

Education – Time for Change!

In its "Report - Poland 2050," the social forecasting committee "Poland 2000 Plus" makes an urgent call for profound changes to the Polish education system. The authors suggest that a huge collective effort is required over the next few decades if the level of social development and quality of life in Poland is to steadily approach that of Western European societies. In their judgment, the greatest challenge is to effect a cultural transformation conducive to an effective, long-term, modern system of education, characterized by continuity and consistency, and covering all stages of learning from pre-school to university.

The current state of affairs is a cause for considerable concern. Poland's chaotic, politically charged, short-sighted education policy, devoid of coherence or consistency, runs counter to the constitutional principles of democracy, social support, equal opportunities, and the separation of church from state. It could even be said to have led to the popularization of fictitious higher education. By dividing courses into three-year Bachelor's and two-year Master's programs, universities have effectively shot themselves in the foot. Moreover, current educational options in Poland bear little resemblance to the changing requirements of society and the labor market, and cause existing social inequalities to be replicated and increased in the school environment, with pupils being segregated according to social background and nominally "comprehensive" schools becoming "streamed."

Poland lacks a modern vision of education able to meet the challenges of the future and change the negative characteristics and habits of Poles, such as insufficient team-working skills; social passivity; an inability to think independently, critically, and creatively; and not observing the rules of common decency in social relations.

In light of the cultural barriers that have been increasing over recent decades, and the scale of neglect and defectiveness in the system of formal education and raising of children, it is clear that we need a new vision for the development of the Polish education system, along with a strategy for its implementation. In order to set about improving the system, the following basic questions should be answered:

- Is it possible to introduce universal pre-school care, enabling equal opportunities and the integration of children from different backgrounds?
- Can current teaching methods be replaced by ones which foster active, investigative, critical, dialogue-based learning, both individually and in groups? If so, how?
- Is it possible, or desirable, to introduce works of contemporary world culture into school curricula, and initiate discussions on the modern world's fundamental problems?
- Can traditional religious education in schools be replaced by objective teaching about world religions and cultures? If so, how?

- How can the culture of competition in schools be changed to one of cooperation, exercising responsibility, respect for otherness, and support for the weak?
- Can external examinations take on a diagnostic, stimulative, and remedial function for schools and students at each stage of general education, rather than serving as a ranking instrument?
- Can schools become centers of lifelong learning, using different sources of knowledge? Can they function as sports and arts centers?
- Can the character of decision-making, evaluation, and inspection processes be changed from "top-down" to "bottom-up"? If so, how?
- Should university degree courses be structured like traditional law or medicine courses, with an initial broad-subject-base phase being followed by specialization and then internships? If so, how can this be achieved? Is it possible to talk about the equal status of all degree courses, and of public and non-public schools, or about a general fee for university studies (with significant state involvement, and changes in the regulations on taxes, donations and bequests to education)?

- Is it possible to abolish the central governing bodies for higher education and research, boosting the autonomy of universities, the Polish Academy of Sciences, and research institutes, and the principle of freedom of academic research?

These questions need to be clarified, fleshed out, and prioritized. Straightforward problems should be distinguished from those which are difficult or impossible to solve. Formulating solutions to some of the problems requires earlier diagnosis of the existing threats and areas of underdevelopment, and many potential improvements to the education system – from the introduction of universal pre-school care, through the re-introduction of five-year Master's programs, to the abolition of reciprocal arrangements for the automatic recognition of qualifications – will

require legislative changes.

One of the most difficult tasks will be to fundamentally change the way schools function, at all stages of the education process. Modifying the management of the whole education system could also be of crucial importance.

These issues will be debated by the PAS Committee for the Development of Polish Education, convened by the Presidium of the Polish Academy of Sciences within the Academy's Division I (Social Sciences and Humanities).



Poland's education policies run counter to the principles of democracy, equal opportunities, and the separation of church and state

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