Educational management and leadership in a changing context

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Abstract

The context of educational organizations changes rapidly and requires changes of schools as organizations as well as changes of whole educational systems. Paper tries to show the complexity of social and economic changes that are key elements of changes in school context in contemporary Europe. It then becomes the basis for the proposal of reconceptualization of educational management as a scientific domain that can help better to describe schools as organizations and stimulate their more adequate management and leadership making it possible to face challenges of complex school context

Keywords: educational management, educational leadership, educational challenges, schools

Introduction

Building an efficient public education system is a very difficult task. States, ministries, non-governmental organizations and experts contend with it. The fundamental element of an educational system is well functioning schools. To say that a particular school is a good school

we have to be deeply convinced that it implements sensible tasks consistent with valuable objectives, and also that this is done in the best possible way. Functioning in the social liquid modernity is an extremely difficult thing. Developing and managing an institution which is not only expected to keep up with all the changes but also to design them, is even more difficult.

Yet, it is possible to work in schools in such a way as to get closer to the desirable state, it is possible to observe reality and respond skilfully to the external context, in accordance with one's knowledge or intuition. In order to do so, first of all, one has to be aware of what is happening around. An awareness of the context of one's actions, openness to information from the external world and flexibility are the most desirable characteristics of people responsible for school management today. We intend to present the issues concerning efficient educational management which are in our opinion of key importance for the pupils' development.

In order to meet the numerous expectations education needs a vision of its own development as a social institution as well as effective solutions at the level of management which will be a reflection of the context of a modern school's functioning. A departure from inflexible pat-

terns, constant contact with reality, anticipation of needs and personalization of offers, as well as a humanistic style of management make up a specific method that could be called "sensitive management". Its essence is the adjustment of the operating rules adequately to the needs of those whom one serves (in the case of education - the pupils' needs), instead of following them only in accordance with studied patterns, or for some other reasons of secondary importance for the accomplishment of educational objectives. Constant changes and a profound social crisis make educational managing and reforming difficult, but these are also the reasons why one should be interested in the changing world and in what can be done with regard to these changes.

The conditions of the school functioning. The inevitability of change. Changes of political and social awareness.

he world has been changing ever faster, and recently this process has taken a disturbing direction. We can observe more and more threats, such as the erosion of international institutions, treaties and agreements, or generally speaking, the order of the world. From the Polish perspective, the most important problem today is some disturbing cracks in the European Union. The idea of united Europe starts crumbling, which makes it necessary to attempt to reconstruct it as soon as possible. Against all odds we have to find a way to prevent the idea of united Europe from becoming just another exhibit in the museum of human naivety and faith in man. We have to make such Europe a fact, and not just a creation included in treaties and press articles.

One of the elements having a decisive influence on our successful implementation of such vision and our subsequent putting it into practice is the way of thinking of the European communities. It is the socialization and education processes that actually shape this way of thinking. The institution that is critical for their quality and results is the school. This is the institution in whose potential for educating wise and responsible people and potential for

shaping the reality we still believe, although it disappoints us so often. This is so because the school looks back to the past and focuses on what was rather than on what will be. Schools should become a social space in which a vision of the future is developed, changes are proposed and actions are planned. Attempts to respond to external challenges will never offer a chance for authentic changes – it will always be only "catching up" with the world, and since we are disappointed with the world, one might hazard a statement that a school made to an external order will not be a school that can meet the present and future challenges.

The contemporary practice of responding to current problems and correcting mistakes should be replaced by future-oriented actions. Instead of preparing pupils for acting in a reality of yesterday and perhaps also today, schools should be preparing them to the life of tomorrow. We should not focus on continuing or defending the status quo, but - drawing conclusions from an analysis of the past and present reality - we should try to get into a habit of continuous development and cooperation. The ever-growing expectations concerning the quality of education have to enforce the perpetual question: what can be done in order to improve the situation?

It is worth thinking about what is ahead of us as well as about the context of the modern school's activities. Th fundamental question which teachers face today is the following one: how to help young people to cope with the constant and fast changes? How to prepare them for the future being aware that the future is now much more mysterious than in the times when our parents or grandparents were growing up? One of the possible strategies is the observation of what is happening around us and an attempt to draw general conclusions, or to guess the modern trends. These conclusions can serve as a starting point for the development of strategies and the search for specific solutions allowing for the effective functioning of a school in a specific context. Each of the strategies should take into consideration the specific activities of the school as an institution altering the social reality and influencing the individual

development of the pupils (Thornburg, 2002).

Readiness for social changes

One of the most serious challenges we face is the ageing of the population. Soon, for the first time in history, in the countries of the so-called wealthy North, the number of elderly people will surpass the number of young people. An additional trend is the decreasing population of the European nations (Marx, 2003). A challenge which the educational systems will have to face will be their skilful reconstruction and connection with other systems, in particular, in order to be able to influence the educational process in the poorer countries in which the population will be growing. A change in the age pyramid may influence the relations between generations, create another style of life and consumption, and another labour market. New jobs and specializations will probably appear, and some of those already known (such as nursing, care of the elderly people, recreation services) will become even more popular. Such forecasting should already now be an inspiration for the people responsible for the educational offer in our schools.

It is becoming more and more evident that civic engagement and the use of the social capital in accordance with the will of a particular community influence the communities' success to a large extent. Unfortunately, although schools use the adjective "democratic", they still remain authoritarian institutions. It is not possible to prepare anyone for democracy in an imperative manner. Young people should be allowed to gain certain shared experience in group work for the benefit of other people. Perhaps that way we will succeed in educating a community able to live and work for sustainable development. Somehow the development of civil society makes it possible to eliminate discrimination and intolerance. For instance, fundamental changes related to the position of women in the society can already be observed, and they generate changes in economic and political customs as well as in the employment or consumption structure (World Bank Report,

2004). Although these are exceptionally permanent inequalities, the changing social awareness should also be reflected in the teaching style and the organization of the educational process.

Another important aspect influencing the form and function of schools is the change of the family model. Modern schools are forced to take up many functions which used to belong to an extended family in the past. Today, schools have to change their work organization - due to fact that children spend more time there in the afternoons - and the character of their activities - due to the insufficient educational competence of the parents, frequently being single parents.

One cannot forget that the recently culturally and ethnically homogeneous societies gradually become societies comprising many various national or ethnic minorities. We cannot afford to ignore that fact in schools any more. Cooperating with persons of different cultural backgrounds becomes a more and more valuable skill. It does not only refer to the principles of good co-existence, but also to competitiveness on the labour market - those who have mastered the skill of working in a multi-cultural community are simply more valuable employees. We should think about programming the educational process in such a way as to enable pupils to acquire the skill, as well as about the conditions to be fulfilled in foreign language teaching and how to solve the problem of religion teaching in schools (EC White Paper, 2002).

Science, work, production

The so-called human capital, i.e. the society members' social and intellectual resources, is becoming more and more valuable for the societies' success and wealth. The human capital has today a measurable economic value, often higher than, for instance, the natural resources. Knowledge and an ability to apply it in cooperation with other people is a new wealth of the post-industrial society (Uchida, Centron & McKenzie, 1996). This has been a well-known fact for a long time, but why does it change the school reality so slowly? It compels one to take a critical look

at the educational process in many countries.

The speed at which our knowledge is developed and extended as well as new discoveries may soon contribute to an even more rapid development of humanity. The increase of knowledge is difficult to grasp even today, and it keeps on accelerating. Nobody is able to follow all discoveries, new texts, or read articles published all over the world in thousands every hour. Such rapid increase of information may either cause a blocking (suspension) of the system or a revolutionary breakthrough and development in many sciences, and subsequently in our lives. Exploration of the universe and sea depths, new computers or robots, medicine interfering into our genes, and many more such aspects will soon determine the level of wealth or poverty of many countries.

One of the factors enhancing the significance of the change of attitude from the historical perspective to the perspective of the future is the constant growth of the importance of technology, in particular, communication technology. The level of technological development will decide about the future of a given region of the world. It is inevitable and simultaneously sad, since it will probably be impossible to catch up with the leaders. Technology can exceptionally accelerate the development or the fall of societies, depending on whether they invest in it or not. New technologies also determine the forms of social communication and the methods of acquiring knowledge. The development of technology precipitates the growth of a gulf between the rich and the poor countries, the so-called developed and underdeveloped countries.

Moreover, we will soon have to face the more and more difficult moral dilemmas related to the development of science and production possibilities. New discoveries and the development of science will impose on us the necessity of deliberating and making decisions related to completely new ethical problems. Will the schools which today cannot cope with educating their pupils be able to meet another challenge?

Organization of the educational process and the labour market

The educational process is also subject to various transformations and trends. One of the most significant processes is the process of moving from mass standardized education to individualized education tailored to meet the needs of the pupils and the external situation. Schools should change their style of work: instead of teaching large groups of pupils following similar curricula and educating an entire generation in the same manner, it is necessary to guarantee conditions for effective education of individuals and to inspire them to develop their careers independently. Due to the transformations on the labour market, the necessity of constant retraining, the absence of a sense of safety, gradually the way of thinking of a professional career and the method of preparing to it starts changing. Nowadays, school graduates have to be specialists in a particular field and have solid general knowledge of individual learning and planning their own activities. In view of the above, adult education is becoming more and more important as well.

As a result of various educational reforms the time of staying at school has been extended, both with respect to the daily hours and the years of education. In most countries the age of starting obligatory education has been lowered and the majority of pupils continue their education for a longer time than they used to in the past. There has been an evident growth of the number of children in nursery schools and the number of students. Simultaneously, the quality of education is now examined more attentively (OECD, 2012). It is a new task for the schools, one to which they have not been prepared so far.

Another challenge is the fact that valued specialists become the subject of competition not only between particular companies, but between professions. This competition may lead to the decline of certain professions due to the lack of appropriate personnel. We should provide against a situation in which there will be no proper candidates for teachers. A conclusion ensuing from this trend is the necessity to

make the teaching profession so attractive as to encourage the best candidates to choose it.

Some of the presented trends are reality, others are only forecasts, but we should attempt to find solutions for tomorrow's problems already today. This challenge is in particular topical in Poland, a country coping with a change of the system, a transformation of the most important aspects of social life, reforms of many institutions as well as illnesses undermining these institutions. One of the ways facilitating the facing of this challenge, i.e. making an attempt to develop an educational model for the future, is the use of other countries' experiences and tailoring them to the Polish conditions.

Modern schools have to be transparent and take responsibility for their actions. In a sense, they have lost some secrecy which used to facilitate the concealment of mistakes or objectives in the past. Today, with more and more educated people looking closely at schools, the head teachers and teachers have to be top professionals in order to be able to defend their decisions . Social inequalities, excessive consumptionism and the impact of mass media do not make their work any easier.

Educational policy in the European Union

The educational system is in the centre of intense interest in many countries. In many countries it is also strongly criticized and therefore new initiatives related to the system improvement and reforming are constantly being undertaken. Although each EU state conducts these activities independently, many ideas and strategies have certain common elements due to the free flow of people and ideas. Educational policy in the European Union is not subject to any regulations at the union level. At present, it is based on the provisions of the Maastricht Treaty. Since it was agreed that education was one of the areas influencing the quality and form of economic integration, it was decided that:

The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encour-

aging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity (OECD, 2001, pp. 37).

Each of the Member States developed their own educational system. Notwithstanding this diversity, the states belonging to the Community determined their common priorities in the area of education referring to each Member State. They comprise the following:

1. equality of educational opportunities,
2. improvement of the quality of education,
3. a new model of a teacher,
4. an European educational ideal (Dziewulak, 1994).

The equality of educational opportunities refers mainly to the children of various nationalities, denominations and languages and immigrants' children, physically or mentally disabled pupils, struggle against all kinds of discrimination, in particular discrimination of girls and women, and propagation of pupils' health and life protection. In Poland, an additional problem is the access to education of children from rural areas, and in particular those affected by structural unemployment and economic recession (Mazurkiewicz, 2005).

The improvement of the quality of education is understood as the upgrading of the educational process, i.e. a more effective way of functioning of the educational system. In order to improve the quality of education a reform of particular subject curricula and elimination of excessive encyclopaedic material from the curricula and school books is recommended and implemented. Some other possible activities in this area comprise the use of the latest scientific and technological developments in the educational process, in particular information and audio-visual technology, as well as a differentiation of the pace of learning of able and less able pupils, or different programme requirements. For over a decade, a reform of the system of vocational orientation and career planning

counselling has been implemented in the European Union; its objective is the preparation of the young people for a more active and appropriate choice of a vocation in accordance with their aspirations and the community's needs.

A new model of the teacher presents a set of characteristics indispensable for modern teachers: academic education, a creative and innovation-oriented attitude and constant upgrading and verification of the level of knowledge. In order to create a universal new model of the teacher constant vocational improvement is necessary. This is also related to the previously mentioned rapid technological, economic and political transformations. A standardization of the teacher training system in the European Union is currently being discussed.

The final educational priority in the EU - the development of a European educational model - focuses on education for peace and democracy, foreign languages teaching, development of a European information network, education in the spirit of religious, racial and social tolerance in accordance with the "Human Rights Convention", and emphasizing the role of the European Union in Europe and in the world. One of the fundamental mechanisms of achieving these objectives has to be a youth exchange programme, which may become a basis for future activities in the area of education.

The presented objectives are the general directions of activities aiming at developing a good quality educational system which in an individualized and modern way will be able to educate European citizens aware of their responsibility for themselves and for the world, and capable of building a community that will allow us to live and work in peace. To achieve this, several initiatives are required, which are necessitated by reality anyway.

First of all, it is the development of a modern effective central administration system required in particular in order to set objectives, determine priorities and assess the schools' activities. Decentralization taking place all over the world is a process having a positive impact on school management and on the adjustment of school activities to people's needs,

yet in the state and community perspective an institution coordinating local activities and setting a common direction is essential.

Secondly, it is an increase of schools' autonomy in order to ensure a reflection of both global and national trends and local needs. For that purpose, the parents' and the local community's participation in the school work and in local educational policy planning should be ensured. It is also important to enhance the role played by women in this process.

Thirdly, it is providing educational activities of proper quality by limiting the encyclopaedic material mentioned previously, shifting emphasis from school teaching to independent learning at home, and including problem-solving skills in the teaching curriculum.

The European Union's educational policy seems to be fully focused on significant yet in a sense, technical matters. Emphasis on the levelling of educational opportunities, the improvement of the quality of education and the transformation of teachers into efficient professionals able to effectively support the pupils' learning process leave the issue of educational objectives aside. No attempt whatsoever has been made to specify why these skills should be achieved. The fourth of the mentioned EU priorities - the development of the European educational ideal - does not seem to attract sufficient attention of the interested parties, perhaps due to their fear of being suspected of indoctrination or promotion of the only justified values. Hence the postulates of tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation, which however, remain slogans with little content in the light of certain social developments of the recent years (such as severe conflicts with ethnic and religious background periodically shaking up the so-called old EU states). These are accompanied by the decision concerning educational policy being left to particular Member States. Although this seems to be a highly democratic solution allowing each EU member to develop an educational system based on its local history, tradition or customs, it is in fact abandoning the idea of developing the European cultural community, which does not have to imply the

disappearance of local cultures. The weakness of the European educational policy ensues from the absence of discussion on the meaning of the words: "Europe" and 'European" and an attempt to determine the foundations of a continental community other than a technological and organizational efficiency required in order to compete with such continental powers as the USA and the Far East countries.

Education for the future cannot do without specifying the basic set of values common for all Europeans which would be implemented through the activities of various educational systems in particular Member States. The European Union, "our common European home", will remain a set of international declarations, agreements and other legal acts negotiated by professional politicians - documents with a limited impact on individuals' behaviour. For this large project to be successful, it is necessary to base education on solid foundations rooted in European and non-European intellectual and spiritual tradition, which seems to be a much more significant task than the technical solutions on which European specialists work with great effort using huge European resources in the course of it.

Educational management as a separate discipline of knowledge

The above deliberations clearly present the specific character of the social institution, i.e. education. The growing complexity of the social world, the multiplicity of new problems which need to be solved, and the solutions of which require a creative approach, place high demands on the preparation of the young people for adult life. Education appears to be social service with a particular objective: the preparation of children and adolescents for a life in a world the form of which is at present impossible to predict. Such definition of the objective seems quite risky, though: an objective is a describable and desirable state of affairs that for some reasons is considered to be valuable, and thus worth achieving, despite all the required efforts. An objective presented as "the prepa-

ration for life in an unknown world" does not allow for pointing out the actual states which would have been achieved in education. Hence the vagueness, not to say - superficiality of the expressions used in the current discourse on the educational objectives: an increase of the pupils' creative potential, development of their skills of continuous education, readiness for changes, and certain similar characteristics which are to be the result - objective? – of contemporary education. The consequence of such state of affairs is the uncertainty of all participants of the educational system concerning the objectives they serve. It is the direct consequence of the already mentioned absence of sufficient focus of both educational practitioners and theoreticians on the axiological foundations of education in modern Europe and in the world.

It seems that in such reality it is best to perceive education as a social institution serving the pupils' development. Presenting development as an educational objective is commonly accepted in modern pedagogy remaining under a strong influence of the progressive ideas deriving from J. Dewey's works (Kohlberg, Meyer, 1993); yet this solution has a similar weakness as that described in the previous paragraph: development being a process cannot be a desirable state. In the preamble to the currently effective Act on the Education System (1991), we can read that "a school should guarantee every pupil conditions essential for their development", which seems to be a safer solution, as the conditions essential for a human being to be guaranteed by a school can be described. The problem is, however, that the term "development" (repeated frequently in the Act) is ambiguous; in psychology one can find many various ways of understanding it (Dorczak, 2014). Thus, the above quoted fragment of the Act is a very general recommendation, as it is not specified at all how development is understood.

The idea of supporting the pupils' development requires some specification, albeit general, concerning the understanding of this process. It does not mean the acceptance of the one and only justified concept. There is a discussion on this issue going on in modern psychology and

it does not seem to ever come to an end. Still, it is necessary to answer the question concerning individual development in order to carry out meaningful activities supporting the process. It is difficult to effectively support something that one does not understand or does not attempt to understand, as then one cannot specify the conditions fostering it. For education understood as social service supporting the individual development of pupils a discussion on individual development and an attempt to explain the process is of key importance, because "an effective school" or "high quality education" are terms which should refer to the degree in which the educational system fosters the development of particular pupils, and what is even more important, the degree in which it is an obstacle or threat for those young people's development.

This problem deserves special attention. In all concepts of individual development a possibility of disorders or even hindering the process is taken into consideration. Human development, in particular in the mental and social sphere, is a highly complex process depending on many factors. According to various data, although its particular stages and characteristics can be described, the developmental cycle is different, unique in each person. Niemczyński (2000) points out a truly individual character of the process: there are no two identical ways of development. Therefore, one of its chief characteristics is internal normativity: the "correctness" of the developmental process can only be assessed in the context of its course, as there are no unequivocal indexes which would make it possible to determine undoubtedly whether there is some progress of development or whether it was distorted.

This observation constitutes a special challenge for education as an institution supporting individual development: it is not possible to base its functioning on actual solutions identical for all beneficiaries. It is highly probable that a solution useful for one person (or a group of persons) might turn out to be a threat for another one (or another group). Teaching arithmetic may be an example here: in order to understand arithmetical operations appropriate

properties of thinking have to be developed (in Jean Piaget's terminology called mental operations), a process which occurs between the age of 6 and 10 in the majority of people (Piaget, Inhelder, 1993). Yet, in school teaching, every 8-year-old is required to master the arithmetic skills provided for in the curriculum, which constitutes a huge difficulty for children developing at a slower pace. Unable to make use of the mental properties which have not yet developed in them, they are forced to meet the school requirements and learn arithmetic operations by heart, which is a tedious and not very effective method. A dangerous effect of such "support" of their development by the school is the children's unwillingness to study arithmetic and all similar subjects, which in turn constitutes a serious threat for their further education in general. The school activities disregarding the possibilities and needs determined by a particular pupil's individual development may actually become a threat for the process, instead of being supportive. The question concerning the percentage of school graduates and pupils being the victims of inadequate educational activities the effect of which is their development diverging from an optimal one remains without any answer.

Education as a threat for development becomes particularly dangerous when apart from disregarding the problem of comprehension of the development process it shows tendencies to accomplish external objectives. This institution always has served and certainly always will serve many purposes. In the above mentioned preamble to the Educational Act one can find also such statements:

Teaching and upbringing, respecting the Christian system of values, are based on universal ethical principles. Education and upbringing serve the development of young people's sense of responsibility, love for the country and respect for the Polish cultural heritage, with simultaneous opening to the values of other European and world cultures.

Later it says that schools should:

prepare them [pupils – J.Ł. and G.M.] *to fulfil their family and civic obligations based on the principles of solidarity, democracy, tolerance, justice and liberty.*

School management versus other organizations management

At present, a serious threat for education supporting individual development is managerism, an idea stating that management is a general field of knowledge of corporate leadership regardless of the purposes the organizations serve and the processes they are to implement. Knowledge of organization and management based mainly on market organization studies is presented as universal knowledge describing all aspects of organizational life. This idea is accompanied by a belief that the use of such knowledge will have equally good effects regardless of what an organization deals with and what purposes it serves. This attitude largely ignores the distinct character of the content of organizational processes claiming that the functioning of each organization is subject to identical laws, and the occurring problems are basically identical (Szczupaczyński, 2004). Special emphasis is put on the economic effectiveness of organizational activity and compliance with formal and legal regulations. Without negating the importance of proper managing of all kinds of resources and following the rules of social interactions, it should be observed that they are the means for achieving the objectives of organizations. In the case of market organizations the main objective of which is profit generation, the means and the objectives are equated: measurable profit is obtained through proper management of equally measurable means. In the case of public organizations to which public schools also belong, the category of profit cannot be applied since these organizations serve non-material and therefore non-measurable purposes. Any attempt to measure the quality of a school's work shows what a difficult task it is. Whereas measuring

the accomplishment of didactic tasks is relatively simple (even though problems with external examinations or school evaluations prove that this simplicity is only apparent), measuring the effects of educational work seems infeasible. Hence, there is a gap between the material measurable expenditures on the functioning of public organizations and the non-measurable effects of their functioning, giving rise to a sense of uncertainty whether the expenditures have been "reimbursed" in the achieved results, whether they have not been wasted. Therefore, the popularity of managerism is growing. According to its supporters' expectations, it should lead to the "ordering" of the public sphere, "rationalization" (i.e. reduction) of expenditures and higher "quality of public services".

Excessive focusing on the economic, formal and legal aspects of public organizations' activities leads to pushing the objective of such organization to the background.

In the area of education an example may be the rationalization of the school network carried out within the educational reform of 2000, which along with the establishment of junior secondary schools was to reduce the costs of education by closing down small and expensive rural schools. The side effect of this operation was the creation of conditions for a huge increase of educational problems, which is commonly mentioned by junior secondary school teachers working in large schools where anonymity and being removed from the previous educational environment together with the problems of growing up are the source of all kinds of difficulties. Contrary to the assumptions of the reform, the establishment of junior secondary schools has also contributed to the appearance of another selection threshold, making it more difficult for children from neglected areas to have access to higher levels of education (Konarzewski, 2002). There are also other risks triggered by managing education without taking into account the specific character of the objective in the form of supporting pupils' individual development.

The ensuing conclusion is the need of developing educational management as a hu-

manistic discipline in which the fundamental reference point is the individual development of every human being examined from all possible perspectives. This knowledge should comprise all aspects of school management and the entire educational system management. In order to acquire it, research has to be carried out in which organizational processes will be analysed through their specific content: learning, teaching and individual development. This publication deals with these issues.

Signals from the Polish schools

It is difficult to evaluate the level of readiness of the Polish educational system to meet the challenges that Poland has to face due to its accession to the European Union and connected with the contemporary trends. There are, however, some alarming signals concerning the teaching results, attitudes, organization of the teaching process and the state's educational policy. It is alarming that in such a significant professional group there is a considerable number of teachers who do not proceed with their professional development (Mazurkiewicz, 2003). Maybe even more worrying is the fact that educational management and leadership is also in a crisis, focused on formal and maintenance issues rather than on teaching, learning and student's development (Mazurkiewicz, 2011, Mazurkiewicz, 2012). And it is in this area - education - that more and more significant changes take place. In the traditional model of teacher training "producing experts" in a particular field, and not experts in teaching and upbringing, professional improvement is of special importance. Unfortunately, it will not be possible for teachers to learn about the modern methods and theories if they continue to refuse to participate in improvement training courses. Obviously, several conditions have to be fulfilled, such as the increase of the courses' quality, but it is difficult to imagine teachers performing their work well without constant improving and updating of their knowledge and skills.

The low level of advancement of other forms of improvement, in particular those implement-

ed within schools, is also a problem. The establishment of mutual support systems in order to solve the pupils' and the school's current problems, fostering the school's development as an educational organization and constituting a foundation for teachers' professional development, is not satisfactory in the light of exacerbating competition between pupils, teachers and schools, enhanced by the quasi-market rhetoric dominant in the current educational discourse. Perceiving other pupils, teachers and schools as competitors in the struggle for a not easily available good (respectively: good marks, employment and promotion, and position on the "local educational market") does not foster the development of trust and respect for the partners, and without it offering and receiving real support in individual, professional and organizational development is not possible.

An even more alarming trend is some reluctance or lack of interest in schools in a broader perspective. If we can find a large group of teachers interested in increasing their teaching competencies, it is still very difficult to find any persons pondering upon the sense of their work, its main purpose or social function. Busy with their daily grind, overwhelmed by the requirements of supervision, Polish teachers do not have time or space for any reflections and for asking the basic question: why do I teach or what do I want to achieve? Support in this area is a particularly significant task. One of the methods of encouraging teachers to meet this type of intellectual challenge can be the presentation of the results of research on education and a discussion of them. A reflection on one's own practice, also based on the research results, is a chance for authentic professional development.

Conclusion

The processes mentioned in this text are manifold: revolutionary changes in morality, global communication and new technologies, competition between mass media and schools as socializing communities and sources of information about the world, destruction of the traditional mechanisms of control, families and

local communities, new extremities and world terrorism, huge changes in the labour market and the emergence of completely new professions, a necessity of constant improvement and changes of specialization, as well as many other phenomena of the recent years from the borderline between economy, sociology, psychology, science and technology described by the prophets of globalization, post-modernism and an anticipated conflict of civilizations. It is worth remembering that the fundamental questions asked by people since the dawn of time are still topical: what does it mean to be human, what is the sense of human life, what role does one have to play in the world, is reality purposeful or does coincidence rule the world? Avoiding a discussion of these issues in education for the sake of effectiveness and dealing with current problems leaves a void and uncertainty in the young people's lives; a void which they more and more frequently fill with apparent values that do not foster their development and their achievement of satisfaction, and that are sometimes a threat not only to their development but also to their lives (e.g. drugs). What can be done by schools then?

First of all, schools should be leaders in the process of changes, and a condition of success is their adjustment to the individual and social needs. Only a careful study of the context of schools' activities can offer a chance for the creation of the future, not for the purpose of reacting to the present, but for the purpose of delineating new directions of development. Obviously, we will encounter extremely difficult questions such as: how to prepare people for the unknown, or how to effectively individualize the educational offer, but only these schools that will make such attempts will have a chance to be well managed. The extremely difficult challenges and the reality of shortage in which schools function impose difficult terms, yet this is a strong argument for starting thinking about it already today.

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