly in harmony with them. Therefore, what happens in education itself is important for the functioning of the economy, politics and culture. To some extent, what we find next to education - and sometimes even seemingly unrelated to it - may be of importance for numerous educational practices (Harari, 2018), either directly or indirectly.

The following preliminary analyses are intended to draw attention to the lost/unclear/contradictory/inappropriate priorities of education in Poland, and relate primarily to phenomena observed in recent years. Some of them are closely related to the political changes of the last six years since the Law and Justice party gained a majority in parliament, but other trends and phenomena are also described which occurred earlier and which have not been dealt with so far. Sometimes there has not even been the will to deal with them.

The following reflections result from interviews and observations of the media reality, as well as scientific and international experience acquired during the implementation of projects in the field of adult education. Thus, an approach focused on non-formal adult education may be perceived as dominant, although these thoughts apply to all types of education.

CIVIC EDUCATION

Societies are wise with the wisdom of their representatives (Applebaum, 2020). Or stupid with their stupidity. In a world dominated (both quantitatively and ideologically) by democracies, it is the voters who choose between sensible or senseless leadership. As long as its citizens have a choice, Poland remains a democracy, for the time being at least. The choice between good and evil would appear to be obvious. However, in order for this obviousness to remain true, there must be several conditions on the part of the citizens themselves:

- they must believe in the democratic process,
- they must know what is right,
- they must want to choose what is right.

Failures of democracy mean that some citizens are not at all convinced that the way of exercising power and the structure of the state have any influence - from government ministries to the level of the local community (Applebaum, 2020). Mistrust is largely the cause of withdrawal, although not the only one or perhaps even the most important. Thus, we are dealing with a closed circle, an endless loop of neglect and self-fulfilling prophecy. Democracy needs to be nurtured. When neglected, it deteriorates and becomes overgrown with weeds in the form of greedy, corrupt and arrogant politicians, for whom the common good can easily become prey, a fabric to be ripped away.

Democracies work well when citizens are interested enough in politics to judge the effectiveness of their elections and, in the event of bad elections, they correct their mistakes, thus holding their representatives accountable. In order to break the cycle of failure and turn it into a continuous loop of improving

democracy, the systematic and regular participation of citizens in selecting their representatives of power is necessary (Benda, 1928).

Civic education in this area must take place from the earliest age and last throughout life. Being a good citizen begins with being responsible for one's own actions, cleaning up after oneself, acting in accordance with generally accepted rules, obeying the law, being socially active in non-governmental organisations, and giving to the environment more than the minimum that is required at work. A good citizen is the one who believes that the world can be made better by improving oneself and setting the right example for others (Mahrik et al., 2021; Pavlikova, 2021; Tkáčová et al., 2021). Such a person will also be careful about personal decisions and political choices and will be disgusted by dishonest people. Corrupt politicians would have no chance of acting in such a world.

KEY COMPETENCES

Among the many sins of pedagogy in recent years, two are of particular significance.

Firstly, educational practice is overloaded with content considered necessary to be assimilated in formal education (Harari, 2018). Thus, amongst all this detail and excess, we lose what is most important. When there is a mass of material to assimilate, it is passing exams that counts, not paying attention to the good sense of determining ever new learning goals. The human mind has a limited capacity, and unused content, which the student does not know even during the process of teaching, is quickly forgotten (see Kralik & Mahrik, 2021). In this way, we invest huge amounts of money in education, which disappears into oblivion within a few years after passing the exams. Therefore, it would be worth rethinking the education system in order to focus on what is most important and necessary, so that key competences are at the centre and not lost in the mass of teaching material, mixed in with less important content. The structure of the whole body of material, as well as the educational process itself, raises justifiable doubts.

The other problem is the ideologisation of formal education, which has proceeded especially since the change of the ministerial position (Meighan & Harber, 2007). The climate of ideological struggle and arranging the content of education so that they reflect the beliefs of ruling party leaders is ineffective, because the parties in power change and do not prepare them adequately to function in the modern world, because the more the ideological content, the less place there is in teaching for key competences. Overblown ideology is of little use in the modern world, where the most important things are skills in working with information, communication skills, group work or critical thinking. Ideology and belief in an imposed, non-antiquated and unconsolidated value system are the opposite of critical thinking and negotiation skills.

The point of reference for defining a set of key competences should be the world of the future and the newly developing labour market, which we are only able to define approximately. However, there are classifications which can become a reference point for modelling the existing education system (Kobylarek, Jakubowska & Błaszczński, 2021). For this to take place, knowledge concerning key competences and learning technologies (Sirotová & Michvocíková, 2019, 2021) and the political will of representatives chosen by wise citizens are necessary. Thus, as mentioned earlier, we return to the need to shape a civic society and a closed circle of either mistakes or successes.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PEDAGOGY

Pedagogy is treated with contempt by many academics (non-educators). Some include it in the so-called “parallel sciences,” which are a kind of cheap fake, an imitation of real science (Sokal & Bricmont, 1998). The quantitative and qualitative indicators that measure the value of science in the greater part of the civilised world are supposed to speak in favour of this thesis - the Hirsch index, citations, high scoring publications, international cooperation, the receipt of funds for universities in the form of grants, and participation in international research projects. According to the above-mentioned criteria, only a few academics dealing with pedagogy can demonstrate great achievements (for example, the greatest famed Polish pedagogues practically do not exist in either Scopus or the Web of Science). Of course, one can always say that these are not the appropriate reference models, but the scientific world checks these indicators rather than the entries in POL-on, the Polish (i.e. local) database of scientists and their publications.

In addition, it is worth mentioning various other pathologies specific to local science, such as:

- a mafia-like approach to habilitation (questionable promotion based on the social criterion) (Śliwerski 2018),
- academic feudalism (Wolfe, 1996),
- a professional God complex (Błaszczński, 2013),
- a feeling of the infallibility of power/the group thinking syndrome of various councils of scientific excellence, which by their very name are already perfect since they decide about the perfection of others.

All this means that the quality of the science is becoming not the sole priority of pedagogic activity, but only one of many of equal or (we are afraid to assume) of less importance than the promotion of the so-called ‘pml’ personality - passive, mediocre, loyal. The power structure of the scientific community can then be easily ossified by power-hungry psychopathic personalities, and independent thinkers can be even more easily turned into vassals or, at best, marginalised.

In effect, science will also become like these socially matched personalities, because ‘pml’ scientists will cultivate ‘pml’ science, which will find recognition

not through publications and quotations in major periodicals, but in the eyes of a society that can promote such unquoted personalities, despite their invisibility in the world of science. One can forget about the rudimentary postulate of insubordination in thinking.

Meanwhile, for educational practices to be appropriate, knowledge about education must have a solid foundation. Despite the clashing of paradigms, we know how a person learns and how to organise education. So why do we have problems with it all the time, and why must we endlessly be reforming it?

It can be assumed that not only representatives of other sciences depreciate the importance of education sciences, pointing out the scientific weakness of those involved in pedagogy. In our opinion, political representatives also share these negative opinions, confirming them with action, especially when the ministries responsible for education are staffed by ignorant people who previously had nothing to do with education. Thus, we come back to the wise selection of appropriate representatives, who will not be guided by ideology, pride and arrogance, but by professionalism and the good of future generations. However, as long as we do not have such representatives, it is the educators' responsibility to apply constant pressure on the world of politics. Or, rather, on the representatives of the teaching and research communities, because it is actually they, as scientific advisers and people representing wider communities, who are able to have any influence on the organisation of society by the authorities.

Considering the vassalage of the environment and the arrogance of the authorities, great doubts may be had as to the effectiveness of the resistance of professors and teaching environments. An additional problem is not only the depreciation of pedagogy as a science (likewise reducing it to the technology of a primitive ideologisation, as partly performed by the concept of "the pedagogy of shame"), but also the anti-science nature of the current ruling camp in many other areas (Reykowski, 2020).

ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION

We consider building ecological awareness to be the greatest educational challenge of our time. Above all, because any other action makes no sense if we do not realise that our life depends on the environment in which we live. Under-educated citizens, improperly defined education priorities, irresponsible populist politicians, weak academics, inefficient representations - all these are contributing to the acceleration of anti-ecological activities of mankind and tipping us all into the abyss (Wojciszke & Rotkiewicz, 2018).

In a sense, ecological ignorance is a derivative of an anti-scientific approach and educational deficiencies. Everything comes together as a whole (Reykowski, 2020).

It also seems that we are facing the final test. If we are wise enough as a species, we will survive this test. If we do not survive, it means we have been too stupid and brought our extinction upon ourselves.

WHAT NEXT

Now education is starting again after a period when the safety of children was a priority during the pandemic. Now is not the time to be wise about what we should or should not have done in the past. If the intention is to return schools to the standard regime as soon as possible, then that intention is good. The public expects a justifiable explanation regarding a reduction of the curriculum. This also applies to the higher expectations of parents regarding their children's knowledge, and also their results in international comparisons (Plavčan, 2020).

It is necessary to engage the education community and communicate with its representatives, even if only small groups of teachers and professionals. They may have opinions other than the ministry, they may not always speak publicly with the best of intentions, but they are willing to deal with school matters, and therefore they need to be listened to and respected and their views taken into account. Most teachers do not want to speak in public, but that does not mean they do not have an opinion, so you need to go to school with them and appreciate it.

Everyone has to roll up their sleeves. Work in the past needs to be examined to see whether the needs of education have been met. Only then can we look at others critically so that we do not continue in our almost national sport. As usual, our teachers will have the most work, so they need to be supported rather than feel insecure. We mean all teachers, without exception, because every school and every class should be a model for our children, each of whom deserves the best possible education. We all know what a good school should look like, and it is up to national governments to recognise that international comparisons of schoolchildren's knowledge confirm that higher national expenditure contributes to better educational results. (Plavčan, 2019).

In order to get out of the impasse, or rather the inexorable race towards the abyss, humanity will have to recognise priorities and invest in what now it only loses (in a material sense) - health and education. However, democracies that have backed the good of their citizens are in a minority, and are certainly not military powers.

As things stand, it is difficult to imagine that humanity (or at least those who decide about its future) will suddenly become wise and turn to the right priorities. This seems to be the least likely.

Unfortunately, the most likely scenario is that, immersed in feuds and stupidity, we will hurtle into the abyss.

There is one other scenario which is moderately optimistic. A major catastrophe, such as a comet strike, epidemic or climate catastrophe, will cause such destruction and the death of so many people that those who survive will begin to more appreciate such values as community, knowledge, wisdom, science, and nature.

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