Jan Łuczyński
Jagiellonian University, Institute of Public Affairs, Kraków, Poland

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT IN POLAND

Abstract

Substantial changes underwent by Polish society during the last eighteen years have posed important challenges for the national system of education. Although numerous attempts have been taken to adjust it to the contemporary social, political, cultural, and economic changes, including massive systemic reform introduced in 2000, a huge discrepancy between the kind of support students receive in schools and the necessities they have to meet outside the educational system is still clearly visible. Three basic challenges: globalization, democratization, and civil society building will be discussed in relationship to educational management as main factors for educational success.

Abstrakt

Głębokie zmiany, jakich doświadczyło polskie społeczeństwo w ostatnich osiemnastu latach, zrodziły nowe wyzwania wobec systemu oświatowego. Pomimo licznych prób dopasowania go do aktualnych społecznych, politycznych, kulturowych i ekonomicznych uwarunkowań, których najbardziej wyrazistym przejawem była reforma edukacyjna rozpoczęta w roku 2000, widoczna jest znaczna rozbieżność pomiędzy edukacyjnym wsparciem, jakiego szkoły dostarczają uczniom, a koniecznościami, jakim muszą sprostać po opuszczeniu szkoły. Artykuł przedstawia trzy podstawowe wyzwania: globalizację, demokratyzację i budowanie społeczeństwa obywatelskiego jako główne czynniki sukcesu edukacyjnego w dobie obecnej.

Education is currently often pointed at as the main means that mankind may use in the 21ˢᵗ century to solve numerous problems stemming from the extreme acceleration of the course of change witnessed today. Although many differences may be found between countries and regions of the world some general tendencies are easy to notice; globalization, democratization, and the building of civil societies across the globe belong to the strongest of these tendencies. Each of them constitutes a challenge for current and future generations as they generate a variety of problems that need to be solved.

The Central European and Polish Context

Central European countries belong to those that need to face these challenges in a particularly intensive way due to the history of this region. After World War II the Iron Curtin was introduced by the agreement reached by Great Brittan, the U.S.A. and Soviet Union and for more than 40 years the territories located east from the river Elbe experienced non-democratic semi-totalitarian social systems under Soviet control. In the case of Poland it needs to be bared in mind that since 1795 this state had been partitioned by the neighboring superpowers of that time: Austria, Prussia and Russia which resulted in the lack of independent Polish state for 123 years. In 1918 independence was regained and defended in heavy fights of the 1919–1920 Polish-Soviet war only to be lost in 1939 because of the Nazi and Soviet invasion. Taking it into account it is obvious that for almost two centuries (with a short break between 1918 and 1939), when Western Europe and America had been developing their democratic systems several generations of Poles were concentrating their efforts on opposing various occupants and struggling for independence, which caused substantial losses and prevented them from developing democratic relationships and. In her attempt to explain the Polish political scene of the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ century J. Staniszkis[1] pointed at this considerable lack of democratic experience as the reason for the current state of Polish politics. Since 1989 the Polish political scene has been going through an extremely intensive course of changes; however, still problems and solutions are posed that, in "old" democracies had been solved long ago. As one example may be served by the high profile kept by church in public life, criminalization of abortion, or the high level of state intervention in business activity. Staniszkis argues that in "old" democracies problems of these kinds were long ago excluded from state policy as they did not allow for reasonable compromises and because of that were left to individual judgments of citizens. In Poland they still constitute core elements of political programs featured by leading parties.

As Polish politicians have been experiencing rapid education in democracy (which sometimes proves to be painful for both the citizens of Poland and for the rest of the world) the Polish society learns the democratic lesson in a much more steady manner. It is well illustrated by election turnouts, which vary from around 40% in parliamentary and presidential elections (with the record of 53.9% in this year parliamentary) to much lower in local elections. Other civil activities (e.g. NGOs) are scarce although some development is observed. This is reflected in polls exploring attitudes to democracy in Central European societies. Recently it was announced in the press that 20% of the citizens who inhabit Eastern German lands' citizens wish the GDR and Berlin Wall would return.[2] This is accompanied by the growing popularity of extreme right organizations

---

[1] J. Staniszkis, *Mamy państwo bez państwa* [We have state without state], "Dziennik", 19.04.2007.

[2] P. Przybylski, *Niemcy chcą powrotu muru berlińskiego* [Germans wish the return of Berlin Wall], "Dziennik", 2.11.2007.

referring to nazi-like ideologies especially among young citizens of these lands. Such results are usually interpreted as showing the costs of democratization; however, they also show the failure of democratic education which may turn out to be very dangerous for the future of democracy in Europe.

Democratization needs to be complemented by the individual efforts of all citizens in the process of building civil society. It would not be very wise to expect such activity, that requires skills, knowledge, and determination, from those who tend to underestimate the value of democracy and refer to non-democratic systems of the past in the search for solutions of current problems. It needs to be noticed that these problems do not exist in a vacuum; the contemporary world acts in many respects as one system[3] due to the accelerated process of globalization. Poland and other Central European countries have been gradually affected by both globalization's economic and social effects: economic differentiation of the society, excessive consumerism, immigration and multiculturalization, access to information and mobility, proliferation of non-traditional life styles. All these effects generate huge tensions between various groups and individuals that, together with a low appreciation of the democratic system, constitute the factors that increase the role of education in this part of the world.

Polish Educational System

All these challenges are to be met in Poland by a very traditional national educational system. Formal education starts at age 7, although some efforts are currently made to pull it down to 6. For more than 20 years there has been a preparatory year for 6-year-olds, but until recently not all children had the chance to attend it. Taking into consideration that only 30% of preschoolers actually attend kindergartens it makes the beginning of formal schooling in Poland rather a late start.

Elementary school takes 6 years and is followed by middle school for another three. These two levels of education are obligatory for all children except those who are not able to attend school due to serious medical or mental reasons. Then the system offers a choice: general high school (three years), technical high school, or vocational school. There is a system of national examinations after each educational level (except for vocational schools). The final high school examination allows for entering universities and other university level educational establishments.

Despite massive educational reform introduced in Poland in 2000, the system still resembles more closely the 19th century European schooling system rather than reflect a contemporary extra-educational reality. It is extremely hierarchical and centralized. Formal education is regulated by the Educational Bill of 1991 and many lower order formal regulations that, in total, constitute the educational law. A simple search of the Polish Ministry of Education website revealed that

---

3 P. Senge, *The fifth discipline*, Currency Press, 1990.

in 2006 alone the ministry issued 26 of such lower order regulations[4] that each school in the country must follow; one regulation every fortnight on average.

There are two centers of power in the Polish educational system: the ministry through its regional agendas controls pedagogical aspects of school functioning, whereas local authorities (fairly independent of central government in Warszawa) are responsible for financing school activities. This duality creates additional tensions: schools need to meet requirements of two different powers. The result is an extreme bureaucratization of school life that pushes aside educational goals. Schools resemble centrally steered offices devoid of any autonomy.

It is not surprising that in such systemic conditions Polish schools are very traditional both in content and method. Academic content prevails over procedural knowledge and skills on almost all levels of formal education. Teachers and students complain on the amount of theoretical knowledge that has to be mastered especially on the high school level. There have been some efforts to change the traditional methodology of teaching (one good example is the *Orange for Earth* program described in Stoecker and Wachna,[5] this volume) but these are rather extra-systemic actions rather than a coordinated systemic change. One important obstacle to real proliferation of active teaching methodologies and other contemporary educational solutions is the national examination system introduced in 2000 which fostered schools' and students' competition at the expense of cooperation. Many teachers are so concerned about the external exam results that they do not accept any other form of teaching than the traditional one. One of the school heads invited to participate in *Orange for Earth* program replied that due to low examination results the following year her school was to concentrate on education – meaning traditional preparation for the next year's exam (Mazurkiewicz, personal communication). The overwhelming concern about the examination results remains in line with a traditional orientation on assessment that is the most important element of formal education for students, teachers, parents, and school authorities. Thus a competitive environment enables teachers' (and school authorities') dominant position over students (and parents) which makes it difficult to think about real democratization of schools.

Taking it all into account it has to be stated that, despite huge efforts to modernize it, the Polish educational system lies well behind other institutions of the contemporary world. Particularly striking is the gap between formal education and the current form of market economy organizations (corporations), although institutions of the public domain also seem to be more ahead. If education is to prepare younger generations to meet the challenges such as globalization, democratization, and civil society it needs to be managed in a different way than it is today. The educational management that is necessary has to assure the schools'

---

[4] J. Łuczyński, *Działania systemowe i warunki stymulujące skuteczny rozwój organizacji (szkoły)* [Systemic actions and settings that stimulate organizational development of schools]. Paper presented at the Jagiellonian Schools Conference, Kraków, Poland, 30–31 March 2007.

[5] E. Stoecker, I. Wachna, *Orange for earth – educational project (temporarily?) changed 100 Polish schools*, this volume, 2007.

autonomy so that they are able to meet the demands of the contemporary world, as well as of the developing younger generations. Democratization should be considered the main priority as it is not only an ethical obligation, but also a "cognitive must;"[6] only in democratic settings can all questions be freely asked, something that is necessary for the full development of students' intellectual, as well as other forms of potential. The 20th century history of academic life in Europe entirely confirms this thesis.

Educational Management for School Democratization

For more than 30 years the idea of reforming ineffective public services has been pursued by introducing management methods developed in market organizations. Public services, especially in Europe, have been strongly criticized for wasting public money on bureaucratic procedures that do not serve the needs of citizens well. It was expected that the introduction of managerial rules in the public sector would lead to cuts in public expenditures and improvement of public needs satisfaction. Contrary to theses expectations it quickly turned out that basing social services on market rules results neither in economic savings nor in the services' quality improvement. Two examples may serve to illustrate this point: the Polish and German public health sector reforms introduced recently.

The reason for this failure is the lack of recognition that public services, contrary to market sector, do not serve material values but ideal ones. Health, education, public safety, culture, religion, or tradition, which are examples of values pursued by public sector institutions and organizations are not easily translated into material ones. In other words, despite all the tremendous efforts of methodologists they are barely measurable which may be illustrated by the history 20th century psychology and its struggle to measure non-material psychological processes. A similar problem is experienced in the field of education where measurement of students' achievements still raises myriads of doubts.

However, traditional methods of central steering based on stiff bureaucratic procedures cannot be prolonged in educational systems for reasons outlined above. In the following section several guidelines for developing truly educational management are offered.

Teachers' Professional Development

Teachers are the core element of the educational system. The attainment of educational goals, students' success, and parents' satisfaction depend to large extent on their work. In line with managerial ideas it is claimed that teachers should care for the quality of their work and that this should be related to their job benefits.

---

[6] J. Dewey, *Democracy and education*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Edwardsville 1985.

This idea proved to be very productive in market organizations: high quality work is evoked by a variety of motivational systems employed according to the organizational settings.

Unfortunately, contrary to the claims of market ideology followers teaching is not like any other profession that is performed in market organizations. Again, teaching means pursuing an ideal, (i.e., not measurable and even difficult to explicitly define), value. To make the picture more obscure it is worth noticing that it emerges as a result of the interaction of the teacher's efforts and those of his/her students, their parents, impact of media, and other factors difficult even to classify. That is why assessment of teaching quality is so disputable.

It is obvious, however, that this does not mean that teaching quality should be left without any care. Although it is hard to measure, it is quite easy to determine intuitively what a particular teacher's work quality would be. So as not to leave the issue to intuitive judgments entirely, it is necessary to develop truly educational methods of teaching quality assurance.

The key concept here appears to be continuous professional development. This process comprises not only constant life-long accumulation of professional knowledge and skills. The most vital part of continuous professional development is the change in the relationship between the professional role and the individual who decides to play it. Blum argues, that in the case of several professions (teaching included) a simple acceptance of the role definition is not enough.[7] It is true especially in professions that consist of providing services in areas important for the life of others. Education is one of them; in the contemporary world the quality of life strongly depends on the quality of education one received. Serving others poses additional requirements on those who decide to do it professionally; requirements that are not necessary in market jobs. There in the market it is relatively easy to assure high quality performance since it may be measured by quantitative methods; individual's behavior results in products that may be quantified. High quality performance in public services where ideal values are at stake cannot be assured by quantification. High quality performance can only be assured by a high level of personal involvement of those performing the role. That is why Blum[8] argues that the key factor here is the identification of professional values and goals with personal ones. If an individual performing the role is able to accept professional values and goals as his/her personal ones it gives him/her strength and persistence in pursuing them despite all possible obstacles and constraints. This state of a individual-role relationship Blum calls a professional vocation. However, not everyone is able to reach it; that is why teaching is not for everyone.

Supporting teachers' professional development, according to the theory outlined above is the crucial factor in assuring school democratization. Only those who take goals and values of democratic education as their own may be capable of overcoming traditional forms of teacher-student relationship which, according to Kępiński's classification of psychiatrist-patient relationships, could be defined as

---

[7] L. Blum, *Moral perception and particularity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994.

[8] Ibidem.

manual.[9] By this Kępiński understood a ruling attitude of the psychiatrist who acts as a specialist whose task is to fix the patient's problem. This attitude of superiority proves to be ineffective in therapy since psychiatric problems are not as other medical ones. Psychiatric patients live in their own worlds, which are substantially detached from the true reality. The ultimate goal of psychotherapy is to help the patient to leave his/her ill world and to enter the true reality. In order to achieve this, the psychiatrist needs to enter the patient's ill world, to understand it, and to offer the patient assistance in his/her own process of constructing the means of return to the true reality. This psychiatrist's attitude Kępiński calls truly psychotherapeutic.

Bearing in mind all the differences between psychiatry and education it is possible to trace similarities between them. Manual teachers treat students instrumentally; as not fully developed creatures, lacking knowledge and skills, unable to undertake responsibility, in need of being educationally "fixed." Assuming such a position a teacher cannot accept democracy in education; his position must be superior to that of his/her students. Otherwise it would end up in educational disaster because of students' alleged weaknesses. Acceptance of the goals of democratic education means assuming a position of the students' partner in the joint search for various kinds of knowledge, entering their world, and offering assistance, a scaffolding as Bruner[10] calls it, in this process. The task of truly educational management is to assure supporting teachers in their professional development in accordance with these lines.

Cross-service Cooperation

The second task of educational management in meeting the challenges of globalization, democratization, and civil society building is providing settings for cross-service cooperation. It must be mentioned that, in order to create democratic school settings it is necessary to assure that all students' problems will be recognized and assisted by school. Unfortunately, due to the extreme focus on students' academic achievement in current school practice, numerous problems experienced by students do not find appropriate assistance. Taking into account that not all families are capable of taking good care of their children's needs it results in a deprivation of, sometimes, very basic needs (e.g. proper nutrition). While fighting such problems, students are not able to concentrate on learning, which leads to learning difficulties and causes complex educational, emotional, and behavioral disorders.

School itself cannot help students in overcoming them; it lacks professional knowledge, skills, and other resources. That is why schools need to establish effective liaisons with other services' establishments such as health (both physical and mental), social security, police and public safety, cultural, religious, and other services depending on the current needs of the students. It is necessary to develop systems of management inside schools that would assure the detection and proper assistance to all problems that may prevent students from full participation in the educational process.

---

[9] A. Kępiński, *Rytm życia* [The rhythm of life], Sagitarius, Warszawa 1993.

[10] J. Bruner, *W poszukiwaniu teorii nauczania* [Toward the theory of instruction], Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1974.

The School Association M.A.K.A.B.R.A. together with the Department of Management in Education of Jagiellonian University, and in cooperation with schools in Belgium for several years now, has been developing in several schools in Kraków area a system of interdisciplinary teamwork that unites school teachers and professionals from other services in detecting and assisting all kinds of student problems.[11] This small scale project reveals that cross-service cooperation is a complex task that needs further examination; however, fostering school democratization requires this effort.

Differentiation of School System

The variety of students' needs, talents, and preferences, as well as, their parents' aspirations and value orientations open an extremely wide spectrum of educational needs that should be met if democracy is to be promoted in education. The contemporary educational system in Poland tends heavily toward one direction, promoting one set of knowledge and values despite obvious differentiations. National educational standards and external examinations are systemic tools that assure the singular focus.

The differentiation of school system is specially vital in meeting the challenge of globalization. The increasing number of immigrants settling down in Poland, as well as the process of regaining the national, religious, and ethnic identity of traditional minorities that were suppressed after the WW II, creates the need for appropriate educational establishments that would be recognized as an element of the national school system. Proper education, respecting values pursued by students of different cultures and religions, constitutes the basic condition for social integration. The violation of this rule underlies the failure of integration policies in Western European countries such as the U.K. and France that periodically experience social turmoil caused by marginalized cultural others in these societies. Their primary accusation against the ruling majority is the deprivation of, proper education.

School Autonomy: How to Achieve It?

To enable the above outlined changes in school systems it is necessary to grant more autonomy to schools. Head teachers should become true educational managers which means that this position should be fairly independent of both the state and local authorities. In a similar way as market managers, school heads should negotiate their policy with those most interested in school results: students, parents, and teachers. The freedom of market managers is limited by the managerial contracts that they have, with the owners of organizations they run. Educational managers 'freedom of negotiation' should be limited by their profound knowledge about pedagogy and human development. Managing a school differs substantially

---

[11] J. Kołodziejczyk, *Organizacja opiekuńczej i wychowawczej pracy szkoły oparta na zespołach* [Organization of guidance in the school based on team work], Psychologia Rozwojowa, Nr 1–2, (5), 2000, p. 99–108.

from managing any other organization. Market organizations pursue one goal: to generate profits. Schools ultimate goal is to support students' development so that they reach their actual potential in the most complete way possible. This in no way could be compared to generating financial profits; all attempts to do so are misleading and cause a wrong understanding of educational management.

The educational process is the core process for educational organizations. The role of educational manager should consist of creating the best settings for it. That means that educational management should be entirely based on the psycho-pedagogical knowledge about individual development and educational needs that stem out of the process of management. Only then may the autonomy of particular schools and the whole educational system be maintained.

Developmental psychology offers a variety of theories attempting to explain the course and sources of change in human functioning and behavior. In order to foster democratization it is necessary to critically analyze them and reject all theoretical approaches that deny freedom of the individual human being. Unfortunately, throughout the whole 20th century psychologists, in their attempts to convert psychology into a hard science (according to the positivist ideal of 19th century) employed deterministic and reductionist stances that forced them to get rid of the concept of free will, since it cannot be solved on such theoretical grounds.[12] Their extreme consequences were presented in classical behaviorism and psychoanalysis; humans were defined as either systems responsive to the environment or as imperfect creatures driven by unconscious, biological drives, respectively. Although theorists gathered under the umbrella of humanistic psychology attempted to re-furnish humans with more human-like tendencies such as the need for self-fulfillment, freedom of choice was not fully embedded into the developmental process.

The work of J. Macnamara[13] who referred to F. Brentano's[14] philosophy offers the possibility to consider human development as a fully autonomous process increasingly governed by the developing individual. A. Niemczyński[15] points out that the developmental process is open in the sense that the final state that an individual reaches cannot be predicted in advance. It is also internally normative: in the course of development the norms are set for this particular course. That makes human development profoundly individual; no identical courses of development may happen to different persons. The theory of individual development as an autonomous process allows for further clarification of educational goals. Schools should enable students to steer the course of their own development by increasing their self awareness and providing them with appropriate cognitive, emotional, and social support. Without democracy in education this seems to be barely possible.

---

[12] A. Niemczyński, *O autonomii rozwoju (zarys problematyki)* [On autonomy of development (An outline of problematics)], Kwartalnik Polskiej Psychologii Rozwojowej, Nr 1(2), 1994, p. 3–11.

[13] J. Macnamara, *A border dispute: The place of logic in psychology*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1986.

[14] F. Brentano, *Psychology from an empirical standpoint*, Humanities Press, New York 1973.

[15] A. Niemczyński, *Szansa na powrót ideałów do rozwoju poznawczego* [A chance for re-introduction of ideals in cognitive development], Psychologia Rozwojowa, Nr 1–2(5), 2000, p. 11–25.

Conclusions

Contemporary education in Poland faces challenges imposed by globalization, democratization, and civil society building. The Polish history of last two centuries make these challenges more demanding than in other regions. The educational system is very traditional: bureaucratic, hierarchical, and centralized. As a means of overcoming these shortcomings the concept of educational management is proposed. It should be based on psycho-pedagogical knowledge and focused on teachers' professional development, cross-service cooperation, and developing school autonomy. Democratization of schools is the condition for meeting contemporary challenges.

References

Brentano F., *Psychology from an empirical standpoint*, Humanities Press, New York 1973.

Blum L., *Moral perception and particularity*, Cambridge University Pres, Cambridge 1994.

Bruner J., *W poszukiwaniu teorii nauczania* [Toward the theory of instruction], Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1974.

Dewey J., *Democracy and education*, Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Edwardsville 1985.

Kępiński A., *Rytm życia* [The rhythm of life], Sagitarius, Warszawa1993.

Kołodziejczyk J., *Organizacja opiekuńczej i wychowawczej pracy szkoły oparta na zespołach* [Organization of guidance in the school based on team work], Psychologia Rozwojowa, Nr 1–2(5), 2000, pp. 99–108.

Łuczyński J., *Działania systemowe i warunki stymulujące skuteczny rozwój organizacji (szkoły)* [Systemic actions and settings that stimulate organizational development of schools]. Paper presented at the Jagiellonian Schools Conference, Kraków, Poland, 30–31 March 2007.

Macnamara J., *A border dispute: The place of logic in psychology*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1986.

Niemczyński A., *O autonomii rozwoju (zarys problematyki)* [On autonomy of development (An outline of problematics)], Kwartalnik Polskiej Psychologii Rozwojowej, Nr 1(2), 1994. pp. 3–11.

Niemczyński A., *Szansa na powrót ideałów do rozwoju poznawczego* [A chance for re-introduction of ideals in cognitive development], Psychologia Rozwojowa, Nr 1–2(5), 2000, pp. 11–25.

Przybylski P., *Niemcy chcą powrotu muru berlińskiego* [Germans wish the return of Berlin Wall], „Dziennik", 02.11.2007.

Senge P., *The fifth discipline*, Currency Press, 1990.

Staniszkis J., *Mamy państwo bez państwa* [We have state without state], Dziennik, 19.04.2007.

Stoecker E., Wachna I., *Orange for earth – educational project which (temporarily?) changed 100 Polish schools*, this volume, 2007.